



Overall the INTAG 497: Comparing French Agriculture to that of the U.S. was truly an experience of a lifetime and I am glad that I was part of the class. I arrived a week earlier in Brussels, Belgium to bike from Namur to France and this was really a great opportunity as well because I was able to compare the two places throughout the entire program. As I biked through the countryside I would see little European towns with the little streets and cars, then it would become all countryside with beautiful landscapes. Biking across the country and staying in the towns along the way allowed for me to meet and see different parts of Europe. This trip was the first time that I have ever traveled internationally and it was a goal of mine for awhile and so I was really excited to finally be able to travel abroad.

The program was set up to allow us to have some free time on every weekend and evening to do with what ever we choose, and it was especially convenient to be there for free museum Sunday. As a group we got to see Musée D'Orsay, The Pompidu, and then ended the day off with the lighting of the Eiffel Tower. Starting out I really had no envision of Paris except for it being this romantic place with the Eiffel Tower in the background, and this is because as I said earlier I have never seen another country, but I was really surprised with what I experienced. I found that what is shown in tour books is not always reality. I had good and well interesting experiences throughout the trip. A shock to me was that the metro, train stations and along the river each had their own unique smell but mostly of urine. Also by 8 a.m. in the morning right after getting off the crowded rush hour train or metro you feel like you need a shower all over again. The city is constantly moving and the buildings are all uniquely designed and a lot of them

seemed to have a great part in history. Looking out over the city from the top of the Eiffel Tower was also a very amazing experience because in every direction you could see for



miles an endless sea of condensed buildings with a few green areas sticking out through them all.

Throughout the trip I learned many little things that are unique to France and different to what we do here in the U.S and it was very interesting to me. Specifically, in restaurants drinks are served with the brand name on the glass, ice is not served; water is served in a separate container from the glass, and the menu is usually a set price consisting of an entrée, plate and dessert. Breakfast usually consists of croissants/baguettes with orange juice or café, lunch usually starts around 1-2pm and most people spend about 2 hours just talking and eating and it is usually a large meal with supper being a smaller portion usually starting around 9-10 pm. When eating I found out that the bread is always placed above the plate on the table never directly on the plate, and both arms are on the table parallel to the plate and from this they claim that they can automatically pick out an American.

The overall class was also a pretty good experience for one thing it developed great friendships from all over the world and it gave a great



opportunity to see and do things that as a regular tourist you might not have known or seen. We got the pleasure to get to have lectures from French professors in a French University with many assortments of French foods and to stay in University dorms with other French students living there as well. Since the Cite Universite was in Paris we had the opportunity to spend time in the city site-seeing and getting a first hand taste of the culture whenever we pleased.

Eating was also an interesting issue to me as well, it was amazing the assortment of cheeses that they have and that the baguette is so famous everywhere and is used in so many ways for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It was funny when as a group we went for breakfast and some of the students were so excited to order hash browns, bacon, and all those normal American breakfast foods until they found out that they don't have those foods for breakfast and ended up eating half of a baguette with jelly as their toast. Plus omelets are considered a food for lunch or dinner served with a choice of fries or salad. Plus the desserts are absolutely beautiful and a good word of advice is to try foods that you would normally not try on a day to day basis and definitely try different desserts they are not just beautiful but also delicious.

The trip to Rungis International Marche, although an early rise at 3:40 am it proved to be well worth the few lost hours of sleep. This was really an interesting visit for many reasons but for one it's a market that is 224 hectares in size and would take on average 3 days to walk the entire area but I think the main reason was because we do not really have anything on that level in the US. It was just amazing to walk into the individual buildings that were dedicated entirely to a specific product. The quality of the products were so fresh with the fish being caught the day before and the flowers freshly

cut and the meat carcasses clean with barely any blood to be found. It was



interesting to learn that it cost 2 euros to actually catch the fish and then they are sold at 12 euros.

It also took me by surprise that most of the workers at Rungis were said to be divorced because



they work from 12 am to noon everyday and it is hard to support a family

when they are never home. In the meat building I learned that there is a big difference

compared to the other buildings like the flowers, cheeses and fish buildings. The

difference is the other buildings have separate cashiers throughout the room where the

buyers of the products can go and pay for their purchases. However, in the meat building

there is only one main cashier and it is not for sanitary reasons but instead so that the



buyer would be able to obtain the complete background information of the animal. It was

really interesting to see the cheese (fromage) building, for one thing the smell made it

very distinctive and I really never have seen so many different types of cheese and

especially cheese that was so big in size. Cheese that weighed 80 kilograms and cost

about 500 euros, and cheese that aged for 18 months, cheese that was black and to rent a

space to sell cheese cost 10 euros per square meter.

The organic farm that we visited was also interesting to me mostly because this farmer was basically taking the more challenging route of transforming a traditional farm

into an entirely organically grown farm with cucumbers, carrots, lettuce, strawberries and many more other vegetables. He also has a business where he sells bags of vegetables that are hand packed for customers who pay for fresh, organically grown produce. The best part is that he actually has to turn down customers because he doesn't have enough produce to sell. It was amazing that he has 9 hectares and only 3 hectares are farmed at a time, plus he only has 3 people packing and a few others working on the farm. On a side note I learned that bumble bees are different from the other bees because bumble bees go to every flower to pollinate whereas other bees go to only the best flowers and so the farmer showed us how he had bought bumble bees to increase pollination amongst his crops. Walking around the farm you could easily tell the main difference from traditional farming and that was the significance of weeds around the plants. He said that he goes out to check on his crops everyday for any sign of a disease because it needs to be immediately taken care of. He talked about a problem he had with his one crop and because it is organically grown insecticide can not be sprayed to fix the problem, so he bought a jar of moths to get rid of the disease.



The Champagne region is a beautiful part of the countryside with fields and fields of vineyards. I thought that this was another very interesting and educational trip. It was really neat to hear how they are very particular about the name Champagne and how even clothing colors; perfumes and crayons are not allowed to use the name. I really never truly thought about it in that respect until the speaker at the Champagne School said, "It is like Alaskan salmon from California, and Florida oranges from Georgia." Also I think that it is something unique to where the products come from because as he was also

saying the reason for the difference in the way the grapes taste is because the soil in the region is chalky which is good for growing grapes, the same goes for Vidalia onions in Georgia's sulfur soil. The products are unique to the location because of the geological aspects and many other characteristics.



It was interesting that there are specific schools just for champagne production, and to get to see the actual process and the cellar with over 500,000 bottles stacked was really neat too.

I learned that there are 3 grape types

including: Pinot Noir a black grape which gives strength and body, Pinot Meunier a black grape gives the roundness and fragrance, and the Chardonnay a white grape gives finesse, as well as floral and mineral overtones. I



learned from one of the students during lunch in the cafeteria, that in order to tell that it is genuine Champagne besides the name being on top and side of the cork is that it is also made of two types of material compared to being just one solid cork material.

Another interesting trip we took where I felt I learned a lot was at the National Assemblée, which is significant to our House of Representatives. We got the whole history and significance of the semi-circle which was built in 1828 and was beautiful; we were told that it started out as being an apartment for Louis the 14<sup>th</sup>'s legitimate daughter and was later reconstructed for the Nationale Assemblée.

Some other interesting information that I learned was that the tapestry behind the perch was from Athens, Rome and is a replica of one of Raphael's paintings. The first ledge is the perch, the second ledge



is for the prime minister and the third on the floor is for the secretaries to record everything that is said. All are made of bronze and redwood, and the entire circle contains 577 seats. Each seat is assigned to a specific person and contains a speaker on the left with their name on the right, a keyboard with buttons for voting in the middle. Public are not allowed to participate in debate, special permission is needed to voice your opinion however on Tuesdays and Thursdays questions are answered and it airs on local TV and on Thursdays it's presented to the senate. The library which was not accessible to the public but was also absolutely beautiful with all the old books; and a famous artist painted the entire ceiling.

The final day of classes consisted of presentations from 3 groups of students that took combined information from all the lectures and discussions and dealt with: GMO's, food safety and its quality and labeling.

GMO's are an issue that the French are not fond of and do not want to be involved with. The French are the 2<sup>nd</sup> exporter of agriculture in the world with there biggest crop in 2006 being cereal at 18.8 M acres, and maize at 7.5 M acres. Regardless of their productivity they have high guards for plant protection, for example protection used on head cabbage cannot be used on broccoli until a study is done on the plant and this is too expensive for a small market to survive. They want the ability to tract were the animal was and what its life history entitles. They are more interested in a pure product rather than multiple components, from multiple products in one. They are specifically more interested in organic products and buying from local open-air markets is a common practice in the streets. Possibly the most common problem is really the lack of education or knowledge of GMO's.

Through discussions and the presentation the final day on food safety and quality I learned that the French are very serious about their food and how it is handled with the fear that was developed after the mad cow and other disease breakouts. About 14% of the French budget is dedicated to food which has decreased since 1975 when it was 25%. We talked about market segmentation with the “fork to farm” theory, where you start at the consumers’ expectation and then develop the actual product. Theory in mind the objectives of the French Agricultural system is to ensure the healthy choice is the easy choice for consumers, delivering the healthy diet, developing value-added food products with quality convenience, availability and affordability, and assuring safe food that consumers can trust. Then we talked about the sensory of producers were a triangle is used to represent how food products are valued, with security at the bottom being the most valued then safety, nutrition, and the less valued is hedonic (pleasure enjoyment).

Quality and safety is backed by the use of labeling and enables producers to increase the worth of the products and gives customers the possibility of choosing quality foods with special characteristics and taste with official guarantee. There are three different complementary ways of adding value to agricultural and food product; 1.) Quality linked to origin and tradition (AOC-PDO, PGI, TSG) 2.) Superior quality (Label rouge or red label) and 3.) Environmental quality (organic farming).

The AOC (appellation d’origine contrôlée) designates products originating in a given region or location where their qualities are essentially due to the areas environment. Basically involving the interaction with the areas natural, climatic, physical and human factors. AOCs apply to wines and spirits, dairy products, olive oil, meat, honey, and so on. Equivalent to AOC for all products other than wines, the PDO (Protected Designation

of Origin) protects a region whose products characteristics are defined by the geographical area. The PGI refers to products originating in a geographical area for a defined level of quality, reputation or other characteristics. Products that apply include food and agricultural sectors other than wine and spirits, particularly poultry, beef sheepmeat, fruit and vegetables. The TSG provides protection for products of traditional nature that are not or no longer linked to the geographical origin, applying to cheeses, meat-based products, beer, cakes and biscuits, etc. A few examples include mozzarella (Italy), traditional farm-fresh turkey (United Kingdom), and Serrano ham (Spain). The agricultural quality label or the Label Rouge (Red label) certifies that the product possesses a specific set of characteristics establishing a level of quality higher than that of a similar product of standard type. This label is given to poultry, meat, marine products, vegetables and fruit. The last label; the “Agriculture Biologique” or “Organic farming” certifies that the product derives from a mode of animal welfare is highly defined with stringent specifications backed by systematic controls. A wide range of organic farm and food products, both fresh and processed, is available from specialist stores, supermarket chains, open-air markets, and over the internet.

Some suggestions that I found or would have found useful for advance preparation and would be helpful to students in the future include: research using books from the library, movies and even just Wikipedia involving the culture, history, geography, government, etc. before the trip. Researching the museums and making a list of the ones that you want to visit along with the art that is unique or famous to it as well. Also make a good list of places you want to visit and check them off as you visit them. Try to honestly learn more than just words in French and practice talking to others in

French. I learned a lot of French as the weeks went by just by relating signs and words, but I think that if I would have been able to actually have a conversation with the French people it would have been a little more interesting than having to have others translate it for me. I think that it was really more enjoyable to see or understand things that I read or learned before the trip. However, I regret not reading and understanding more about the main attractions and museums because to actually understand the history behind each one would have given a better significance to them.

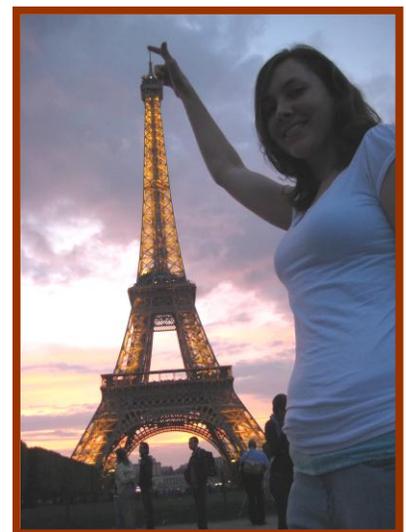
I found that packing lightly was the best option of all throughout the entire trip, because you have to do a lot of lugging it around the airport and trains and really you don't need a whole lot of clothes. I found it to be a really good idea to buy a couple of cheap towels and wash rags at Wal-mart and then when you leave just throw them away. For one thing it gives you all that room for souvenirs and you don't have to worry about drying them out or anything. Plus I packed jeans with shirts that could be worn multiple times in multiple ways and were relatively thin, again saving on room. Plus the best purchase that I think I brought with me was a lightweight waterproof rain jacket. Depending on the weather it worked well for rainy days (no umbrella needed), windy and colder days. Also so as not to make the same mistake as a lot of the students did, bring at least one or two colder weather clothing; because although it is spring time the weather is unpredictable and can be pretty cold at times.

A final suggestion for students which I feel I greatly benefited from is getting a group of students together and taking a day trip to another part of the country specifically the rural areas. The side trip really forms close friendships and makes for a really enjoyable experience. To actually get together with the other students and organize a trip

and to see a little more than just Paris, was well worth it. I strongly suggest, if it is not included in the agenda to visit Caen, Normandy and a little town of Bayeux. Also I found it a really fun and exciting experience to see the American beaches and cemeteries for the D-day festival, something about standing there surrounded by all the white crosses and hearing bagpipes playing in the background and listening to a veteran talk about his experience touches you and is something not to miss.



I have and will advertise the value of this experience to peers simply by word of mouth, just telling everyone about my experience and what the two weeks encompassed. However, next year when classes start up again I would be glad to talk about my experience and answer any questions that they may have and even present a powerpoint on the trip just to give them an idea of what to expect. I would advertise the value of getting to see another country and culture and to see how they deal with their agriculture and food products. I would advertise the value of the friendships that are formed while involved in this program and that you get to meet new people not just from the US but from all over the world. Plus the instructors are amazingly nice and are there to help you with everything and where else would you be able to touch the top of the actual Eiffel Tower.



*THANKS FOR EVERYTHING, IT WAS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY!!!*

