

Dietetics Students Tour Madison Foodservice Hands-on Sustainability

Senior Dietetics students in the Foodservice Operational Management course met bright and early on Saturday, September 29, to load into the school vans for their first field trip of the year. Eleven students, along with Professor Jasia Steinmetz, Professor Marty Loy, and CPS Café manager Denise Brennecke, traveled to Madison for a hands-on lesson about the “loop” of sustainable food service, following foods from farmer to market to foodservice establishment.



The trip included a full schedule of activities, beginning at the Dane County Farmers’ Market in Capitol Square in downtown Madison. Students enjoyed the energetic environment—thanks to a variety of arts and crafts vendors, musicians, and nonprofit, political, and public information booths—and the enormous variety of foods the market provides. With nearly 300 vendors all supplying foods and other items produced in Wisconsin, the Dane County Farmers’ Market is reported to be the largest producer-only farmers’ market in the country.

“I talked with a farmer who grew several types of peppers and knew such articulate information on each variety,” said student Natalie Zalewski. “Not only does that give me a general sense of the differences comparing the types, but I thoroughly appreciated his passion for food. Similar experiences occurred at each booth and soon you begin to realize that they enjoy educating the public even more than trying to sell their produce.”

After surveying the market, the students crossed the street for lunch at Café Soleil. The café serves breakfast and lunch, while L’Etoile, the fine dining restaurant upstairs, serves only dinner. L’Etoile was established in 1976, and it features a seasonal menu “inspired by the artisans and small sustainable farms of the Midwest...rendered with a French technique.”



The Dietetics group had the opportunity to sit down with L’Etoile and Café Soleil Chef Tory Miller, a UWSP alumnus, to hear about his vision for sustainable food production and to ask him questions about his establishment and experiences.

Miller also showed the group his production kitchen, which was busy preparing for Saturday evening service, and told the group that he usually spends 4 to 5 hours at the farmers’ market on Saturday mornings buying local ingredients for the week.

“He has incredible culinary skills and knowledge about sustainability, yet he spoke candidly with us about his experiences,” said Tiffany Adrians. “His passion for using local foods to create unique, elegant dishes is obvious.”

Before arriving at their next destination, the students were treated to a surprise stop at Candina’s, a Swiss chocolate shop that is just south of Madison and is known as one of the 10 best chocolate producers in America. Some students indulged a sweet tooth, while others simply admired the shop’s immaculate lobby and mass production kitchen.



The last stop was Uplands Cheese Company in Dodgeville, where Pleasant Ridge Reserve, an artisanal farmstead cheese, is made using what the company calls natural, “old world” practices.

The single herd of cows whose milk is used to make Pleasant Ridge Reserve “graze lush pastures from early spring through fall, just as all cows did before the industrialization of our food system,” according to the company’s management. “The resulting milk has better nutritional value and more varied and subtle flavors.”



Pleasant Ridge Reserve, which is similar to a French Gruyere, has won many prestigious awards, including the 2007 Gallo Gold Medal Award for Best Artisanal Dairy Product, Best of Show at the 2005 and 2001 American Cheese Society conferences, and U.S. Champion at the 2003 U.S Championship cheese contest.

Dietetics student Krystle Richardson said of her experience, “It was a real treat to be able to taste cheese that is known nationally and that has won national awards,” said Dietetics student Krystle Richardson. “The cheese was amazing; it wasn’t hard to tell the difference between this fresh aging cheese and store-bought cheese.”

The students and instructors boarded the vans to head home to Stevens Point, exhausted but excited about their new perspective on sustainable food service.

Senior Dietetics student Stephanie Roethle commented on the impact the field trip had on her.

“It opened my mind up to how accessible local foods can really be,” Roethle said. “We don’t have to look that hard for it.”

Senior Katie Dickman also appreciated the value of the experience.

“Overall, this...gave me greater insight into the lives of farmers, the amount of time and attention given to produce a product, and level of food quality that can be achieved,” Dickman said. “The experience was very worthwhile and leads me to want to support local foods even more.”

Steinmetz and Loy said that insight was exactly their goal in offering the experience.

“We hope that the experiences we provide will help you see the accumulated knowledge from the past years and application of this in practice,” Steinmetz told the students. “We hope that you will be the upcoming visionaries who will promote local, sustainable food practices in all areas of food and nutrition.”