



Alumni Spotlight

Clair Doan

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Life as a turkey farmer, banker and world traveler

A lifelong resident of Norwich, Ontario, Clair Doan grew up on a dairy and cash crop farm. Agriculture has been a mainstay in his life.

He graduated from the University of Guelph in 2001 with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture and completed the K-State Master of Agribusiness program in 2009. He and wife, Kathryn, purchased their first farm in 2006, and then established a turkey production unit in 2009.

"An appealing aspect of turkey farming is the planned aspect of production, we place and brood birds four times per year, which tend to be the busiest weeks of growing the birds. They are very sensitive to their environment so we must ensure they get a good start. These placement dates are scheduled months in advance, and I set my work schedule around these dates," Doan said.

One major challenge Doan and other poultry farmers faced this past year was the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5 outbreak in North America. Turkey flocks were primarily affected by H5N2 strain of the virus. By July 2016, more than 48 million birds had been affected in the U.S. (USDA 2015).

"Our farm was very fortunate to have not been affected by avian influenza. Three farms in our county of Oxford were infected with the disease.



"Our farm is a family business, and we appreciate that our children will be raised on a farm working along with us, which we value as learning about life's lessons."

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However, we remained outside the quarantine zone. We increased biosecurity on our farm and minimized any additional traffic on farm. All feed and supply trucks on the farm were subject to additional biosecurity including being cleaned, having tires disinfected, and ensuring they travelled through safe zones," Doan said. "These outbreaks devastated farms and have created the new reality of ensuring our farm will always have a heightened sense of biosecurity."

In addition to the farm, he also maintains a full-time job as the Associate Vice President Agriculture, Ontario for the National Bank of Canada. Doan manages the Ag Banking team in Ontario with teams located in London, Kitchener, Barrie and Casselman, and he assists in market development, supports strategy

development and execution in agriculture markets.

Managing responsibilities at National Bank and his family farm requires a lot planning and a little help from his family.

"Farming and banking both have their own demands. Through planning and working as a team with Kathryn, we have enjoyed growing our own business, yet sustaining rewarding careers. Kathryn and I value raising our three daughters Carmyn, Sophia and Charlotte, surrounded by agriculture—they keep me grounded now matter how busy things get," he said.

"Needless to say, a lot of farming is done in evenings and weekends."

"We are fortunate to live near my family, and I rely on my brothers to monitor the birds if we are away, as well as work as custom operators for our corn, soybeans and wheat fields. Our farm is a family business, and we appreciate that our children will be raised on a farm working along with us, which we value as learning about life's lessons," Doan said.

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Strategic planning is an important theme in Doan's career and was a major factor in his Master of Agribusiness thesis. When he began his MAB thesis project, his goal was to have a research project that was meaningful, credible and he wanted the research to make a difference in his life and that of his clients at National Bank. Doan became

fascinated with gaining a better understanding of business planning and how his clients at the bank created, then executed plans. This idea was the topic of his thesis, Strategic Planning as a Differentiating Factor in Performance.

"I had clients that seemed to do limited business planning and those that paid for high priced plans, but they didn't have any accountability to these plans,

both seemed troubling to me. By formulating a question that suggested business planning could both be formal and informal, I surveyed my client base through a questionnaire to investigate the types of business planning on their farm," he said. "I then took the survey results and compared it to their financial results and drew conclusions. My take away was that businesses

In Clair's own words...

Why choose the MAB program?

- I always wanted to pursue a master's degree since graduating from my undergrad in 2001 – it was a long-term goal.
- I had an undergrad degree in Science and had never formally studied business; only had direct work experience from my time spent in banking, thus the desire to study in ag business was a big priority.
- It was important that I continue to work full time while studying, as I didn't want to disrupt our responsibilities we had at home.
- The most appealing aspects of the programs were the ag focus, and that it combined both in class and on line courses. It was important to me to have the feeling of a class and to know those that I would be interacting with, as well as meet the faculty and staff while on campus.
- Being able to write a thesis was a big consideration – this is really a differentiating factor. Other programs don't offer this ability to study, research and fully develop a research topic that is meaningful to individuals.
- I valued the international travel opportunities to look at other sectors across the globe; this included participating the South East Asia trip to Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam in 2008.

Tips on writing the thesis:

- By selecting my major professor early on (at the beginning of year two), it helped build a relationship for those couple of weeks on campus to discuss and brainstorm ideas.
- I had a clear goal to be done for May graduation. Personally, we had our first child due in September of that year, so the project needed to be done!
- You work so hard for the first two years; really at this stage you are so close, so just *force yourself to keep going*.

Major lessons:

- By having a topic that is truly meaningful to yourself, it will feel less like a project and much more like a discovery process.
- If the thesis has the ability to positively influence a group or business, it will help to reinforce the need to complete the thesis, and hold it to a high level of quality because you know you need to be accountable to them and not just yourself.
- Follow the step-by-step process set out by MAB faculty and staff, don't get behind, and leverage their step-by-step guide.
- Perhaps one of the largest tasks, which can be onerous, was the literature review. I had already started the survey process to keep the research and analytical process on going, so that I wasn't behind schedule once the literature review was finally complete.
- Leverage your major professor's support; we by nature are not researchers and don't write these types of reports regularly and they do.

Final thoughts:

Overall, any master's program will derive results that are equal to or greater than the input required. Meaning, the more you put in to the program, the more you will get out. Because the MAB program is based on a class format with face time with professors and classmates, you are able to interact and build relations with colleagues. The course work is designed to use real-life examples and impact your own business. Then, of course, there is course work that provides a sound theoretical frame work, and to cap it off the thesis was a long lasting and highly valuable report that I still reference today.

Since completing the Master of Agribusiness program, and because I used and engaged my client base for my thesis, it was a very rewarding experience to present my findings back to them. Still today, I will have clients say to me "we know you like business plans!"

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do plan, both in terms of written and updated business plans. However, for the vast majority of farmers, their planning is much less formal, but the outcomes are similar.”



Doan inspects rice packaging at the Chiameng Rice Mill in Bangkok during the 2008 MAB trip to Southeast Asia.

Completing the MAB program gave Doan a sense of personal accomplishment and he recommends all professionals create a professional development plan to learn new skills.

“Through hard work, I was fortunate to take on a leadership role at National Bank. No doubt my MAB played a role in that promotion. I have a huge sense of personal accomplishment about completing my MAB. Nobody can take this away from me no matter where I go in the future,” he said. “Times change and evolve, but I have an expectation that all members on my team have a professional development plan. It doesn’t always need to be a formal master’s degree such as the MAB program, but people need to continually build and improve skills to meet our changing work and economic conditions.”

His passion for agriculture and drive to continue learning recently earned him a new opportunity.

“As my career continues to progress at National Bank, I was spending less time focused on agriculture issues and more time invested in people, process, and product management; thus I had a

desire to refocus energy on agriculture issues, so I applied for a Nuffield Farm Scholars program,” Doan said.

The international Nuffield organization provides scholarships to agricultural leaders to expand their knowledge, network with individuals around the world, and to promote the advancement and leadership in agriculture. In recognition of his love of agriculture, Doan was rewarded with a Nuffield Canada scholarship.

“I have been awarded one of three 2016 Nuffield Canada Scholars, part of Nuffield International’s global program that has participating countries in the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Netherlands, and France. In total, approximately 75 scholars participate in the program,” Doan said. “My Nuffield project will focus on how Canada’s supply managed sectors, particularly poultry farmers, can manage during times of uncertainty with increased political and global market pressures.”

As part of the program, he will travel to Ireland in February 2016 to meet with other scholars from around the world for one week of tours, workshops, speakers and networking. He will also travel for an additional 10+ weeks to other countries to continue studying. Doan seeks to gain a thorough understanding of production and marketing models abroad. His focus is to ensure the industry remains relevant and competitive while seeking market opportunities.

The Nuffield Scholarship is another step in the continuing journey in his life as a turkey farmer, banker and world traveler.

“A big part of the Nuffield Scholarship is taking the experience and knowledge that I learn and sharing with those that have invested with me, as well as work colleagues, clients, and farmers committed to Canadian agriculture,” he said.

Calendar of Events

December 1

MAB and AgEcon scholarship application deadline

December 7

MAB at Kansas Farm Bureau Annual Meeting in Manhattan, KS

December 11

K-State fall commencement at Bramlage Coliseum

December 18

Final electronic copy of thesis due to Graduate School to be Spring ‘16 graduate without enrolling in spring hours

January 3-8, 2016

MAB Campus Session at K-State

January 18-22, 2016

MAB Thesis Campus Session at K-State

February 12, 2016

MAB at American Farm Bureau Federation Young Farmers & Ranchers in Kansas City, MO

March 3-5, 2016

MAB at Commodities Classic in New Orleans, LA

March 4, 2015

MAB at Cattlemen’s Day at K-State

March 13-18, 2016

MAB Campus Session at K-State

March 31 - April 2, 2016

MAB at MANRRS Annual Career Fair, Jacksonville, FL

April 18-20, 2016

MAB at the Petfood Forum Conference in Kansas City, MO

April 22, 2016

Final electronic copy of thesis due to Graduate School to be Spring ‘16 graduate

May 13, 2016

K-State spring commencement at Bramlage Coliseum

June 11-20, 2016

MAB international farm and agribusiness tour of Brazil