



Cowabunga!

Donations to the AABP Foundation don't just go to scholarships and research projects. They also help fund activities that serve to stimulate and educate our future food animal veterinarians. One such activity that has been going for 25 years is the annual Bovine Educational Symposium (Cowabunga) trip at North Carolina State University during Christmas break that involves over 45 students and faculty, a very large bus and a week of visits to veterinary practices, farms of all types and other agricultural industries.

The Cowabunga experience is not limited to food animal students only, which may help increase food animal interest, as well give those who pursue small animal medicine a better understanding of food animal production. NCSU's Dr. Mark Alley, has been leading the Cowabunga trip for seven years. "This trip allows us to take students to the next level and demonstrate that animal husbandry, welfare, and overall health can be just as good, if not better, in some situations, with larger scale food animal production," Alley says. "Cowabunga serves as an excellent recruitment tool for students who don't have a true direction upon entering veterinary school. It shows these bright energetic students that there are opportunities for veterinarians to practice high quality, science based veterinary medicine in a manner that can be financially and personally rewarding without having to remain in a small animal clinic."

This year, the Cowabunga crew headed to Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania with a densely packed schedule visiting veterinary practices, beef and dairy farms, a deer farm, a genetics company and two slaughter plants (one primarily cow, one veal).

First-year student Oberlin Brinker (equine/food animal focus) was amazed how many people on the trip were so far removed from agriculture in general. "I was raised on a farm and I was surprised to hear peoples' opinions/reactions to things, but not always in a bad way," she said. "There are so many misconceptions about agriculture with the general public and our veterinary student body. Cowabunga provides a great opportunity to introduce agriculture to this group."

A second-year, small-animal focused student on her second Cowabunga trip agreed. "There are few opportunities to see the depth of the food animal production industry except through this program. I am a small-animal focused student but it is important for me to know where my food comes from and to validate or debunk the rumors and beliefs of our culture surrounding this issue. Cowabunga has readily prepared me to answer the questions that acquaintances and clients may ask about the beef and dairy industry."

Another first-year student, Amanda Fox, said, "I was most surprised by how incorrect the ideas that I had about large farms were before the trip. I learned a lot about the importance of management, and that the type of farm really means nothing about the way animals are treated."



Students on the trip experienced food production from farm to fork. A slaughter plant isn't the most pleasant place, but visiting one in Pennsylvania gave the students a dose of reality. Third-year student Stephanie Gibson said, "The slaughter house was the most surprising thing to me because I had never been in one before. I was rather impressed how well they handled the animals even though it was a tough experience for me to be a part of. I was happy to learn and see how animals are processed and to know that they are well cared for before they are processed."

Alley says visits to slaughter plants are a valuable part of the trip. "These future veterinarians will be able to stand in an exam room with a client and describe what actually occurs at a slaughter house, and not what might be portrayed in the media," he says.

Cowabunga supported by the AABP Foundation

The Cowabunga trip is a large financial and time commitment for students and faculty, and donations are critical to its success. The 2013 trip cost \$19,000, and Alley says donations from industry represent approximately 50%, and individual donations account for about 15 to 20%. Students do numerous fundraisers (T-shirts, bake sales, license plates, etc.), and they also get some support from the local SCAVMA organization. Unfortunately, SCAVMA and industry donations have decreased over time. "In 2014, the students are interested in visiting the cattle industry in California," Alley says. "Unfortunately this trip is expected to cost \$45,000+. This would be the largest Cowabunga trip in history if they are able to achieve their fundraising goals."

One source of funding for Cowabunga has come through the AABP Foundation. Dr. Glenn Rogers, Aledo, Texas (and AABP Foundation chairman), donated designated funds (along with a matching corporate contribution from Pfizer) to the AABP Foundation to "pass through" at a later date to a project of his choosing, which was supporting Cowabunga.

"I donated the money to the Foundation in 2008, but was waiting for the right opportunity for a unique and worthwhile project," Rogers explains. The Cowabunga trip included Rogers' ranching operation as part of their "Texas Tour" in 2012. "This revived my interest in the Cowabunga experience," Rogers says. "I had served as an advisor for the Bovine Club and this trip during my seven-year tenure at NCSU-CVM and have always felt that this trip had positively impacted many students to consider a career in food supply medicine."

Rogers contributed to the funding through the Foundation for 2013 and the funds will continue for five years through 2017. "Contributions to the AABP Foundation gives the contributor a unique opportunity to give back to this great profession," Rogers notes. "Bovine practice has been a rewarding career and I want to give back to future veterinarians and agriculturalists so they can continue receiving the many opportunities I have been afforded. By designated 'pass-through' giving, the contribution becomes even more personal and directed to a specific program."

Cowabunga is an outstanding educational experience for veterinary students regardless of their species of interest, Alley adds. "In my opinion, donating to Cowabunga through the Foundation is a means of supporting the veterinary profession that has supported us. A donation to Cowabunga is way to continue that ripple effect of which that we all hope to be a part."

To that effect, one first-year veterinary student said, "To be a good veterinarian, you have to have an open mind and be educated. To be educated, we must have opportunities to learn the real world outside of the classroom and trips like this are exactly how that happens."

Find out more about the AABP Foundation at <http://foundation.aabp.org/>.