

Chad Vorthmann trip to Germany



Chad Vorthmann visited various provinces in Germany as part of the 2011 McCloy Fellowship in Agriculture. He came to the Treynor Optimist Club on February 4 to show pictures and talk about his experience. He lives and works in Colorado.

After reunification of Germany, farmers in East Germany could buy the land they were farming. Under Communism they were not allowed to own land. Some farmers chose not to buy because of the amount of debt they had to incur. Others bought additional land. The average farm today is 225 hectares or about 625 acres. 60% of the

farms are over 2500 acres.

Chad talked about Brandenburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Hessen, and Rhineland provinces. There are six political parties. People vote for a political party and delegates to parliament are allocated by percent of the vote. Three of the main parties are the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), which is the conservatives, the Free Democratic Party (FDP), the liberals, and the Green party (Left). The Green party, although small, contains a lot of academics and yields a significant amount of power. They were able to ban nuclear power in Germany after the tsunami in Japan.

Chad talked a lot about differences in Germany. Tractors have very wide tires and are licensed like automobiles. They cannot be more than three meters wide or they require an escort when crossing or driving on the road.

Packing plants are more about the workers than the consumer. Livestock is killed one day and deboned the next, while the meat is not fully cold yet. Workers are paid by volume, so they don't allow it to cure for two weeks like here. Therefore the meat will be tougher.

All livestock is tagged. Most milk cows he saw had a tag in each ear, some with radio colors around their neck to monitor food and water intake. Some even had leg irons to measure how many steps they take, to ensure they are getting enough exercise. There are no black cows in Germany because some people think there is a link between the black gene and Mad Cow disease. Also cattle are not castrated.

Regulations require that hog barns have natural light for the pigs. Many buildings had to be retrofitted with large windows.

The wineries in Rhineland are on steep 6 degree slopes. They make excellent white wine. Beer consumption is going down in Germany, being replaced by wine and other alcohol. In Germany, in contrast to the United States, the larger breweries get a premium for their beers. Local beers are thought to have a lower quality and are therefore cheaper.

Youth can drink alcohol at age 16 in Germany, but cannot drive until they are 19. Companies are making non-alcoholic beer and marketing it to children.

Alternative energies are important in Germany. Many farms they visited also had bio gas facilities to take manure, create bio gas, and burn that to create electricity.

One interesting farm Chad saw had solar horse feeders. The horses were boarded outside and had implanted chips that determined how much to feed each horse. Grain, other food, and water were

spread far apart so the horses had to move around a lot. Boarding there was more expensive than other stables.

Another farm used robotic milkers. The cows decide when they want to be milked (with very little prodding) and went into a stall when they were ready. Sensors hook up the milkers. The average cow there milks 3.3 times a day, with some doing five or six times. Implanted chips track their production. The same farm has 350 fruit trees. They distill the fruit and produce schnapps. They also have solar panels on each building.

The government is promoting alternative energies. Farmers can get \$0.20 per kilowatt for wind production, \$0.27 for solar, and around \$0.45 for biogas. They sell what they produce and buy back cheaper electricity for their use. 40% of farm income comes from subsidies.