



FSLI FELLOWS EXPLORE AGRICULTURE, SUSTAINABILITY, AND CULTURE IN COSTA RICA

JUNE 8-12, 2026

Thirteen FSLI Fellows and staff had the opportunity to participate in an immersive five-day international learning experience in Costa Rica, exploring the connections between agriculture, food systems, sustainability, education, and rural development. Through site visits, hands-on activities, and discussions with industry and university leaders, Fellows gained valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges facing agriculture in a global context.



The program began with a visit to the University of Costa Rica, where Fellows learned about the university's role in advancing agricultural research, education, and extension efforts throughout the country. Discussions with university leaders highlighted the importance of partnerships between higher education, producers, and communities in addressing food system challenges. The visit included enlightening conversations with the college leaders regarding their views on leadership and managing large organizations. It was especially interesting to hear how academic leaders are selected in Costa Rica, which is quite different from the process in the United States and Canada. The University of Costa Rica is the oldest and largest university, established in 1940 with an enrollment of about 40,000+ students across its main campus and regional sites.

A tasty and educational stop during the trip was to Sibú Chocolate, where Fellows explored the journey from cacao bean to finished chocolate product. Participants learned about cacao production, processing, value-added agriculture, and the importance of storytelling, branding, and consumer engagement in creating successful food enterprises.



Fellows also visited Linda Vista Farms, part of Ball Horticultural Company, where they learned about the operation's role in producing high-quality young plants that support growers throughout the region and beyond. During the visit, participants explored greenhouse production systems, plant propagation techniques, and the technologies used to maintain consistency and quality at scale.

During a visit to Guayabo Lodge, Fellows participated in a hands-on coffee harvesting experience. Participants picked coffee alongside local producers and learned about every stage of the process, from harvesting coffee cherries to roasting and preparing the final product. The group also enjoyed making traditional patacones, gaining a deeper appreciation for Costa Rican food traditions and culture.





The delegation was welcomed by CATIE Director General Dr. Luis Pocasangre, who received the group in his office and shared the institution's vision and key strategic areas of work. Fellows participated in a discussion with the Dean and members of CATIE's faculty to exchange experiences and explore opportunities for collaboration in areas related to food systems, agriculture, research, academic training, and global knowledge networks. As part of the visit, the group toured CATIE's International Cacao Collection, a world-renowned resource for the conservation and sustainable use of cacao genetic diversity.

During their visit to EARTH University (including lunch with university administrators), Fellows learned about the institution's innovative approach to agricultural education, sustainability, and experiential learning. A highlight of the visit was touring the university's banana production operation, where Fellows observed production practices designed to balance productivity with environmental stewardship.



The group traveled through the scenic highlands surrounding Poás Volcano, where they observed firsthand how Costa Rica's unique geography, climate, and volcanic soils support a diverse agricultural sector. The stunning landscape served as a reminder of the close connection between natural resources and food production.

Additional visits included a local dairy farm and a strawberry farm, where Fellows examined production practices, business operations, and opportunities for innovation.

Throughout the week, Fellows strengthened relationships with one another while broadening their understanding of global food systems. The experience reinforced FSLI's commitment to developing leaders who can think critically, collaborate across sectors, and address complex challenges in food, agriculture, and natural resources.

The Costa Rica experience provided a unique opportunity for learning, reflection, and connection, leaving Fellows with new perspectives on agriculture, sustainability, and leadership in an increasingly interconnected world.