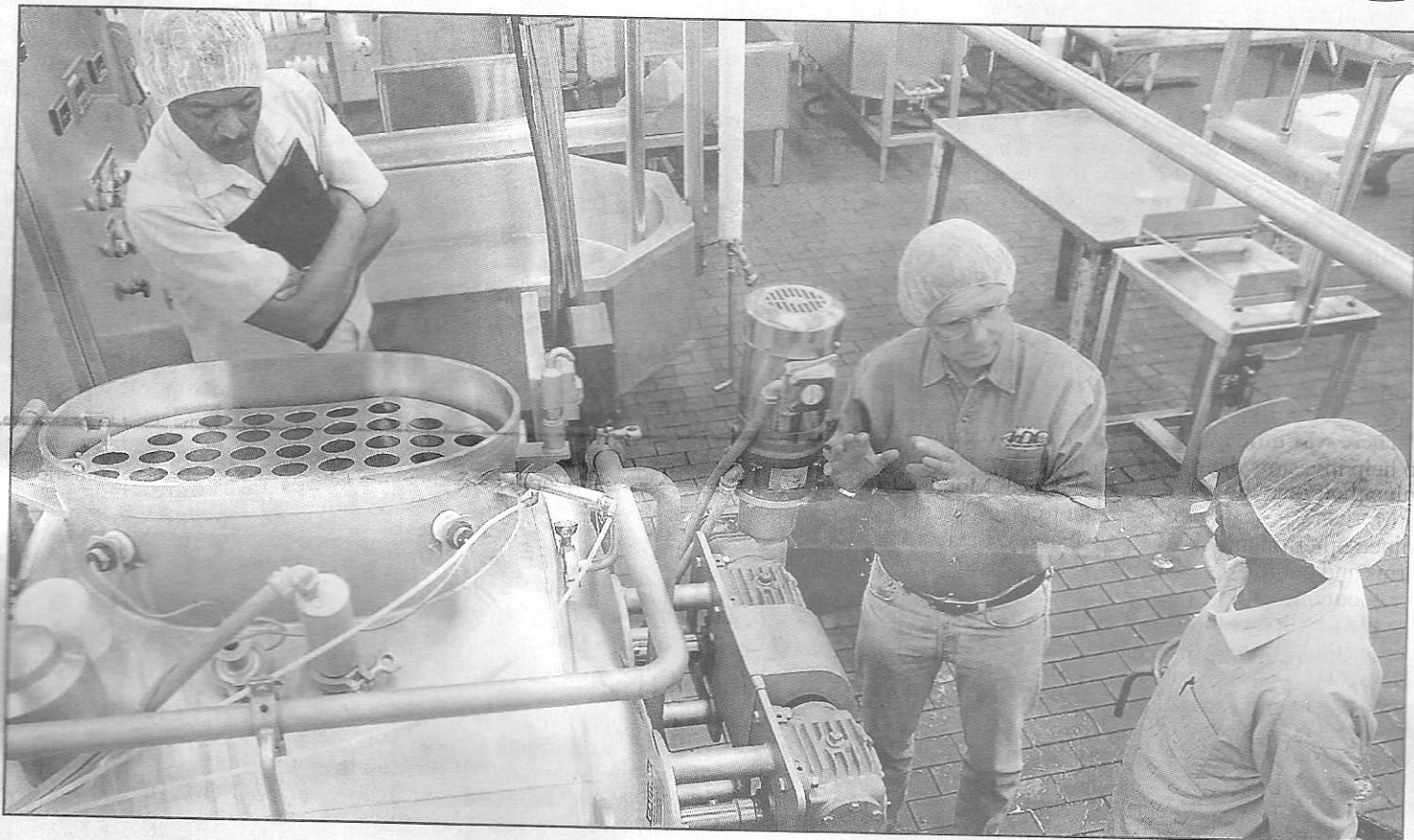


Taste tests and teaching



Eli Lucero/Herald Journal

Carl Brothersen, center, talks to Samuel Tegene, right, about the process of making cheese as Adefris Teklewold looks over a cheese vat during a tour of the Western Dairy Center on the USU campus Friday morning.

Eight Ethiopians learn about U.S. agriculture at USU

By Kevin Opsahl
staff writer

During a tour of Utah State University's Western Dairy Center on Friday, it wasn't long before samples of pasteurized cheese and Aggie Ice Cream made their way into very technical discussions — and very literal taste tests.

What better way to learn about American agricultural farming techniques than to at least taste some of the results?

A group of eight Ethiopian political and agricultural figures toured the Dairy Center

— located inside the C.A. Ernstrom Nutrition and Food Sciences Building — capping a 10-day trip to Cache Valley to learn about the various kinds of drought-resistant seed farming experiences, with hopes that they'll be able to apply those back to their home country.

The Ethiopian delegation visited a number of farms and research facilities in Utah and Idaho, exploring the techniques and learning from the expertise of local farmers.

"Everything is amazing, compared to our agricultural facilities there," said Yigzaw

Dessalegn Bekele, crop research director for the Amahara Regional Agricultural Research Institute, after the dairy tour. "(In Ethiopia) production is very low. ... We've learned good lessons here (on the trip)."

Bekele explained that in Ethiopia, farmers enterprise their operations — unlike the United States, where farmers tend to specialize and the agricultural industry is market oriented.

"They do a lot of things together," Bekele said of Ethiopian farming. "There's a lot of risk, so to minimize that risk they diversify their enterprise."

Samuel Tegene, with Fedis Agricultural Research Center, echoed that sentiment.

"Ethiopians are not ready to take risks," Tegene said. "Because of this, they're doing mixed farming."

The group's trip was sponsored by Morrell Agro Industries, or MAI — the company that recently introduced American dry farming techniques and drought-resistant seeds to Ethiopia. The company's CEO and president, Paul Morrell, is a Logan native.

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"They've had wheat where they've never had wheat before," Wallace Odd, a trip organizer, who usually spends almost half of his year in Ethiopia and serves as the executive vice president of MAI. "What we're seeing is a transformation. The project is well worth while."

If this and other similar drought-resistant seeds and techniques were estab-

lished in Ethiopia, food and grain yields could more than double, MAI specialists say.

One of the seeds the visitors studied was researched by USU scientists.

Evan Maxfield, also a consultant with MAI, said in one farm where the seeds were applied, experiencing 90 percent crop failure, the farmers were able to harvest 90 percent of their crops the year after.

"They had food and money," Maxfield said. There are approximately

80 million people in Ethiopia, and 85 percent of them are involved in farming said Ken Steelman, a MAI consultant who has been with the delegation throughout much of their trip.

"If they can grow more food, fewer people will be starving," Steelman said.

This is the second group MAI has brought to Utah to share hands-on farming experiences.

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