

**Annie Patterson**

**2013 IFYE to Austria**

**Monthly Report #1**

Wow! It's hard to believe I've been in Austria for a month now! Time just flies by. This exchange program has given me a new perspective of the world and I am learning so much from my host families.

Of course, living in a new country takes some adjusting to adapt to the different culture and language. Unfortunately, I did not know German before arriving in Austria, but I'm picking up on words here and there. It is also interesting due to the fact that Austria has several different dialects within the country that vary from "proper German." Thankfully, quite a few people here speak at least a little English, so I can usually get the point across. My first two host families have been fluent in English, and I'm grateful to them for playing the role of translator in public settings.

I spent the first month of my exchange in Lower Austria (Niederösterreich), which is the federal state that is in the most northeastern part of Austria. I spent the first two weeks with the Kührer family in a small village called Glaubendorf. It was only about 20 miles from Vienna, so we were able to make several trips to Austria's capital city. Glaubendorf is located in the "Wine Quarter" of Lower Austria, and as one of the Kührer's uncles produces wine, I was fortunate enough to visit some of the vineyards and wine cellars and sample a few of his varieties. My third and fourth weeks in Austria I moved to another small village called Inning and stayed with the König family. The König family raises crops such as wheat, corn, and sugar beets. In addition to farming they own and operate an energy facility that uses the natural gas created from fermenting corn silage to produce electricity that is sent out onto the grid. It is a very interesting system, although I don't have enough knowledge to explain how it works in detail. They live near an area called the Wachau, which is a beautiful region along the Danube known for its wine, restaurants, and cathedrals and monasteries, many of which we had the chance to visit.



Kührer Family (L to R): Raphael, Gabriel, me, Monika, Erhard, Michael



König Family (L to R): Andrea, Thomas, me, Leopold, Gudrun, Ksenia, Johannes

I was able to learn a few things about Austrian agriculture, despite the fact that the König family was a little bit “in between” farm work because wheat harvest wouldn’t start for another couple of weeks. I was sad I wouldn’t be able to take part in that. However, my host dad and brother were kind enough to take me around to some other local farmers to learn about their operations. We visited a dairy farmer who milked about 40 head twice a day, with each cow averaging about 10,000 kilograms of milk per year. He raised a particular Austrian breed called Fleckvieh. I had never heard of it in the U.S., but from what I’ve been able to research it is a traditional form of the Simmental breed. Another farmer in the area operated a farrow-to-finish swine operation. He owned 120-130 Landrace/Yorkshire sows, which would farrow around 25 piglets throughout the year, so he had over 3,000 hogs moving through his operation throughout the year. A local layer operation owned about 6,000 laying hens whose eggs he delivered to local grocers, restaurants, and individuals. The eggs were transported from the barn to the sorting station by conveyor belt, stamped with his individual farm identification number, and hand-packed into the crates. To make sure we covered the major livestock species we also visited a family farm that raises around 700 Merino sheep. Although they shear sheep twice per year and sell the wool, they focused mainly on meat production. On average it takes 4-5 months for their lambs to reach market size of 45 kilograms. It was really interesting to get a firsthand look at Austrian agriculture. While agriculture’s end goals are essentially the same, some practices in Austria vary from those common in Kansas, such as:

- Farms in general are smaller in Austria than back home. Often you would need to combine 5-10 different crop fields to achieve the size of a “normal” field back home. Most Austrians are astounded when you tell them your “small” family farm is 500-600 acres (200-250 hectares).
- Grazing livestock are often not sustained from only being on pasture. It is practical to keep dairy cattle indoors to simplify milking routines, but even beef cattle are often housed and fed in the barn. Even the animals on grazing pastures usually require supplemental nutrition because there is simply not as much land available in Austria, so pastures are often not large enough to meet all the energy requirements of the livestock.
- Bulls are often left intact, at least in the cattle operations I visited. When I asked about the practice of castration the farmers gave the impression it was not often utilized. This is slightly confusing because the word for bull in Austria is “stier” which sound very much like the English word “steer” and means the opposite. It’s a learning process! However, in the swine facility we toured the farmer did castrate the boars.



Farm identification number



Young gilts



Me holding a baby Merino lamb

I've also noticed a few other random differences between Austria and things I'm used to in Kansas:

- Roads in Austria are difficult to navigate...at least to this Kansas girl. I'm used to roads being more-or-less straight and that is certainly not the case here! The streets are also narrower and higher speed limits are allowed. When riding with my families I generally have NO IDEA how we get from point A to point B.
- Breakfast is almost always bread and marmalade. Lunch is a hot meal and the largest of the day. Supper is lighter and often includes bread and cold meats.
- The majority of cars are manual, whereas in the U.S. most would be automatic transmission. Also, spotting a pick-up truck has been something of a rarity for me. I think in one month I have seen four trucks total. I'm definitely not in Kansas anymore!
- Hazelnut ice cream! Maybe it exists in the States, but I'd never had it before coming to Austria and I'm determined to find some when I get home!
- Summer in Austria is much milder than in Kansas. They think temperatures around 80° F (26° C) are hot and temperatures over 100° F (38° C) are unfathomable.

Thank you to the Kansas 4-H organization, Austria's Landjugend program, my hometown sponsors, and my host families for making this exchange possible! I am loving the experience and am looking forward to my second month!