

On September 7th-9th, the Virginia Tech Soybean Breeding Group, led by Dr. Bo Zhang, welcomed 85 attendees representing 8 land-grant universities, 3 USDA-ARS stations, 5 growers associations, and 3 agricultural companies from across the South and Midwest to Richmond for the 2016 Annual Soybean Breeders' Tour. The tour gives soybean researchers an opportunity to come together to see the field research of a different program each year and discuss the latest happenings within the field of soybean research to promote collaboration and the free exchange of ideas.

After a warm reception and plenty of socializing on Friday, the tour hit the ground running on Saturday morning with a trip to Montague Farms in Center Cross, VA where the innovative Taliaferro family introduced the attendees to the unique operation they have developed in the niche market of selling food grade soybeans to Japan and Korea. The group then moved to the Eastern Virginia AREC in Warsaw, VA. The AREC tour focused on Virginia Tech's multifaceted soybean program with speakers including Dr. Zhang, Dr. David Holshouser, Dr. Mark Reiter, Dr. Michael Flessner (PPWS), and Dr. Hilary Mehl (PPWS). This stop also gave the attendees the opportunity to compare their own varieties and lines and boast their successes by exploring the cooperative yield trials at the AREC. Saturday was rounded out with a dinner and business meeting where graduate student was allowed to introduce themselves and their research to the group before the University of Missouri was nominated and voted as the hosts for the next iteration of the event which will be in 2018 due to the World Soybean Research Conference in Savannah, GA in 2017.

The final day started with the attendees splitting up to go to 3 different tours. The first group went to San-J International's soy sauce plant in Richmond to see how soybeans are turned into a wide range of versatile and delicious products. Another group visited the Sabra dipping company in Richmond where they were introduced to the production of hummus and other bean based condiments. The final group toured VCU's Rice Rivers Research Center in Charles City where they saw the latest, cutting edge research being performed at this unique station.

The tour finished with everyone joining back together at Virginia State University's campus for lunch and a tour of their on campus research farm. The attendees were exposed to the exciting research happening at VSU including chickpea and soybean breeding and a diverse

program of specialty vegetable and fruit greenhouse production aimed at small farmers across Virginia.

Reviews from the attendees have been absolutely glowing, and all are looking forward to seeing how the University of Missouri will try to top our effort in 2018.



Dr. Zhang introduces the attendees of the 2016 Southern Soybean Breeders' Tour to the Virginia Tech Breeding program at EVAREC in Warsaw.



Tom Taliaferro of Montague Farms explains the basics of growing food grade soybeans for export to East Asia.