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2012 Student Inspiration Awards

Sally Silverman
University of Pennsylvania

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2012 | STUDENT INSPIRATION awards

BY SALLY SILVERMAN

FOR THE FIFTH CONSECUTIVE YEAR, PENN VET HAS NAMED THE RECIPIENTS OF ITS STUDENT INSPIRATION AWARDS.

EACH YEAR, STUDENTS WITH BIG IDEAS AND A PASSION TO SHARE THEIR KNOWLEDGE ARE HONORED WITH THE AWARDS, WHICH ARE GRANTED TO HELP THEM ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS.

THIS YEAR, TWO PROJECTS HAVE BEEN CHOSEN TO RECEIVE THE AWARD. BOTH PROJECTS ARE FOCUSED ON IMPROVING THE NUTRITION AND LIVELIHOODS OF VILLAGES IN HAITI AND INDIA THROUGH FOCUSING ON ANIMAL HEALTH AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY.

Lending Haiti a Helping Hand

To A. Nikki Wright and Lisa Gretebeck, the impoverished Caribbean nation of Haiti means opportunity. In a country where 80 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, Wright and Gretebeck have identified a unique opportunity to both better economic conditions while improving human nutritional health and standards. Their proposed project is a learning center in Haiti that will provide education and training in sustainable goat management, while improving the genetics of the local goat population and supporting financial independence and community commerce.

With experience in small animal veterinary practice, lab animal medicine and biomedical research, Wright entered vet school with an appreciation for the interconnected nature of human, animal and environmental health.

“Since starting veterinary school,” she said, “I have discovered that my desire to further the concept of One Health is best served via my passion for food animal medicine, and in particular the fields of infectious disease, epidemiology, and food security.”

After visiting Haiti, and witnessing the devastation that grips the country, she became determined to find a way to contribute sustainable solutions to the problems of its people.

During her undergraduate career at Middlebury College, Gretebeck participated in a public and primary health care course with the Comprehensive Rural Health Project in India. It was here that she first became aware of the innovative possibilities for a multi-disciplinary approach to promoting community health. She returned to India a year later to develop a micro-finance-based goat production project, which proved to be a powerful tool for the community. The women named the project AMAR, meaning “never



Working in Haiti, Lisa Gretebeck (pictured in two left images) and Nikki Wright (pictured in two right images) aim to improve nutritional health of people through bettering the genetics of the local goat population.

ending” in their local language, and it is a name that Wright and Gretebeck have chosen for their Haiti project.

“This experience in India,” said Gretebeck, “and understanding the impact that animals can have on people, were crucial factors in my pursuing a veterinary degree.”

When the two veterinarians-in-training became aware of their shared interest, they began to work together. They have already made tremendous progress with their project, establishing partnerships with the iF Foundation, a nonprofit offering micro-financing for disadvantaged populations in developing countries, and Dr. Keith Flanagan, an American veterinarian who has been in Haiti for more than 25 years. The iF Foundation donated a small piece of land where Wright and Gretebeck will build a hurricane-resistant house for 20 goats. They have already begun to farm the local forage that will provide feed for the goats. An existing building on the property will be modified to serve as a classroom, clinical lab, storage facility and living area for farm staff and interns.

Five families at a time will participate in a training internship that will focus on basic goat husbandry as well as reproductive principles, parasite management and nutrition. Successful completion of the internship will earn each family a bred female goat and weanling kid. The families will also agree to donate a goat back to the center in the future, in an effort to maintain the population.

The goal of AMAR Haiti is self-sustainability; it’s a program in which the roles of both Wright and Gretebeck will eventually become obsolete.

Said Gretebeck, “I told the women of AMAR [in India] that I was going to study to become a veterinarian, and come up with the most effective and sustainable goat project possible. I am keeping my promise.”

The AMAR project, evaluated with bi-annual progress reports based on qualitative interviews, will become the model for a successful and sustainable program that can be applied to different communities throughout the world.

Educating Women, Improving Processes in India

According to a quote from the World Bank, “GDP growth originating in agriculture is at least twice as effective in reducing poverty than GDP growth originating in other

sectors.” With that key factor, the Student Inspiration project of Audrey Barker and Shannon Kerrigan will focus on educating women in the Nellore District of Andhra Pradesh, India on more efficient dairy husbandry practices. The yearly hands-on training they conduct will be supported by monthly educational sessions via an internet interface and a website composed of pictorials and audiovisual learning aids.

Kerrigan first visited India as an undergraduate at Rutgers University, participating in Semester at Sea. Barker first traveled to India as a study-abroad student while an undergraduate at University of Maryland. Their shared interest in India and the desire to use the power of veterinary medicine to improve the conditions of those in need brought them together at Penn Vet.

Traveling to India in the summer of 2011, the two were involved in a study on the prevalence of internal parasites in dogs and cats. It was while journeying through the Indian countryside that, observing the reliance of the population on livestock for nutrition and financial security, and the poor management and healthcare of that livestock, they began to focus on the potential for veterinary medicine to have a positive impact on rural communities. Their next step was a trip to more than 15 Indian villages conducting surveys on animal husbandry and production. They met with government officials and veterinarians, dairy self-help groups and government agencies. Their experiences and the data collected focused them on dairy animal production in the rural communities of Andhra Pradesh.

Their project, Penn Vet Mere Saathi, is the vehicle by which Barker and Kerrigan hope to realize their vision to improve the socio-economic conditions of the poorest of individuals through improved productivity of dairy stock. Their educational approach will focus on five topics: the importance of regular veterinary care and its impact on milk production; utilizing the free and subsidized government veterinary care and rural development programs; recognizing common health problems; proper heat detection and other breeding practices; and nutrition management. Barker and Kerrigan have already established rapport in several villages with the leaders of government-sponsored Self Help Groups through which Penn Vet Mere Saathi will function.

Said Dr. Y. Ramana Reddy of the Sri Venkateswara Veterinary University, “The project set forth by these women will strengthen Indian dairy farmers, students and people in dairy industry by improving milk quality at farm and manufacturing levels as well as the marketing level.”



In India, Audrey Barker and Shannon Kerrigan aim to educate women on efficient dairy husbandry practices with an online and in-person training program they are working to create.