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K-State Master of Agribusiness

THE SYLLABUS

A newsletter for Kansas State University Master of Agribusiness students, alumni & friends.

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MAB Class of 2029 Emma Duff and Landon Trout at the September MAB Campus Session.

Field Notes from Dr. Brady Brewer,
Master of Agribusiness Director

MAB Students, Alumni, and Friends,

As we approach the end of 2026, I want to take a moment to reflect on what has been an exciting and productive year for the Master of Agribusiness program. From welcoming new students and celebrating the accomplishments of our alumni to expanding professional development and international learning opportunities, we have much to be proud of.

One of the highlights of this year has been welcoming 21 new students into the MAB program. These students bring diverse professional experiences, industry perspectives, and backgrounds that enrich the learning environment for everyone. One of MAB's greatest strengths is the opportunity for students to learn not only from our faculty but also from one another. I look forward to seeing these students grow throughout their time in the program and the contributions they will make to the MAB community and the agricultural industry.

It has also been rewarding to see the continued accomplishments of our students and alumni. From career advancements and new leadership opportunities to professional recognition and personal milestones, members of the MAB community continue to make an impact across the agricultural industry. Their achievements are a reminder that the value of MAB extends well beyond graduation, and we are always proud to celebrate their successes.

This summer, we successfully hosted our Strategic Financial Management for Agribusinesses executive education program in Manhattan. Through a 2.5-day interactive business simulation, participants explored how financial information can guide decisions related to growth, capital allocation, and long-term strategy. Building on this success, we are excited to offer two executive education programs in 2027: Foundations of Finance in January, focused on developing practical financial management skills, and Strategic Financial Management for Agribusinesses in July, which emphasizes applying financial information to more complex business decisions. These offerings represent an important part of our efforts to expand MAB's impact by providing professional development opportunities beyond our graduate degree program.

Another highlight of 2026 was our MAB international agricultural tour to Spain and Portugal in June. Experiences like these provide opportunities to explore agriculture beyond our borders, learn about different production systems and business practices, and strengthen relationships among members of the MAB community. They also reinforce the increasingly global nature of agribusiness and the importance of understanding the opportunities and challenges facing agriculture around the world.

Dr. Brady Brewer

Our connections with industry continue to be an essential part of the MAB experience. Throughout the year, agribusiness professionals have generously shared their expertise, provided real-world perspectives, and helped connect classroom concepts to the challenges facing today's businesses. I especially want to thank our MAB Advisory Board, which met twice this year to provide guidance on the direction of the program. Their thoughtful feedback and industry insights are invaluable as we evaluate our curriculum, enhance the student experience, and ensure MAB continues to meet the evolving needs of the agribusiness industry. We are fortunate to have such a dedicated group of professionals invested in our success.

As we look ahead, I also want to encourage those who believe in the mission of MAB to consider supporting the program through a financial contribution. Gifts to MAB scholarships help make graduate education more accessible to working professionals, while contributions to the program's general fund support educational initiatives and experiences that enrich our students' time at K-State. Every gift, regardless of size, helps us continue creating opportunities for current and future students. If MAB has made a difference in your career or professional network, I hope you will consider helping us provide those same opportunities to others. (mab.ksu.edu/alumni/give-back.html)

Finally, I want to express my appreciation to our faculty and staff, whose dedication makes these accomplishments possible, and to our students, alumni, and industry partners for their continued engagement and support. The strength of MAB has always been the people who make up our community, and I am grateful for the role each of you plays in its success.

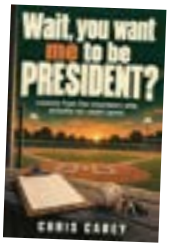
As the year draws to a close, thank you for being part of the MAB family. I wish you a wonderful holiday season and look forward to all that we will accomplish together in 2027.

Best regards,

Brady E. Brewer

Students and Alumni

Chris Carey ('07) has written a book, *Wait, You Want Me to Be President?* It is about leadership, showing up when nobody else wants to, making tough decisions, dealing with criticism, and learning that sometimes the people doing the most are the ones you'll never hear about. Available on Amazon at: https://amzn.to/4k5c0jh.



Mike Hofer ('07) started a new position as President at Vitalix, Inc., a company that specializes in quality low moisture cooked molasses supplement tubs

Nate Smith ('11) opened a side business in June that sells crepes at the Olathe [KS] Farmers Market on Saturday mornings and special events. The name of the company is Nate's Crepes L.L.C.

Dana Brooks Christy ('13) is now the Managing Director at Kincannon and Reed Global Executive Search. She was honored with a monumental leadership award by the American Pet Products Association (APPA) and the Pet Industry Distributors Association (PIDA) at the Global Pet Expo in March 2026.

Michael Kempke ('13) was recently admitted into Aspirant Formation for the Permanent Diaconate in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

Jarah Hauger ('14) has started a new position with John Deere as Onboarding and Engagement Manager.

Darren Blew ('16) has been promoted to Operations Director at Tortilla King. He and his wife also opened Blew Heeler, a bar and grill in Pretty Prairie, KS, featuring beef from his brother's cow/calf operation.

Nicole Cleggs-Burns ('17) was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in the Army Reserves on August 7.

Kendal Quandahl ('17) is now Director of Quality and Product Support for CNH in North America. The role ties together customer experience, dealer feedback, product quality, and problem-solving.

John Sachse ('17) wrote and published his first book, *Built in the Dirt: The Resiliency Playbook*. A 4th-generation Kansas rancher, an Army National Guard officer, and a certified resiliency coach. He's learned that resilience isn't a feeling — it's a skill forged in pressure, built through reps, and shaped in the dirt. Available on Amazon: https://amzn.to/3WiBmjV.

Amy (Varner) Schweizer ('20) has taken a new position as an Ag Loan Officer at The Citizens State Bank in Newton, KS.

Megan Espinda ('21) is now with Indiana Soybean Alliance, Indiana Corn Marketing Council, and Indiana Corn Growers Association as the Stakeholder and Member Development Project Manager. She is also a class member of the American Farm Bureau Federation's Partner in Advocacy Leadership Program, Class 13.

Cynthia Garlick ('22) was married to Derek Kehm on October 10.

Darren Drake ('25) started a new position as Director of Sales at BASS Hybrids. BASS Hybrids provides high-yield, non-GMO corn seed designed for resilience, soil health, and performance.

Rachel Scharplaz ('25) is now the Director of Customer Experience at EA Risk.

Dylan Oja ('27) married Cheyenne Groat on June 20.

Jordan Martin ('28) has a new position with John Deere as an University Partnership and Technical Coach.

Tana Overton ('28) recently stepped into the role of Director of Livestock – East at Armor Animal Health. In this position, she leads and develops livestock sales representatives across the eastern U.S., guides business growth, and supports collaboration to serve dairy and beef producers. She also received the 2025 Innovation Award for our Livestock division, recognizing her work helping launch Mastatest in the U.S. Tana and her husband, Matt, are excited to welcome a baby girl in December, with their son, Hezekiah, preparing for his new role as big brother.

Kierstan Rhodes ('29) is now a Dairy Product Sales Coordinator or Hilmar.

Left: Joshua Moore ('27), Kendal Quandahl ('17), Scott Schadler ('21) and Jacob L Maurer ('15) representing CNH at the 2026 Farm Progress Show.

Right: Dana Brooks Christy ('13) receiving a leadership award at Global Pet Expo in 2026.

Group at Gospa Citrus, Seville, Spain

Beyond Borders: MAB explores agriculture, business and culture in Spain and Portugal

From dairy farms and olive groves to vineyards and cattle operations, the Kansas State University Master of Agribusiness international farm and agribusiness tour experience once again demonstrated that learning extends far beyond the classroom.

This summer, MAB students, alumni, faculty and guests traveled through Spain and Portugal for an immersive experience that blended agriculture, agribusiness, history and culture across two countries rich in agricultural tradition. The journey provided participants with opportunities to explore global production systems while experiencing the people, landscapes and practices that shape agriculture in the region.

Throughout the trip, participants visited a diverse range of agricultural enterprises, gaining firsthand insight into the similarities and differences between European and U.S. agricultural systems.

"Overall, a great trip and such a wonderful way to stay connected to K-State and the industry I love so much," said MAB alumna Megan Espinda ('23), IDEM Agricultural Liaison for the Indiana Department of Environmental Management.

The tour began in central Spain with a visit to Finca Hualdo, a sheep operation producing traditional Manchego cheese. Participants learned about the interconnected nature of livestock management, land stewardship and artisanal food production while seeing how regional identity and agricultural products are closely linked.

As the group traveled through the Castilla-La Mancha region, famous for the iconic windmills associated with Don Quixote, discussions expanded beyond production practices to include history, culture and the role agriculture has played in shaping communities across generations.

Additional stops highlighted the diversity of agriculture throughout the Iberian Peninsula. Participants visited Los Pastoreros Cooperative near Granada, where they learned about the history and operations of a dairy cooperative producing thousands of liters of milk each day. In southern Spain, the group toured Complejo Agroalimentario de Olvera, an agricultural cooperative that integrates an olive oil mill, feedlot, composting operation and grain storage facilities into a broad agricultural enterprise.

For Sheila Hamlett ('27), MAB student and Senior Director of Food Safety and Environmental, Health & Safety at KLN Family Brands, the variety of agricultural experiences made a lasting impression.

"This trip was fantastic," she said. "The agricultural sites were all very interesting and the guides were knowledgeable. I learned so much about olive oil. I had no idea it was so nuanced. Never would have thought to put it on ice cream, but wow! Cattle, cork, citrus... so much history there. And the wine! Amazing. I can't wait to see where we can go next."

Other visits showcased specialty and value-added agricultural systems, including olive oil production at Basilippo, citrus

production at Gospa Citrus, cork forest management and cattle operations at Companhia das Lezírias in Portugal, purebred Red Aberdeen Angus production at Agrotoro, and the A Campo Abierto ranch, where participants experienced Spain's unique tradition of breeding fighting bulls on horseback. Wine production also offered opportunities to explore agricultural value chains through visits to Bodegas Arúspide, Cockburn's Port Lodge and Quinta da Foz.

For Espinda, Portugal offered some of the trip's most memorable agricultural experiences.

"My favorite part of the trip was the cork forest in Portugal," she said. "Harvesting cork is nothing I had ever thought about in the world of agriculture prior to this trip." She also enjoyed visiting the UNESCO World Heritage cities of Évora and Coimbra, where centuries of history provided additional context for the region's agricultural traditions.

One of Espinda's favorite experiences came during the group's final winery visit outside Porto, where grapes are still crushed by foot using traditional methods.

"The winery industry's market access in Spain and Portugal is so highly regulated that there is less drive for expansion and mass production," Espinda said. "That allows many wineries to remain small and produce wine in very interesting ways. I also learned a lot about olive oils and what to look for in a good quality cooking oil."

While agricultural learning remained central to the trip, cultural experiences added important context and perspective. Participants explored historic cities including Madrid, Toledo, Granada, Seville, Lisbon, Porto and Évora. Highlights included visits to the Alhambra Palace, the Real Alcázar, Jerónimos Monastery and the Cathedral of Seville, along with a traditional flamenco performance and opportunities to experience regional cuisine and local customs.

For Kelsey Waugaman ('26), MAB alumna and Orchard Assistant at California State University, Fresno, one of the most memorable cultural experiences was visiting the Alhambra Palace in Granada.

"The stunning views and beautiful gardens left a lasting impression on me, and it was easy to see why it's considered one of Spain's greatest treasures," Waugaman said.

Among the agricultural visits, Waugaman found the A Campo Abierto bull breeding ranch especially memorable.

"Watching the demonstrations, I felt like I had stepped directly into the ranchers' way of life and the world of bullfighting and horses," she said. "It gave me insight into a tradition and industry I had never experienced up close before."

For Tillie Johnson ('28), MAB student and Operations Supervisor at CHS Inc., the carefully planned balance of agriculture and culture made the experience especially memorable.

"My husband and I had never been to Europe before, so being able to go on this trip, have everything planned through the university, while also fulfilling a course for my master's degree was a no-brainer for us," she said. "We really appreciated how the trip was a perfect combination of the typical tourist

Alcázar of Toledo, Toledo, Spain

Tillie Johnson ('28), Los Pastoreros cooperative dairy Granada, Spain

A Campo Abierto, a fighting bull and horse ranch, Cádiz, Spain

attractions and the agricultural focus with visits to farms, cooperatives, wineries and small businesses that allowed us to compare them with operations in the U.S."

Johnson added that one of her favorite experiences was visiting A Campo Abierto, where fighting bulls are raised on horseback, followed by the performance at the Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art.

"Personally, I'm a huge horse person, so being able to go to A Campo Abierto where they raise fighting bulls and do everything on horseback, as well as the Royal Andalusian School of Equestrian Art and watching their show was incredibly meaningful to me," Johnson said. "I'd highly recommend this trip to anyone who wants to get the most out of spending two weeks in Spain and Portugal."

The MAB international experience has long served as an opportunity to connect classroom concepts with real-world applications while strengthening the relationships that make the program unique. Throughout the journey, conversations continued on buses, over shared meals and during farm visits, creating an environment where students and alumni learned not only from industry experts, but also from one another.

For Mark Davis ('12), MAB alumnus and Manufacturing Operations Specialist, those conversations became one of the most rewarding aspects of the trip.

"We thoroughly enjoyed the trip. The opportunity to get up close and personal with production agriculture in Spain and Portugal was an unforgettable experience," Davis said. "One of the things I enjoyed most was getting to know the other travelers in our group. We had a diverse group with varying agricultural backgrounds, which led to some very interesting conversations about the differences in production agriculture systems."

Those relationships were among Waugaman's favorite memories as well.

"More than anything, my favorite part of this trip was experiencing the beauty of these countries alongside wonderful people," she said. "The friendships I made along the way turned fellow travelers into people who now feel like a part of my life, and that made every moment even more meaningful."

For Alison Hurwitch ('27), MAB student and Associate Director of Strategic Development and Innovation – Cattle Business at Merck Animal Health, the experience extended well beyond agriculture.

"Lisbon and Porto were highlights of the trip for me," Hurwitch said. "I loved the contrast between Lisbon's lively modern feel and Porto's historic charm, and I came away with a deeper appreciation for Portugal's culture, people and beauty."

She also found that the region's cuisine became an important part of the experience.

"This trip was unforgettable, and the culinary experience was a major part of that. From Iberico ham and olive oil to fresh seafood and local wine, every meal reflected the richness of the region and made the trip even more meaningful."

By the end of the journey, participants returned home with much more than photographs and souvenirs. They gained a deeper understanding of global agriculture, a broader appreciation for international food systems, and lasting friendships with fellow MAB students, alumni and faculty.

For Davis, the experience exceeded every expectation.

"From production agriculture to historical castles, palaces and cathedrals, every day was an adventure," he said. "With the expert guidance of Mary Sullivan, Dr. Brady Brewer and Victoria Feldkamp, it truly was the trip of a lifetime."

As agriculture becomes increasingly interconnected around the world, experiences like the MAB international farm and agribusiness tour continue to prepare students to think globally while strengthening the relationships that define the MAB community.

Group at Quinta da Foz winery in Pinhao, Portugal

Companhia das Lezíriascork cork oak forest, Lisbon, Portugal

THESIS DEFENSES

Dennis Jackson

Class of 2025

A Foundation for a Legacy-Driven Conversation about Succession in a Family Farm Business

MAB Thesis projects can be found at mab.ksu.edu/research/theses.html

SAVE THE DATE

November 1
K-State Online scholarship application due

November 4
MAB at Chicago Section IFT in Chicago, IL

November 6
MAB at AFA in Kansas City, MO

November 15
Spring MAB/Ag Econ scholarship applications deadline

November 17
Defense ballot and final copy of thesis due to be Fall '26 graduate

November 15-19
MAB Campus Session

November 18-19
MAB at Kansas Agri-Business Expo in Wichita, KS

December 6
MAB at KFB Annual Meeting in Manhattan, KS

December 11
Fall Commencement at Bramlage Coliseum

January 3-8, 2027
MAB Campus Session

January 12-14, 2027
Foundations of Financial Management for Agribusinesses in Manhattan, KS

January 16-20, 2027
MAB at VMX Expo in Orlando, FL

January 18-22, 2027
MAB Thesis Session

January 31, 2027
MAB at KFB YF&R Conference in Manhattan, KS

February 2-4, 2027
MAB at NCBA CattleCon in Nashville, TN

February 19-21, 2027
MAB at Western Farm Show in Kansas City, MO

March 3-5, 2027
MAB at Commodity Classic in New Orleans, LA

March 2, 2027
Last day to complete Graduation Application in KSIS for name to appear in commencement program

March 5, 2027
MAB at K-State Cattlemen's Day in Manhattan, KS

March 22-26, 2026
MAB Campus Session

May 7, 2027
Examination ballot and final copy of thesis due to be Spring '27 graduate

May 14, 2027
Spring Commencement at Bramlage Coliseum in Manhattan, KS

July 12-14, 2027
MAB at IFT FIRST in Chicago, IL

July 13-15, 2027
Strategic Financial Management for Agribusinesses in Manhattan, KS

Alumni Spotlight

LaKoda (Kelber) Sparks 2019

From the Classroom to Tanzania: Putting Agricultural Education into Action

For LaKoda (Kelber) Sparks, a 2019 graduate of Kansas State University's Master of Agribusiness (MAB) program, agricultural education has always been about more than teaching students about farming. It's about helping people connect what they learn to real-world opportunities.

From building successful FFA chapters in Iowa to developing innovative online agricultural education programs and preparing to share farming knowledge with communities in Tanzania, Sparks continues to find new ways to make an impact through agriculture.

Finding Her Path Through Agricultural Education

Sparks earned her bachelor's degree in agricultural education with a minor in agronomy from Iowa State University in 2015. She began her career teaching agricultural education at Estherville-Lincoln Central in Estherville, Iowa, where she grew the school's FFA chapter from approximately 15 members to more than 110 in just two years.

> ***"After that first [campus session] week, I realized I was in the right spot! I had unlocked a passion for logistics and marketing that I did not realize I had."***

In 2017, she returned closer to home to teach at Colo-NESCO, where she helped grow another FFA chapter to more than 90 students, an impressive accomplishment for a school with approximately 40 students per grade level.

After taking time away from teaching to start a family, Sparks returned to education in 2023 with Choice Charter School, an online school serving students throughout Iowa.

There, she developed a virtual agricultural education program and established Iowa's first virtual FFA chapter. Today, she teaches agriculture and shop classes while collaborating with teachers in other subjects to help students understand how classroom concepts apply to everyday life.

She's also preparing to launch her own agricultural homeschooling program in January 2027. The program will combine agricultural education with core academic subjects, helping students explore concepts such as mathematics, communication and business through practical agricultural applications.

An MAB Thesis That Became a Business

The idea for Sparks' homeschooling program actually began during her time in the MAB program.

As an agricultural education teacher, she frequently heard students question when they would ever use concepts taught in their core classes. She saw opportunities to connect those lessons to agriculture, whether calculating fencing requirements using geometry or developing communication skills needed to secure farm financing.

Those experiences inspired her MAB thesis, which focused on developing a business model for an agriculture-based homeschooling program.

Through her research, Sparks explored homeschooling requirements throughout the Midwest and surveyed families to better understand their educational needs and interest in agriculture-focused curriculum.

Now, several years after graduation, she's turning that research into reality.

Sparks originally chose the MAB program because she wanted to continue teaching while earning a graduate degree that would expand her knowledge beyond education.

"I wanted to round out my resume," she said.

But she admits the first week was intimidating.

"That first day of class, I kept asking myself what I had gotten myself into!" Sparks recalled. "Being an education major, I didn't think I had enough experience or background knowledge to make it."

Those concerns quickly faded as she discovered new interests in logistics and marketing and built relationships with faculty and classmates.

"After that first week, I realized I was in the right spot! I had unlocked a passion for logistics and marketing that I did not realize I had," she said.

"This program isn't a typical program. Every person involved wants to see you succeed and become successful. This program is designed for full-time employees that want to build relationships in the industry and build the knowledge to advance their own careers."

Today, she credits the MAB program with helping her launch her homeschooling business, manage the businesses she and her husband own, and pursue opportunities she hadn't previously imagined.

Taking Agricultural Knowledge Across the Globe

One of those opportunities will take Sparks and her husband, Ian, to Tanzania in November 2026, where they'll participate in an agricultural mission trip through Authenticity Book House (ABH), an organization that has supported Tanzanian pastors through training and educational resources for more than a decade.

Many of the pastors ABH serves also farm to support their families. However, limited access to equipment and agricultural training can make producing reliable crops challenging.

Sparks will work alongside ABH's Director of Agriculture, Aaron Mathes, to provide practical training in soil preparation, seed spacing, planting depth and crop management.

The team will also distribute handheld, single-row planters designed by Mathes to help farmers achieve more consistent planting depths and spacing. Sparks has developed illustrated reference materials that farmers can continue using after the team returns home.

The training will combine classroom instruction with hands-on demonstrations and assistance planting fields.

For Sparks, the experience brings together her background in agricultural education, her passion for helping others and the business knowledge she gained through the MAB program.

She and the ABH team hope to return near the end of the growing season to provide additional training in harvesting, crop storage, livestock feeding and marketing surplus production.

ABH is also developing a conference center in the Dodoma region to support ongoing agricultural and pastoral education.

Advice for Future MAB Students

Looking back, Sparks encourages current and future MAB students to embrace the opportunities the program provides, especially during the thesis process.

"Dive into it and let the research guide you," she advised. "I didn't know where my thesis was headed, and the more I researched, the more my thesis developed!"

She also encourages students to take advantage of the expertise and support of MAB faculty.

"Lean into the professors for their help. They want you to succeed! Welcome their advice and suggestions."

For Sparks, the program's greatest value goes beyond the coursework. It's the combination of practical business knowledge, industry relationships and faculty support that continues to influence her career.

"This program isn't a typical program. Every person involved wants to see you succeed and become successful," she said. "This program is designed for full-time employees that want to build relationships in the industry and build the knowledge to advance their own careers."

And while her career has taken her in directions she never expected, her K-State pride remains strong.

"The MAB program was one of the best decisions I made in my life!" Sparks said. "And I will be pushing my children to become WILDCATS! EMAW!"

Agriculture Making a Difference in Tanzania

This November, MAB alumna LaKoda (Kelber) Sparks ('19) and her husband, Ian, will travel to Tanzania with Authenticity Book House to help local pastor-farmers improve their agricultural practices.

Through hands-on training and practical tools, the team hopes to help farmers increase crop production, better support their families and strengthen their communities.

Interested in learning more or supporting their efforts?

Visit Authenticity Book House to learn about the organization and its mission. Those who wish to contribute can also make an optional donation through the Tanzania mission fundraising page.

- **ABH Website:** https://abhbooks.com/
- **Online donation form:** https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/donation-form/general-14

K-State Master of Agribusiness presents

Foundations of Financial Management for Agribusinesses

A Hands-on Executive Education Program for Managers, Owners and Professionals across Agribusiness.

January 12-14, 2027
Manhattan, KS

Understand the Numbers. Analyze Performance. Make Better Decisions.

Participants will develop a practical understanding of the balance sheet, income statement, and statement of cash flows before applying those concepts to financial decision-making. Using the DuPont framework and an applied business case, participants will explore how profitability is influenced by margins, asset utilization, cash and inventory management, and capital structure.

The emphasis throughout the program is not simply on calculating financial measures, but on understanding what the numbers mean, why they change, and what managers can do about them.

What you will gain:

- Read and interpret the balance sheet, income statement, and statement of cash flows
- Understand how the three financial statements relate to one another
- Use financial information to evaluate business performance and support management decisions
- Apply the DuPont framework to understand the drivers of profitability
- Evaluate the role of profit margins and asset turnover in financial performance
- Understand how cash, inventory, and working capital decisions affect the business
- Examine how debt, capital structure, and equity management influence financial performance and risk
- Use financial analysis to identify business strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement
- Communicate financial recommendations through an applied business case

Registration Fee:

- $1,750 includes course materials and meals/ snacks
- **Company Team Rate:** $1,500 for each additional attendee from the same company

Taught by Dr. Brady Brewer

Register online:
mab.ksu.edu/about/events/executive-education/