The USDA Cochran Fellowship Program’s Influence on Attitudes of Polish Participants about America

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Introduction
As Poland transformed from a centrally-controlled economy to a market-based economy it was the recipient of technology transfer. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Cochran Fellowship Program (CFP) was a major vehicle for this transfer through capacity building of Polish agricultural key leaders. The acceptance and possible diffusion by these leaders hinges on a positive attitude about the technological innovations. This study was conducted to describe the CFP’s influence on Polish participants’ attitudes about the U.S.

Major Points
Attitudes were assessed with a post-then-pre survey of 1989-1999 participants to describe the nature of attitude change about the U.S. Attitudinal change was further explored across the participants’ professions and ages. Attitude descriptors were phenomenologically analyzed from participant face-to-face interviews.

The majority of participants either did not change or they positively changed their pre-existing attitudes about the U.S. from before to after the CFP. Attitude about the U.S. management style had the greatest percentage positive change. Attitude about U.S. products had the greatest negative change.

Overall, government professionals had the least amount of attitude change from before to after the CFP. Academics had the greatest percentage of negative attitude change. The majority of business people and private-business owners had similar, positive attitude changes. There was a significant difference in attitude change about the U.S. management style between academics and private-business owners.

Participants 51-60 years were least susceptible to attitude change. The 61 years and over participants had more positive attitudes about the U.S., though they also had negative change about the U.S. management style. The two younger age levels, 40 years and under, 41-50 years, had similar, positive attitude changes from before to after the CFP.

Conclusions
The CFP had an overall strengthening influence on Polish participants’ pre-training positive attitude about the U.S. Post-CFP, the participants described the U.S. management system as efficient because it allows for the U.S. free-market transparency, which requires and encourages innovation of products and services. However, there was a negative attitude after the CFP about U.S. products. Polish participants, as their interviews revealed, were not always receptive to U.S. products and services, in part, because of their desire to develop Poland’s own brands and styles.

Educational Importance
International training programs are costly and need to be as effective as possible. The study’s author recommends that the U.S. Department of Agriculture and others consider attitude and the degree of attitude change anticipated when designing international program training and selecting program participants.