

NYFEA INSTITUTE, NEW ORLEANS, LA, NOVEMBER 30-DECEMBER 4, 2022

The 2022 NYFEA Institute was filled with interesting information about several segments of agriculture that we in PA are not familiar with. Five PYFA members attended the Institute in New Orleans and enjoyed learning about southern agriculture and touring the fascinating city.

The first speaker was Hayley from LSU Ag Center who told us about the crawfish industry, a very important product of southern Louisiana which produces 85% of all U.S. crawfish. Some of the industry is wild caught but most is farmed on rice farms. Red Swamp Crawfish need fresh water, dissolved oxygen, and decayed rice plants to feed on. They are harvested from January to June with daily trapping; in cold weather they burrow into the mud.

Thursday was spent touring the city's various neighborhoods by way of the Hop-on Hop-off bus. Tour guides on the busses delivered much interesting information about the French Quarter, Garden District, and Arts District with their rich history, beautiful homes, and excellent food. That evening we all met at Mulatte's restaurant for some traditional Creole fare—catfish, red beans & rice, and bread pudding—with a great Zydeco band.



Jackson Square



French Market

Friday we boarded three busses for agriculture tours, learning all about growing and harvesting sugar cane. Louisiana grows 500,000 acres of sugar cane, Florida the same, and Texas 40-50,000 acres. It is the middle of harvest season so we got to watch the combines chopping the cane and trailer trucks delivering it to the factory where the first step in processing occurs, turning it into raw sugar. There are 11 raw sugar factories in LA which operate 24/7 during harvest from September to January. When the cane is harvested it must be processed within 24 hours or it begins to spoil. Harvest is a race to cut all the



sugar cane before frost destroys the crop so combines run 7 days a week, rain or shine. Average production is 33-35 tons per acre of chopped cane, which is 8500 pounds of sugar.

Fields are planted in the spring by laying stalks of cane into furrows, 6-8 feet apart, where it sprouts plants from each node. A field is harvested for 3-5 years before being replanted. Planting is the most labor intensive part of the crop, and H2A laborers are employed to plant by hand or by machine.

Front- first year sugar cane; Rear- ready to harvest

Growers lease the land and belong to a co-op which sells the crop to the mill, receiving 60% and the mill receives 40%. Each day during harvest season the mill tells each farmer how many truckloads it will accept from him that day. After processing into raw sugar, the mills sell the product to refineries which process it into the sugar products we know—white granulated, brown sugar, or powdered sugar.



After watching the harvesting, we visited Lula Westfield plant, a family business since the 1870s. The process is basically the same today as it was in the 1870s but more efficient. Lula owns 40,000 acres of

cane land and 300 hauling trailers. When the chopped cane arrives at the plant it is chopped fine and fed into a crusher to extract the juice. This process is repeated and filtered six times to remove the most sugar from the stalks. It then goes into the evaporator to remove water and become sugar crystals and molasses. The molasses is spun out by centrifuge. The residue of fiber called bagasse is used to burn for energy to run the mill. The entire process from truck to raw sugar takes about 12 hours. The raw sugar is piled in a 450 ft. long warehouse and shipped out to the refinery at the end of the season.



Next we enjoyed lunch at the banquet facility at Houman House, which we toured later in the day.



Following lunch we traveled to Nachurs Alpine Solutions, a manufacturer of fertilizers since 1946. The company has five plants in the U.S. and two in Canada, and specializes in NPK fertilizers for starter nutrition. The St. Gabriel, LA, location has 20 employees who manufacture the fertilizers and other chemicals for other industries, shipping them by rail, truck, and barge.

Nachurs mixing tank

Following the Nachurs tour, we returned to Houman House for a tour of the gardens and beautiful 1840 plantation house know as the "Sugar Palace." The structure began as a one-room cabin and trading post and was added to through the years. The estate has frontage on the Mississippi River and once contained

over 12,000 acres of the finest quality of tillable land. It now consists of 38 acres and is beautifully landscaped with many sculptures, water features, and live oak trees over 600 years old. The home is privately owned and occupied by the owner, who allows daily tours. It was fabulously decorated for Christmas.





Saturday morning following brunch, the business of NYFEA was conducted. Clovia Ketchum, TX, advanced to President, Rusty Tipton, KY, was elected President Elect, and James Wolff, IN, was elected Secretary. Next year's hosts, Texas Young Farmers, gave a preview of the Institute which will be December 6-9, 2023 in College Station on the campus of Texas A&M University. The 2024 Institute will be held in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The traditional Salute to States' Agriculture and announcement of the Ag Communications Award winner Morgan Graves, SC, and Ag Expressions Award winner Lindsey Morris, SC, followed, and then the auction of baskets and other items donated by state chapters.



In the afternoon we all rode the busses to Mardi Gras World where we toured the 300,000 square foot working warehouse where floats are made for Mardi Gras parades and we each got to make our own mask with glitter and feathers.



Then we enjoyed a two-hour dinner cruise on the paddle wheeler Creole Queen; a delicious meal accompanied by a live jazz band. The evening was beautiful so many watched the river from the upper deck. A wonderful finale to a great conference in New Orleans!

