

Out Of The University

by Tommy Gardner

On a clear and sunny Friday last week, more than 20 scholars from nearly as many countries donned mud boots to match their thinking caps as they toured some of the area's farms and food production facilities.

These individuals, most with Ph.Ds and some pursuing post-doctoral studies, were Fulbright scholars attending a conference host-

ed by the Vermont Council on World Affairs in conjunction with the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The four-day conference, titled "Living Sustainability: Innovation in Food and Energy," included expert panels and close-up visits of the people who work in Vermont's food and energy business. Half the scholars concentrated on sustainable energy systems in the Middlebury area, and

And Onto The Farm

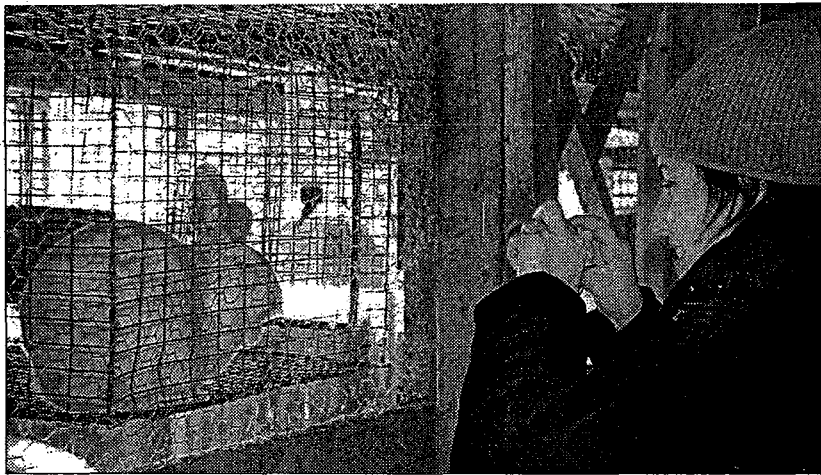
the other half took the bus to the Northeast Kingdom to check out the food scene.

Dr. Catalin Albu, a Fulbrighter from Romania conducting business research, previously had a rather jaundiced view of how business works in America. Albu has been in the States for several months, and before he started the tour, "he felt he understood what Americans were like, the way they conduct business,"

according to Elena Gustavson, the program director for the Center For an Agricultural Economy, and Friday's de facto tour guide.

Gustavson added, "By the end, the words he (Albu) said was he was wrong, and he was happily wrong."

The Fulbright Program, founded in 1946 by the late U.S. Sen. J. William Fulbright, D-Ark., is a kind of intellectual exchange, in which
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Giuliana Pallotta of Italy, who is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Washington, photographs one of the bunnies at the Sterling Farm in Craftsbury. (photo by Vanessa Fournier)

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U.S. citizens receive grants to study abroad while non-U.S. citizens come to the United States to study. The program operates in more than 155 countries. According to the State Department, approximately 300,000 "Fulbrighters" have participated in the program, 114,000 from the U.S. and 186,000 from other countries.

While touring the working farm at Sterling College in Craftsbury, there were smiles to spare as the Fulbrighters followed around enthusiastic Sterling undergraduates who showed off their greenhouses, barns, woodpiles, pens, hutches and kitchen. Tim Patterson, the college's director of advancement, stood in the humid hoop house where the first lettuces of the season were coming up nicely. He told the Fulbrighters Sterling is one of only seven colleges in the nation where all students are required to work.

Gustavson said she found it striking the scholars were "absolutely enthralled" with the idea of applied work, both at Sterling and other stops.

"One of them said, 'we spend so much time studying and not as much working,'" Gustavson said.

This was a revelatory trend that continued through the rest of the tour, as the Fulbrighters visited High Mowing Organic Seeds in Wolcott and, in Hardwick, Vermont Soy and the Vermont Food Venture Center, which is nearing completion. Gustavson said some of the Chinese scholars, in particular, were impressed with how smaller food producers such as High Mowing grow, process and distribute their products all at the same place. The Chinese government controls so much, and there is so little land, that Vermont farms and smaller ag models were something innovative to them.

Back at Sterling, it was East meets West as Sterling students and Fulbright scholars shared methods for raising animals as food sources.

Schirin Oeding, a Sterling junior, told how she and her boyfriend were raising pigs and were able to turn the process into slaughtering and butchering lessons for fellow students. One thing Oeding pointed out, when it's 15 below zero, the inside of a pig feels quite warm.

Dr. Ranjay Singh, from India, has a Ph.D. in environmental science and is studying conservation in the U.S. He shared his own tips for fattening up chickens.

"The hens really love the leaves of the garlic and onion. It rapidly increases their body growth," Singh said. "It is very very popular in Gulf countries. The sulphur (in garlic) really helps to develop the immune system."

Some scholars paid studious attention, and others reveled in the sun and in the squish of mud underfoot. Dr. Giuliana Pallotta, an Italian studying post-doc research in engineering, took pictures of the horses, the rabbits, the hills, her fellow scholars and her new Vermont acquaintances. An enchanted smile never left her face. She said the food the Sterling crew made — using ingredients from the farm — was delicious.

Louise Calderwood, the Venture Center's interim director and an adjunct faculty member at Sterling, said the enthusiasm was reciprocal.

"The depth of their knowledge and experience, coupled with their curiosity about everything we're working on at Sterling College was invigorating," she said.

As the scholars ambled to the waiting tour bus, Cameroon plant pathologist Dr. Nicolas Niemenak said he wanted to find a maple sapling to bring back with him to study. He picked the right spot, he was told. Niemenak struck up a conversation with Oeding, who hails from Germany.

"Oh, sprechen Sie Deutsch?" the Cameroon citizen asked, and he and Oeding conversed in German all the way along the college grounds.