

FSLI International Trip to Costa Rica September 15-20, 2019

On September 15th the FSLI inaugural international experience began with a group of 10 traveling to Costa Rica. The learning objectives of an FSLI international tour are: 1) to experience a food system outside the USA within the context of the governance and culture of that location, and 2) discuss among one's peers the perspectives learned from international travel, develop new understandings of how different food systems function, experience the working relationships of different players in international food systems, and evaluate the impact of US policy and influence on the country and organizations visited.



More specifically, the learning outcomes for the trip to Costa Rica were: 1) to increase the understanding of multilateral organizations working in the Western Hemisphere related to the agriculture and food systems, 2) create opportunities to experience the tropical agriculture systems, and 3) to

interact with leaders in multinational higher education, research and policy making organizations.

Prior to the trip each person took the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES) to measure their intercultural competencies. This assessment evaluated the skills critical to interacting effectively with people from cultures other than their own. The group was asked to keep a journal during the trip so they could reflect on the report they received from the assessment allowing them a chance to work on any areas they wished to improve.

The group arrived independently in San Jose, Costa Rica where arrangements were made to stay at the Hotel Autentico.

The first stop on Monday, September 16th was to visit PROCOMER www.procomer.com an institute in charge of promoting the exportation of Costa Rican goods and services throughout the world. The group presented a very informative introduction to the organization, describing how they simplify and facilitate the exportation of locally made and grown products, recruit new exporters to expand their markets, review potential developmental areas for local products, and perform market studies.



The next stop was a tour of Starbucks' first and only coffee farm, Hacienda Alsacia.

<http://www.starbuckscoffeefarm.com/en/>

The majority of Starbucks coffee beans are purchased from independent farmers so this 240 hectare coffee farm is used mostly for research. Their research is focused on creating best practices to make growing coffee more profitable for small-scale farms, develop new lines of coffee plants, and find global sustainable solutions to economic and environmental pressures.

After enjoying lunch and the beautiful view of the farm from the Starbucks café the group drove to Turrialba to meet the Director General, Dr. Muhammad Ibrahim, of CATIE, Centro Agronomico Tropical de Investigacion y Ensenanza www.catie.ac.cr





CATIE is a tropical agricultural research and higher education center. The mission of CATIE is to increase sustainable and inclusive human well-being in Latin American and the Caribbean, promoting education, research and outreach for the sustainable management of agriculture and conservation of natural resources.

The group then visited an organic family coffee and produce farm. The owner explained the history of his farm and how a group of farmers have formed a cooperative to sell their produce and coffee. He also gave the group an extensive tour of his operation. He is associated with CATIE helping them explore ways of helping farmers move toward environmentally friendly farming practices and develop ways for local farmers to be successful.



The next day the group visited EARTH University www.earth.ac.cr a private non-profit international university. The university offers a four year undergraduate degree in agricultural sciences. EARTH presents a world-class scientific and technological education emphasizing ethical entrepreneurship and strong socio-environmental values The

educational approach is based on two principals: Student-centered academics and experiential learning.



While at EARTH the group heard from the Academic Dean, Dr. Yanine Chan and several faculty members.

The EARTH students shared their entrepreneurial projects with the group.



The week ended with a visit to the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture, IICA. www.iica.int The purposes of IICA are to encourage, promote and support the efforts of the Member States to achieve their agricultural development and rural welfare. The member states include 34 countries in the

Americas (North, Central and South America), which observer countries participating from all parts of the world. The Director General of IICA said at a recent meeting "The mission of this Director General is to ensure that agriculture in the hemisphere is prepared to seize existing opportunities to convert the agriculture sector into the potential guarantor of food security worldwide and of environmental sustainability on the planet."



In recalling the FSLI international experience, participants commented on the interactions they had with local individuals, internationally-renowned academics and scientists, students, workers, and other local citizens. There truly was an enhanced understanding of tropical agriculture, alternative production practices, multinational higher education institutions, and private and governmental organizations and agencies designed to enhance farmers, food security, and sustainable agricultural practices.