“RULE Launches Trajectories At Intersections of Leadership & Agriculture”

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A RULE Study Institute is certainly a journey on unfamiliar terrain. Consider the well-honed quote, “It’s a walk on the wild side.” Whether you are a farmer, a fire chief, a faculty member, a PDA or DCED employee, an environmentalist, an office holder in local government, or someone still searching, RULE, Pennsylvania Rural-Urban Leadership Program, of Penn State Extension is certainly a path of innovation as well as introspection. RULE has a six-pack of Curriculum Cogs and among the agricultural, economic development, historical, diversity, public presentation skills, and environmental stewardship perspectives, all are explored in acknowledgement of, “Conflict.” Conflict invites us to challenge, change and grow, a true filter of transformation. The class blends rural and urban forums to approach conflict through its many prisms to build self-awareness, provide clarity and construct trust bonds.

A sampling of RULE XIX Scholars and one volunteer Management Team member, (a former RULE scholar) hastened to share their perspectives.

~ Melissa Harrop, Lancaster Farming Special Section Editor/ Owner and Operator at Meadow Creek Livestock

“The impact the RULE program has had on me is apparent in my everyday life. Whether I am working at Lancaster Farming on my editorial responsibilities, writing an article, or driving forward with my volunteer work within Farm Bureau; my experiences in civic engagement, leadership, advocacy and diversity is pushing my fellow scholars and myself towards a better understanding of each other and keeping the diversity that agriculture brings to us all at the forefront.”

~ Michael Roth, Director of Conservation and Innovation, PA Dept of Agriculture

"My participation in RULE has been critical in growing my network and more importantly my understanding of myself and others. With a job focused on innovation, these experiences have been vital to ensure I work for a future that is informed by diverse experiences and backgrounds for the greatest impact. I was honored to share my hometown of Pittsburgh during one of the institutes where we toured Hilltop Urban Farm. There, I was able to introduce the class to an incredible leader, John Bixler. John demonstrated how agriculture is part of a fulfilling life, regardless of urban or rural genesis. RULE provides the opportunity to be enriched through diversity. From the leadership, participants, speakers, and content, the ability to gain new perspectives is abundant.”
“Once again, the RULE program exposed us to the reality of yet another socioeconomic activity that brings health, purpose, and social interaction within a very environmentally friendly setting. This Hilltop Farm in the city is evidence of commitment, service and smart agriculture that takes place regardless of time and space, an opportunity to beautify and enhance the urban experience for the good of all parts involved. As an economist, I must say that seeing how resources get used efficiently in an urban setting, whose space is already limited, becomes an example for cities and states to follow towards best satisfying people's needs and wants, their wellbeing.”

“The Penn State Extension RULE program has provided those like myself a number of opportunities to explore various rural or urban sectors as it relates to agriculture and government. During a recent visit to a veteran-owned farm, Terrace Mountain Alpacas, it was rather enjoyable to see firsthand the true benefits of programs such as PA Preferred and Homegrown By Heroes being used to help keep business sustainable and the farm growing. Whether it’s taking a picture with friendly alpacas, speaking directly with farmers about their work, and buying locally-made products, it all showcases the great things happening throughout our Commonwealth.”

“A colleague in Penn State’s College of Ag Science was a RULE X alum from 20 years ago, and he finally agreed to serve as a RULE XIX Management Team member. He was surprised at all of the curriculum developments and the active role of scholars.

“As someone who has spent a lifetime in and representing the interest of traditional farm families whose heroic efforts feed us abundantly every day, it has been heartwarming to see how the current RULE class on their own initiative have been highlighting the creative ways outstanding individuals are using urban farms to transform and improve quality of life in inner-city areas. There is no better way to bridge the gap between rural and urban than sharing these experiences through the RULE program.”
~Michael Woody, Doctoral Candidate at the Fox School of Business, Doctorate of Business Administration Program, Temple University

Locked on by the presentation on Land Grants by Senior Associate Dean, Steve Loerch, one of our scholars noted from the very first Study Institute, “I learned a great deal in a short amount of time. Dr. Loerch inspired me to learn more and to connect him to my department. Additionally, he influenced me to look at farming in different ways. He sold me.” Michael, an Army Veteran of 21 years, was the guest speaker in a veterans podcast where he spoke about RULE and PA agriculture, extolling apple production. In a subsequent LinkedIn post, he shared, “My secret is out. I want to be a farmer.”

Our RULE XIX scholars teach us with more velocity that we endeavor to give to them. They ask salient questions and make comments worthy of multiple exclamation points. I was especially interested in the takeaway of a USDA employee, who posts frequently about agriculture.

~Daniel Blottenberger, Public Affairs Specialist, United States Department of Agriculture

“During one of our institutes in Lancaster, I asked our Amish host: ‘Why bother meeting with us and telling us your story?’ With tears streaming down his face, he responded: ‘I love doing this. I love the interaction I have with the RULE program participants.’ I didn’t understand why he was crying, but I do now. I joined the RULE program because I saw professional success in some of my USDA colleagues that were alumni in the program. I wanted to emulate that success in my own career. The RULE learning experience has been exceptional for me. Not only have I traveled to new locations throughout rural and urban Pennsylvania, but I have increased my professional and resource network during each RULE institute. The professional experiences I have gained through RULE are something that I feel will be limitless. The program has planted leadership tactics and values in me that I use every day now. The connections I have made and continue to make - I will be reaping the benefits from for years to come.”

RULE is program of Penn State Extension.
We are recruiting interested leaders for RULE XX, Fall 2024.
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