Internship with Deer Valley Farm

This summer I had the pleasure of interning with Deer Valley Farm located in Fayetteville, TN. This farm focuses its efforts on producing high-quality seed stock for the Angus industry. To produce high-quality animals, Deer Valley uses breeding techniques such as artificial insemination and embryo transfer to improve the pedigree and increase the animal production. My responsibilities ranged from working in the office and assisting the office manager with paperwork, to handling and working the cattle.

During my first few days, I was introduced to the database system the farm uses to record important information about individual animals on the farm. I input new calf information into the system, input pregnancy check dates, and moved identification numbers of the animals to different pens in the database system to match where these cattle were on the physical farm. Throughout the internship this database system was used to digitize anything that was done physically on the farm. I also recorded artificial insemination data, embryo transfer information, and embryo flushing information as well as weaning weights, pedigree information, and due dates.

Beyond the data input and verification aspect of working on this farm, there is an immense amount of physical labor that goes into keeping Deer Valley running smoothly. Working the cattle is an extremely important job on the farm, and this includes vaccinating, tagging, pregnancy-checking, and checking overall physical condition and health of the cattle. Many of these tasks are performed by restraining the animal using a head chute in which the
cattle are fed to reduce stress on the animal as well reducing the danger to the farm laborer. The information that is recorded and observed while working the animals is then sent to the office where it is put into the database system.

I was able to help with all of these tasks, and this helped disperse the workload for the office manager, helped get data into the system faster for more accurate cattle management, and helped work the cattle faster to reduce the stress of the animal brought on by heat and confinement. One example in particular was when one of the farmhands had to work a herd of heifers alone. I volunteered to help which allowed the farmhand to load the cattle in the chute, gather more cattle into the corral, vaccine each heifer, tag some of the heifers, and record this information without putting undue stress on him alone. Opportunities like this presented themselves frequently and each time I was more than willing to help out.

Outside of learning how the farm operates, I also learned about the economic and business aspects of the farm. Each year Deer Valley has two large sales where they sell bulls raised in the previous year. Along with the bulls, a number of high-quality cows and heifers are sold as well. The majority of these animals are Deer Valley bred and owned or co-owned; however, these sales also include stock from other farms. Smaller local farms and farms without the same connections or reputation as Deer Valley will ship bulls or heifers to Deer Valley to finish them off for sale. This allows for the cattle to be in top physical condition and provides a larger customer base for potential sale which the other farms might not be able to provide. These animals can be co-owned animals between the smaller farm and Deer Valley, or
Deer Valley receives a commission from the sale of these animals. Besides the two large sales, cattle can be bought and sold throughout the year. Along with the livestock operations, Deer Valley owns roughly 5000 acres, part of which is sown in soybeans and corn. Some of the harvest is used to create feed for the cattle while the rest is sold. In this way Deer Valley is able to utilize its resources to partially sustain its operation as a world-class Angus facility.

Working at Deer Valley Farm has given me the opportunity to observe and work in the Angus industry and develop a more informed knowledge of the industry itself. It has given me a better understanding of what it takes to keep a farm of Deer Valleys caliber up and running, while also showing me the amount of work and time that it takes to produce a single high quality animal. From this I learned to ask questions whenever I did not understand something fully, take the time to learn how to do things the correct way, and how to multitask appropriately to get a job done in a stressful and potentially dangerous situation.

Leaving Deer Valley, I have a better understanding of what I want my career goals to be. Going into this internship I knew I wanted to work in the agricultural field, preferably with animals, however my experience at Deer Valley and the support that I got from each of its members has driven me to pursue veterinary medicine, a dream I have had since I was younger. I have begun to seriously look into my career at Sewanee and what I will need to do to apply for vet school in the next few years. Had I not interned at Deer Valley, I would not have been encouraged to pursue veterinary medicine again. However, I leave the farm with a better
understanding of the Angus industry, the business that makes up the farm, and a clear path for myself in the future.