



**From the Department of Dairy and Animal Science**

This regular column from Penn State's Department of Dairy and Animal Science features the research findings, student opportunities, and reports on other important topics generated in the Department. Watch for notice when back issues of the column are archived on Lancaster Farming's Internet [www.lancasterfarming.com](http://www.lancasterfarming.com) home page.

**PENN STATE STUDENTS TOUR, LEARN ABOUT AGRIBUSINESS**

Introducing Penn State students to the many emerging career opportunities in the dairy, livestock, and poultry industries is an increasing challenge. The Department of Poultry Science and the Department of Dairy and Animal Science have found an unusual teaching tool: a 40-passenger excursion bus.

The two departments sponsored the first Student/Faculty Industry Tour for 36 undergraduate and graduate students, featuring six farms and companies in southeastern Pennsylvania that reflect the diversity and variety of occupations that exist in agriculture.

Terry Etherton, head of the Department of Dairy and Animal Science, says the unorthodox tour is the perfect way to let students see the many career opportunities open to them.

"It's vitally important for students to see the broad spectrum of options available in animal agriculture," he explains. "It can influence their decisions on a course of study. Students need to recognize that jobs in animal agriculture span the spectrum from the family farm to laboratory scientists conducting molecular biology research."

On this bus tour, they saw several representative companies and farms in one trip, and could ask questions. It was a terrific real-world experience!"

Incoming freshmen, students new to Penn State's University Park Campus (from other campuses and other universities) and graduate students joined faculty chaperones on the two-day excursion. The tour included stops at Leidy's, Inc, a swine packing and processing business in Souderton; the Toxicology Department of Merck Research Laboratories, a pharmaceutical research firm near Philadelphia; egg-processing facilities at Kreider Poultry Farms in Manheim; and the 400-acre Hershey Brothers Dairy in Manheim.

They also visited the 850-head-capacity Nissley Brothers Beef Feedlot in Mount Joy and the Hanover Shoe Farms, Inc. of Hanover, a pre-eminent Standardbred horsebreeding facility for more than 60 years.

"Agriculture is a huge industry with vast employment opportunities, and this tour provided students with an overview of six diverse enterprises," explains Erskine Cash, professor of animal science and tour coordinator. "The tour enhanced their awareness of the industry and encouraged informal interactions with students and faculty."

For Tiffany Turrentine, a first-year student from Philadelphia now studying at Penn State Berks, the tour allowed her to see first-

hand many of the systems and processes described in her high school textbooks.

"I was really interested in the places that we went to, like the Merck Labs," she relates. "Some of the lab work that they showed us I had learned about in high school, and it's what I want to study in college. Merck is looking for Penn State students for full-time employment, and if I hadn't participated in the tour, I would never have learned that."

As a native of Edmonton, Canada, doctoral candidate Paul Kononoff got an extra benefit from the tour: as he was discovering the state's animal science industries, he also was getting his first look at much of the landscape.

"It's definitely a lot more rolling than the Canadian prairies that I'm used to," he says. "The trees and mountains are quite lovely, and the farms are more picturesque. Where I'm from, there are lots of beef cattle -- it's not unusual to see 10,000 head on a facility -- but the dairy operations are smaller. Here, it's flip-flopped: feedlots may only be 100-200 head, but the dairy operations are ten-fold what I'm used to."

Kononoff says he was impressed by the enthusiasm and innovation that he encountered on the tour, and came away with a

renewed sense of the "tremendous opportunities" available in animal agriculture. He even got new ideas for his advanced research into dairy nutrition. But the best aspect of the trip, he says, was the opportunity to rub elbows with faculty, fellow graduate students and undergraduates outside of the classroom.

"I got a snapshot of Pennsylvania agriculture, and I got to know faculty away from the academic environment," he says. "It was a good time to get to know them as people. I also got a better understanding of the needs of the farmers from the perspective of a researcher. I'm not familiar with the way that agriculture is done here, and I now see that I can bring expertise and fresh ideas from a different part of the world and blend them with what I'm learning here."

Etherton says that the two departments plan to make the tour an annual event, visiting facilities in every part of the state on a rotating basis. The tour was supported by grants from PennAg Industries, the Pennsylvania Beef Council, the Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association, Turkey Hill Dairy, and the participating departments.

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