

2017 NYFEA WINTER INSTITUTE



Thirty-one Pennsylvanians, including 15 youth participants, attended the 2017 NYFEA Winter Institute December 6-9 in Savannah, Georgia. Headquarters was the beautiful Riverfront Marriott Hotel, where tugboats and huge container ships could be seen passing by. Georgia Young Farmers have 56 chapters with 5,484 members.

The conference began with the delegate business meeting on Wednesday afternoon. NYFEA's delegates were Steve Kline, Kenny and Denise Sanner, and Dan Wilkinson. It was announced that Delaware Valley University is now an affiliate member of NYFEA. Following the delegate meeting Executive Secretaries from ten states held their annual meeting.

Thursday morning's tour visited the Port of Savannah, the fourth largest container port in the U.S. and the largest in acreage (1200 acres) and tonnage handled. More containers are exported than imported, but business is more equally divided than most other ports. About 11,000 trucks per day service the port, taking about one hour to load or unload. The port has 1200 employees but supports an additional 55,000 jobs in the region. Georgia's #1 ag product is poultry, and the Savannah port is the largest poultry exporting port in the U.S.



Thursday's second tour stop was JCB, manufacturer of skid steers, backhoes, and loaders. JCB is a family run business based in Great Britain and operating in the U.S., Brazil, China, and India. Savannah is their North American headquarters and only factory in North America, covering 55,000 sq.ft. and 1000 acres. Joseph Cyril Bamford, founder of

JCB, invented the backhoe loader in 1953, and today half of all backhoes sold are built by JCB. Attendees were treated to demonstrations of all types of equipment, from small skid steers to large loaders, as well as a tour through the factory. The Savannah plant builds 8 skid steers, 50-60 backhoes, and 80-90 loaders each day. Each skid steer contains 5000 parts. JCB also offers an intern program for new high school graduates, in which they earn two associates degrees and a bachelors degree while learning on-the-job in five years.



The next stop was Ottawa Farms, 900 acres offering pick your own berries, Angus cattle, and agri-tourism features. Over 6000 school children tour the farm each year, the last remaining farm in the county.



The Mighty Eight Air Force Museum was the location of Thursday's dinner, featuring Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture Gary Black and delicious, local Leopold's ice cream. The museum contains the City of Savannah B-17 bomber from WWII.

Friday's tour left the hotel early and traveled to Appling County, where the County Farm Plant Company was founded in 1988 by James and Maria Cook. This farm produces wholesale bedding plants, vegetable transplants, hanging baskets, and a retail garden center. Attendees saw demonstrations of the automatic seeder and automatic transplanter, that plants 800-1000 trays per day, which is the amount delivered daily to 200 customers in a 140 mile radius. The Cook family and 35 fulltime and 10 seasonal employees operate 45 greenhouses covering 254,000 square feet. They grow over 100,000 flats of bedding and vegetable plants, over 375,000 pots, and over 100,000 hanging baskets annually.



The next stop was Southeastern Gin & Peanut, which employs 24 fulltime with a maximum 80 during harvest season which begins in mid October. Five hundred pound bales of cotton are run through the three cotton gins, baled, and wrapped in plastic. While there are some cotton factories in NC, 80% of the cotton is exported to be manufactured and then returned to the U.S.

The company owns wagons and semi-trailers that farmers use to deliver their peanuts to this location where they are graded by federal/state inspectors and stored until sold, about 53,000 tons per season grown in a 12 county area. The loads are probed in 15 places and dried or cleaned if necessary. The load must be below 10.4% moisture and below 7% foreign material. Peanut harvest begins the third week in August. A new type of



peanut grown is high oleic, preferred by candy makers because of its longer shelf life, but it does not grade as high or yield as much as the other types so a \$50 per ton premium is given.



The final tour stop was Circle F Farms, owned by Woody Folsom. He has 2000 acres with 800 head of registered Brahmin cattle, plus 8 Chevrolet dealerships. He stressed having a good vaccination program, excellent breeding, and gentle treatment of the animals.

Saturday morning two speakers, Chip Bridges, an ag teacher, and Greg Williams, cotton and peanut farmer, spoke about challenges and opportunities in Georgia agriculture and how the GA Dept. of Education supports agriculture education in the schools. Georgia has 42,000 FFA students and 474 ag teachers supported 70% by the state and 30% by the school district.

NYFEA officers for the coming year are Stan Deal, GA, president; Kenny Boyd, AL, president elect, Pam Berning, IN, past president, and Tim Faulkner, SC, secretary.

The Institute wrapped up with the announcement of winners of the Ag Communication Awards—Social Media winner Justin Kurtz, PA, and Press Release winner, Wyatt Law, IN. Next year's Institute will be held in Rogers, Arkansas, December 12-15, 2018.