



# Alumni Spotlight

**Christopher Carey**

MAB Class of 2007

Plant Manager

OkTex Baking

by Mary Bowen

## Playing it Safe

Chris Carey, Plant Manager of OkTex Baking in Marietta, Okla., has built a career on playing it safe. When most people think of careers in agriculture, they picture things like farming, ranching, and food production lines. While all of these are a big part of the food and agriculture industry, there is one piece that is the backbone of every agricultural career – safety. Carey never thought he’d make a career out of explaining and enforcing safety procedures, but that is exactly what he’s done.

Growing up, Carey’s father worked in livestock transportation and while he enjoyed being around the agriculture industry, he was not sure what he wanted to do. After some consideration, he went to work for Cargill Meat Solutions as a Purchasing Manager and then moved on to Cargill Animal Nutrition as a Plant Manager Associate. While there he discovered a greater purpose in the area of industrial safety.

“Every year, workers are killed on-the-job due to safety hazards or not following policy. At Cargill, safety was the most important part of your job. I earned the title ‘Safety Champion’ and it became my responsibility to make sure everyone knew and followed safe practices. My career has grown from there,” Carey said.

With an undergraduate degree in Animal Science, he felt he knew the science side of the industry and the importance of safe practices, but needed to gain more knowledge of the business side of agriculture in order to advance. He turned to the Master of Agribusiness (MAB) distance degree from Kansas State University. With the increased knowledge of agribusiness, better public speaking and decision-making skills, stronger leadership abilities and more confidence being just a few of the benefits Carey says he gained by completing his Master of Agribusiness degree.

“Because of my safety experience, Fehr Foods offered me a Safety Manager position, which lead to a promotion to Process Improvement Manager. I was constantly pulling data from all over the plant to figure out the most efficient production processes. The MAB taught me how to interpret the data and really increased my business knowledge and data analysis skills. Before, I didn’t feel like I had the skills needed to make good decisions – now I feel like I can really grow in the

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industry,” he said. “Because it is a distance program, I could continue working while completing the MAB coursework – I didn’t have to relocate to take Classes.”

Not only has Carey benefitted from his further education, so has Fehr Foods, maker of Lil’ Dutch Maid Cookies. As a requirement to complete his Master of Agribusiness degree, Carey created a comprehensive safety manual for the company as his final thesis project. “The Benefit of an Effective Safety Program in the Agribusiness Industry” was created to develop an employee driven safety program that would reduce the extent and severity of work related injuries, improve employee morale and productivity, and reduce worker’s compensation costs.

“I was already working on safety procedures, so we decided it would be a good project for my thesis and for Fehr Foods. It is still used at Fehr and is updated every year,” he said. “With continuous improvement in the area of safety, goals can be achieved and people can come to work and go home the same way they started the day.”



MAB Alum Chris Carey at OkTex Baking.

Carey’s story doesn’t end there. Just recently, he was given even more responsibility within Fehr Foods. He was promoted to Plant Manager of one of their sister companies, OkTex Baking. He now is responsible for all aspects of the cookie manufacturing company, not just safety procedures.

“All of the business and economics skills I learned in the Master of Agribusiness program are used daily in this new position. I handle everything from production to budgeting to administration, and of course, safety,” Carey said. “I chose the MAB program for its focus on agribusiness and its good reputation in the industry – it was a good decision and I would

recommend it to anyone wishing to advance in the agriculture industry.”

A full text version of Carey’s thesis, “The Benefit

of an Effective Safety Program in the Agribusiness Industry” can be found at <http://hdl.handle.net/2097/503>.

What safety procedures does Chris have to remind employees of regularly?

- *Lifting properly*
- *Not lifting too much weight*
- *Strains are the most common injury*