

Summary of My Experience at American Proteins, Inc., as a Participant of the CAWS
Educator Exchange Program
by: Michelle Pender

I would like to begin this summary by expressing my sincere thanks and appreciation to the exemplary people at American Proteins for educating me on their work and for welcoming me. Every person I encountered graciously took time to talk with me about and show me their work and asked me about my work as an educator. It was my privilege to have spent time in getting to know their process as a plant, but more so in getting to know the people there.

The work they do is fascinating and it prompted me to ask hundreds of questions. Everyone was so patient, kind, and knowledgeable about answering them. The question I asked most everyone one was: "What is your favorite part about working here?" The answer, every time, was that they enjoyed working with the other people there. This is a beautiful testament to the quality of this company and its employees. After spending time with the people there, I completely understand why that was the response.

Teamwork has been the theme. Within each department there was respect displayed for one another as well as for those working in other departments. I heard many say that they all try to watch out for each other. Many more say that they strive to treat others the way that they themselves want to be treated. It showed. There was always work to be done and they were about the business of completing it. All the while, their focus was on taking care of the process and taking care of one another.

Each department shared with me that their jobs would be impossible without the work of the other departments. Each department stated admiration for the others and the work that they do.

The efforts made to ensure the quality of their product in all the departments where I observed were impressive. The standards were upheld not only because it is required, but because the employees take pride in their work.

Efficiency, recycling, conservation, and safety were all discussed in each department. The safety bonus employees receive seemed to be one of the benefits they expressed appreciation for. I think it's great to reward people for following guidelines. These guidelines are in place to protect the employees and it's nice to receive a pat on the back for doing what you are supposed to be doing anyway.

In my profession many people believe that one should not reward another for doing what is required of them. They believe that the reward should be not being punished for breaking the rules. I believe that we all need encouragement to keep on keeping on and that positive reinforcement is a step in the right direction. Also, not only is the recipient of the recognition inspired to continue the right behavior, even though it is for his or her own good, but it may inspire the person who is not following the guidelines to change.

Several asked me what I had gained that week that would be useful in educating kindergarten students. In my experience I have found that when teaching a skill if I can relate it to a real-life experience that I or another person has had, then the students see the value in learning it. Some of the skills I have observed this week that will be applicable to my students are: legible handwriting, adding, subtracting, weighing, measuring,

maintaining a clean and organized work space, team work, taking pride in completing tasks, steps in a process, following directions, transportation, creativity, scientific method, recycling, conservation, using technology, inventing from necessity and for convenience, value of hard work, competency in using a computer, treating others and themselves with respect, and communicating with others.

Thank you to C.A.W.S. and American Proteins for helping me to become a better educator. Thank you to American Proteins for all the ways you support Hanceville Elementary and other schools, for the difference you make in our students through your support, for taking time to share with me, and for allowing me to share with you.