

Fresh Perspective



"I intend to unite the small diversified farm industry I am in using the basic models in New Zealand to collaborate, share technology, equipment, and resources in new farmer education and recruitment. Combining the various approaches from the New Zealand dairy industry, wine industry, and fruit growers will provide a good model for me to start with.

The value that I receive by getting outside of my regional box of thinking and observe other farmers' methods to solving the problems we all face is so immense it is incalculable."

Collaborative Learning



"Going to New Zealand with our group of new farmers was a once in a lifetime sort of opportunity. ...New Zealand was a perfect country to visit, given the need for members of the trip to schedule time away from farms during their less busy seasons. Also, it was great to be able to visit someplace during its growing season. Farmers usually just don't have time to look at other farmer operations during their own busy seasons.

We were able to visit a diverse number of agricultural operations in New Zealand--- ranging from cow and sheep dairies, hops, cherries, apples, wine grapes, to several sorts of processing facilities. The first day of the trip, visiting the dairy operation—I thought to myself, what does this have to do with growing cherries or vegetables? But what I discovered through conversation, and being able to visit these operations, in the company of a group of other diverse farmers, was really valuable in terms of being able to compare the overall business system of each type of farm.

I found I learned a lot, not only from the place we were visiting, but also from the people I was with, making the entire experience even more worthwhile...."

New Ideas



"I saw new ways to protect sweet cherries from cracking including rain covers, automatic calcium chloride sprinklers, and growing in bags. I also saw an increased awareness in being friendly to the environment."

"I saw farmers getting good prices for their produce and doing well in spite of high land prices and no government subsidies."

"I saw a family operation that grows, packs, and exports sweet cherries. This gave me the idea of going more vertical in my own strawberry/cherry/blackberry farm."

Cultural Views



“New Zealand communities seem to me to have a much more laid back attitude, yet have a stronger focus on priorities of community and health than the US communities. Every NZ farmer I spoke with said “you have to start with your soil health.” It didn’t matter what type of farmer. The culture is much more ecologically based than the “you gotta know what chemicals to pour into your land” focus of the US.

A conventional winery we visited said, “we don’t buy grapes if the farmer has used any herbicide sprays.” I’m excited to use the NZ examples to show other Michigan farmers that ecological methods are not only better practices due to their environmental ramifications, but also they can be more economical as well. ”

Respect for the Land



The dairy farmers, breweries and hop processing plant that we toured each found it worthwhile to team up with their counterparts, rather than compete. The new world economy will demand these types of alliances.... It was gratifying to see that being environmentally responsible was not a passing fad for NZ, but a way of life....

The opportunity to look at the different farming practices, many that aren't practiced heavily here (e.g. rotational grazing), allowed us to compare/contrast. It almost seemed as though NZ is frozen in time in some ways, yet they have adapted eloquently to changing economics, politics and the environment. Where US farmers have taken shortcuts to maximize yield (e.g. Round-Up, GMOs), NZ farmers take a longer view and do little to poison their soil or disrupt the permaculture. They respect the land and the need to let it dictate what it needs. It is almost as if they are more respectful of limited or finite resources, or have a crystal ball that predicts certain failure if this respect isn't shown."

Sticking together



"The exposure to New Zealand communities was a great experience. Most every kiwi we met seemed to be so helpful and willing to share ideas and methods. Here in the U.S. that doesn't always happen, sometimes it seems as though everyone is out for themselves. I feel if our communities worked together to achieve similar goals our industry could be much stronger, similar to the strength NZ has with their markets."

"If all the farming disappeared from the people in this group it would be terrible for everyone – we (the group) need to stick together, help each other and work together."

Protecting Farmland



"Access to water seemed very crucial in virtually all types of agriculture in New Zealand. Stewardship of that resource and the soil is crucial to the farm's success... The fundamentals of reducing pesticide and fertilizer inputs to protect the soil, air, and water quality came through at most of the farms we visited."

"By educating local farmers to make their land more productive it will preserve the land. It is great to see this happening in a free market system in New Zealand. Innovative farmers keep land in production, expand, and their farming practices add value to their land making it less attractive for development. It is clear that devaluing farmland is not the answer after seeing the systems in New Zealand, the key is increasing the value of agriculture so that land remains in production. I hope that my participation in the New FARM program and networking with other farmers helps everyone realize the potential of their farms and the value they can build in their land and community."

The Next Generation



"After being in this group, I have realized that there are things that can be done to help us make it in farming. I believe that we need more young people getting into farming for the love of it. I've seen this love in our group...."

"I was impressed by the Dairy farm program/culture they have in New Zealand. I would like to be part of a similar industry effort to encourage young people, unaccustomed to farming to enter farming."

"One of the things I found helpful was how the farming community in NZ was very helpful for young farmers wanting to get into the farming industry. I feel at home our community could be more supportive of new young farmers, and not view them as competition that should be squashed."

"This trip to NZ has got all the young growers excited about the opportunities in Ag in MI. It is a global market and MI grows a lot of quality food that is going to increase in demand. We need lots of regulatory reform in our country to assist these growers in making more money. Right now, it seems impossible for a young grower to get involved and make a living in agriculture. The costs of land, infrastructure, and annual inputs prohibits young farmers to get involved."

A Future View



"One thing I noticed about the agricultural community in New Zealand is how much farms worked with each other toward the common good. Dairy farmers transferred their cattle to other farmers who were better equipped to manage them over the winter. Hop farmers "borrowed" sheep from neighboring farmers. These kinds of relationships among farmers, if developed further than they are in the U.S. could really change farming. Being part of the New FARM group in NZ, I fostered relationships with other farmers ... I am sure the relationships I've developed with other farmers who have the same experiences and "outside the box thinking" that came from the NZ trip will provide even further farm collaboration in the future."

"One theme in New Zealand that I picked up was how the people in NZ felt about Agriculture and how they embraced it. The locals seem to think farming was cool or at least important, and they had an understanding where their food came from."

Water Matters



"Water use is essential to the success of New Zealand farmers. Despite that we live in an area with abundant water, we need to better understand how to use it efficiently to produce high quality, valuable crops. I intend to improve my understanding of irrigation strategies in our sandy conditions; it would be great for Michigan farmers to become leaders in water use efficiencies."

"I am a fourth generation farmer on our family farm. We raise beef cattle, cherries and corn. The NZ farmers have developed a very sophisticated irrigation system. By observing the NZ irrigation techniques through dykes and collection ponds, I would like to use these techniques on my farm from our tart cherry coding pad. By collecting the access water in ponds and irrigate out to adjacent corn fields."

Profitability



"As a grape grower, being exposed to New Zealand's farming practices has further proved that environmentally friendly practices can and are economically viable. This has far reaching implications into my own operations."

"Maximize land use, NZ does not grow low value commodity crops because their infrastructure does not support it. MI farmers need to be mindful of higher profitability opportunities."

"The models of cooperation shown by the wineries, grape growers, and hops growers provides a great example how cooperatives can be formed and benefit the economic growth and profitability of any farm industry."

Shared Experience



“Traveling with the New FARM group enabled a diverse group of individuals to spend a significant amount of time together sharing their trade knowledge and experience that most likely would not have happened otherwise.”

“I think that now that I have been in the New FARM program I feel that there are more young farmers with similar issues as me. I now know some friends I could go to for advice, and more people in the same “boat” that will help me be more resilient.”

“I am much closer to people in the group now. I understand better what their operations are, what they do and who they are. It offered many casual moments to have real discussions and conversations. We could not have achieved this level of cohesiveness just by having meetings at home. We had been meeting for two years as a group, but a two week trip overseas really brought us together. And I do think that is a togetherness that will have far reaching impacts on the NW Michigan Agricultural scene!”

Hops & Brews



"We found many things in common, primarily a love for the land and the possibilities it holds; and beer."

"NZ showed us several examples of cooperative business models that could work here. The dairy farmers, breweries and hop processing plant that we toured each found it worthwhile to team up with their counterparts, rather than compete. The new world economy will demand these types of alliances."

"I feel after touring the hops yards and talking to the hops growers in our region, I plan on trying to get into growing some hops..." "



Apples & Cherries



“While I am an apple and tart cherry farmer, my eyes were opened to many new growing and cultivating ideas. One of the big things I picked up on no matter what was being farmed, was the dedication the New Zealand farmers had in being good stewards of the land and leaving it in better condition than when they started.”

“Being a cherry and apple farmer one of the hardest things is finding good help. We need the attitude they have in NZ where they are proud to be farmers.”

“Seeing dwarf apple trees and seeing the amount and quality you can grow has made me change my thought of them and will be investing more. ”

