

Irish visitors promote study abroad program



Representatives from the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) in Northern Ireland recently visit Montcalm Community College and area farms. Above, pictured from left are CAFRE Senior Equine Lecturer Alison Morris, CAFRE Advisor Alan Johnston, Mares Vanderploeg and CAFRE Head of Food Education Fintan McCann.



By Renae Gould

Montcalm Community College's Agriculture Club had some special visitors this fall. Three representatives of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) in Northern Ireland came to the college's Sidney campus to discuss their study abroad program.

They started their day with a visit to Main Farms in Lakeview, Trufant, and Greenville, where they saw potato harvest, storage, and shipping. Their next stop was MCC's Sidney campus where they toured the greenhouse and had lunch with members of the Ag Club. After a tour of campus, they ended their day with a visit to Vanderploeg Friesian Farms and Vanderploeg Holsteins in Ithaca, a large-scale dairy and world-class horse farm.

"We have been visiting Michigan for 25 plus years," said Alan Johnston, an adviser with CAFRE.

CAFRE representatives always come this time of year to be a part of Michigan State University's study abroad fair, but this is the first time they have visited MCC.

"It was because of Brian (Gardner) that we came to visit MCC," Johnston said. "He was over in Ireland last April visiting our campuses."

Johnston, along with Alison Morris and Fintan McCann, talked about CAFRE's programs and their three campuses. They have 1,800 students in their programs. All three campuses are in rural settings, but only a couple miles from a bigger city. The campuses are Greenmount, where students study animal science and horticulture; Loughry, where students learn the business and technology side of food production; and Enniskillen, where students study everything equine.

"Our programs are theory-based, but also practical," Johnston said. "They learn by doing and getting their hands dirty."

The study abroad partnership with CAFRE has included 180 students from Michigan. Two MCC students in the Institute of Agricultural Technology program, which is a joint program with MSU, Jeff Marek and Emily German, will be traveling to CAFRE in January as study abroad students. The program runs for four months and they will be studying at the Greenmount campus. The modules, or classes, the students will take have to be related to what they're studying here and will be used as part of their degree program. They try to balance the ratio of students that come here and that go to Ireland.

Study Abroad

Two Montcalm Community College agriculture students will be traveling to Ireland in January to study abroad.

They will be attending classes at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) in Northern Ireland for four months.

Emily German, 19, of Lowell, said she's excited to see how they run their farms in Ireland because they are a lot more animal based.

"I'm excited to experience new things," she said. "I haven't really traveled much out of the state."

Jeff Marek, 20, of Howard City, is looking forward to seeing the potato production at CAFRE, since he works on a potato farm here.

"I'm really interested in learning about a different culture, especially behind the scenes of the agriculture world," he said.

German likes MCC because the classes aren't big, and she can get to know everyone pretty easily. Her favorite class, so far, has been Animal Science.

"That's the side of agriculture I'm going into, and it's been the most helpful, so far," she said.

Marek said another MCC student got him interested in the Agricultural Operations program. His favorite class, so far, has been Crop Science.

"I believe the professor was the best and I was interested in learning more in-depth about the crops," he said.

He works at Main Farms, which is 14,700 acres of cash crops in Lakeview, Trufant and Greenville. He runs fertilizer and helps with tillage.

German works at Double R Ranch in Belding as a guide and takes people on horseback through the woods. She has worked there for four years. She rides horses quite a bit and she barrel races, too. She hopes to become an artificial insemination technician and has applied for an internship in this field for next summer.

Marek is focused on finishing college right now, but he hopes to be a full-time firefighter in the future. ■

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Johnston said the average size of a farm in Northern Ireland is 80 to 100 acres and there are 50,000 farms in the area. Many of the farm owners contract out the work on their farms because there isn't enough equipment to go around.

CAFRE is funded and run by the Department of Agriculture. It may be a smaller program, but it has a lot of technology. In the food technology area, there is a brewery, bakery, chocolate making and ice cream making.

Gardner, MSU-MCC ag program coordinator and Ag Club adviser, said CAFRE is an awesome opportunity for MCC's ag tech students to study abroad. He said it was nice to start off the day at Main Farms because his student, Marek, works at the farm and got to give them the tour.

"To see it first-hand was mind boggling to them," Gardner said about the Irish visitors' reaction to the large-scale Michigan agricultural operations. ■



CAFRE representatives toured Main Farms during their visit. Pictured, from left, are CAFRE Senior Equine Lecturer Alison Morris, CAFRE Head of Food Education Fintan McCann, MCC student and Main Farms employee Jeff Marek and CAFRE Advisor Alan Johnston.

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MCC offers agriculture program in partnership with MSU IAT

By Shelly Springborn

Montcalm Community College (MCC) offers the Agricultural Operations degree program in cooperation with the Institute of Agricultural Technology at Michigan State University (MSU).

Through this partnership, students earn an associate degree at MCC while at the same time earning a two-year certificate at MSU. It also allows students to access resources in academics, financial aid, career services and student life at both institutions.

This program is for students who are interested in gaining in-depth agricultural industry and business knowledge to apply to their own operations or to launch careers in the industry. It integrates a wide range of disciplines including business, leadership, technology and compliance through hands-on laboratory learning and classroom formats as well as a required internship.

MCC-MSU Ag Program Coordinator Brian Gardner works on MCC's Sidney campus, assisting students with agriculture career planning, professional internship placement, financial aid decisions and enrolling in necessary courses. He said the program is perfect for recent high school graduates or for those who are seeking retraining for a new career opportunity.

"Agriculture in our county is our heritage, and it is also our future. We know how important it is to us in everyday life, and we're working to enhance what we do with education to make it an even brighter future for us," Gardner said.

In addition to a cost savings whereby students pay MCC's tuition rate while attending the college, yet earn dual-enrollment credits with MSU, Gardner said every student involved in the program will complete an agricultural internship.

"The opportunity to gain hands-on knowledge will set them apart from those who only have classroom instruction," he said.

Of the credits required for certification, the majority are delivered by MCC and the remainder are delivered by MSU. It is possible for a student to complete one of these programs and transfer to a four-year agricultural degree program at MSU. All MSU courses are offered on MCC's campus or online. ■

