

Catching Up with CALS Jan. 11, 2017



Kronenberg Delivers Food Processing Training to Kyrgyzstan

Fermented mare's milk and crunchy yogurt balls were among the most interesting foods that Jeff Kronenberg sampled while visiting Kyrgyzstan to deliver food safety training through a U.S. Agency for International Development program.



Kronenberg's efforts focused on dairy processors by providing HACCP and food safety workshops for managers and workers, and on-site technical assistance for two small dairy processors.

The focus on Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point training reflects Kyrgyzstan officials' interest in producing export products that meet market standards.

His Oct. 31-Nov. 11 visit was a collaboration with BT Innovations in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital and largest city, and ACIDI-VOCA, an international development nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C.

Kronenberg is a food processing specialist and assistant professor for UI Extension and the UI-Washington State University School of Food Science who works with Boise-based TechHelp to provide food safety training and technical assistance to Idaho food processors and agricultural producers.

Darigold employees at its Caldwell plant supported the effort by providing pre-project support in preparing food safety and quality control information.

"I was impressed by the interest and the effort by the participants in the workshops," Kronenberg said. "A lot of the food production and processing still relies on traditional methods and are small family operations. It is really a different culture, but they are very receptive to learning and applying what they learn," Kronenberg said.

The difficulty is the facilities and equipment, which reflect both traditional approaches and the industry's smaller scale. Applying international standards to a dairy that might only have five cows and is operated by a small family is challenging.

The emphasis on dairy products – both from cattle and horses – reflects the central Asian nation's culture that is still closely tied to its people's nomadic heritage, Kronenberg said.

Some of the products were unlike any foods he had sampled before during his previous international trips. Although it is unlikely that fresh or spray-dried fermented mare's milk will become the next big thing in international cuisine – largely due to milking hazards and seasonal availability – other dairy products may influence markets.

The small processors' other products included yogurt, dried skim milk, kefir, ayran, butter, cream and fluid milk.

"It wasn't that long ago that yogurt was largely unknown in many supermarkets," Kronenberg said. Now it is not uncommon to find drinkable yogurt products or kefir on shelves. The interest in other fermented products and probiotics may attract some attention to other traditional foods."

Kyrgyzstan's most important markets are Russia and Commonwealth of Independent States countries that have long been associated with it. Those trading partners, like the European Union and others worldwide, are increasingly focused on ensuring that imported goods meet safety standards.

Kyrgyzstan and Bishkek were exotic – the country is home to the World Nomad Games, a horse-centric olympics of rough and tumble events. The landscapes were also reminiscent of Idaho with high, dry steppes that produced rich stores of livestock, grains and fruit intertwined with mountain ranges.

The trip was his fourth to the region. He has also worked in Belarus, twice, and the Republic of Georgia.

“I like volunteer projects because I think you need to give back. I look at people when they’re learning new concepts and feel good about that, and then there’s a moral component: I appreciate having an impact on the improvement of public health,” Kronenberg said.