

A

Global Adventure

Four Saint Joseph FFA livestock judges relate the experience of a lifetime as they traveled Europe and developed a more global view of agriculture.

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Our tour group posed for a photo at the Lakes of Killarney. The mountains in the background are the highest points in Ireland.

With each passing moment, the agriculture industry becomes increasingly global. Youth entering careers in animal agriculture must be aware of the changes in the industry.

Recently our livestock-judging team from Saint Joseph, Mo., witnessed firsthand the differences between the European and American beef, dairy and sheep industries as

we traveled throughout Scotland, Ireland and France.

The trip was sponsored by the National FFA Organization and was geared to teach high-school and college students about European agriculture. Visiting the Royal Highlands Show, exploring production facilities scattered throughout the three countries and staying with host families

added to the diversity of our trip.

For the four members of our judging team, the journey to Scotland began long before we applied for our passports.

In fall 1997 our group, five strong, sat in Room 124 of Hillyard Technical Center to set our goals as an FFA livestock-judging team. David Hoy, our coach, wrote at the top of the list, “win a trip to Scotland.” To

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guarantee this goal, we would have to win the livestock-evaluation career development event (CDE) at the National FFA Convention.

Many hours of work during practice and competition later culminated at the awards banquet in Louisville, Ky. We tied for runner-up, then lost the tiebreaker — oral reasons. When all was done, two points separated the top three teams of Oregon, Oklahoma and Missouri. It was one of the closest finishes in history.

A few weeks later we got our invitations to judge in Scotland. We reached our goal!

After landing in Scotland June 21, we went to the Royal Highlands Show to prepare for the judging contest in which we would compete in two days. We stepped through the front gates and entered a foreign land. At first glance it appeared to us like any other state or county fair; but, as we proceeded to the back of the grounds to the sheep and beef barns, things began to change.

In Scotland there are two climates that create a need for different types of animals. In the mountains of northern Scotland, cattlemen must select for hardiness and survival. Breeds like Galloway and Scottish Highlander are prominent. In the grasslands of southern Scotland, where the cattle must be in confinement from October to April due to the moisture, cattle are raised strictly for lean meat yield.



Textel is a double-muscled breed of sheep used for meat production in Scotland.

The show was in full swing.

Eight rings were circling at once, each with a different breed and judge. No less than two of the judges were giving reasons at the same time.

The preparation of their show animals was intriguing. The Sullivan show-supply wagon wouldn't do much business there. No clippers, adhesive or show halters were used, just cotton-rope halters and a little saddle soap.

The culmination of our judging careers came at the Scottish Young Farmers Competition June 23. We judged four classes in 20 minutes and gave two sets of reasons. Classes consisted of

Charolais, Angus, Belgian Blue and Simmental heifers. In each class the animals were lettered, from left to right, A-B-X-Y, which presented an interesting challenge when giving oral reasons.

After all the smoke had cleared, a member of our contingent from Oregon made it to the second round. The rest of us took the afternoon to enjoy and to learn as

much as we could about the little piece of Scottish agriculture represented at the show.

Traveling to Ireland gave us a new perspective of the limitations of European agriculture. The Irish government places quotas on all agricultural goods. One dairy farm we visited had a total quota of 130,000 gallons of milk per year. If a farm produces more than its quota, it is fined one and a half times the market price for the milk. And because of environmental regulations, they can't just dump excesses. This quota system is true for all agricultural industries in Ireland.


Beef animals in Ireland must be electronically tagged in both ears, and paperwork must be completed on every animal and filed through the government, similar to the licensing of a car.

Because of the quota system, these farmers have no financial incentive to produce higher-quality cattle with the traits popular in the United States, such as fast growth or carcass quality. They must merely be concerned with reaching their quota. With carcass quality not a concern, many commercial breeders use extremely heavy-muscled bulls on dairy-type cows.

Animal-rights groups are active and



Participating in the Young Farmers Competition at the Royal Highland Show was an amazing experience. Fighting for position to see the animals was one of our challenges.



These 100-foot cliffs at Point du Hoc, Normandy, France, were scaled June 6, 1944, by the Second Ranger Battalion commanded by Lt. Col. James Rudder during the Omaha Beach landings of the World War II D-Day invasion.

have implemented many laws in Europe. For example, if an animal is older than 2 weeks, a painkiller must be used when dehorning.

Our time in Ireland was short, however, and we soon were on our way to France. While in France, we had the opportunity to stay with host families for a weekend. The hosting stay provided a more personal experience and opportunity to immerse ourselves in the most intimate workings of a French family dairy farm.

The farms were much smaller in size than the average American farm, about 60 cows in a herd. Most of the European countries have a limited supply of grain and heavily graze their livestock.

More important than the agricultural knowledge we gained on the trip was the cultural experience. From the start we were faced with overcoming the communication barrier. Even the most basic questions and phrases were a challenge. We ate, slept and breathed the French culture. From visiting castles, seeing an outdoor play and going to a disco at 2 a.m., the hosting stay was a memorable experience.

The trip is only one of the many opportunities of which students involved in



The Normandy American Cemetery is one of 14 permanent American World War II cemeteries on foreign soil. Within this 172.5-acre cemetery, 9,387 American servicemen and - women are interred. It is a beautiful place that truly pays respect to those who paid the ultimate sacrifice.



Meat and produce are available at fresh-food markets like this one in Dublin, Ireland. European beef lacks the marbling of our grain-fed beef in the United States.

the FFA can take advantage. Career development events, such as livestock evaluation, provided our team with a view of the world that we could not have experienced otherwise.

Communication with agriculturists in the United Kingdom provided an insight into international agriculture from a grassroots level. As we compared our marketing of agricultural products to their marketing system, we soon realized how

fortunate we are to have the freedom to choose what we produce and when we sell it.

Students that choose agricultural education and the FFA as part of their educational experience have opportunities that many other students do not. The agricultural education experience includes leadership training, hands-on coursework in agriculture-related areas, community development and personal growth.

Students are able to interact with other students with similar interests on local, area, state, national and international levels.

Through this process, students are being educated today to solve the future's problems. For more than 70 years, this process has produced the next generation of agriculturists, thus creating a promising American agricultural future.



You still can see remains of the German bunkers at Point du Hoc that were bombed by the Allies on the eve of the D-Day invasion.