2013 NEW GRAD STUDENTS

The Department of Horticulture is joined this fall by seven new graduate students: David Corey Noyes (MS, Brainard), Adam Ingrao (PhD, Fernandez), Diep Tran (PhD, Beaudry), Fransiska Basundari (PhD, Iezzoni), Matthew Bedewitz (PhD, Barry), Ben Mansfield (PhD, in rotation) and Shujun Ou (PhD, Jiang)
INTRODUCTION TO HORTICULTURE INDUSTRIES IN MI

As part of the Horticulture grad student orientation, the Department sponsored a tour of a cross-section of our Michigan horticultural industries and visits to our Clarksville, Northwest Michigan and Southwest Michigan research centers. Four of our incoming students (Ingrao, Tran, Basundari, and Ou) and Marivi Colle, who was previously unable to participate, joined the three-day, two-night, 700-mile journey lead by Dr. Randy Beaudry, Graduate Program Chair, and our Department Chairperson, Dr. Vance Baird.

Day 1: We started out mid-morning on August 19 under fair Michigan skies, which, it might be noted, stayed fair the whole trip (Michigan being what it is, the tour leaders were mildly astonished). Our first stop was the Clarksville Horticultural Experiment Station in Clarksville, MI where Dr. Greg Lang introduced the students to his high tunnel work on cherry. We learned about the impact of the high tunnels on pest and disease pressure, and about tree growth characteristics under different pruning systems. The second stop was Riveridge Packinghouse in Sparta, MI. Mr. Jamie Kober gave us a highly informative tour of these state-of-the-art storage and packing facilities, highlighting the electronically integrated nature of the many systems used to clean, sort, shine, package, and market Michigan apples.
Lunchtime found us just across Hwy 31 at the picnic tables of the Schwallier farm, run by Phil Schwallier, and the associated farm market, Schwallier’s Country Basket, operated by his wife, Judy Schwallier. Mr. Schwallier, an MSU Regional Extension Educator, introduced the group to his farm, which he heavily depends upon for his many research projects with the Michigan apple industry. He also provided a short tour of the agricultural entertainment (a.k.a., ‘agritainment’) features of the farm market (e.g., rides, petting barn, goat pen), which comprise a growing aspect of today’s farm markets as they innovate to survive in an increasingly urban world. We climbed into the van and headed north on Hwy 131 for a two-and-one-half-hour drive to the Traverse City area and our final educational venue of the day: Bel Lago Winery and its vineyards in Leelanau county near Cedar, MI. As we sipped a trio of Bel Lago white wines, one of the owners, Dr. Charley Edson, led us to the vineyard where he lectured us on the challenges of cultivar, climate, insect pests, and pathogens in wine production. An informative and entertaining tour of the cellar demonstrated the remarkable impacts of blending, aging, and barrel storage on wine flavor.
We finished out the evening with a fish dinner at Dick’s Pour House in the small town of Lake Leelanau followed by a perfect sunset view of Lake Michigan and the Manitou Islands from the sandy (and ‘squeaky’) shores of Sleeping Bear Dunes at Good Harbor Bay.

Day 2: After a nice ‘American’ style breakfast at the 45th Parallel Cafe in Sutton’s Bay (food portions much too large), we travelled to the Northwest Michigan Horticultural Research Center where Mr. Bill Klein, the farm manager, introduced us to the Center, then loaded us onto a green and white (of course) trailer for a farm tour on what was a truly beautiful Northern Michigan morning. Myron Anderson drove as Bill introduced us to the many projects in which the farm is engaged, recounting the diverse departments in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources represented in those efforts. We then headed down-state to the Grand Rapids area to visit Henry Mast Greenhouses in Byron Center, Michigan. Mr. Leroy Devries, the facility manager, gave us a detailed tour of the greenhouses, providing a glimpse into the well-planned and highly structured world of temperate-zone greenhouse production. We saw acres of chrysanthemums, ornamental peppers, celosia, sunflowers, orchids and poinsettias in one of Michigan’s largest greenhouse facilities.

Following lunch at the Windy City Grill for a little Midwestern fare (again portions too large -- we should have each split a sandwich basket!), we continued our down-state journey and checked in at the dormitory at the Southwest Michigan Research and Extension Center (SWMREC) near Benton Harbor, Michigan. We dropped our gear, put on our bathing suits, and headed to Silver Beach in the coastal city of Saint Joseph, MI where we swam in the cool clear waters of southern Lake Michigan and created a little beach artistry in the sand. After sunset, we returned to the dorm for snacks and lively evening conversation.
Day 3: There were seven cooks in the kitchen to greet the day. We began our tours at SWMREC following a short introduction to the Center by Dr. Tom Zabadal, Station Director. Dr. Bill Shane, fruit Extension Educator, provided a feast of peaches and plums as we toured germplasm and cultural research plots. He introduced us to the ‘Beaumont’ peach, released by he and Dr. Amy Iezzoni, from MSU, as well as an as-yet unnamed white peach (the Mackinaw Peach?), which he plans on releasing in the near future. Dr. Ron Goldy, vegetable Extension Educator took over at the hoop house production systems for vegetable and flower crops and led us through his germplasm and cultural trials for pepper, zucchini, sweet corn, watermelon, tomato and muskmelon. We took leave of the Center and drove to meet with Mr. Trevor Meachum at High Acres Fruit Farm near Hartford, Michigan. We started at Trevor’s nectarine orchard, which was in its final day of harvest, then toured his grape tomato field -- the largest field of its kind in the Great Lakes Region. We were amazed at the speed and energy of his hard-working crew and were shown the electronic tracking system used to record the harvests of each worker and provide for product traceability.
After a visit to his pepper trials accompanied by Meachum’s dog, Custer, we departed for Hickory Corners, Michigan for a visit to Hop Head Farms. There, surrounded by Michigan’s largest hop yard, we were greeted by Mr. Patrick Abeli and the owner Ms. Bonnie Steinman. Patrick gave us a tour of the yard, demonstrating the aroma and growth habit differences among the hop cultivars. Then he showed us the picking machine and oast house facilities, which had their trial run the day before we arrived. We were told Hop Head Farms supports a rapidly growing Great Lakes Region beer industry by providing locally grown hops with a minimum of chemical inputs.

We loaded up in the van for the final time and drove to MSU, happy with what we saw, tired from the effort, and with a renewed appreciation of our beautiful state and its diverse horticultural industries.