

Story by Jean Barton

California CattleWomen hosted the annual American National CattleWomen Region VI meeting in Monterey with members attending from Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Washington, Montana, Minnesota, a special guest from Australia, and California.

Monterey County contributes nearly 10% of states' ag production on only 2 % of California farm land, and we were able to see a sampling on our agriculture tour.

Bengard Ranch in Salinas with family members Bardin, Tracy Pezzini, Bridgett Bengard Rotticci, and Tom explaining the produce operation was our first stop. They have farms in AZ, CA, FL and Mexico, growing iceberg lettuce, broccoli, romaine, green leaf and red leaf lettuce, cauliflower, celery, kale. Bardin and Tracy shared the 165 year family farming history in the Salinas Valley.

We noticed fields were in different stages of growth from just harvested, disked, seedlings, nearly ready to be harvested , and crews harvesting. They double crop the land. Broccoli and cauliflower are harvested a couple of times, while they harvest lettuce once, and prepare land for next crop.

Fields are 15 minutes or less from the cooler. Lettuce has a short shelf life, so they quickly cool it after harvest since it is a 5 day trip to market. "Best use date" is the shelf life.

Tom is the Food Safety man, and he told us "Wash Your Produce."

75% of crops are drip irrigation, and the valley had a good aquifer that recharges from the foothills. An interesting note was, reservoirs do not comply with food safety. There are buffer zones between produce fields and livestock grazing, from several feet to quarter mile for more food safety requirements of produce buyer/shipper.

At the cooling and shipping area, Project Manager Bridgett B. Rotticci told us the fork lift drivers knew which field a box of produce came from by identification. Each pallet is quality controlled, then pallets are prepared for cooling. 15 minutes in the cooler, and it is 34°F when it comes out. We noticed the broccoli was packed with ice for longer travel.

National Cattlemen's Beef Association President Kevin Kester, Parkfield rancher was enroute to SF airport, stopping to speak to us on trade, the farm bill, and legislation.

Driving down the scenic river road to Hahn Estate Winery, Soledad was much nicer than the state highway. Jessica Schmidt, tasting room manager was our guide at next stop, explaining how Hahn was a Santa Lucia Highlands niche wine producer.

Hahn has 3,095 acres of Pinot Noir, and 2,060 acres of Chardonnay using six different vineyards.

The Chardonnay matures in French oak barrels ranging in price from \$ 1,000 to \$ 4,000, reusing the barrels by taking good care of them. The Pinot Noir uses American oak barrels and they make different varieties of wine.

A barrel will yield 30 cases of wine, and the alcohol is based on brix level.

They do quality control, since every bottle has cliff number. If the cork is incorrect, they go back to cliff number, and check the case of bottles. The capsule is the wine cover on top. Screw caps won't age, and budget friendly. Synthetic corks are a cost factor. Jessica told us to store our bottles on side, so cork doesn't dry out.

After learning how it was made, we experienced tasting five wines, accompanied by a pairing plate of cheeses, crackers, etc. while overlooking the Salinas Valley from the Tasting Room Deck. Many women left with bottles or boxes of wine.

Garlinger Cattle Ranch, Salinas, is run by five sisters and their mother. Monterey Co. CattleWoman member Joanie Ketcham took us up a dirt road to see the cattle grazing in lush grass high on a hill. Wonderful bus driver because it was a steep hill, but what a view!

The Monterey CattleWomen and Cattlemen hosted a reception in the Turf Club on the Monterey Co. Fairgrounds. Wine, cheese, beef, (including sweetbreads) and fruit . A very nice conclusion of the day.

Next morning, Pamela Griffin, ANCW Region VI Director from AZ opened meeting with a welcome, and she posted on Facebook: "The best speaker I've heard! Inspirational, change driven, interactive. He made us laugh from the depths of our bellies, made us uncomfortable and showed us change is ok and it can be creative, to seek out the person least like us to engage. Everyone matters and so much more. I know I can speak for us all, Highly Recommended for any event! Jeremy Bates from Odyssey Pen."

"What Others are Saying (and Doing) about Animal Agriculture," Dr. Frank Mitloehner, Professor, UC Davis. He is an advocate for science, and is confronting the issues for us using social media, #GHGGuru, with 100,000 hits in a week on Twitter.

We need to be compassionate and give effective responses based on science. Talk and engage with the public, explaining what we are doing. The days of not telling how we take care of our cattle are gone. Don't be quiet!!!

If we don't share when asked, someone will do it for us. For example, Robert Kenner, film and TV director who directed the Emmy award winning film FOOD, INC; contacted 100 ranchers and farmers 3 times for interviews. 97 failed to respond and the film was based on the input from 3 individuals.

Wanda Pinnow, ANCW President Elect, shared the programs and benefits of being a member. Encouraged members to ask for new tool kit, " Women in Ranching."

Celeste Settrini's "Who Am I?" illustrated how to tell your story, by sharing how the city wanted to put their 100 year old ranch inside city limits ten years ago. She and family didn't want to sell property, she told them: "We worked many years for our land." Several of us had tears in eyes listening to her speak. She was so passionate about saving the ranch.

From that she knew that she wanted to be a spokesperson. A voice for all the ranchers. She realized she could do it by being herself. "Snap a picture, tell why and what you are doing on social media. Stand up for what you believe in! We are doing great things! Celebrate! Get excited! Create innovative way you tell story. Don't apologize for what you do. Listen to our off ranch friends. Support each other as women, and work together."

Other speakers were Jenny Lester Moffitt, Undersecretary, CA Dept. Food & Ag, and Henry Gonzales, local Monterey County Ag Commissioner.

Incoming CCW President Callie Borrer, Tehama Co. CattleWomen member, received a standing ovation for chairing the memorable event.

Photo: Bridget Bengard Rotticci, project manager at Bengard with pallets of Romaine Hearts in background, was educating cattlwomen about the produce business during the Monterey County agriculture tour.

