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Cal Poly to Welcome Chinese Students in New Dual Master's Degree Program

SAN LUIS OBISPO - Cal Poly's College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences is preparing to welcome its first two students from Shanghai Jiao Tong University in China to study dairy science in San Luis Obispo as part of the campuses' new dual master's degree program.

The first two Jiao Tong students are scheduled to arrive at Cal Poly in fall 2009 for the second half of a two-and-a-half year master's degree program. They will take mostly classroom courses in the first half at Jiao Tong, followed by 12 to 14 months at Cal Poly focused largely on research.

Phillip Tong, director of Cal Poly's Dairy Products Technology Center, said the program is extraordinary in that participants will graduate with two degrees - a master's in food science from Jiao Tong and a master's in agriculture with specialization in dairy products technology from Cal Poly.

Tong said Jiao Tong is one of China's most prestigious universities - a science- and technology-focused campus he said is often thought of as that country's MIT.

Cal Poly will welcome two Jiao Tong students per year. Dairy Science officials recently made a recommendation on who the first two participants should be.

The program, Tong said, is launching as China's dairy industry experiences rapid growth, in part because of government efforts to bolster residents' nutrition by increasing dairy consumption. Most residents of China traditionally have consumed little dairy, he said.

However, the pace of growth has challenged China's dairy technology infrastructure and made it more difficult to let a strong safety system evolve naturally over time, he said.

"The food industry in China is quite advanced overall, and consumers are seeking more value-added foods. So the potential is there for dairy," Tong said. "Cal Poly has a chance to play a role in helping China insure a safe and healthy food supply."

This will be the only dual-degree program in the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences, said Associate Dean Mark Shelton. However, it is a pilot program, and more could follow in the college.

The program is also the next step in the college's continuing connection with China. Tong first visited China 15 years ago as part of a U.S. Department of Agriculture team and began traveling there regularly to put on educational seminars on dairy science through the U.S. Dairy Export Council. And the Dairy Products Technology Center began hosting visiting scholars from China about a decade ago.

Cal Poly president Warren Baker and senior adviser Joe Jen - Cal Poly's former agriculture dean who served as

undersecretary of agriculture for research, education and economics with the USDA - traveled to China in April 2007 to visit three universities and explore joint program ideas. Jiao Tong's and Cal Poly's programs appeared to pair well. So Shelton traveled to Shanghai in June 2007 to develop a more concrete plan.

"It was a good fit," he said. "We saw that the education there was quite academic and not quite as practical as what students would experience doing their thesis work at Cal Poly."

Sheng Yi, a director's assistant at Jiao Tong's SJTU-Bor Luh Food Safety Center and a visiting scholar at Cal Poly this quarter, agreed with Shelton.

"Dairy Science is new at Jiao Tong," Yi said. "And our students will find Cal Poly's learn by doing education to be very helpful."

Tong said there are benefits to Cal Poly faculty and students through the program, as well, such as chance for students to broaden their world views and for everyone to make connections with current and future industry leaders.

That serves a broader Cal Poly goal to globalize the education it provides, Shelton said.

"We're seeing how the global economy is intertwined," Shelton said. "Our students and faculty need to have an understanding of what's going on around the world."

About Shanghai Jiao Tong University

The university, one of the oldest in China was founded in 1896 as the Nang Yang Public School. It has about 38,000 students, split almost evenly between undergraduates and grad students. International studies are a significant part of the university's programs; Jiao Tong reports having exchange programs and other relationships with more than 100 universities and colleges worldwide. For more information, log on to www.sjtu.edu.cn/english/index/index.htm

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