

Kansas State University

## Master of Agribusiness

*More than a decade of developing agribusiness leaders*

CONTACT: Mary Bowen • 785.532.4435 • [mjbowen@ksu.edu](mailto:mjbowen@ksu.edu) • [www.mab.ksu.edu](http://www.mab.ksu.edu)

### **K-State students and alumni tour Southeast Asian agribusinesses**

**MANHATTAN, KAN.,** – With expansive river valleys and deltas, rich soils, and a humid tropical climate, Southeast Asia has plentiful agricultural resources, but less than one-third of Southeast Asia’s land is in agricultural use and most are small family or communal farms. Due to a growing population, the region is one of the largest marketplaces for food and the rapid economic growth of these countries shows potential for positive growth in the agricultural industry. The K-State Master of Agribusiness (MAB) distance-education program offered students and alumni a chance to learn about the food and agriculture industry in Southeast Asia during a trip to Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.

“The MAB trip to Southeast Asia was a great experience. We really enjoyed learning about the agribusiness and industry in the region. The cultural and historical tours really added to the experience. It was fascinating to learn how the different countries’ government structures have influenced business and agriculture. It added a glimpse of the culture we might not have otherwise experienced if we traveled on our own,” Leslie Svacina, Communications Director of Minnesota Agri-Growth Council, St. Paul, Minn., and MAB student said.

With stops in three countries, the group visited a variety of crop and livestock operations, agricultural and food-related industries, and aquaculture, including stops at the Malaysian Palm Oil Board, PKPS Tilapia Farm, and the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; C.P. Retail and Marketing (CPRAM), Chiameng Rice Mill and the United Nations in Bangkok, Thailand; Dabaco Feed Mill and local wet markets in Hanoi, Vietnam; and a Cargill feed mill and small-to-large size back-yard hog farms outside of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

“The trip demonstrated to me how entwined our food systems are. On our first visit in Thailand, the tour of CP food processing facility allowed us to see first hand the use of competitively priced labor in the making of food which inevitably ends up on our dinner tables at home,” Clair Doan, Manager of Commercial Banking – Agriculture at the National Bank of Canada, in London, Ontario said. “And at the Chiameng Rice Mill, rice was being processed for shipping to Canada; it was interesting to see our government regulated food labels in dual languages (French and English) being printed on large bags of rice destined for North America.”

These visits also provided glimpses of an agriculture industry at varying stages of development. For example, palm oil, rice and ready-to-eat food industries in Malaysia and Thailand are highly developed with modern processing plants, while the rice industry in Vietnam still relies on hand planting and harvesting small plots of land. Some rice farmers are just beginning to modernize, showing great potential for growth. In addition, the visits gave the group a feel for the differences and similarities between Western and Eastern practices.

“It was interesting to see the different ways things are done. For instance, we visited three hog farms in Vietnam, all called ‘backyard hog farms’ because they are literally in the backyard. The largest farm had 30 sows and was a only few steps from the family’s home in the middle of their village,” Svacina said, “but they chose to use a U.S. feed source because of the company’s reputation and the performance of the feed.”

Allen Featherstone, Agricultural Economics Professor and Director of the Master of Agribusiness program, thinks people enjoyed getting a different perspective on agriculture. “While agriculture in Southeast Asia is different than in the U.S., Southeast Asia is an important importer of U.S. agricultural products including dried distillers grains along with other feed grains. Vietnam and Thailand are major suppliers of rice. In addition, Malaysia is the world’s largest producer of palm oil which is second to soybeans as the largest contributor of vegetable oil. As such, Malaysia may be an important supplier of biodiesel.”

Time was also set aside for enjoying the culture, shopping and sightseeing in each of the locations. Stops at famous sites such as Batu Caves, the Malaysian rain forest, Grand Palace,

Halong Bay and the Cu Chi Tunnels were highlights. Group members had opportunities to shop for bargains in bustling night markets and enjoyed wonderful meals of combinations of fresh fish and chicken, fruit and rice.

The Master of Agribusiness has lead tours of South America, visiting Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay in 2004, and Russia in 2006. The program is beginning to plan for the fourth international trip tentatively scheduled for April 16-May 1, 2010 to Australia and New Zealand.

“I thoroughly enjoyed traveling with the K-State group -- the mix of current students, staff, alumni and spouses all with an interest in agriculture allowed for interesting discussions. I strongly encourage the participation in travel opportunities organized by the MAB program,” Doan said. “Although it may not have been a restful trip, the busy schedule strengthened my education about global food and agribusiness management and allowed us to tour, meet and interact with real people in Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.”

###