

## The Kitchen Window, Mines, Logs, Ships and Vietnam

So you are probably looking at the title of this blog post and are wondering what do all these words, The Kitchen Window, Mines, Logs, Ships and Vietnam have in common? Not much other than "all things Minnesota Farm Living from the past week."

Okay, so let's dissect my past week.

Starting on Monday afternoon, I attended a [CommonGround Minnesota](#) workshop.

CommonGround is a group of volunteer farm women whose main goal is to have conversations and answer questions other consumers may have about their food. Our workshop speakers included [Sue Zelickson \(foodie from WCCO radio\)](#), Steve Wehrenberg, Missy Morgan, [Katie Pratt](#) and Roxi Beck of [Center of Food Integrity](#). A very nice array of topics were presented.

We ended our workshop with an influencer event at the [Kitchen Window](#), which is a kitchen retail store that also offers cooking classes. So who were the influencers? Women from many "food" walks of life--from women responsible for school lunch programs to local TV news personalities (I met and talked with [Kim Johnson](#) of WCCO. She convinced me I need to try pork belly.)

Together, we prepared our own food via various food preparation stations atop the Kitchen Window outdoor kitchen roof deck area. Not only was the food phenomenal, but great conversations ensued. Here was our menu:

- Smoke & Shake Parmesan Chicken Wings
- Petite filet mignon slider bar
- Roasted garlic, blue cheese, mushroom and onion flatbread
- Gambas al ajilo (garlic shrimp) with romesco
- Ginger biscuit and fresh fruit

We ended the evening with an informal Q & A where CommonGround volunteers were asked questions about how we raise and grow food on our farms. Everyone was truly engaged and in my opinion, we had the best, deep-rooted conversations of the evening. And the frosting on the cake

(pardon the pun) for me was reconnecting and meeting new members of CommonGround Minnesota. Just an all around great workshop and delightful event.

I left Wednesday morning for Duluth to attend the next session of MARL. In my humble opinion, the Duluth area is Minnesota's biggest secret. It's absolutely beautiful! *I LOVE Duluth!* And it was really nice to see everyone again from MARL. A few highlights:

On Wednesday afternoon we visited a vegetable farm at the Hoffbauer Farm. "Farmer Doug" grows many types of vegetables and flowers along with evergreen trees. He and his wife, Lois, are dedicated to providing customers the highest quality and best tasting fresh fruits and vegetables possible. And based on the way his gardens look, he does exactly that!

Starting at 6:30 a.m. Thursday morning, we boarded a bus for a 10-hour tour of the mining and logging industries. I think it's fair to say many Minnesotans do not realize the importance of either one of these industries. And my personal knowledge level of these industries needed some help.

The mines hold a special place with me. Many of my family members were from northern Minnesota and worked in the mines when mining was at it's peak. Our bus took us to Hibbing Taconite. One interesting note was how both the mining and farming industries are similar. They, too, become frustrated with additional regulations and permitting requirements. It took a year for them to receive a permit to move a conveyor. Do you think we have just one too many regulations/permitting requirements? It was impressive to hear how taconite is reclaimed through new technologies. I look forward to hearing about newer technologies that are only valid on the drawing boards or stored in someone's intellectual mind.

Random fact: Did you know that 90% of iron and steel is recycled?

Our next stop took us to the logging forests. We were reminded that more trees are planted than are harvested. It takes 45-50 years for a newly transplanted tree to reach full maturity for logging purposes. That's a long time. The logging area we visited was primarily Aspen trees used for paper fibers.

After we finished our bus tour, we were all looking forward to the highlight of the day--the revelation of our international trip! We were given a number of clues prior to the announcement and I think many of us already knew where we were headed. So where ARE we headed next February?

VIETNAM!!!! I do have to admit that I remember the Vietnam war. I was young but I remember the

feeling of families hoping their sons would not be drafted. I remember the evening news continually peppered with war scenes. Every. single. night. I remember watching the end of the war scenes and the returning POWs. Putting that aside, I am excited about going! And from what I have heard from others who have visited Vietnam, it is beautiful.

Our last day concluded with a tour of the [Duluth Port Authority](#). The seaway of Duluth employees 3000 people locally. They ship out 38,000,000 in total tonnage per year. Yes, the shipping business has changed over the years, but like all other northern Minnesota industries, they are adapting and using technology to grow their industries in different ways. We ended our MARL experience with a harbor cruise on the Vista Star.

My family decided to stay a couple extra days in Duluth after MARL ended, which meant I missed my family reunion on Saturday. It's been many years since I have missed a family reunion. And even as I write this, I still feel bad about it. Family means everything to me. For many of us, we may only see each other once a year but we have that "family connectedness" that no one else has. And we keep losing family members every year. My dad, who was one of 14 siblings, is now down to one sibling. No, it's not the same family reunion from years ago. But we adjust, we make it what it is and we enjoy each other's company.

And we are grateful.