

Empowering Future Ag Leaders — It's a TALL Order

The Texas Agricultural Lifetime Leadership (TALL) program began in the early '80s with an idea and an uphill climb. The Texas Agricultural Extension Service was considering the need for a new kind of adult leadership program, to teach a new generation of rural leaders about changes in global agriculture. Similar programs were underway in a number of other states, but the cost to fund such programs was high.

Dr. L.S. Pope, who was the dean of agriculture and home economics at New Mexico State University, had the idea to seek funds from sources outside the Extension service, and began a campaign to sell the idea of this new program to large foundations and philanthropists. The support from the agricultural community, including the late, former Texas Governor Dolph Briscoe, was overwhelming, and the TALL Class I began in 1987.

Several things have changed with TALL over the years, but the mission statement remains the same: "TALL will create a cadre of Texas leaders to help ensure effective understanding and encourage positive action on key issues, theories, policy and economics that will advance the agriculture industry."

TALL participants are some of the state's most promising ag leaders, selected through an intense application and interview process. Applicants must first be nominated by a TALL alumnus or by Texas AgriLife Extension personnel. Then, a very in-depth application must be completed. Following this process, an interview is conducted, and the class participants are selected.

The current class, TALL XII, consists of 26 men and women between the ages of 25 and 40 from across Texas, of whom 60 percent are actively engaged in farming and ranching. Their term began in July and will end with graduation in June of 2012.



Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz, director of the TALL program, and his wife, Kathy, on the TALL XI international trip to Russia and Poland in 2010.

The two-year program consists of eight sessions, in which the participants travel to agricultural operations and locations in Texas, Mexico, Washington, D.C., and New York. In addition to studying topics such as the livestock industry, high-tech agriculture and natural resource use, the class is given the opportunity to learn about governmental influence on agriculture and to meet with USDA officials, congressmen and senators. The final session is an international trip, to expose the class to the global agricultural world. Past destinations included New Zealand, Brazil, China, India, Argentina and Indonesia.

This demanding two-year schedule adds up to about 55 days of time away from the farm, ranch, business or office — a significant amount of time for the busy participants to surrender. When a new member is approved for admission to the program, a written statement from his or her employer is requested, verifying that participation is in line with their business schedules and

objectives. But TALL members believe the sacrifice is worth it, and they are rewarded with a new-found understanding of global agriculture, trade and politics, as well as invaluable connections with other members and contacts with key leaders around the globe.

But perhaps even more important is the post-graduation performance of the TALL participants. If the time, money and effort that goes into each successive class is not followed by eager participation in local, state and national affairs, then the TALL experience is of no value. Fortunately, the results of the program have been promising, with nearly 50 percent of graduates moving on to important careers within organizations, agencies or the communities in which they live. Many graduates have advanced to positions of state or national leadership.

Capital Farm Credit is a proud sponsor of the TALL program. The program's director, Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz, has a bachelor's



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degree and a Ph.D. in animal science from Texas A&M University, and a master's degree in agricultural education from Texas Tech University. He has been with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service for more than 20 years, and has received numerous awards for outstanding service. He brings valuable experience and leadership to the TALL program, and serves as a role model for the young participants. Mazurkiewicz also is a borrower with Capital Farm Credit's Bryan credit office. In fact, when Class XI traveled to Russia and Poland in the spring of 2010, Dr. Mazurkiewicz proudly wore his Capital Farm Credit jacket as he learned about Russian agriculture.

Capital Farm Credit also has had the honor of sponsoring several TALL graduates over the years, including Jim Phillips of College Station, Brenda Kellermeier of San Angelo, Trae Ottmers of Fredericksburg and Clint Robinson of Lubbock. Tanya Foerster of Lubbock is in the current TALL class.

For more information on the TALL program, or to be a sponsor, please contact Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz at (979) 845-1554.

Capital Farm Credit Grads Praise TALL

The feedback from TALL program participants has been positive from the very beginning. In 1987, Class I students commented on their experience, saying, "The program exceeded expectations ... I learned more in two-and-a-half days than in many semester-long classes ... I honestly could not have imagined a better meeting ... All segments of the program had a great impact on me personally." Over the decades, the enthusiasm for TALL — and for its program director, Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz — has grown along with the program. Some graduates share their thoughts:

"TALL (Class VIII) was very beneficial for me. It is an in-depth study that will challenge you and sharpen your abilities. Over the two-year program, you will see the big picture of agriculture and how all the pieces fit together. As you travel the state, nationally and then abroad, the insights you gain as well as the people and contacts made are invaluable. The program keeps paying dividends long after you graduate. I am fortunate to be included in the TALL family.

Dr. Jim does an outstanding job leading TALL. He is passionate about the program and is dedicated to giving each class member the experiences and tools needed to grow as leaders and advocates for agriculture. And with his boundless energy, he is hard to keep up with sometimes!"

—Clint Robinson, senior vice president and branch manager, Lubbock

"I am a graduate of TALL III and served as executive treasurer of the TALL Alumni for about 15 years. It is a great program that helps you to establish so many 'real' relationships with people of common interests and similar backgrounds. The program covers so much in regards to types of agriculture, political interaction and urbanization.

I still call on contacts made through the TALL program and always look forward to meeting new graduates!"

—Brenda Kellermeier, senior vice president and branch manager, San Angelo

"I participated in TALL class IX from July 2004 through June 2006. The eight seminars, including a two-week trip to tour the agricultural infrastructure of Brazil, were truly outstanding, as we were given the opportunity to meet literally hundreds of people who shared our passion for agriculture. I utilize the networking opportunities afforded me during my TALL experience on a weekly basis, as I now have contacts located throughout the state who can provide me information on practically every agricultural commodity and enterprise. As a TALL graduate, it is my responsibility to serve as an ambassador for the program, and I have given presentations on the program to various groups, as well as served on the interview team for the upcoming class."

—Jim Phillips, senior vice president of correspondent lending, Capital Markets Division