

UPDATE:

FASFAS Congressional Science Fellow: Report from the Hill

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I would like to thank the American Meat Science Association for aiding in sponsoring this wonderful opportunity through the Federation of American Societies of Food Animal Sciences (FASFAS). I would also like to thank Dr. Brent Theurer, FASFAS President, who has been extremely helpful through this first year of the fellowship. I would also like to acknowledge my husband, Dr. Mike Siemens, who is the Wisconsin Beef Extension Specialist, for allowing me to spend the year in Washington without him.

What is a Congressional Science Fellow?

The Congressional Engineering and Science Fellows Program is a cooperative effort of approximately 20 national engineering and scientific organizations, which each sponsor one or more postdoctoral professionals for one-year fellowship awards. The purpose of the Program is to provide a unique public policy learning experience, to demonstrate the value of such science-government interaction, and to make practical contributions to the more effective use of scientific and technical knowledge in government. This year there are 28 Fellows working in House and Senate offices. All hold professional degrees in numerous disciplines, and bring to the program an extremely wide range of backgrounds and levels of expertise, from those of us fresh out of graduate school to full professors and senior scientists in the corporate sector. This year seven Fellows are sponsored by agricultural societies, an increase of three over last year.

Who is FASFAS and Why Are They Involved?

The Federation of American Societies of Food Animal Sciences (FASFAS) was created because food animal scientists saw a need to speak out with a unified voice on key issues that affect food animal science and animal agriculture. FASFAS has four charter associations: American Meat Science Association, American Society of Animal Science, American Dairy Science Association and the Poultry Science Association. Dedication to the application of sound science to food animal agriculture and fostering communication of the role of food animal agriculture to the general public is FASFAS's objective. To reach this objective, they recognize the need to have scientifically informed resources available to Congressional members and staff. By sponsoring a Fellow, the society has placed a scientist within the system not

to engage in politics per se; rather to contribute scientific or technical knowledge to the process of public policymaking.

As a Congressional Fellow, I am Not a Lobbyist!

While I do not intend to deny nor ignore my affiliation with FASFAS, I clearly am not on Capitol Hill to lobby for animal science research and/or production issues. In addition, FASFAS is organized and operated for charitable, scientific and educational purposes. It is limited in its ability to influence legislation. With these constraints in mind, my role allows me to inform the FASFAS Board and the membership of current legislation and to answer questions about issues.

Who Benefits From a Fellowship?

I believe there are three beneficiaries of a fellowship. First, and foremost is the Representative or Senator with whom the Fellow works and his/her staff.

"As a member of the House Committee on Agriculture, I believe programs such as the FASFAS Congressional Fellow Program can play an important role in providing needed scientific and technical research capabilities in an unbiased manner. Agricultural policy decisions need such background and policy review."

Rep. Charles Stenholm (D-TX)

"I wish to congratulate FASFAS in approving and developing a Congressional Fellow Program. In addition to my duties as staff director of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry, I am responsible for keeping Members and staff of the Committee up to date on emerging agricultural issues as well as other subject areas. Angie has been a primary source of information and analysis regarding a variety of issues. Her professional standards and objectiveness and responsiveness have been, and will continue to be, of great value to me and those I serve."

Dan Waggoner, Staff Director,
House Agriculture Subcommittee
on Livestock, Dairy and Poultry

I have had several requests for information regarding the Fellow program. There is a need and more importantly an interest in having Fellows on the Hill.

Secondly, FASFAS and its member societies benefit. These benefits are not as tangible as those for the Congressmen. These will be longer term benefits that will increase as

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more Fellows are placed in the program. One of the most important is name recognition for FASFAS. Because FASFAS is a new organization, it is relatively unknown. Between the contact that Bob Zimbelman, ASAS Executive Vice President, and I have with various organizations, we have continued to increase the exposure of FASFAS. We need to increase the awareness of policymakers that professional societies do exist and that they are interested in being helpful.

I hope that I have also helped educate the FASFAS and member societies' board members about the "process." As more people gain experience on the Hill, a network from which Societies can learn will be invaluable. The placement of talented scientists that can communicate clearly helps to break the "scientist's stereotype" that is commonly found in Washington. There is no substitute for repeated personal contact when communicating on important subjects. People respond better to people they know. The Congress is no different.

Thirdly, there is no question that I personally have gained from the experience. As in any job, one hopes to make a difference and to personally gain from the experience. I have had the opportunity, by necessity, to improve my communication skills and broaden my perspective on agricultural sciences and agriculture, in general. I have been able to test my skills as a scientist in a truly unique environment. I expect this to be beneficial to my own career development as well as to the ways I can serve FASFAS member societies in the future.

What Are My Responsibilities?

As a member of the House Committee on Agriculture Republican Staff, I work with the Livestock, Dairy and Poultry Subcommittee whose Ranking Minority Member is Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-WI). Rep. Charles Stenholm (D-TX) is chairman of the subcommittee. Rep. Stenholm has introduced the Farm Animal and Research Facilities Protection Act of 1991 (H.R. 2407). The bill, better known as the "break-in bill," currently has 245 co-sponsors.

Legislative Activities

Two issues have dominated the legislative agenda for the Livestock, Dairy and Poultry (LDP) Subcommittee. The first is the review of the drop in farm milk prices. The LDP subcommittee held a hearing April 10, 1991 on the "Review of farm-to-retail pricing and marketing relationships in the dairy industry." I researched and analyzed the dairy product marketing chain by reviewing USDA data and speaking with economists and industry personnel throughout the nation in preparation for the hearing. Although the hearing is over, the subcommittee is continuing to monitor the current dairy situation and will hold a hearing in June addressing the dairy inventory management studies requested in the 1990 Farm Bill.

The second is the activities of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The GATT talks broke down last December when the European Community, the United States and others could not agree on agricultural issues. In February, technical discussions resumed, but the tough political questions have not yet been addressed. Why are these talks important to the livestock industry? The GATT will address

internal support, export subsidies, market access and sanitary issues. The dairy industry, as well as other livestock commodities in Europe and other parts of the world, is heavily subsidized, with internal and export subsidies. This leads to an "uneven playing field," as government officials like to refer to it. For example, the U.S. dairy industry, although it has an internal support program through the Commodity Credit Corporation, cannot compete in the world market against the subsidies offered by other countries. The U.S. would like to address these unfair practices and will continue to support the reduction of artificial trade barriers.

Informal conversations have included discussions on science in industry versus in academia, big science versus small science, the tenure process and publishing of research, bST and other biotechnology, waste management, production efficiencies in agriculture versus marketing efficiencies in other industries and philosophical viewpoints on maintaining "small farms." Although these discussions did not result in any immediate legislation, I hope the concepts of my viewpoint will be beneficial down the road.

Non-Legislative Activities

Congressional Fellows are also in a unique position to become involved with a range of organizations, both because of our ties with professional societies, and because we work in Congress. These include USDA staff and committees, various professional societies, academic and industry groups and coalitions.

- USDA User's Advisory Board
- USDA Joint Council
- USDA NRI-Competitive Research Grants Office staff
- USDA Regulatory Enforcement and Animal Care (REAC)
- USDA Extension Service Futuring Panel
- AID Bureau for Science and Technology Livestock Analyst
- National Research Council Board on Agriculture
- Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) Policy Committee
- Coalition on Federal Agriculture Research Missions (COFARM)
- American Society of Plant Physiologists, Washington Section
- ARPAS—D.C. Section
- American Horticulture Society Association Annual Board Meeting
- American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)
- Farm Animal Welfare Coalition
- Council on Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST)
- NASULGC
- Council on Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching (CARET)
- Resources for the Future Leadership Fellows
- American Diabetes Association
- Biotechnology Forum
- pST Information Group

What Have I Learned?

As Patrick Boyle, AMI President, mentioned in his earlier presentation, it is extremely important to form cooperative alliances within our agricultural sector. Scientists and the animal industry need to form a consensus on where we are headed in research, especially as funding becomes more limited. We need to debate the options, not only among ourselves but with other professional societies and industries in animal agriculture.

Scientists can interact with Congress if our message is clear. The language is sometimes different and motivations vary, but we can present useful data for policy decisions as

well as present our case for research. Personal contact is essential for maintaining communication with policymakers. Industry learned this long ago as demonstrated by the existence of "Washington" offices. The value of face-to-face contact cannot be underestimated. I encourage all of you to visit with your Senators and Representatives not only in Washington but also in your state.

I would like to leave you with a challenge. We need to open debate on the challenges facing our industry, and *not just among ourselves but throughout* the animal production community. We need to set our own priorities or someone in the Congress will do it for us.