



A journey to  
be shared



# Welcome to the Ag Leadership Family

*As the spouse/life partner of a fellow, you are an integral, respected and welcome participant in the Ag Leadership journey. Your sincere interest and support helps to ensure a successful experience for all individuals involved.*

*We understand that there is a real balancing act with work responsibilities, family priorities, volunteer obligations and personal needs. Ag Leadership is an additional commitment - so how will it fit into your family's life?*

*Our wish is to make the Ag Leadership Program a positive, rewarding and fun learning experience for all family members. In this guide we provide answers to frequently asked questions, a list of benefits and challenges, and tips from other spouses that we hope will help you during the journey.*





# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Q Can spouses/life partners attend seminars?**

**A** There are four seminars that are specifically designed for spouses/life partners to actively participate in — the first and last seminar of each year of the program. The presenters structure their material to include spouses/life partners. These four seminars provide you with a meaningful experience and allow you to develop a better sense of the nature of the program. Although we encourage you to do the reading and other preparation for all of the seminars, the balance of the seminars are designed for the fellow only.

## **Q Can we get the dates for the seminars?**

**A** Yes. There is a master calendar on the CALF website (Family Portal link) that you can use to see the dates and locations of the seminars.

## **Q If we have other obligations, can a fellow miss a seminar?**

**A** The program is made possible by generous donations from our alumni and sponsors. This allows us to offer a high quality educational experience at almost no cost to the fellows. To honor our donors, the fellows are required to actively participate in all of the seminars. We can make exceptions for emergencies, but the fellow is still obligated to complete the seminar with a different class.

## **Q How much homework will fellows be required to do?**

**A** There is a significant amount of reading that we expect the fellows to complete before most seminars. In other cases, they are preparing speeches, working on group assignments or gathering information. Like most educational programs, to get the most from the program it is important they come to the seminars prepared. We encourage you to participate as appropriate with your spouse/life partner in the readings and other activities between seminars. It will help you better understand what your spouse/life partner is experiencing and you will gain from the readings as well.

## **Q How are national and international seminar locations selected?**

**A** The core faculty members from our partner universities select the locations based on learning objectives. We look for opportunities that provide the fellows with a unique growth experience, but at the same time keep an eye on safety. We look closely at the U.S. State Department travel advisories in order to not put the fellows in harm's way.



**Q What happens if there is an emergency that occurs during the national or international seminar?**

**A** For emergencies that occur at home, the staff members in the CALF office are in touch with the staff leading the seminars and can serve to relay information to the class while they are traveling. For the national and international seminars, CALF has an emergency response plan and a communication plan that will cover most contingencies. In addition, you will receive an itinerary that will provide you with details about where the class is at any given time. For the international seminar, we carry travel insurance that can be used to cover the costs associated with medical emergencies. We also work closely with the U.S. Embassy in each country we visit so that they know where we are at any time in case of any emergencies within the countries we visit.

**Q Is there an easy way for me to communicate with my spouse/life partner while he/she is on a travel seminar?**

**A** This has become a lot easier with cell phones. However, like all of the seminars, the fellows are not able to take calls while they are in session. In addition, access to the Internet and the use of Skype and other video conferencing tools have made it easier to communicate and allow greater interaction. In some cases during the international seminar the class will be in locations where Internet or cell phone access is limited, but we work to minimize those times. During the national and international seminars the classes write a daily blog (posted on our website) so that you and others can keep up with their experiences.

**Q What do I need to know to help my spouse/life partner prepare for a seminar?**

**A** Allowing them the time to adequately prepare for the seminars is extremely helpful.

**Q What should I expect when my spouse/life partner returns from a seminar?**

**A** You know them better than we do, but giving them the opportunity to talk about the experience is a great way to help them deepen their learning. Each person has his/her own way of processing and sharing the information learned during a seminar. It is helpful to be flexible and let them talk about the experience when they are ready. Perhaps you and your spouse/life partner can discuss a “seminar debriefing” routine that is mutually beneficial.

**Q Are there opportunities for the families to get together?**

**A** Yes. At the four seminars that include the spouses/life partners, there is some time to interact with the other families. We also encourage the class members to plan some informal gatherings outside of seminar time. Most classes have some type of informal summer gathering to allow families, including any children, to come together. The relationships between the fellows can last a lifetime, as can the relationships between the families.

**Q Does CALF provide us a way to bring the spouses/life partners together?**

**A** Formally no, but informally we are here to support the spouses/life partners. We can share a contact list with names and numbers. We would encourage the spouses/life partners to use social media or email to create an easy way for the group to communicate.

**Q To whom do I turn if I have questions about the program?**

**A** For any questions your spouse cannot answer, CALF office staff will be happy to help.



## BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES FOR FELLOWS AND FAMILIES

### Benefits

- ✓ Improving communication and listening skills
- ✓ Broadening horizons and perspectives
- ✓ Gaining new friendships and connections
- ✓ Managing time and delegating tasks more effectively
- ✓ Lifelong learning opportunities
- ✓ Mutual support and understanding

### Challenges

- ✓ Spending additional time on assignments
- ✓ Traveling away from home for monthly and travel seminars
- ✓ Managing stress as a result of balancing home, work and Ag Leadership demands
- ✓ Experiencing new emotions

# Been There, Done That: Tips from Spouses

Four individuals provided some advice based on their experiences as spouses of Ag Leadership fellows. While every couple and family is different, these tips may be helpful as you embark on this shared journey. All of the spouses agreed that attending specific seminars and being involved were extremely beneficial.

**WELCOME SEMINAR** The initial orientation seminar in November can be a very positive experience. You will have a chance to meet all of the fellows in the class and the other attending spouses/life partners. It is a very unique and select group of individuals from throughout the state. Meeting everyone at this seminar makes future gatherings and seminar conversations more enjoyable. The welcome seminar is where you get your first real understanding of exactly what is in store for your spouse and your family. Everyone is on the same page at that point – a little anxious, but excited about what the next two years will hold.

**INVOLVEMENT** Participating in seminars, events and activities will enrich your life immensely. You are encouraged to attend every seminar and event that you're invited to. Being involved connects you to what your spouse/partner is going through, and at the same time, you can have your own educational experience. For example, attending the San Quentin seminar can be an incredible learning opportunity for both of you.

## ADDITIONAL TIPS

**Scott Heilmann** | *Husband of Mica Heilmann, Class 40*

- 1. Use Skype.** The ability to use Skype is a great and inexpensive tool that can put you face-to-face with your family member. My 3-year-old was very happy to see and talk to his mom while being away for multiple days.
- 2. Be prepared.** Fill out your Ag Leadership calendar for the two years of the program. The program will go by fast and there always seems to be a seminar right around the corner. Being prepared for when your spouse/partner is away makes the time spent apart much easier to handle.
- 3. Be involved as much as you can.** Every event is different and each one is a great opportunity to learn something new and be around some outstanding individuals.

**Cherie Stephens** | *Wife of Jeff Stephens, Class 24*

- 1. Let your spouse decompress.** Allow him/her to share their experiences with you as he/she feels comfortable. Be patient. Figure out when a mutually good time to talk will be. It may not be right when he/she gets home from a seminar; it may be a few days later or the next week.
- 2. Try cutting back on communication.** Decrease the amount of talking and emailing while he/she is at a seminar and during the national and international trips. Let them be a part of their seminar or travel experience without bringing them back to home or work issues. This can be seen as a “growing” technique for both of you. We didn't have certain tools of communication that are available now and it worked out fine.

**Tena Horn** | *Wife of Eric Horn, Class 38*

- 1. Make time to talk after seminars.** I always made time when my husband came home from the seminars to just sit and talk about what he learned and had experienced. He was always so wound up when he got home that this helped him unwind and allowed me to feel more a part of the whole experience as well.
- 2. Understand seminar schedules.** Seminar schedules can be long and they need time as a class to talk about what they experienced during the day. There can be some really long nights. Don't expect to hear from them as often as you may be used to.

**Maureen Andrew** | *Wife of Kevin Andrew, Class 18*

- 1. Talk to your spouse about the trip as soon as he/she gets home.** Each trip will be so different and they get so much thrown at them that they get all excited again when they rehash everything that took place on their trip.
- 2. Be a supportive spouse.** This is a once-in-a-lifetime learning and networking experience for your spouse. It was amazing to watch my husband grow and become more involved with the agriculture industry. At times you're going to say, “You're leaving again?” – but the two years will fly by and the friends you gain as a couple will remain for years to come.
- 3. You have cell phones, email and Skype.** You are so lucky! In Class 18, we did not have any way to communicate except for collect calls. My husband and I had never been separated for two weeks throughout our relationship, and I ended up delivering a beautiful baby boy exactly nine months after Kevin got home from the national trip!

# Families New to the Ag Leadership Program

How will Ag Leadership fit into your family's life? Learn more about the seminars, time commitment, communication, unique learning opportunities and new friendships.

[WWW.AGLEADERS.ORG](http://WWW.AGLEADERS.ORG)



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