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RLND Class VI Update
Regional Agriculture and Rural Issues
Seminar 5 by Mary Mertens and Holly Miller

June 2014

Members of RLND Class VI recently attended the “Regional Agriculture and Rural Issues Seminar” June 24-27th in Minneapolis, MN. This seminar was the fifth of ten seminars Class VI participants will experience.

The first stop on the seminar was Great River Energy (GRE) in Maple Grove, MN. The class participants had lunch with GRE management and learned about the cooperative model, environmental and business development, and partnerships with GRE and community economic development. The class also received a tour of the GRE building and grounds; learning more about energy use and solar and wind power.



RLND Class VI at Great River Energy

The class then traveled into Minneapolis for a beautiful walk through the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden. The sculpture gardens showcased a wonderful way to increase the health of a community! To conclude the first day of the seminar, the class met up with Mike Liepold, Director of the Minnesota Ag and Rural Leadership (MARL) program, and his wife, Paula, to partake in a Lake Minnetonka dinner cruise. It was a wonderful opportunity to network with fellow classmates and learn more about projects and events classmates have been participating in recently.

The second day started with a unique tour and discussion at the Land O’ Lakes headquarters in Arden Hills. Gary Weber, Member Relations, provided a very interesting look into the past of Land O’ Lakes and explained the products that involve the company name. Becky Wahlund, Test Kitchen Director, provided a tour of the test kitchens and the R&D that happens at

headquarters. The class then loaded the bus and took time to process information on the way to CHS, Inc. in Inver Grove Heights. CHS provided lunch and covered many topics that involve CHS including wholesale operations, aligned solutions, grain marketing and corporate citizenship.

The evening concluded with a lively discussion on community capitals and the meaning of sustainability in the food system.

The discussion on sustainability continued on the third day, Thursday, as the group toured the Mississippi Market Natural Food Co-Op in St. Paul. Liz McMann, Consumer Affairs Manager, and Kari Binning, Marketing Manager, provided a tour through the market showcasing their local farms and ranch products, as well as seasonal products. They also discussed the local food co-op model and partnerships they are able to provide and participate with the community. The local food co-ops provide millions of dollars to local producers! The visit concluded with some shopping and purchasing of local products.



Liz McMann leads tour of Food Co-op

The next visit was to AgriBank in St. Paul. AgriBank provided lunch and gave a thorough presentation on the process of the financial resources available to agriculture and communities. Jim Scheibel, Executive in Residence at Hamline University, spoke to the group on the importance of organizing and public narrative.

The last stop was the restaurant, Cowboy Jacks, where the group discussed the first year of RLND, goals for the second year, and discussed and asked for feedback on their projects.

The following day, Friday, the seminar concluded with a discussion and a re-cap of everyone’s highlights of the seminar. We departed to our communities rejuvenated and full of new knowledge.