

A SEAT AT THE TABLE



Two CALS Students Complete FAO Internships

BY VANESSA BEESON

Two undergraduate students in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences recently completed internships with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, or FAO. The organization's mission is to achieve food security for all and make sure people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives. Both MSU students engaged in FAO's critical work to ensure citizens of the world have access to a seat at the table.

Naomi Taylor visits with a village in Malawi and conducts an irrigation survey. Photo submitted.

Naomi Taylor, environmental economics and management major in the Department of Agricultural Economics, traveled to Malawi, Africa to survey villages about irrigation while Bailey Martin, food science, nutrition and health promotion major, set off to Santiago, Chile, to do her part to combat childhood obesity.

NAOMI TAYLOR

Taylor learned about the internship from Randall Little, her agricultural economics professor.

"I saw tremendous tenacity and drive in Naomi, which prompted me to encourage her to pursue this opportunity. Her sense of confidence communicates a willingness and ability to tackle such a huge venture. I didn't know if she would go for it, but I was certain that if anyone could handle it, Naomi could," Little said. "We are very proud of the job she did. She exhibited great courage in this undertaking and represented our department, college, and university with excellence."

Taylor saw tremendous promise in the opportunity.

"I am majoring in environmental issues and global economics and minoring in international studies, so this internship was ideal since it gave me a chance to contribute to something big like the global issue of food security while working abroad in a developing country."

In 2004, a severe drought in Malawi caused a national food shortage. Eighty percent of the country's economy depends on agriculture. The government requested assistance from the FAO and the Flanders International Cooperation Agency, or FICA, for small-scale farmers. In 2008, the

organizations initiated the *Improving Food Security and Nutrition Policy and Program Outreach Project* in the Malawian districts of Kasungu and Mzimba, both of which were heavily impacted by the drought. An emphasis of the program included introducing irrigation to farming communities.

Taylor's internship analyzed the impacts of introducing irrigation. She also assessed current challenges and suggested solutions. She evaluated food security, nutrition, and income of irrigated and non-irrigated sites throughout the two districts. FAO was in charge of getting her where she needed to go but everything else was up to her.

"I created questionnaires and conducted



Above: Naomi visits with two children in Malawi; left: a roadside market in Malawi. Photos submitted.

surveys with the help of a translator," Taylor said. "After I collected the data, I created and presented a final report where I analyzed the information, evaluated challenges, and offered solutions. I presented the report at FAO's Kasungu regional office and the organization's Malawian headquarters in Lilongwe."

The internship took a considerable amount of patience and perseverance. The villages Taylor visited to interview the farmers often required traveling for hours down dirt roads. Additionally, there was a fuel shortage that contributed to long delays, altered schedules, and canceled visits.

"In the end, I ended up visiting 17 irrigation sites and five non-irrigation sites,"

Taylor said. "I wish I could have visited more sites because the analysis isn't as quantitative as I would have liked but ultimately, I feel like I've accomplished what I set out to do."

Despite the challenges, Taylor grew to enjoy the Malawian way of life.

"When I visited the villages a couple of times, women would sing and dance for me and tell me how thankful they were for the visit. I was also gifted with a chicken on two occasions," Taylor said. "The people are really what make Malawi great."

Taylor said the internship has made her more committed to her major and minor.

"I enjoyed gaining access to a global perspective on economic issues," Taylor said.

"Much of what I did focused on economy, things like affording fuel and equipment and delivering an efficient distribution of inputs. While I would like to focus more on the environmental side, I would love to work with government policy, with an organization like FAO. I want to have an impact on a larger scale."

The overall lessons Taylor garnered from the experience included confidence and gratitude.

"I never in a million years thought I would go to Africa, let alone spend three months in such basic conditions," Taylor said. "We didn't always have electricity or indoor plumbing. I have a deeper appreciation for these amenities now."

BAILEY MARTIN

Martin, who is pursuing a concentration in nutrition, was excited about the chance to help fight childhood obesity in Santiago, Chile. Both Sylvia Byrd, food science, nutrition and health promotion professor and Renee Matich, food science, nutrition and health promotion instructor, encouraged her to apply.

“In the field of nutrition, cultural competency, and cross cultural skills are essential but often difficult to develop without hands-on experiences,” Matich said. “Bailey embraced her FAO internship knowing it would allow her to experience the world beyond her comfort zone. I believe she has returned with a strong sense of professional responsibility and validation of her personal resilience.”

Martin was accepted as a resource mobilization and communications intern for FAO. Martin’s internship centered on comparing childhood obesity rates in Chile versus the United States. Her research paper, which was submitted to and accepted by the FAO, provides details and insight on policy and statistics on childhood obesity in both countries. Her findings will be used to build more research and as a reference for childhood obesity questions.

She worked and interacted with interns from over 20 countries including Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Mexico, Denmark, and France. Her internship provided many opportunities to travel throughout Santiago and conduct interviews with representatives



Left: Bailey (second from right) and friends riding bikes around Santiago. Right: Bailey with fellow FAO staff on her last day at the office. Photos submitted.



from two of Santiago’s organizations working to address childhood obesity in Chile.

One such organization was JUNAEB, Chile’s national council for school assistance, where she interviewed nutritionist, Sofia Bustos, who supplied information about the food offered in schools and showed interest in beginning a partnership between the council’s feeding program and FAO’s research regarding childhood obesity in Chile.

She also traveled to the community of La Reina to assist in the development of the Urban Gardens there.

“This garden project is designed to bring local gardens to the seven school districts in La Reina. The objective is to place gardens at the schools so that the children can develop knowledge about how healthy and nutritious local foods are grown.” Martin said. “I hosted an interview with the director

and creator of the project and reported the findings back to FAO to further establish rapport between the two organizations.”

While in Santiago, she embraced the culture by participating in a variety of activities. “Some of my favorite memories include a curry dinner with other expats, hiking El Roble Mountains with co-workers, participating in a parade in Valparaiso and scuba diving in the waters off of Easter Island,” Martin said.

While the language barrier was a challenge for Martin, she embraced it as an opportunity to delve into the culture.

“Not knowing the language was a challenge,” Martin said. “I spent many evenings at the language exchange practicing and improving my Spanish.”

Martin says time spent at the exchange was a source of joy, a place where she learned Spanish and forged friendships.

For Martin, the experience solidified her choice of major and ignited her passion for travel and blogging.

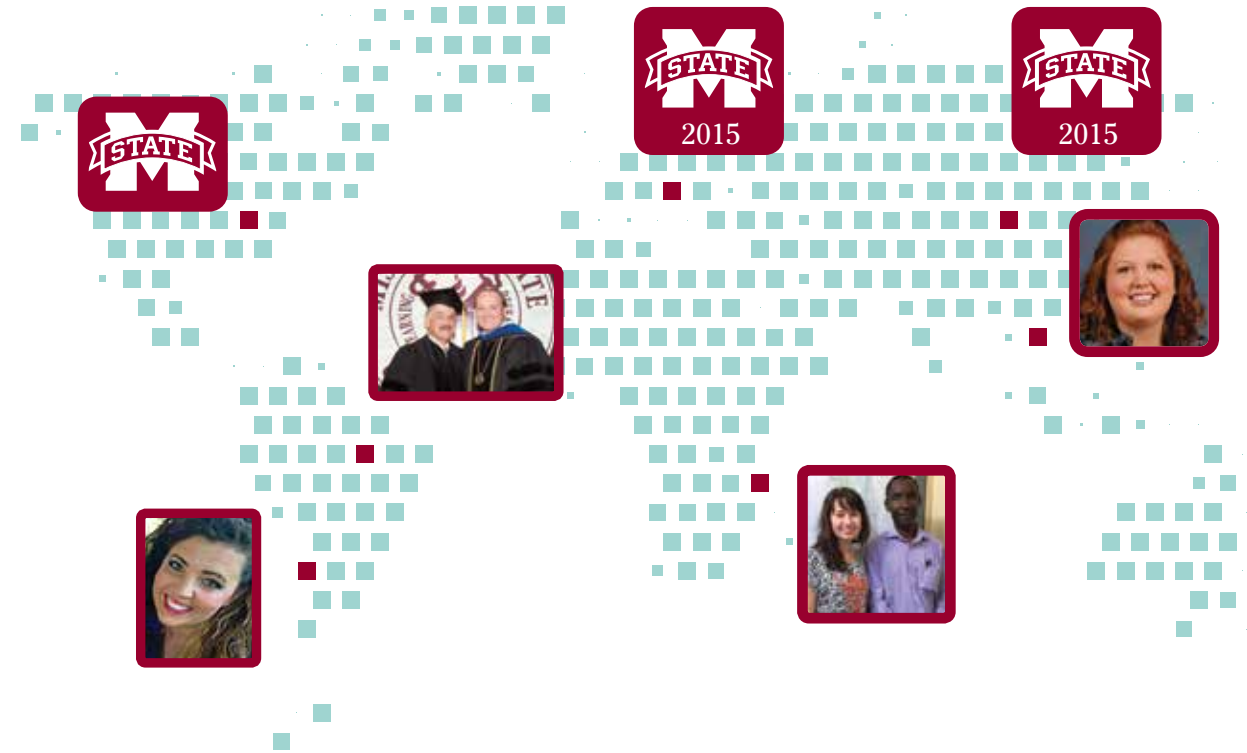
“I have a new appreciation for my major. The internship shed light on the importance of quality nutrition as something that translates across all boundaries,” Martin said. “This experience also taught me my dream job will include health, nutrition, blogging, and travel.”

At the end of the adventure, the life lessons Martin gained from the experience included being able to step out of her comfort zone and embrace new experiences.

“Spending three months in Chile taught me the importance of embracing another culture and striving to make a positive impact on the lives of the people you meet,” Martin said.



APRIL MCCAIN, an animal and dairy sciences graduate student at MSU, is in Vietnam working as a Borlaug Fellow. She is conducting the first safety survey on meat and poultry products in Vietnam. Photo submitted.



STUDY ABROAD INITIATIVE

STUDY ABROAD opens a world of opportunities for CALS students. It immerses a student into an unfamiliar world with different cultures, languages, and environments. It helps students become more marketable to employers and provides numerous intangible life skills. It also teaches students to appreciate and embrace diversity firsthand. A recent survey by the Institute for the International Education of Students found that study abroad positively and unequivocally influences the career path, world-view, and self-confidence of students.

While a recent MSU report indicates that less than four percent of CALS students participated in a study abroad experience as an undergraduate student, the Dean has set a goal to increase participation to at least 15 percent in the next five years. CALS administrators and faculty believe that study abroad prepares students to work in our interconnected global world. That’s why the college has embarked on an initiative to assist students in an international or study abroad experience as an undergraduate.

This year the college has funded two Study Abroad Faculty-Led programs: Landscape architecture’s Charles Fulford is teaming with Charles Freeman and Caroline Kobia, fashion design faculty in the School of Human Sciences, for a trip to Italy to explore farm to fashion. Plant and Soil

Sciences faculty member Guihong Bi is partnering with Shien Lu, a faculty member in biochemistry, molecular biology, entomology and plant pathology to explore the past, present, and future of agriculture in China.

STUDY ABROAD MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH GENEROUS DONORS

A recent gift by Phyllis Ford established the Donald and Phyllis Ford Excellence Fund in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences to support study abroad opportunities. Growing up on a farm in Greenville in the Mississippi Delta, Don learned about agriculture early in life. As a gifted athlete, he excelled in football, baseball, and track and received a football scholarship to Mississippi State in 1955. He considered coaching as a career, but following an injury, he changed

his course to agriculture. Mr. Ford had a highly successful career in the ag-chemical business and served as chairman of the board and president of American Plant Food Corporation. Donald Ford was honored as the 2013 CALS Alumnus of the Year. Donald Ford died in February of 2014. Phyllis Ford is continuing his legacy through this gift.

MAKE A GLOBAL IMPACT

Study Abroad is a major initiative in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and you can help provide opportunities to train future leaders in global awareness. Gifts may be designated for the Study Abroad Initiative to fund scholarships, faculty support, travel, and logistics. Please contact Jud Skelton at jud.skelton@foundation.msstate.edu or 662-325-0643 or Dees Britt at dbritt@foundation.msstate.edu or 662-325-2837.