

2016 Canadian veterinary student blogs together

Final reflections

By Ali Frye

It has been almost a month since being back in Canada and it feels weird to not see the familiar faces of our Kenyan family. While it had only been three months of time spent together, it felt like a lifetime in terms of the friendships and bonds we formed. While we will have to wait some time before being back together with many of the people we had to say goodbye to, we are lucky to have the Kenyan girls in Canada.



Our Kenyan home

Having to say goodbye to Kenya was harder than I expected and I honestly had to put off writing this last blog for a bit in order to give myself some time to decompress, reflect and reintegrate myself back into Canadian society. For me, culture shock was more about the adjustment of coming home than it was going to Africa, and there were a lot of things I had to come to terms with since being back. From feeling guilty about the things I am blessed to have in my life, feeling greedy for owning all that I own, righting my internal clock and fighting off some “bugs” that happened to join me home, it took me a bit of time to process everything.

Going to Kenya, I had a few ideas of what to expect, but the reality of it was so much more. From the amazing veterinarians we had the opportunity to work with, the knowledge we gained, the people we met, the farmers we worked with and the beautiful landscapes and cultures, I fell in love with the country.

If I had to make a list of the important things I learned while being in Kenya, it would start something like this:

- 1) The children have a sense of responsibility and maturity that far exceeds that in North America. At a young age, they are left in charge of the farm animals, to tend to the house, cook and fetch water; and while there will always be exceptions, they seem to do as they are asked without much argument. They play outdoors with toys they have made from garbage they find laying around, make balls out of old socks, bags and twine, and create games that, even with the



language barrier, they are able to teach us and enjoy together.

Emily giving important information about cow comfort to the whole family.

- 2) The concept of having pets is foreign to most people. When we first arrived the neighbors had a dog that was kept in rough shape; not because people are purposefully abusing them, but because there is a lack of education (as well as resources) as far as what an animal needs and the benefits it can have for all parties. Dogs are kept mostly for guard purposes and are tied during the day and let loose in the evening to fend for themselves and retrieve their own food and water. As much as this seemed cruel at first, understanding their perspective made it easier to see where they were coming from. Many of them could barely put food on their own table on a regular basis, so how could they be expected to provide for the dog that is capable of hunting for itself. This didn't stop me though from trying to teach them about the love and enjoyment a dog could bring to their lives, and the fun the children could have teaching it tricks and playing games with it.



Jenny – the neighbourhood dog who stole my heart

- 3) Bartering is an important skill to learn. In many of the shops there are no prices associated with products and as a mzungu, you are automatically charged twice as much because you don't know any better. After being in Kenya for almost a month, we started to get more comfortable with arguing prices and walking away when they tried to overcharge. In time they learned we weren't as clueless as we had once been when we first arrived and would give us a fair deal.



The local market

- 4) Knowing how to change a tire is a life skill you can't go without. While in Canada, we rely on CAA to handle most of our vehicle "emergencies", whereas carrying the spare parts and knowing how to use them is a requirement when driving on the rough, bumpy roads of rural Kenya.



Our driver Timothy changing one of many flats with a very concerned audience

- 5) Cell phones are an important mode of communication and banking for people even in the most rural areas. I will never take wifi for granted in Canada after getting used to having a signal that could cut out at any moment and was so weak that sending or downloading anything often turned into an all week event.
- 6) I thought that having to learn French in school was difficult, but the people we worked with spoke many languages that are taught at a young age. From learning English, their local tribal language and Swahili, they are able to easily interchange between them and communicate easily amongst each other. Often the younger children or teenagers would be assisting the parents to understand what we were discussing in English because they had just learned the language in school.
- 7) Things run on Kenya time which can be as much as an hour behind regular time. When we first arrived we were early for everything but by the time we left, we had adapted to this way of life - to the point that we were even late to our own going away party, in true Kenyan style!
- 8) Kenya food may be my favorite out of all the cultural dishes I have tried. Being gluten free, nut free and unable to eat raw onions, garlic or milk, this was one place I managed to always find things that fit my pain-in-the-butt diet without having to cause too much of an issue for the cooks (who were great at catering to my needs). My favourite dishes were the ugali (maize flour made into a heavy bread-like texture) and sukuma wiki (a cooked dish of kale) both of which I have been lucky enough to enjoy since being back in Canada courtesy of the Kenya girls that are here now.

Even Obama loves the food!



- 9) The people in Kenya are extremely generous. When they scarcely have enough for themselves, they are eager to share with others and invite you into their homes for tea and food. The farmers we visited would often make hot tea for us and send us away with a bag full of treats from the garden. There isn't a selfish bone in their bodies, something that I aspire to be more like.



I know I could continue this list for many more pages, but for now, this is where I will leave it. While I was there primarily working on a project involving dairy cattle, working in the community and alongside the local farmers made me realize just how much I enjoy incorporating working with people and the idea of “One Health” into the veterinary practice. In addition to the veterinary skills I obtained, the opportunity I had to grow as an individual is something I will continue to benefit from and not something I take for granted. I look forward to the day I get the opportunity to return to Kenya, but in the meantime, I will take the many lessons and skills I learned and apply them to life back here in Canada.

Not Ready To Say Goodbye

Posted on [August 15, 2016](#)

by **Ali Frye**

We are in our final stretch of work here and the reality of having to leave is starting to sink in. As much as I miss Canada and look forward to being back, things here are starting to feel

more and more like home as time goes on. The first month we were here was all about learning the ropes, meeting new people, and being in awe of the fact that we were in Africa. We were getting to know our team, figuring out how to aim using a pit latrine, adjusting to being called “mzungu”, and experiencing our first of many cow rectals. Everything was new and exciting!

The second month we really started to make this place our home. We made amazing friends, were invited to take part in community events (even sat front row with the senator of Meru for a fundraiser), grew to love the neighborhood kids like they were our own siblings, and finally started to get the lay of the land (no street signs, or addresses make things quite interesting). We started to learn and practice our Swahili and Kimeru, were taught many of the local traditions including the need for “chai” (tea) at every possible occasion, fell in love with the food, and could even go as far as to say we started to adapt to the bumpy gypsy rides and the crazy driving.

Going for our runs, Kelsey and I made friends along our routes who laugh and run with us, wave to us as we go by, and the kids of all ages run in swarms along with us. Even the community is starting to get used to us being here and we blend in (as much as physically possible), more like we belong than the outsiders we originally were. Having been to the same farms on more than one occasion we are getting to know the individual farmers on a personal level and returning for visits has been exciting to learn more about them as well as their animals.



We have grown close with the people we work with, our amazing cooks, the neighbors, etc. and these last weeks have been a little emotional for all of us with the thought of having to say goodbye. While most of us are hoping to return at some point in the future (a reunion trip is already being discussed), we are still dreading the day we leave. While we know it won't be goodbye forever, it is still hard to leave the ones we have grown to call friends and family.

Constructing comfortable cow stalls

Posted on [July 13, 2016](#)

Hello from Kelsey Goodick on the veterinary team in Naari!

Canada Day week was an exciting week for our youth farm service project as we focused on cow and calf comfort. Swapping our stethoscopes and rectal sleeves for hammers and nails we became carpenters for a couple of days and worked with two of our youth farmers to build new stalls and improve cow comfort on their farms.

We first began by teaching the farmers the importance of having comfortable, proper fitting sleeping stalls to attain good milk production. We explained that a cow produces the most milk when she is laying down, and to encourage rest she must have a soft and comfortable place where she will want to lay. We also stressed the importance of having a proper fitting stall that isn't too small that the cow is uncomfortable while sleeping, nor too big that she will pass waste into her stall making an unclean resting environment that will dirty her udder and increase the risk of mastitis. Finally, we discussed the roles of a clean and dry calf pen in preventing calf illness, especially scours. Then with a hammer, a jembe (garden hoe) and a penga (machete) in hand we were off to work to build new stalls.

Our first farm had two sleeping stalls that were much too large, with hard rocky flooring and a calf pen that was too small to comfortably hold their growing calf. Our solution was to divide one of the sleeping stalls to make two smaller, more appropriate size stalls and remove the rocks

to even out and soften the ground, and turn the second sleeping stall into a new calf pen.



Emily and Ali discussing construction plans.

With my past handy-man experience being limited to building a slanted bookshelf in home etch, assembling IKEA furniture and hanging pictures, I thought this plan sounded easier said than done. However, with many hands make light work, and with the help of the farmer, lots of muscle work and only a few hammered thumbs we got the job done – Emily and I even built a new milking stool (farmer comfort is important too)!



Our farmer was a great help at hammering all the difficult nails!



The new calf pen!



Emily testing the milking stool in the new sleeping stalls!

The next day we were ready to take on our next construction challenge; building two sleeping stalls and a feed trough from scratch! With our second farm only having a fenced in area and a milking stall for their cows, we certainly had our work cut out for us. After a long day of clearing manure, removing rocks and adding fresh soil to soften the ground, chopping trees for wood, hammering, digging and masoning we successfully completed our task!



Our rectal sleeves were used after all – to clear manure!



Everyone hard at work!



Our end result: new sleeping stalls and a new feed trough!

We were very pleased with improvements made on both youth farms, and we hope that the cows will rest more comfortably and that the farmers will soon begin to see increases in milk production!

Brrrrrrr.....Kenya and getting handy with a hammer

Posted on [July 2, 2016](#)

By vet student Ali Frye

It has been a while since our last post because we have been without power for the past little bit which makes everything a little more complicated and a lot more interesting (apologies in advance for the extra long blog). Cold showers, no lights and the sun going down just after 6pm means indoor fires to keep warm and early nights around here!!

The weather has been on and off with days that are extremely chilly, wet and misty and while the vet team trudges along to our farm visits freezing our behinds off, we pass Kenyans bundled up in puffy winter jackets, “toques” and scarves. Perhaps it’s that our Canadian exterior is starting to wear off, but 10°C (which would be shorts weather for most back home) is now unbelievably cold and requires many layers and lots of warm tea! It makes for creative ways of keeping warm and Kelsey and I have been running extra to get the blood flowing, which is helping with our marathon training!

As with any family we have our off days, but it has been amazing to see that no matter what, we are able to come together and complement one another. The team atmosphere is apparent between the nutritionists and vets from the days we swap rolls and learn to work side by side in a completely new environment, to the times they call us when they know we are working nearby to come join them for a warm meal (other than our great company, I’m still not sure what we contribute to their days though). While both teams have been busy at work, we continue to enjoy each other’s company on our down time; playing games in the evenings, visiting local markets, going on hikes, and evening doing yoga together! We really are lucky to have such a great group of individuals under one roof!

The “weekend” Gang!



As for the vet team, along with visiting our scheduled farms with Joan and Dennis, we have been doing our second visits to the Youth Farms with our recommendations and follow up questions. This has been both an interesting experience and a huge learning process. Our initial plan for the farms changed when we encountered issues with finding female calves to include in our project as described in John's previous post. We ended up having to make some adjustments to our farm inclusion criteria to ensure we had farms with animals that fit with our main objectives (to improve calf nutrition/prevent mastitis with the goal of increasing future production to benefit the farmer). To do this, we ended up having to make some exceptions in regards to our other criteria such as the need of the farmer to understand English, which posed some issues for Kelsey and myself.

The first farm we revisited was a woman who when we first visited, had a farm in better condition than others we were used to seeing. At first this seemed a bit of an unfair way to spend our resources because we have seen so many farms that could use the assistance, but in the end we realized that she was a perfect fit because she was extremely receptive to the recommendations we gave her, a very hard worker and is someone that the community would be able to look to as a positive example of what should be done on the farm (which was one of the main objectives of the youth farms – to set up role model farms that can teach others and provide guidance). It was an overall positive experience and the first time I really felt like I personally had a hand in the changes and teaching as we each took a part of the recommendations to discuss with the farmer. Kelsey did mastitis prevention/milking practices, Emily discussed nutrition/feeding, I did cow comfort/stall management and we enlisted the expertise of Dennis and Joan to discuss reproduction practices and heat detection.

Being able to communicate and discuss our input and advice directly with the farmer was a rewarding feeling. Up until this point we have been performing services for the farmer but the language barrier limited one-on-one discussions. It was nice to be able to share and teach the

things we have been learning and see the farmer's appreciation. In this case she showed her gratitude by sharing eggs from her farm with us.

The next few farms were a bit harder for Kelsey and myself to take part in because the farmers did not understand English and the communication barrier was very apparent. We ended up having Emily deliver the recommendations we had previously come up with and did what we could to help out. One of the tasks for our second visit was to teach the farmers to correctly plant the Calliandra seedlings we were supplying as nutritional feed for their cows. Since this could be taught by showing them, it was something Kelsey and I could help with and only require minimal translation.



First nail hammered in as a practice test (success!!)

In addition to delivering the recommendations we had from our previous analysis of the farms, we are also taking measurements and making plans to construct stalls on the farms that have their cows currently without shelter. Emily had previously visited with Shauna's team to learn some of the building techniques, so we are excited for her to share them with us! Time to get down and dirtier than we usually are and try our hand at construction....stay tuned to see how they turn out!

Cheers,

Ali (and the Vet Crew)

Playing nutritionist for the day

Posted on [June 15, 2016](#)

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by **Ali Frye, vet student**

Today Sarah and I switched places and I had the amazing opportunity to travel with the Nutrition Team to see the work they do, while she got the pleasure of sticking her arm in a cow and visiting farms. I was lucky because today they were visiting the Naari Girls Secondary School which is an age I really enjoy working with (our equivalent of a boarding high school) and interacting with the students was a ton of fun.



Visiting schools with the Nutrition Team (Kira and Catherine)!

We spent the morning visiting with the Principal and some of the staff and then toured around the facilities. Our main focus was in the kitchen area since this is where the magic of the nutrition team happens, but we also visited the dormitories, gardens (where we got to see the screen house and water tank provided by FHF), and classrooms.

We went around to each of the classes, introduced ourselves and answered questions the students had for us (some of which were quite amusing such as “do you eat snakes and snails”). Since the students are mostly taught in English, we were able to communicate with the help of the teachers

and the constant reminder to slow down; we apparently talk really fast which they find amusing. Many of them were keen to know about our school system, what our programs included and how they could come to Canada to study.



Discussing our work and answering questions from the students.

When we returned to the kitchen after our visits, we observed the cooks making Githeri (a mixture of beans, maize and cabbage) for lunch and I tried my hand at “helping” with a poor attempt to stir the giant pot, which was quite the work out. I was taught about the portions, ingredients, measurements and the nutritional value of the food. It was definitely interesting to see the process and experience the preparation of a meal made for 120 students.



Getting an arm workout attempting to stir the Githeri

Of course I could not leave without visiting the school's cows. Although I was wearing a skirt and smelling like a real human for the first time in a long time, I couldn't resist examining some of the animals and asking about their milk production. I found it interesting to see that although the school had approximately 11 animals, only two were providing milk at an amount that together totalled 9 Litres per day. The school uses this milk to prepare food and tea for the students during the year and sells it to the dairy during the months the students are not around. They expressed their disappointment with their current yield and were quite interested when I mentioned potential improvements they could make to increase their production. This spiked my interest in looking into a way we could educate some of the schools on the same techniques and improvements we are currently working on with our farmers. I feel it would not only benefit a the large population at the school with increased product and income, but it could potentially set an example for the students interested in agricultural studies (which many told us they were). Perhaps a project for us in the future?!!



Couldn't keep away from my four legged friends.

Overall, the day was filled with great company, good food, new experiences and a ton of laughs. It was a great way to experience what our colleagues are working hard on since as part of the veterinary team, we usually only see our portion of the project. It was a nice change to see another side to what Farmers Helping Farmers does for the community.

I'm looking forward to another opportunity to tag along with this team!

Cheers, Ali

Getting the 5 Naari youth farms up and running

Posted on [June 12, 2016](#)

by John VanLeeuwen

Part of our plans for the vet team are to go to 5 farms (every week or so) to help them with the health management of their calves and cows. Specifically, we wanted to demonstrate the benefits of good feeding for preweaned and weaned calves, and good mastitis prevention for cows, among other things. This blog describes the initial process for getting this part of the activities off the ground – part of the story indeed.

Our first task was to work with the Naari Dairy to find 5 farms with newborn calves from different regions of milk collection. You wouldn't think that would be too difficult among the 500 farms that currently ship milk to the dairy, but it ended up being a little harder than we figured, for a number of reasons. First, with a number of insemination providers in the area, many Naari member farmers were using inseminators who did not have easily accessible records of inseminations. Also, the Naari Dairy did not have an inseminator for a large part of last year, so their insemination records were sparse and not useful. The Chairman decided to call a meeting of board members, and in a few days, they met to discuss the request, gathered some information, and eventually created a list of five farms that they gave to us.

A couple days later, we scheduled our first farm visit for this purpose, arrived at the farm, and then found out that the farmer did have a calf but it was already 5 months old and weaned. OK, not exactly what we were looking for, but we ended up being able to use this farm as a replacement farm for one of the drop out farms from the research project. Therefore, getting to the farm was not time wasted, but it appeared that we were back to the drawing board with regard to the 5 farms. Lesson learned : things sometimes get lost in translation or mis-interpretted, or sometimes your intelligence information is faulty.

We asked the Dairy to confirm that the list was indeed a list of farms with newborn calves (less than 1 month old). The message back from them was that this was not so easy. Having worked in Kenya for over ten years, I understand that cows have a long calving to conception interval on these farms – often having two years or more between calves. So finding these farms with newborn calves may be a little harder to do than first thought. We decided to have the milk collectors ask the farmers if they had a newborn calf when they were picking up milk, and get names and phone numbers and regions from them.

The next day, we went to another farm on the list and this farm did have a newborn calf, which we confirmed on the phone prior to going to the farm – this time. On this farm, there was a smart lady who already had one of our cattle health management handbooks and was doing some good things with her calves and cows, but still room for improvement. So we started the process with her, collecting baseline information on the farm management and productivity, and deciding on how to proceed with recommendations according to the areas needing improvement both visually and from the survey. We also checked her 2 cows and 2 newborn calves. Yes 2 newborn calves on one farm. One was 1 ½ weeks old and the other was 3 weeks old. Both bull calves. The cows were in descent body condition, with no mastitis currently, but they did have mastitis in the past, and so she was happy to hear about how to prevent mastitis. She said that the two calves were doing well, and drinking their milk well. However, when we examined the older one, it had a fever of 40.7 celcius, breathing a little fast, enlarged lymph nodes, and lumps in its skin in many places on its body. After further questioning, we found out that the calf had been vaccinated for East Coast Fever, and so these clinical signs were a reaction to the vaccine, which would explain why the calf was still eating well, despite what looked like signs of East Coast Fever. We told her what we found (she did not realize there was any reaction) and that she should monitor the calf, and call a vet tech if it ever stops drinking milk. We explained concepts of feeding calves for good growth and decided, with the woman's permission, to try a little on-farm pilot experiment. With 2 bull calves on the same farm, getting the same management, but only a little difference in age, we would feed one with enhanced feeding practices (paying for her to do so),

and let her feed the other calf how she normally would, so she and others can see the response to difference in management. We will monitor how things change over the next 3 months.



3 week old calf vaccinated for East Coast Fever

[The Real World – Naari Edition](#)

Posted on [June 9, 2016](#)

By Ali Frye

We are learning to fly solo now that our professors are back in Canada and the vet team has made the big move into the house with the nutrition students. There are now 8 of us in the house (plus our amazing cooks) and we are one big unconventional family with every dynamic possible. We joke that we should have a camera crew following us for a reality show as we

often look like we belong on the Real World TV show with all of our crazy antics, interactions and banter.



It's never a dull moment with the vet team

Our group has started doing yoga in the yard to stretch out the kinks we obtain from being bounced around in the vehicles on the bumpy roads, but we draw quite the crowd from the neighborhood children who enjoy joining in and laughing at our “silly” poses. Between the sheep and chickens running around and the neighborhood kids, it's quite the sight to see! Even when we go for a run, the children chase us down the road putting our speed to shame and laughing the whole way. We are starting to notice that it never gets old for the kids and we are learning to have fun with it and enjoy our “celebrity” status for the time being (plus it makes us run faster!).



Yoga on the porch with encouragement from our new neighborhood friends

The teams have also been taking time to learn about the area, take part in local engagements and visit events in the area such as the Agricultural Fair, the Governor's town meeting, and local church services. It has been fun to interact with the locals, get to know them on a personal level and see what their lives are like outside of what we see when we visit the farms.



Post camel ride fun at the Agricultural Fair

The vet team has recently graduated from our green thumbs that we acquired from assisting in planting the trees, to our brown sleeves as we move into our hands on work with the cattle performing physical exams, nutritional assessments, and of course the infamous rectal exams (the stereotypical vet student right of passage). We average around 4 farms/day (on average 3 cows and a few calves per farm) as we get our feet on the ground and learn the ropes from our excellent teachers (Joan, Dennis and Emily). It has been both challenging and rewarding as we put our skills from school to the test and get dirty with the hands on work.



Kelsey could not be more excited to be arm deep in the cow

Every farm we've visited has been unbelievably welcoming and despite the fact that they may not have much themselves, the farmers are quick to invite us in for tea or send us off with an arm load of fruits, veggies, eggs and this week even a LIVE rooster (who we named Frank and is now living in our backyard). They truly are grateful for the project and the benefits it has had on their livelihood.



Enjoying tea with our new rooster “Frank” and the wonderful farmers

One of my important lessons of the week was learning to always watching where you are walking while on farms. I found out the hard way that the manure pile blends in with the dirt after sinking over my boots in the manure and having to be rescued by Denis and our friend Sunny. I now walk with my eyes on the ground and an extra pair of shoes near by!



Hanging out with the neighborhood kids before heading off to farms with my twin for the day

Stay tuned for more adventures of the team!

Ali

Ten things I've learnt during my two first weeks in Kenya

Posted on [June 4, 2016](#)

Jambo! Hello from Kelsey on the vet team!

It is hard to believe that we are wrapping up our second week in Kenya. The past couple weeks have been absolutely amazing. Everything is so new from the language, to the shopping, to the power outlets; I am really enjoying all these new experiences. I have been learning so much as I settle into my new home for the summer. Although the culture shock can sometimes be a little overwhelming I am beginning to get the hang of life in Kenya and I've learnt 10 important things along the way:

1. Bananas in Kenya are like potatoes in PEI; they are never in short supply. I've been eating them at breakfast, lunch and dinner. I don't think my potassium levels have ever been better!



Ali at the fruit market

2. It can get really cold in Kenya! As Canada is gearing up for summer, Kenya is preparing for winter and the evenings can get a bit chilly. Thank goodness our amazing cook Vincent lights fires after dinner to keep us warm and toasty.
3. Running at Naari's high altitude is a lot more challenging than I thought it would be. Ali and I have been training for the Charlottetown Marathon, but so far we are wiped after just a few short minutes. We are hoping our bodies will adjust soon, and we'll be able to run like the wind by the end of the summer.
4. The matatus (the public buses) are sometimes traveling live parties; they are sometimes playing dance music that can be heard from across the street. There is also a saying here that the matatus are never full. It is amazing how many people can fit in one bus!

5. It is hard to talk to a Kenyan before their morning tea. A Kenyan without their tea is like a Canadian without their Timmies.



Ali enjoying a cup of tea at one of our farm visits.

6. Kenyans have the most delicious traditional foods. Every dinner, we have been treated to amazing meals of vegetable stews, sukuma (tossed cooked kale and onions) and ugali (cooked maize flour).
7. You can never see too many elephants. We are always keeping our eyes peeled when we travel to the neighboring town Meru, as they can be typically seen on the sides of the road in that area. We were also lucky during our weekend trip to Sweetwaters Safari and saw dozens of elephants during our game drives and at the watering hole in front of the hotel.



Elephant at Sweetwaters

8. Always carry a spare tire (and sometimes you need a spare tire for your spare tire). The dirt roads in Naari are very rocky and bumpy and can be very unforgiving to tires. In our first week we had to fix two flats.
9. You always feel like the Queen of England while walking or driving down the road. Everyone we pass greets us with wide smiles, big waves and a warm Habari (Hello).
10. Finally, the most important things I've learnt is that Kenyans are some of the friendliest people in the world—they really give our friendly Canadian reputation a run for its money. In just two weeks, I have made friends with four more amazing Kenyans who will be coming to UPEI: Emily, Sarah, Grace and Anne. We have made such a strong friendship (through talking, singing, dancing, preparing food, and working together) that I am sure it will last for well beyond our time in Kenya!



The whole gang all together!

It has been such an amazing two weeks, and I am excited to see what Kenya will teach me over the next 3 months!

Kwaheri (goodbye) for now!

- Kelsey

[Great new friendships in Kenya](#)

Posted on [May 22, 2016](#)

The Vet Team survived week one in Kenya with great new friendships and only a few minor sunburns!

We arrived in Nairobi after a long 26 hours in airports and planes full of anticipation and excitement of what we would find when we landed. We were picked up at the airport happy to find our entire luggage had arrived with us, and our adventure began! After being picked up by a fantastic driver from Sportsmens Safaris who strapped our luggage to the roof of a safari vehicle, we took off on the streets of Nairobi which is so far from anything I have ever seen before. The traffic, the number of vehicles, and people going every direction was something you have to experience to believe; it was the most amazing and scary experience watching them weave in and out of spaces that would barely fit the front bumper of a vehicle without scratching a thing! We thought we had crazy drivers, this was something else! We arrived at our hotel safe and sound and curled up in our beds under our mosquito nets.

The following day the veterinary team made their way to the Nairobi University for meetings and a tour of the veterinary school. It was a warm welcome and very interesting to see the similarities and differences between our study environments. The one thing that was definitely the same was the stress in the air as the students were waiting to write their exams! After our

tour, we met up with the nutrition team and played tourist at Kazuri Beads and the Giraffe Park where we “kissed” the giraffes (some of us got a bit more than we bargained for with a sloppy kiss from the giraffe!). We slept well after a busy day and got up early to hit the roads again; this time to Kenyatta University where we were welcomed by the Dean of Applied Human Sciences and met up with our Kenyan graduate students who will be joining us for the summer. It was the perfect introduction and even though it has only been a week, I already know we have made friendships that will last a lifetime. We have spent time exchanging stories, learning about one another’s families, languages (mostly them teaching us and laughing as we butcher the language while struggling to practice) and laughing more than I have ever laughed. We really feel like a family already which it’s something I never expected this early in our trip.

Our first day out on the farms was exciting, almost as exciting as the ride in the Gypsy vehicle to get there! The dirt roads are mostly composed of potholes larger than the ones in PEI and we bounced around in the back of the vehicle most awkwardly as the veterans of the project reassured us we would learn how to relax and “go with it” (my back says otherwise), but it is a great way to make sure you’re awake first thing in the morning! The farms here are absolutely beautiful, the scenery is something out of a painting, and the variety of fruits and vegetables is a dream come true as the farmers are very generous and let us sample their crops. It has been very interesting to visit as many farms as we have thus far to see the similarities and differences between them as well as be able to see how various recommendations that the project has made in the past have benefited them. They are some of the most generous and hardworking people I have ever met and we have so much we can learn from them as well as knowledge to exchange in return. We are all very excited to be working with the families and farmers and learning more about the way they operate and how we can be of benefit to them in the future!



Ali, Emily and Kelsey – Instant friends as we warm up in front of the fire with a glass of wine (yes, it is actually “cold” in Africa...go figure!!)

Initial Blog.

By John VanLeeuwen

John VanLeeuwen here, PI and leader of the Vet Team for the QE II Scholars/Farmers Helping Farmers/UPEI project, in partnership with Kenyatta University, Nairobi University, Naari Dairy, and Upendo Women’s Group.

Ali is posting her vet student perspectives of Kenya so far and I so would like to add some notes from a project perspective.

Things are going fairly well here in Naari. Our team consisted of Alli Frye and Kelsey Goodick (two Canadian UPEI vet students), Dennis Makau and Joan Muraya (two Kenyan UPEI PhD students), Emily Kiugu (a soon-to-be UPEI MSc student from Kenya), and myself, with assistance from Steven Mwenda (FHF Kenyan horticultural staff) and/or a member of the Naari Dairy. We have been to 25 of the 40

farms who were given seedlings in October – the seedlings were in varying stages of growth. Some farms are doing really well with seedlings 2-3 metres tall and they were already harvesting branches from the seedlings and feeding them to their cattle. This was great to see. Some farms were not completely following instructions on keeping all of their seedlings from getting overgrown by other crops, trees or weeds. So we had to provide instructions on better weed control, and harvesting and/or moving Napier grass that was too close to the seedlings. In some cases, we even had to move the seedlings to a better location for them to thrive. With our big group, we took time to do some weeding on some farms (demonstrating the importance), particularly where we had to search for seedlings amongst weeds - good thing we did this or they would likely have been lost, or in the case on one farm, where the woman was recovering from being in the hospital.

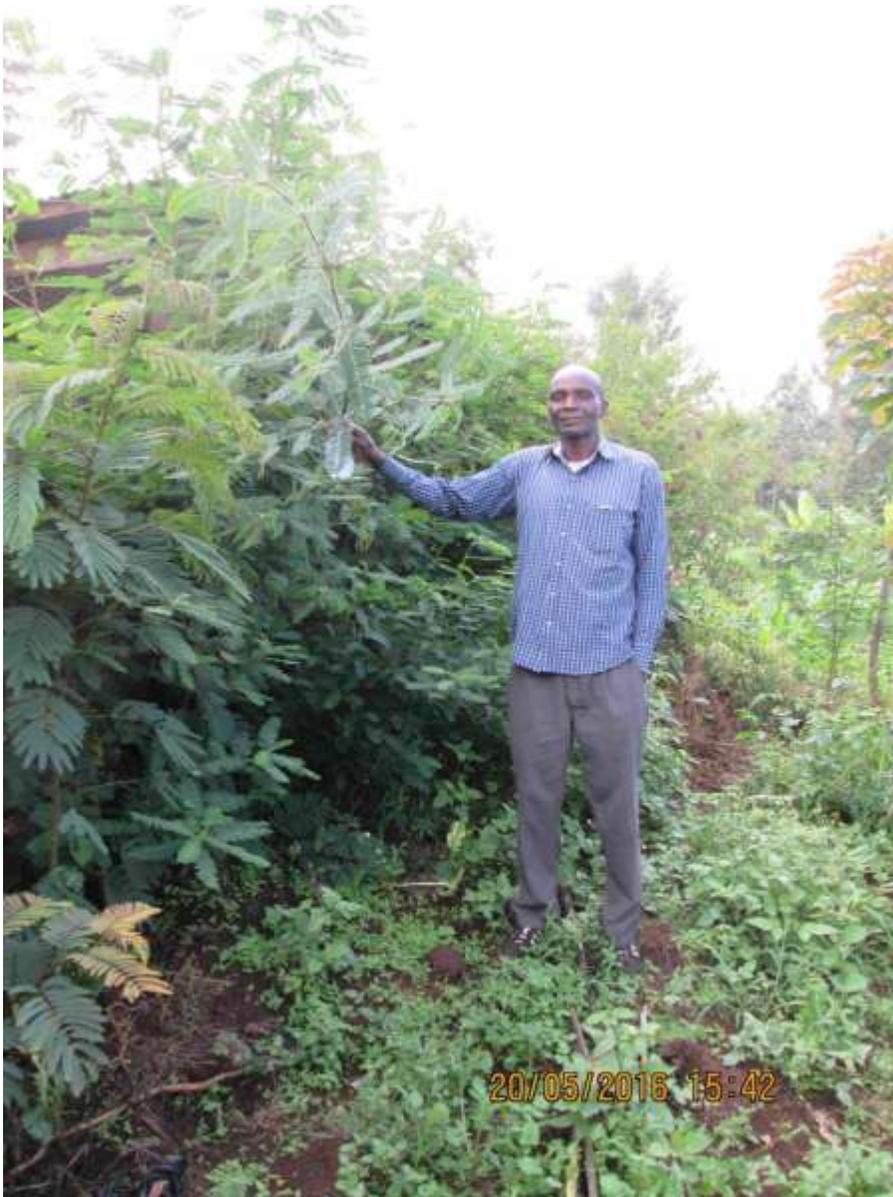
A few farmers were told by someone else in the area (not our team) to plant the seedlings in their bags but just cut the bottom off of the bag which meant that only the roots at the bottom of the bag could reach soil to help the seedling grow - so these seedlings were not growing very fast at all. Again, with our big group, we took time to remove bags and replant (again demonstrating the importance). One farmer's husband did not want us to remove the bags but we insisted and so figured we needed to do it or it would not get done.

With our group, we got the seedling rescuing, weeding and replanting done much more quickly than the farmer could.

Some seedlings were not a vibrant green colour and clearly needed manure but we did not spread manure for them – we figured that was not such a big job, and they do that for other crops, so can do it for the seedlings. They sometimes did not think of the seedlings as a crop to be tended to while it's roots got established, instead figuring it was a tree that would grow with little care.

On all seedling farms, we also gave them a reminder and further guidance on how to harvest and feed the seedlings. All in all, a successful first week in Kenya.

Next week, we plan to get to the other 15 seedling farms in the next couple days, and then get the protocols set for the 5 "youth farms" and 80 "experiment farms" by getting to some of them before I leave. More on that later.



[QE II Scholars en route to Kenya](#)

Posted on [May 15, 2016](#)



Here are the QE II vet and nutrition scholars and supervisors, waiting to board the plane to Zurich, en route to Nairobi and finally Naari, Kenya.

Jennifer Taylor describes the project:

This project aims to improve the livelihoods and health of farm families in the Naari region of Kenya and provide opportunities for university students from Kenya and Canada to work together and increase cultural understanding. It started in May 2015 and will continue for 3 more years!

The 2016 scholars from Canada include Kira Stratton, Catherine Williams, Kelsey Goodick and Ali Frye. Our Kenyan scholars include Joan Muraya, Dennis Makau, Sarah Wangeci, Anne Shilechei, Emily Kathambi Kiugu and Grace Wanjohi, Supervising faculty include UPEI's John VanLeeuwen (Principal Investigator), Jennifer Taylor, Charlene Van Leeuwen, Shauna Richards and Colleen Walton. Supervising faculty from Kenyatta University include Lucy Kathuri, Irene Ogada, Joan Murithi, Sophie Ochola and Vivian Wanimo; from University of Nairobi, George Gitau.

Stay tuned for our adventures! [#gescholars](https://twitter.com/gescholars)