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ERS Summer Interns



Photo: Stephen Peterson, USDA/ERS

Some of the 2005 ERS Summer Interns

Front row (left to right): Chatavie Newton, Gaurav Ghosh, Helen Waqui

Middle row (left to right): Erdal Kara, Elizabeth Ashley, Alba Marie Baez, Jin Zhang, Cristian Lopez, Cheng Zhao, Kara Lynch

Back row (left to right): Nicholas Bradley, Madison Brown, Jason Moore, Mikael Pyrtel, Chao Lin, James Whitaker

Each summer, hundreds of college and graduate students from all over the country descend upon Washington, DC, to observe policymaking from the vantage point of an internship. The benefits to the interns are clear: access to the government's inner workings and key players and opportunities to contribute to the formation, analysis, and operation of policy. But their employers also benefit. For a research agency like ERS, summer internships help sow seeds for the future: by exposing students to the interesting problems and potential contributions of agricultural economics, ERS—and the discipline as a whole—might reap sizable returns in the longer term.

In 2005, ERS summer interns worked on a variety of projects, from assessing the production impacts of direct government payments to farmers, to compiling a global demographics database for use in modeling global food demand, to researching and developing methods to better disseminate ERS research products. Kara Lynch, a graduate student in agricultural economics at Texas A&M University, analyzed ACNielsen Homescan food purchase data. She and ERS economist Ephraim Leibtag investigated the relationship between household income and where households purchase food (grocery stores, supercenters, etc.). In addition to her analytical skills, Kara brought to the project her experience as a Homescan panelist. "As both a Homescan participant and a Homescan data user, I was in the unique position of seeing the survey process from both the data collection and end user viewpoints. As a

researcher, this experience helps me appreciate the value of survey design and the nuances of data analysis," says Kara.

ERS interns represent different walks of life, as befits the agency's participation in programs designed to attract academically qualified minority students, including Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities Internship Program, Washington Internships for Native Students (WINS), and USDA/1890 National Scholars Program. Helen Rain Waiquiu came to ERS through the WINS program. A member of the Sun Clan of the Pueblos of Jemez and Acoma in New Mexico, Helen is studying environmental economics at the University of California at Berkeley. Working with ERS senior economist Elise Golan, Helen contributed to a summary of ERS literature on the economics of food choices, a topic that is of great interest to her. "With the arrival of a fast-food chain to my reservation, I became very interested in weighing the economic costs and benefits of having such a restaurant in our community, given the nationwide epidemic of obesity and related conditions. My experience at ERS not only will further my academic career, but also will inform and shape my community development efforts," says Helen.

Recruitment for 2006 summer interns starts in March with an announcement on the ERS website (www.ers.usda.gov/abouters/employment/).