



Dr. David Galton
Cornell Dairy Fellows Program

“Cornell Dairy Fellows Program fulfills Cornell mission to ‘interweave fundamental knowledge with practical education’”

By Melanie Soberon
08/25/2010

‘A commitment to the interweaving of fundamental knowledge and practical education’ is one of the core values of Cornell University emphasized by Cornell President Skorton in his “State of the University Address” in October 2009 (Cornell University Strategic Plan 2010-2015). The Cornell Dairy Fellows program, founded by David M. Galton, professor of animal science, in 1983, exemplifies this mission through its strategic balance of scientific instruction and practical industry education. Every year, between 38 and 45 students enter this nationally recognized dairy program known for its industry focus.

Galton began the Cornell Dairy Fellows program in the fall of 1983 with the vision that students headed for careers in the dairy industry needed more than traditional science courses to prepare for the ever-changing world of modern agriculture.

“Our program emphasizes science, business and management” said Galton. “Over time, we’ve developed business and herd management courses to complement traditional science courses in order to better equip students for the dairy industry. While the science is here and an essential part of the Dairy Fellows program, dairy industry is the focus – there are very few programs that have that focus with the same degree of intensity.”

The underlying qualification for applicants to the Cornell Dairy Fellows program is a sincere interest in careers in the dairy industry, whether that career is related to veterinary medicine, research, agribusiness, law, production agriculture or another aspect of the dairy industry. Sixty to seventy percent of Dairy Fellows students pursue careers in dairy production.



2010 Dairy Fellows students and advisors

“The core strength of the Dairy Fellows program is the combination of courses and experiences that prepare students to have a better awareness and knowledge base of the dairy industry” said Galton.

As a junior, along with the study of dairy industry and farm analyses, Dairy Fellows develop a resume and take personality assessments in order to establish career direction and prepare them for an internship the upcoming summer. Animal science faculty members Dave Galton, Thomas Overton and Mike Van Amburgh work with the students individually to match them with that internship.

“We work with the students very closely and know them on a personal basis,” said Galton. “Internships are a major component of the Fellows program. Almost all the Fellows do an internship between their junior and senior year of college but some will also do summer internships earlier in their college career – we don’t mandate the internship, but highly insist that they do at least one.”

“In the senior Dairy Fellows course, students participate in the more intense farm analyses, industry tours, and seminars,” said Galton. “They go more in-depth on the trends of the dairy industry, and we help them better position themselves as they apply for jobs.”

Other than the two required courses, Dairy Fellows are free to choose additional courses according to what is relevant to their interests, whether that be dairy herd management, research, business, or another topic.

“There is not an absolute required sequence of courses they have to take for Fellows, although a variety of courses have been developed to meet the needs of preparing the students for industry,” said Galton. “We have a more advanced nutrition course, a course on whole farm nutrient management, herd health, Spanish and a decision making course. We didn’t have these courses fifteen years ago. Also, we have been very fortunate that the Cornell undergraduate business program has developed into one of the top-ranked undergraduate business schools in the country, currently ranked at number five. We are also very fortunate to be at Cornell where the students can take those courses as animal science students and still take all the business courses they’d like.”

Exchange programs are another emphasized aspect of the Cornell Dairy Fellows program. Through Cornell Abroad, students can arrange to study for a semester or year in another American or international university; popular sites of study include New Zealand, Scotland, England, Spain and Australia.

One of the principal components of the Dairy Fellows courses and program are the in-depth farm analysis tours. On a typical in-depth farm analysis tour, students will visit a farm equipped with limited data about the farm production and management. They will have a few hours on the farm to interview the producer and agribusiness professionals that service the farm as well as to make on-farm observations, calculations and ultimately, recommendations to the dairy farmer regarding potential improvements or problem areas.

“We go to dairies where there is a trust established, whether it is because the farmers know the county extension agent, who set up the tour, or we know the owners,” Galton said. “There are dairies and businesses that we’ll go to that we don’t know but we feel more comfortable when we do know them so that we can ask more direct questions that yield more information for the students. There is also follow-up through county agents and/or Pro-Dairy specialists and some follow-up from faculty.”



Students discuss the farm they analyzed earlier in the day with the producer and agribusiness professionals that service the farm as they formulate their recommendations.

As for industry tours, every other year, the students visit California for a week of touring various agricultural production sites.

“California is the place to take students to give them a high impact exposure to a variety of agricultural commodities – dairy, grapes, nuts, citrus fruit, beef,” explained Galton. “We could take them to Florida and then Texas and then Iowa but you’d have to travel a long way to achieve the high impact of each of these aspects of modern agriculture.”

On the alternating years, Dairy Fellows students often join the Cornell University Dairy Science club on their international dairy industry tours. These trips take place in Italy, Spain or Germany. Cornell animal science faculty members Mike VanAmburgh, Thomas Overton and David Galton organize and oversee these tours.

Dairy Fellows also attend dairy industry conferences to keep abreast with current industry news and trends as well as the application of scientific studies in the dairy industry. Some of the conferences that Fellows attend include the Northeast Dairy Producer Association annual meeting in Syracuse, NY, the Cornell Nutrition Conference in Syracuse, NY, the Herd Health and Nutrition Conference in Auburn, NY, and the Western U.S. Dairy Herd Management Conference in Reno, NV.

“We encourage them to go to the conferences and will financially support their attendance through registration, lodging and meals,” said Galton.

Financial support for the Fellows program comes from dairy producers, agribusinesses who are involved in Dairy Fellows, Dairy Fellow alumni and Pro-Dairy, who customarily raise \$45 to 60,000 a year to help support the program. Pro-Dairy is a state-funded team of ten specialists in various dairy farm management disciplines who work directly with dairy

producers and agribusiness professionals to enhance the profitability of individual dairies. Since 1997, Pro-Dairy has been administered by the Cornell Animal Science department, directed by David Galton until 2010, although most of the specialists are located in the department of their discipline - Soil and Crop Science, Agricultural and Economic Management, and Youth Development among others. Thomas Overton, professor of animal science at Cornell is the current director. The specialists from Pro-Dairy participate in the Dairy Fellows program by teaching in the courses, participating in the farm analysis and the industry conferences.

As students graduate from Dairy Fellows, their level of interest remains high in the program due to its personalized nature. Alumni continue to participate in the program's industry tours, the most recent being a week-long trip to dairy farms in the region of southeast Georgia and northwest Florida in January of 2010.



Cornell Dairy Fellows and Alumni visit a grazing dairy farm with 600 head of cattle during the 2010 Florida and Georgia Dairy Fellows Alumni and Contributors trip in January.

“Every year, we pick an area that has growth in the dairy industry or something new and different to host our annual Dairy Fellows Alumni and Contributors trip,” said Galton. “This provides an opportunity for the students to interact with alumni, but it also serves to maintain an identity with the alumni – that the Dairy Fellows program is still continuing and still working towards the same mission as when they were in it.”

David M. Galton, is a New York native, born and raised on a dairy farm in western New York. After receiving his B.S., M.S. and PhD degrees at Ohio State, Galton spent some time as an assistant professor of dairy science at Louisiana State University before returning to New York as a professor of animal science at Cornell University in 1981.