



Alumni Spotlight

Max Irsik

MAB Class of 2002

Assistant Professor & Extension/Beef Cattle

Large Animal Clinical Sciences

University of Florida

Gainesville, Florida

Business and economics skills complement Veterinarian's scientific background

by Mary Bowen

Max Irsik earned his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from Kansas State University in 1977 and began practicing. He operated a successful mixed-animal Veterinary practice in Western Kansas. After growing his practice and expanding into consulting arrangements with several large beef cattle stockyards, he heard about the K-State Master of Agribusiness (MAB), a distance-degree program offering business and economic skills for professionals in the food and agriculture industry.

The flexibility and convenience of the MAB program allows students to continue working while they complete their graduate degree. The degree is completed using DVDs, podcasts, email and multi-audio interactive chat sessions. Students only come to the K-State campus four weeks during the 2½ year program so they are able to continue their everyday life without relocating for school.

“I was running a busy practice and raising a family, but wanted more academic and practical business knowledge related to the animal health industry. I couldn’t take time away from my family or practice to go back to school, so when I learned about the MAB program, I was very interested. The flexibility of not being on campus full time plus the focus on business skills and agricultural policy was what I was looking for,” Irsik said. “I learned new skills in policy, computer analysis and finance that are all very applicable and I learned to put them all together to analyze economic factors in animal health. These are a completely separate set of tools than you learn with an animal health/science background.”

Irsik found the skills learned in the program not only

complemented his technical skills and experiences as a Veterinarian, but he was able to use them to provide better consulting for his clients. His thesis was titled, “Estimating the Effects of Animal Health on the Performance of Feedlot Cattle.” The thesis examined the effects of animal health, mortality or morbidity on the performance of feedlot cattle and models were developed to aid in the analysis for feed conversion, average daily gain and cost of gain.



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After completing his MAB in 2002, he had several offers to purchase his mixed-animal practice. Eventually he did sell the mixed-animal clinic, but continued working with his large-animal clients. Named Kansas Stockman of the Year in 2003, Irsik kept looking for opportunities to further use his combination of technical and business skills.

“With my new business skills and extensive Veterinary experience, I thought academia might be a good choice,” he said. “It turns out teaching has been a great way to use the combination of skills I have learned.”

Irsik and his wife, Linda, moved to Gainesville, Florida, where he took an Assistant Professor position with Large Animal Clinical Sciences at the University of Florida. As an Extension Veterinarian, he provides support for the beef cattle industry within the state of Florida, as well as providing technical information and consultations with producers about the management and health of beef cattle.

“I really enjoy being an extension Vet. I have the opportunity to do consulting and research, as well as teaching,” he said. “I like to tell Vets the importance of having the ability to

problem solve using computer applications. Having the knowledge to build spreadsheets and use data to make better decisions that will maximize operations is helpful and I encourage them to look into programs such as the MAB program to gain those skills.”

Working in Extension at the University of Florida also provides him an opportunity to continue research that is

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Australia and New Zealand tour planned

Planning for the MAB agribusiness tour of New Zealand and Australia is well underway. Scheduled for **April 16 - May 1, 2010**, the trip includes stops at cattle, deer and sheep farms, dairies, fruit and vegetable farms, grain and cotton farms, as well as, agricultural and food related industries and an overnight farm stay in Australia. Time has also been set aside for sightseeing.

We are currently collecting a \$600 per person deposit. All deposits are due by November 1. The trip cost is \$4,950* per person, which includes in-country logistics; hotel/motel rooms; entrance fees for special events; & most meals for double occupancy; and flights from West Coast to Auckland, New Zealand, internal flights in New Zealand & Australia, and from Brisbane, Australia to West Coast.

We have close to 30 individuals committed to join the group, but there a few spaces left, so if you are interested in joining us on our trek down under, please contact Mary, mjbowen@ksu.edu or 785-532-4435. **A full itinerary is available at www.mab.ksu.edu.**

*These rates are based on current estimates and exchange rates. Trip costs will be paid in local currencies and the final cost will depend on the number of travelers and exchange rates.

Trip Itinerary & Highlights:

Friday, April 16, Depart U.S.

Sunday, April 18, Arrive into Auckland, NZ

Monday, April 19, Hamilton - Rotorua

- Meeting at Fonterra
- Waikato farming province
- Visit an Organic Kiwifruit orchard
- Visit to 700 cow dairy farm
- Rotorua, Maori Hangi, and interesting thermal activity

Tuesday, April 20, Rotorua - Palmerston North

- Te Puia thermal area
- Visit a deer farm and learn how red deer are farmed for their antler velvet and venison
- Visit a beef (1,000) and lamb (10,000 plus) finishing property near Fielding

Wednesday, April 21, Palmerston North – Wellington fly to Christchurch

- Visit Massey University
- Agribusiness visits

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valuable to the industry. His research interests include reproductive efficiency of beef herds, calf health, computer applications for beef producers and the association of animal health and economics in beef cattle production. He has also contributed to industry publications and given presentations such as “Factors Affecting the Sale Price of Bulls Consigned to a Graded Sale”; “Adding Value to Holstein Steers Through Confinement Feeding”; and “Computers, Vets and Data: a Synergy or a Conflict?”

As for the future, Irsik and his family enjoy living in Florida and working with cattlemen in the state. However, he is interested in further expanding his consulting services. With the convenience of the internet, he has discovered he can consult from Florida or any other location.

“I’ve learned to change my paradigm. You can consult with a feedlot in Kansas from anywhere in the world through the use of a computer as long as you have the expertise to interpret the data you’re looking at.”