



## MY MEETING NOTES

### Training-cum-Exposure Visit to the University of Florida, Gainesville, USA February 3 to 15, 2022



*Mahesh Chander and Ashok Kumar Verma visited the University of Florida at Gainesville, USA, from February 3 to 15, 2022, on a training-cum-exposure visit. Here, they talk of their experiences.*

#### CONTEXT

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is implementing the National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP) funded by the World Bank across 58 AUs from the ICAR-AU System to improve the quality and relevance of higher education in agriculture. One expectation from NAHEP is that it will lead to improvement in education by enhancing the skills of students and creating better job opportunities for them, but another more immediate one is the belief that upgradation of faculties would bring more relevance into the entire agricultural education and research system of India. Ultimately, better skills can definitely enhance the overall productivity of agriculture and allied sectors. Among several components of this project, one is training-cum-exposure visits of faculty and students to institutions in developed countries. The ICAR-Indian Veterinary Research Institute is one such institution under NAHEP, where, the Centre of Advanced Agricultural Science & Technology (CAAST) has been sanctioned as Advance Centre for Livestock Health (ACLH). Under this project, there is a provision for trainings that are organized abroad, for a duration of one week to three months for different categories of scientists and students.



The host Department for the visit

One of my (Mahesh Chander's) doctoral students visited Arizona State University from October to December, 2021, and another one underwent training for two months at the [International Livestock Research Institute](#) (ILRI), Nairobi. Likewise, many faculty and students are currently placed in various other universities in the USA, UK, and Switzerland, etc. We opted for training at the [Department of Agricultural Education & Communication, University of Florida](#), Gainesville, Florida, USA, to learn about the various programmes of the [University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences \(UF/IFAS\)](#), and to acquaint us with the outreach activities of [UF/IFAS Extension](#). Our exposure and training are expected to enhance our capacities towards improved delivery in the Indian context.

## THE ARRIVAL

We arrived in Gainesville on 3rd February, 2022, and stayed till 15th February, 2022. We were received at the airport by our hosts – Dr [Sebastian Galindo](#), Research Associate Professor, Department of Agricultural Education & Communication, University of Florida and Dr [Norma Samuel](#), Associate District Extension Director, for Central District with the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS Extension). This was a very helpful gesture from the hosts – of receiving us at the airport and taking us to our place of stay. They also asked us if we needed to go to a supermarket to buy anything we needed. This is particularly reassuring when we arrive in any foreign country.



**Community Garden Visit with Norma Samuel, Clark Park Community Garden, Sumter County**

## LEARNING

The entire programme was handled very professionally right from the beginning, as the detailed programme schedule was mailed to us in advance. The study programme was drawn up jointly by the faculty of the Department of Agricultural Education & Communication & UF/IFAS Extension. The time management was perfect and every activity was conducted with extreme punctuality.



An overview of what we learnt in our short stay at the University of Florida is presented below:

1. The training programme helped us get insights on extension programme evaluation and impact assessment methodologies, tools and techniques of data collection and surveys. We really liked the one pager Feedback-cum-Evaluation Sheets used at the end of training programmes conducted by the Department of Agricultural Education & Communication & UF/IFAS Extension. The pre- and post-assessment (or before & after) is still a predominant impact assessment methodology adopted at this university for extension programme evaluations.
2. We learnt about various issues connected to functioning of non-profits globally, including in USA and India, while interacting with the faculty of the [Department of Family, Youth & Community Sciences](#). The non-profits have been making significant contributions in the socio-economic development of USA and many other countries around the world, including India.
3. We had fruitful interactions with the faculty of [the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems](#). We got to know about the various livestock development programs being implemented by the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems in developing as well as underdeveloped countries across the world. We realized that there are ample opportunities to collaborate for livestock development, wherein, India can provide technical support to developing countries together with the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems.



**With Faculty/team of Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems & The Food Systems Institute**

4. The discussions with the faculty of the [the Natural Resources Leadership Institute \(NRLI\)](#) helped us understand the issues pertaining to leadership in environment and agricultural development.
5. Our interactions with the management, faculty, students, and staff of the Evaluation Program and Outreach Core of the [Southeastern Coastal Center for Agricultural Health and Safety \(SCCAHS\)](#) was very fruitful as we could get insights on interdisciplinary research. In India too, there is emphasis on interdisciplinary research, so there is good opportunity to learn how interdisciplinary research can be taken up in actual practice.
6. When interacting with county agents, we found that [4 - H](#) is a very effective program for shaping the life of youth for national development. On our visits to agricultural fairs, we saw many school children enthusiastically participating in 4-H activities, such as handicrafts, raising crops and livestock rearing, caring competitions, etc. 4-H used to be an integral part of the Land Grant patterned Agricultural Universities in the initial years, but we do not hear much about them now. We strongly believe that this is one good concept which we should revive to inculcate interest in agriculture among the younger generations of India.



**With Dr. Stacy Strickland, County Extension Director, UF-IFAS Extension Osceola County Extension**

7. We visited three counties, viz., [Sumter](#), [Alachua](#) and [Osceola](#), to get acquainted with field extension activities being undertaken by the extension agents in these counties. It was fascinating to know the innovative work being done by the counties to create awareness, impart knowledge and skilling of the local communities. Programs, such as landscape gardening, management of water resources, Master Gardner program, and use of drones in agriculture, were some of the unique ones we learnt about during our visits to these counties. We were highly impressed to see the work the UF/IFAS Extension faculty was doing to improve the lives of Florida's residents. We can draw parallel among UF/IFAS Extension and [Krishi Vigyan Kendras \(KVKs\)](#). We believe KVKs can get inspired from the work of extension agents working with counties in terms of activities, infrastructure and innovative approaches used.



**With Extension Agents of Alachua County**

### **The Way Forward**

We are convinced that there is a great potential for meaningful collaboration with the universities in the United States of America and agricultural institutions in India, over and above the existing collaborations underway in many different areas at present. Our agricultural universities need to further explore the scope for collaboration with American Universities, so as to co-create developmental opportunities for academic research excellence and outreach activities, in agricultural sciences in particular. NAHEP too envisages that the faculty would benefit from increased collaboration of Indian Agricultural Universities with other universities globally to raise research quality, and also to facilitate better educational quality and relevance. We are confident that both faculty training and capacity-building can help improve the delivery of agricultural education and its learning outcomes.





**With the Extension Faculty at Bushnell Office/UF-IFAS Extension Sumter County & Natural Resources Program**

Finally, we are grateful to all faculties, administrators and county agents for facilitating our visit and sharing their ideas and experiences with us which were very helpful. In particular, we wish to thank Prof. Sebastian Galindo and Prof. Norma Samuel for facilitating our visit. We are also grateful to ICAR-[Indian Veterinary Research Institute](#) for sponsoring our training that helped us enhance our learnings.

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