



# Alumni Spotlight

## Kate Duke

MAB Class of 2008

CRM Project Manager/Trainer

Farm Credit of the Virginias

by Mary Bowen

*Pieces of this article were featured on AgCareers.com's e-newsletter in September and will be included in the November issue of Ag Lender magazine.*

## K-State Master of Agribusiness perfect fit for Farm Credit employee

Kate Duke grew up on her family's 800-head beef cattle farm in Glasgow, VA. She was active in 4-H, FFA and planned on becoming a veterinarian. While pursuing an undergraduate degree in Animal & Poultry Sciences at Virginia Tech, she was required to take some economics courses and realized she enjoyed learning about the business side of the agriculture industry. This interest led Duke to a career with Farm Credit of the Virginias (FCV) and the completion of her Master of Agribusiness (MAB) distance degree from Kansas State University.

"I grew up around agriculture and knew I didn't want to go into production agriculture, but still wanted to be involved. I've always enjoyed the agricultural community and working with Farm Credit allows me to stay involved and support the ag community. The MAB program allowed me to further my education, while keeping the agriculture focus," Duke said.

Currently a CRM Project Manager/Trainer with FCV, Duke is responsible for training and providing user support of the customer relationship database to loan officers within Farm Credit. She knew she wanted to pursue a master's degree and began researching MBAs, when a friend told her about K-State's distance Master of Agribusiness program. She chose the MAB program because it had a focus on agriculture and the ability to complete a master's degree without leaving her position at FCV to be on campus full time.

"I really liked the agribusiness aspect of the MAB – liked that it wasn't straight business like an MBA. The flexibility of the online courses worked great for me, but since we attended sessions on campus a couple of times a year, I still felt engaged with my classmates and professors," Duke said. "I really felt like I was 'going to school' because of the connections and friendships I made during the campus sessions."

Increased technical knowledge and business skills, stronger

leadership abilities and more confidence are just a few of the benefits Duke says she gained by completing her Master of Agribusiness.

"I've gained confidence and increased my knowledge base – it has made me better at what I was already doing. I also feel that I am able to contribute more to Farm Credit of the Virginias by asking for more projects and making recommendations for improvements to management," she said.

Not only has Duke benefitted from her education, FCV has also gained some insight into their leadership development program, which recruits potential leaders and further develops them through internal programs.

In the ever-changing marketplace, it is hard to maintain

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competitive advantage. Organizations have relied on improvements in technology, cost reduction, and pricing to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Recently more organizations are realizing the importance of recruiting potential leaders and developing them further through

internal programs. With more than half the senior management personnel eligible for retirement in the next five years, FCV created the "Training of Today's/ Tomorrow's Association Leaders" (FCV T.O.T.A.L.) development program.

"The demand for high-quality leaders will greatly exceed the supply in the next few years, so this leadership development program will be important to enhance skills of



*MAB Alumnus Kate Duke at K-State Graduation ceremony May 2008.*

potential leaders within FCV," Duke said.

As a member of the first FCV T.O.T.A.L. class, Duke evaluated the program for her Master of Agribusiness thesis project in order to make recommendations for improvement. She identified five best practices of leadership development: an organizational culture of leadership development, leaders developing leaders, 360-degree feedback, coaching and mentoring, and job

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# MAB Program Director named Interim Head of Agricultural Economics Department



Master of Agribusiness Director Allen Featherstone was selected as Interim Department Head of Agricultural Economics in early October. He will serve the next 12-15 months while a national search for a permanent head is conducted.

“I’m pleased to provide leadership to the department through the

next year as we continue to pursue our mission, streamline our programs, and prepare for new leadership,” Featherstone said.

As Department Head, Featherstone will provide leadership to department faculty and staff; represent the department with agricultural producers, agribusinesses, policy makers, industry groups, alumni and communities;

provide fiscal management and identify funding support for departmental programs and initiatives.

While serving as Interim Department Head, he will continue his role as MAB Program Director and continue teaching MAB courses (AGEC 713 Agribusiness Financial Management; AGEC 710 Comparative Food and Agriculture

Systems; and AGEC 740 Seminar in Agriculture Economics Analysis); as well as working on student theses committees.

“The Master of Agribusiness program and its students are important to me and

I will continue as its director,” he said. “I look forward to continuing teaching my MAB courses and working with students as they complete their theses.”

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## Upcoming Events

### November 4

Deadline to have your name appear in December commencement program

### November 7-22

MAB Trip to Southeast Asia

### December 1

Scholarship applications due for January 2009

### December 2

Deadline to attend fall commencement - Approval to schedule final examination and diploma information forms due

### December 12

K-State fall commencement

### December 19

Final copy of thesis electronically deposited with graduate school

### January 4 - 9, 2009

Campus Session

### January 19 - 23, 2009

Thesis Campus Session

### March 15 - 20, 2009

Campus Session

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assignments and action learning. Duke’s analysis revealed the FCV T.O.T.A.L. program follows all of these best practices, but she did make recommendations to further improve the program.

Duke’s recommendations for further improving the effectiveness of the FCV T.O.T.A.L. program are: further developing the strengths of T.O.T.A.L.; incorporating job assignments and/or action learning exercises; increasing participation of senior managers; developing a plan for life after T.O.T.A.L.; and maintaining a current curriculum. By making an investment in future leaders, FCV will have the capability to increase recruitment and retention of talented and effective leaders.

“The thesis project was very beneficial and I liked that it was relevant to my company. It also gave me an opportunity to make recommendations to management, many of which have been implemented,” Duke said. “I think they are more willing to come to me with other projects or questions they might not have considered me for prior to this project.”

A full text version of Duke’s thesis, “FCV T.O.T.A.L.: An Analysis of Leadership Development Best Practices and Recommendations” can be found at <http://hdl.handle.net/2097/681>.

## Be watching for...

*In the next issue:*

- An introduction to the 12th MAB Class
- A review of the MAB Trip to Southeast Asia
- The 3rd MAB Professional Development Event