



Meat us in Weber

The Meat Science Association offers students new opportunities and connections

Story and photos by Kaitlin Morgan

Not every club kicks off its school year with steak, but that has never stopped the Meat Science Association from treating its members to a tasty learning experience.

The first MSA meeting of the fall 2014 semester was a chance for members to hear from Kansas State University's newest meat science faculty member and MSA adviser, Travis O'Quinn. After performing a blind sensory evaluation on various cuts of beef, students learned about consumers' perspectives — everything from the types of muscle desirable for grilling to the role that price plays on the eating experience and buying preferences.

The Meat Science Association is a unique organization within the Department of Animal Sciences and Industry. Through industry tours, guest lectures, professional conferences and other opportunities, students interested in the meat science industry are able to learn and grow their passions outside of the classroom alongside graduate students, faculty and industry professionals.

History in the Making

For more than a decade, meat science graduate students have

built the organization around industry connections and professional development. But this past year, MSA decided to do something it had never done before — include undergraduates.

When MSA was first established at the university more than 20

students looked to undergraduates to revive the clubby offering the burst of fresh thinking and energy it needed to ensure success for many years to come.

“Our group was struggling to stay alive,” Tapian says. “Here at K-State, we really are one

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—Aaron Tapian, Meat Science Association President

years ago, it offered a chance for graduate students to work hand-in-hand with faculty members and industry professionals, says Aaron Tapian, graduate student from Santa Rosa, California, and 2013-2014 Meat Science Association graduate president.

In the early years of the organization, students would travel to the Tyson Foods packing plant in Emporia, Kansas, and work in the coolers collecting carcass data to be shared with meat buyers and feedlot owners in an attempt to make the process of producing beef more efficient.

When the plant closed its beef slaughter operation in 2008, MSA lost part of its identity. Last year, Tapian and his fellow graduate

of the strongest meat science programs in the country, but for us to thrive and build upon that, it was important to get the undergraduates involved. We needed members and leaders that would be here for longer than the two or three years it takes to complete graduate school.”

K-State doesn't offer a meat science undergraduate major. Animal products is an option for animal sciences majors, but MSA has become the department's best option for connecting students to the meat science industry.

“Coming in as a freshman, I didn't know how many people were in the animal products option with me. I didn't even really know the meat lab was located in Weber,”

recalls Allison Hobson, animal sciences and industry student and MSA undergraduate president. “As I grew older and got to know more of the professors and the people in the industry, I realized there was a bunch of us all interested in the same thing. Whether we were food science and industry or animal science, it didn’t matter.”

A Bundle of Opportunity

Mock interviews, résumé critiques and industry tours are just a few of the ways MSA is working to prepare its undergraduate members for the future and bring them closer to the industry.

“The Meat Science Association offers a different opportunity,” Hobson says. “It isn’t the normal club you see walking around the College of Agriculture Watermelon Feed every fall. It’s different because you have undergraduates, graduates and faculty all working together to cater events, host a barbecue contest and be actively involved in the industry by going on tours and hosting guest speakers.”

Victoria Willis, animal sciences and industry student, moved 1,187 miles from her home in Pasadena, Maryland, to attend K-State and now serves as the MSA undergraduate vice president. Willis grew her connection to MSA and the industry through competing nationally at last year’s Reciprocal Meats Conference as a member of the K-State Meat Science Quiz Bowl Team. For her, MSA has been more than just a club; it has become a way to uncover many different aspects

and opportunities within the meat science industry.

“I attended the Farmland and Armour-Eckrich plant tours in Nebraska last year,” Willis says. “We were able to get a personal tour of each processing plant to better understand how they operated. It was through these events that I was able to expand my professional network and relate the things I learned in the classroom to a real-life scenario.”

Another area of meat science Tapian is hoping to expose more students to is undergraduate research. The club’s goal is to help undergraduates create their own projects. In doing so, he says undergraduates develop the thought processes they will need to figure out their paths in the industry or cultivate emphases that can take them farther in pursuing a graduate career.

Building the Future

“One of our biggest ties is our industry aspect of how we want to relate to future employers and really produce students from K-State that are going to make a large impact in the industry,” Tapian says.

Tapian is thankful for MSA, the lifelong friendships he has developed as a member and the chance it has given him to give back what K-State has gave him.

“My first year at K-State, I was a transfer student from California,” Tapian says, “I didn’t really know anybody. My dream for MSA is to facilitate for those students who haven’t found a home in another club or organization, but beyond that, I want this club to produce leaders for the meat science industry, and I don’t think that’s a tall task.” **KS**

K-Staters and BBQ

Story by Kaitlin Morgan

Join the K-State Meat Science Association on Weber Lawn for the 2015 MSA Barbecue Contest during the 2015 Open House.

The event was designed in 2014 as a way to get more publicity. Last year, nine teams of students,



PHOTO COURTESY ALLISON HOBSON

Contestants at the barbecue contest get their entries perfect for sampling from judges and the passing crowd.

faculty and other meat enthusiasts competed, and all the meat was donated from corporate sponsors.

Teams presented their meat to a panel of professional judges, and the winners in different categories were selected based on appearance, flavor and texture. The competitors were able to serve more than 350 spectators and talk one-on-one with them about food safety, handling and preparation.

This year, MSA plans to continue the tradition as a fundraiser with an entry fee for teams and a plate charge per spectator.

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