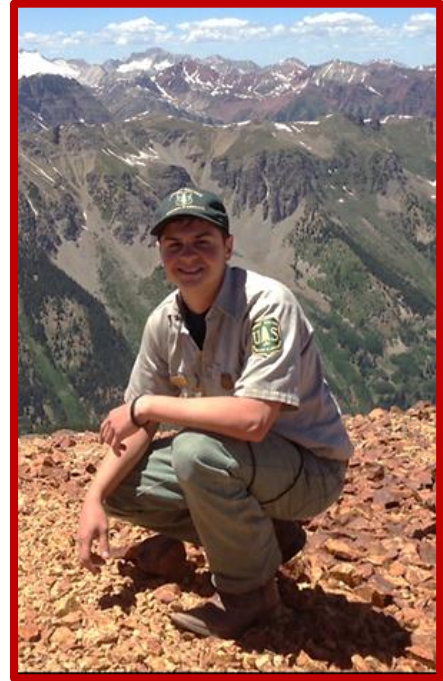


Reflections from David Vela about the MANRRS trip to Birmingham, Alabama.

1. **Why did you apply to go on the USDA FATE sponsored trip to Birmingham to attend the MANRRS Conference?** I applied to attend the 2014 MANRRS National Conference because I knew it would be an invaluable opportunity for me and others to develop both professionally and personally. I attended the MANRRS National Conference last year in Sacramento, California and learned so much from the experience that I knew I would love to see what was in store for this year. I knew that there would be many opportunities to gain important knowledge that I could use to my advantage and create professional networks that could ultimately land me a career. However, as a graduate student who serves as a point of contact and source of information and guidance to the undergraduate FATE scholars, I knew that the information and networking connections I could establish would be very beneficial to distribute back to them and help them advance themselves in their professional endeavors.



2. **What did you expect to learn from attending this conference?** In attending the conference I expected to learn about different tips and advice for developing professionally as well as learning about different careers I did not previously know about. I knew this would also be a great opportunity to make networking connections with other students and professionals at the conference

3. **What did you actually learn?** In attending the conference, I learned much more than I could have expected. Aside from workshops on professional development and professionalism, there were many speakers giving their own insight on specific careers such as academia, veterinary medicine, sustainable farming, and so much more. We also had the opportunity to listen to speakers give their personal stories and advice on perseverance, motivation, and leadership which I found to be very inspirational.

4. **Has the experience at the conference changed your career goals? If yes, please explain.** Attending the conference and learning of so many different career opportunities, my career goals have definitely been broadened. Prior to the conference, I had set my goals on a career in academia but upon attending the job fair and speaking with different professionals, I learned that there were many other career paths I could pursue with a degree in Agricultural Education. I am now considering pursuing a career where I can reach large audiences of people both in the United States and internationally.

5. **How has being a participant in the USDA FATE scholarship program helped you in pursuing a college education?** Being a FATE recipient has done so much to help me grow as a student and as an individual. Dr. Morrish, Dr. Saucier, and Shirley Pilus all work diligently to provide the scholarship recipients with as many professional opportunities as possible. Without the opportunity to attend events such as these, I know I would not be where I am today. Between creating a social community, mentoring and guidance, financial assistance, and professional opportunities, being a part of this grant has allowed me to persist through my education as smoothly as possible while knowing that there are so many people supporting me.

I will tell my fellow USDA-FATE scholars that this trip was an amazing and invaluable experience that helped everyone grow in all aspects of their character. I would hope that the stories and advice myself and the other members who went on the trip will encourage others to pursue opportunities such as this in the future.

6. **What did you like best about the entire experience?** What I enjoyed most about the experience was seeing myself and all of the other MANRRS members seize the opportunity to get our names out into the professional world and create valuable networking connections. Every day of the conference provided different activities that were conducive to network building and social interaction. I know that this experience was extremely valuable to everyone who went on the trip and helped us become more confident professionals.

7. **What will you tell your fellow USDA FATE scholars about this trip?** I will tell my fellow USDA-FATE scholars that this trip was an amazing and invaluable experience that helped everyone grow in all aspects of their character. I would hope that the stories and advice myself and the other members who went on the trip will encourage others to pursue opportunities such as this in the future.

8. **What will be your fondest memory of going to Birmingham and the 2014 MANRRS conference?** Although there were many memories made at the conference, I would have to say that being able to bond more closely with the other Texas State MANRRS members and create lasting friendships was the fondest. All of the members spent five days together where we were able to get to know each other and really become friends. The entire experience was one that I will cherish and never forget. I hope that the Texas State MANRRS organization can continue seizing opportunities such as this and keep providing students the opportunity to develop as professionals.