

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Current & Emerging Ag Leaders Descend on Canada's Nation Capital

GUELPH, ON – Good leaders approach issues by focusing on the common ground, not the differences. This was a key takeaway for Class 13 participants of the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP) and the LEAD New York program as they joined together in Ottawa to study Canadian/American relations, government and agricultural trade and food policies and issues in late October, 2010.

The sixth seminar of AALP was initiated months before class participants arrived in Ottawa, ON. Each member of the AALP class was paired with a LEAD New York pen-pal from a similar career field. LEAD New York is a sister program to AALP in New York state. AALP and LEAD participants shared emails in advance of the seminar, and introduced each other to their class peers on the seminar opening night. During these introductions, it started to become clear that regardless of glaring differences – like the size of two pen-pal's respective dairy operations north and south of the border, for example – similarities in interests, challenges, and willingness to help lead agriculture forward was common between all participants. This common link made for great discussion and debate, open-minded learning and the expansion of leadership skills.

Over the course of the seminar, participants heard from several influential individuals involved in agriculture direction and decision-making, affecting agriculture trade and food policy. Fred Gorrell, Director General, Market Access Secretariat for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada set the tone by stressing to participants that globally, the world is envious of the Canadian,/US trade relationship. He asked the AALP and LEAD participants to look beyond big, emotional agricultural trade issues between Canada and the US (e.g. COOL) that make up only approximately 10 per cent of trade, and focus on the opportunity and strength that comes from the other 90 per cent of trade that takes place seamlessly each day.

Because of the existing trade relationship, and because Canada and the US are like-minded countries with highly integrated markets, many of the seminar speakers echoed that there is great opportunity for growing Canada/US relations, which will help our nations meet future challenges, such as feeding a growing population. One key path forward will be based on technology and innovation solutions, explained Greg Meredith, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy Branch, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada. A standardized, science based regulation and export system was another key area pointed out by many speakers as being crucial for Canada and the US to work together in the future. Finally, to maintain a competitive edge globally, Ron Bonnett, President, Canadian Federation of Agriculture reminded participants that, "we need to be focussed on exporting high value products into high value markets. Exporting and competing on a price basis is a losing game."

AALP and LEAD participants also heard from several influential, well-known politicians and advocates for Canadian agriculture. Hon. Wayne Easter, Agriculture and Agri-Food Critic and M.P. Malpeque PEI, shared his perspectives on the importance of leadership in agriculture. Similarly, Bev Shipley, M.P. for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex spoke about the importance for leaders to do what is right, rather than what is popular, along with the importance of having a vision, noting that being visionary can often be a lonely place to be.

In keeping with the leadership program structure, the session also engaged participants in an interactive leadership development workshop. Dennis MacGillivray, MacGillivray and Associates Inc. Chicago, IL, lead the group through a 'Building Bridges' workshop, which assessed the approach to dealing with issues, or capturing opportunity through the analogy of building a bridge. "All leaders have the commonality of having the courage to take risks," MacGillivray said, as he challenged participants to step out of their comfort zones and confront

situations head on. If you want to be successful as a leader and in sharing a message, MacGillivray says you must follow the three E's. Leaders need to: Earn the right to speak, by speaking to what they know; be Eager to share, by having passion for the cause; and be Excited, sharing your message with authentic exuberance. He ended with two key reminders for the participants. "As a leader, leverage something bigger than yourself. Being a leader is about more than just you," said MacGillivray. And, when it comes to inspiring and motivating others, "The more you give, the greater the capacity you get to give."

The Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP) is an executive development program for men and women in Ontario to further develop their leadership skills and work to shape the future of the agri-food sector and rural communities. AALP is a program of the Rural Ontario Institute (ROI). Class 13 next heads to Niagara Falls in January 2011, for their seventh seminar.

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Photo caption: AALP Class 13 participants and LEAD New York participants expanded their network during their Ottawa seminar to include like-minded agricultural leaders each side of their respective borders. Networking took place in class as well as during evening activities. Shown above, AALP introduced their LEAD New York friends to the fun and comradeship of the great Canadian game of curling.