

Teachers Learn About Minnesota Agriculture Through Tours

Learning never stops for teachers. Especially for 40 teachers located from all areas of Minnesota. They embarked on a two-day ag tour visiting ag businesses and farms in southern Minnesota. The bus trip, sponsored by [Minnesota Soybean](#) and [Minnesota Ag in the Classroom](#), was the first-ever educational tour where teachers could learn about agriculture and earn continuing education credits. They probably were a little apprehensive. Perhaps mixed with a bit of excitement. But no one doubted they came prepared to learn about agriculture in southern Minnesota.

So, let's hop on the bus and get started!

AgCo

Our first stop was [AgCo located in Jackson, MN](#). All I knew about the company prior to the tour, was they manufactured farm machinery and equipment. When we arrived, we prepared ourselves for the two-hour tour with a short video. We all put on headphones/receivers (so we could hear the tour guide) and safety glasses. Our group was split into two groups and before you know it, we were off!

AgCo has several companies around the world. The facility we toured manufactures Massey-Ferguson tractors. And we got to observe a tractor, on an assembly line, assembled from start to finish. It was awesome! The company employs over 900 people and we were all blown away by how large the company is. And, oh, the technology. One of the first things our tour guide told us was how they use google glasses. That technology is crazy. Imagine wearing glasses and having documents and drawings show up in your glass lenses! That is just one example of the technology they use.

One of the takeaways for me was all the different types of jobs available. Learning a skill or trade is essential for companies like AgCo. These are quality jobs, good pay and good benefits. Its a great working environment—it was very clean. They truly take pride in their working environment.

Ready for our next stop?

Round Lake Winery

By this time, it was lunch time. Can you think of a better place to tour and eat lunch than a winery? Yes, [Round Lake Winery](#) here we come! I surprised the teachers when I told them we would be doing a wine tasting as we toured the winery and vineyards. Surprisingly, no one objected.

Wineries and growing grapes has blossomed in Minnesota. We were fortunate to listen to the wine maker as the winery was bottling that day. Lunch was a simple burger bar along with a glass of wine. The day was beautiful, the surroundings exquisite with a waterfall garden. Perfect! My favorite wine? Temptation!

The only negative was we had to leave and couldn't enjoy it longer. Our next stop?



Round Lake Winery



Round Lake Winery



Round Lake Winery

Minnesota Soybean Processors

Now we are on our way to [Minnesota Soybean Processors](#) in Brewster. We started in their conference room where general manager, Scott Austin presented to the group. MSP is an independent soybean processor. Farmers from about a 50-mile radius deliver and sell their soybeans to this facility. Soybeans are processed by cracking the beans, which allows the oil to be extracted. Once the oil is extracted, soybean meal is left. Soybean meal is used for feed in livestock, the oil is either transported for further processing or is processed locally into biodiesel. Most of the soybean meal is exported to Mexico.

Minnesota is a leader requiring all diesel fuels to contain 20% biodiesel. We reminded the teachers that the bus they were riding in, was fueled by biodiesel. Love when we can “grow” our fuel!

We split into four groups and started to tour the facility. We had to leave our cell phones in the conference room because of the dangerous chemicals we would be near would cause damage to our phones. We all put on hardhats (looking official) and were on our way. We literally toured every nook and cranny of the facility. We climbed stairs, went into control rooms—all with a different view of the soybean processing facility.

Perhaps what hit most teachers (and me) the most was when Scott Austin talked to the group about what he looks for in hiring new employees. He reiterated he needed employees that show up, can write a email that is easily understood and can communicate effectively. They need to think on their feet and problem solve.

And he has a hard time finding employees.

I heard a number of comments after this tour about how this message needs to be heard by more people and students. He was very clear in his message.

The only negative aspect in this tour was trying to keep on schedule. This was my first time scheduling a tour and believe me, I learned a lot. I now know what I will and won't do next time. The other aspect I took home was how passionate they are about their jobs. You could see it. You could feel it. It was awesome to see people have this much passion!



Scott Austin, general manager, speaking to teacher group

Heritage Acres

We were now on our way back to Martin County and Heritage Acres. Once we arrived at [Heritage Acres](#), Sue Knott and Keri Sidle of Minnesota Ag in the Classroom were ready to show them [MAITC resources](#) available to them. They were put into small groups based on the grades they teach and then were given a MAITC lesson to complete. Sue and Keri tag teamed (and did it wonderfully) and showed them how to order materials and access the curriculum matrix. Did you know there are over 400 lessons K-12? And you can sort by keyword, grade level, subject area and

standards?

But the biggest surprise of the day came next. Each teacher received a \$30 gift card to buy classroom materials through the Ag Classroom Store. Again, thank you to Minnesota Soybean!

It was now time to relax and enjoy a stuffed pork chop meal provided by [Lacey's Catering](#). We would be joined with other members of Minnesota Ag in the Classroom board of directors and other interested personnel. Joel Mathiowetz proceeded to conduct the annual MAITC meeting. After the meeting, attendees checked out the Heritage Acres buildings and displays.

It was a long and exhausting day. But a fun day!



MAITC lesson



MAITC lesson



MAITC annual meeting



MAITC lesson

Now on to Day 2!

Center Creek Orchard

Our morning's first stop was Center Creek Orchard in Fairmont. [Center Creek Orchard](#) is owned and operated by Gary and Karen Toupal. When Gary and Karen bought this acreage, they had no intent on turning it into an apple orchard/agritourism site. Gary started planting some apple trees. And then some more. And then some more. Until they had an apple orchard.

They are both newly retired enjoying their second life. Center Creek Orchard. The orchard is an agritourism site also. I took my granddaughter there last year and I couldn't believe all the really fun family activities they have for families to do. It's definitely worth a trip.

They are open on the weekends September-October. During the week they host school groups.

Minnesota Farm Living

Connecting Consumers with Farmers

<http://www.mnfarmliving.com>

Last year they hosted 40 groups. We learned a bit about agritourism and how they have grown their business. We also learned about the apple orchard business—how to grow apples and the challenges that go with it.

I must say they did a fabulous job!



Center Creek Orchard



Center Creek Orchard



Center Creek Orchard

Next stop? A hog barn site owned by Nick Tonne.

Nick Tonne Hog Farm

Nick is a young farmer—someone trying to start his farming business. Let me say, to start farming is really, really hard. Nick works with his family, but a few years ago, decided to build a hog barn and contract with a local farm, LB Pork. This business setup is very common. Barns are very expensive to build (newest ones now cost about \$1,000,000) that it's next to impossible to buy the pigs, buy the feed and then wait 6 months for a paycheck. Contracting with another farm allows new, young farmers a guaranteed monthly rent check and start to build equity. The certainty of a rent check is

good for them and bankers like it.

Martin County is the #1 hog producing county in Minnesota. Our county sells over 2,000,000 pigs per year. I gave the teacher group some basics about raising hogs and biosecurity as we would all be required to put on disposable boots once we arrived at the farm. The boots are not to protect us, but rather, to protect the animals. Because we just don't know where everyone's shoes have been. I told the group, no question off the table. I knew this would be something many of them had never seen before. The hog barn we toured holds 2400 head. The pigs looked great and are very curious as they were scurrying around. Some asked about the marks that some of the pigs had on them. If a pig is not acting quite right, we will place a mark on them so we can keep close watch on them.



Nick Tonne Hog Farm

Now we were ready for our last stop—The Brad and Rochelle Krusemark Farm.

Brad and Rochelle Krusemark Farm

One we arrived, it was time for lunch. All the teachers had the opportunity to eat one of Martin County's famous pork chop on-a-stick. And they were tasty! Thank you to Martin County Pork Producers for donating the pork chops! They didn't disappoint. The Krusemark also treated us to some fresh sweet corn. It was the first sweet corn I ate this year so it was doubly good. We finished our meal with homemade mini apple and cherry pies from Lacey's Catering.

Rochelle started us off by introducing us to her farm and family using a powerpoint presentation. We then split into three groups- one lead by A.J. Krusemark who talked about some of the crop nutrient research he is involved in, one group lead by Caleb Krusemark who talked about their cattle operation and the last one lead by Brad and Rochelle who talked about their precision/cover crop equipment.

Part of the teacher tour agenda was a mystery activity and they were ready to find out what it was.

They would all get a chance to drive a tractor!

And they loved it!. Each person drove a tractor and had a "buddy" with them to help them if they needed it. It was truly fun and great to see them drive. I saw lots and lots of smiles with this activity. There just is nothing better than seeing, touching and feeling what we do on the farm.

And just like that, the tour was over. I heard a lot of very positive comments. Some said they had a blast! They all filled out evaluation forms so I will be very interested to get their perspective.



Brad and Rochelle Krusemark Farm



Tractor Driving!



Driving tractor



Pork Chops! Thanks to Martin County Pork Producers!

In the end, what does a tour like this mean?

I had someone ask me what I thought the teachers would get out of an ag tour. Wow, what a loaded question. First, teachers love to learn. They wouldn't be teachers if they didn't. By touring agriculture sites, many experienced something they will never experience anywhere else. They learn about how their food is raised and grown. They learn that there are many types of farms. They learn how our local ag businesses are important to farmers. They now have a perspective that many other teachers don't have. It expands their horizons, which will make them better teachers. They can talk with authority and credibility when teaching their students about farming, science and where their food comes from. They are important influencers to their students, which is why it's important they have the truth and can share that truth about agriculture.

And with that, I thank them for taking two days out of their day and touring southern Minnesota. They were a fun and wonderful group. I also want to thank Sue Knott and Keri Sidle for helping me stay sane and on schedule. Could not have done this without them or Minnesota Soybean.

print

Like this:

Like Loading...