The eighth class of Rural Leadership North Dakota (RLND) met in Bismarck January 9-11, 2019 to learn about agriculture issues and rural policies. The group also learned first-hand how the statewide political process works.

The seminar began with a tour of Cloverdale Meats in Mandan. Cloverdale focuses on more than smoked bacon and tangy summer sausage. They are reinventing the way they bring employees into the family-owned company and also how they encourage employees to excel through quality work and training. Their efforts and investment in employee engagement demonstrated some of the key leadership components Class 8 learned about throughout the session.

The group had the opportunity to learn about milk production, automation and see a barn full of calves. RLND alumni Andrew Holle showed the group around his family operation near Mandan and explained the balance of family, milk production and distribution.

Classroom sessions for the seminar focused on the political processes that govern the state of North Dakota and how to be involved or affect those processes. Pete Hanebutt of the ND Farm Bureau walked through the campaign process and Carlee McLeod of USND explained how policy experts and constituents can engage with their legislators.
This, she noted, was important during the months of legislative session but even more important during the interim session while legislators are researching different issues and possible solutions. She stressed the importance of flexibility and partnership with others to achieve legislative victories.

The Class saw first-hand how the Legislative process works by attending various hearings at the Capitol Building. Public Service Commissioner (PSC) Randy Christmann met with the group to explain the numerous areas the PSC has oversight of and how he views his responsibilities to different stakeholders. From abandoned mines to train safety and solar farm siting issues, the complexities of serving on the PSC cannot be understated.

Many participants spent time with their local representatives or senators while the House and Senate were in session. Senate Majority Leader Rich Wardner of Dickinson and House Majority Leader Chet Pollert of Carrington visited with the class about balancing different versions of bills and how to get individuals with different ideas to work together.

Gov. Doug Burgum and Lt. Gov. Brent Sanford met with the class and discussed some of the issues facing rural areas in North Dakota. Balancing issues with housing, transportation and infrastructure and encouraging talented residents to find opportunities in the state were some of the issues they noted. Lt. Gov. Sanford discussed some of the ways the RLND program positively impacted Watford City when he was mayor.

They also described the dynamics and logistical issues that arise when the legislature is in session debating the multiple initiatives the administration has identified.

Class 8 also had the chance to learn about the vast responsibilities of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department from the Deputy Director. The Department has numerous leadership responsibilities including setting policy to protect the state from threats like Chronic Wasting Disease, managing wildlife populations and fishing regulation enforcement.

On the final day of the Seminar the Class reviewed more chapters in the Leadership Challenge book and practiced Parliamentary Procedure with NDSU Extension’s Andrea Bowman. This key skill is necessary for individuals aspiring to be involved in any type of public office, locally-elected position and smaller-scale positions as well. The group voted in various aspects of trail mix and enjoyed the product of their work while the seminar concluded with additional information about their upcoming trip to Chile.

Within the span of three days, Class 8 saw leadership in action. It was in expected areas like the hallway of the state capitol but in areas a bit more secluded like a barn full of newborn calves or the human resources department of a meat processing facility. The seminar reinforced what we have been learning all along, that acts of leadership exists all around us in expected and surprising ways.