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Program Director:

Dr. Anastasia Elder

Edited by:

Elizabeth Fox

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Hayden Miller

“My Internship at USA Rice Federation”

As an agricultural economics student at Mississippi State University, my internship assignment at the USA Rice Federation was the perfect fit for me. The people within the organization, as well as the opportunities that they were kind enough to afford me, truly made my internship.

The USA Rice Federation, stylized as USA Rice, is unique in the sense that it advocates for and represents every facet of the United States’ rice industry (producers, millers, and merchants). Most other agricultural commodities are represented by a variety of groups (i.e. National Corn Refiner’s Association, National Corn Grower’s Association, etc.). The various facets of the industry are represented on numerous councils within the organization along with the six rice major rice producing states: Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas. As a Mississippi native, I feel that this organization had a great deal of relevance to me.

USA Rice is comprised of several councils and boards. USA Rice Council, USA Rice Farmer’s Board, USA Rice Miller’s Board, and USA Rice Merchant’s Board are the primary ones. Additionally, there is a USA Rice Political Action Committee (PAC) Board, a research board, a policy board, and a multitude of others. Members of the federation comprise the membership and leadership of these boards. Farmers, merchants, and millers have representation on the boards and help to make decisions for the organization guided by staff input.

The staff of USA Rice is led by CEO Betsy Ward. Since I was a policy intern, I worked for the Policy and Government Affairs division, led by Peter Bachmann, Vice President for Policy and Government Affairs. I reported to Josie McLaurin, Manager for Government Affairs,

and Jamison Cruce, Senior Director for Government Affairs. This team was over all of the policy work for the organization. The primary policy goals of USA Rice are whatever provides the greatest benefit to the US rice industry.

Over the course of my internship, international trade and domestic issues were both at the forefront. Internationally, the organization is currently holding trade negotiations with the government of Iraq, urging the International Trade Commission to assist the rice industry with India flooding the world rice market, and lobbying Congress to ease up trade restrictions with Cuba. Domestically, input costs for rice farmers are at record prices while the world market price of rice remains stagnant. Eighty percent of US rice farmers are predicted to be unprofitable this year. Thus, the organization is advocating for Congress to provide assistance to rice farmers. Additionally, there is a slew of regulations that are not beneficial to the rice industry. The policy and government affairs team has met with multiple government agencies to address these issues.

My duties as a policy intern covered a wide range of topics. One expectation was that I stayed up-to-date on current policy events within the agriculture industry. Additionally, I was expected to keep up with key primary elections affecting members of House and Senate Agriculture and Appropriations committees and rice-producing states. I typically spent up to two hours a day reading various specialty agriculture news services in order to get caught up in the world of agriculture policy.

My primary weekly task was writing our *Capital Update*. This weekly newsletter is sent to members of USA Rice as well as key staffers on Capitol Hill. It is a brief overview of events and policies that had occurred or been implemented over the past week that have a direct effect on the rice industry. It would typically be around four pages once I finished writing it. Then, it would go through multiple layers of editing before finally being published on Friday afternoons.

Additionally, I wrote several stories for *USA Rice Daily*, a daily publication that typically includes one or two articles related to the rice industry. USA Rice has a tabloid magazine called *The Whole Grain*. I also wrote a story for that publication focusing on my internship.

Other intern duties included assisting with the PAC. I occasionally gave advice to the Policy and Government Affairs team on who to donate funds to. Since Federal Elections Commission (FEC) reports were due this summer, I also helped the team with that. I was the only intern for USA Rice this summer, so I joined the team at multiple fundraisers and receptions where I got the opportunity to meet the Congressmen and Senators that we were donating to. These functions also served as great networking opportunities. The *USA Rice Economic Brief* was another publication that I assisted with. My background in agricultural economics gave me the knowledge to assist with this quarterly publication.

This internship was a great experience for me and further solidified my love and passion for both public policy and agriculture. I am returning to my senior year of college with a deeper understanding of the agriculture industry and my future career plans. This was a truly lifechanging summer, and I hope to return to Washington, D.C., upon graduation.