



Alumni Spotlight

Ted Monoson

Class of 2002
Communications Director,
Congressman Mike Conaway and
House Committee on Agriculture
Washington, D.C.

Representing Agriculture

MAB Alumn Ted Monoson was recently appointed Director of Communications of the House Agriculture Committee. In a short interview, he shares his experiences and thoughts on U.S. agricultural policy.

Q. Tell me a little about your background, education and work experience.

A: I worked as a reporter for the *Terre-Haute Tribune-Star* before moving to Washington, D.C. I was the newspaper's southern bureau reporter and lived and was based out of the town of Sullivan, Indiana. I covered general news, but also spent a considerable amount of time covering agriculture. I wrote about everything from the 1996 Farm Bill's impact on farmers to farmers' adoption of biotechnology to changes in the hog industry. After moving to Washington, D.C., in 1999, I covered agriculture, energy and natural resources for *Congressional Quarterly* and then the major newspapers in Montana and Wyoming. While at *Congressional Quarterly*, I was the main reporter covering the 2002 Farm Bill. In 2004, I went to work as an agricultural policy aide for southwest Ohio Congressman John Boehner. Agriculture is very important in his

congressional district. The district has significant livestock, row crop and dairy production. After Congressman Boehner became House Majority Leader, I worked on both local and national issues, and was his main aide on the 2008 Farm Bill. In 2009, I went to work in government affairs for the agriculture and energy sector. In 2013, I joined Congressman Mike Conaway's personal office staff as his communications director.

Q. Tell me about your current position as Chairman Conaway's spokesman. What is an average day like?

"Chairman Conaway wants to make sure that all Americans, whether they live in our cities, suburbs or rural America, know about farmers and rancher's hard work and their commitment to preserving the soil and water that we need to grow our crops and feed our livestock."
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Ted Monoson, MAB Class of 2002

A. It is an honor to work as the Committee on Agriculture communications director. Chairman Conaway has a great deal of respect for America's agricultural history and much optimism about our country's agricultural future. As his communications director, I work closely with the Committee policy staff to make sure that we are effectively conveying the importance of the work that the Committee is doing and serve as an advocate for American agriculture. I draft and implement the Committee's communications strategy.

Q. What current issues are your office working on?

A. One priority is to make sure we have nutrition programs that work for both American taxpayers and recipients. A second priority is to make sure that we have commodity markets that effectively allow agricultural producers to protect themselves from risk. Committee members and staff are also effectively conducting oversight of both implementation of the 2014 Farm Bill and the Agriculture Department in general. The Chairman and his fellow Committee members understand that oversight of the laws that Congress have passed and the departments and agencies under the Committee's jurisdiction are just as important as the creation of new laws. Finally, the Chairman considers the Committee as an advocate for our farmers and ranchers. The Chairman wants to make sure that

all Americans, whether they live in our cities, suburbs or rural America, know about farmers and rancher's hard work and their commitment to preserving the soil and water that we need to grow our crops and feed our livestock.

Q. What are the goals of your office to strengthen agriculture?

A. Our office works hard to make sure that all Americans recognize the value of our agricultural sector. Our goal is to make sure farmers and ranchers have an environment in which they have an opportunity to make a living growing the food that feeds America and the fiber that clothes America. We have a variety of tools to accomplish this task. We are making sure we have the right policies in place. We are working equally hard to communicate the importance of these policies for all Americans. We use speeches by Chairman Conaway and Committee members, press releases and social media to accomplish this goal.

Q. What led you to politics?

A. I would say I am in policy as much as I am in politics. I stumbled into both policy and politics. I came to Washington, D.C., for personal reasons. While working as a newspaper reporter, I developed a strong interest in agriculture policy. This eventually led me to work on agriculture policy for a member of Congress. Although I have done some political work, my passion is policy. Politics is important because in order to get the best policies put into law, you need the best men and women to get elected.

Q. Why did you decide to pursue the Master of Agribusiness program?

A. A professor at another university, whom I used to pester with questions



Rep. Mike Conaway, R-Texas, works with his chief of staff Scott Graves, right, and communications director Ted Monoson, in his Rayburn office, November 20, 2014. (Photo By Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call)

when I was a reporter, suggested I enroll in his university's master of agribusiness program. His suggestion led me to realize that I could more effectively do my job as an agriculture reporter if I had a stronger understanding of agriculture in general and economics specifically. I looked at his university's program and Kansas State's program and decided that Kansas State's Master of Agribusiness program better fit my needs.

Q. Tell me a little about your thesis. Why did you choose your topic? And what did you learn?

A. I wrote my thesis about the Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS). I reviewed the impact that the RFS was having on commodity prices. The thesis allowed me to more effectively do my job in government relations. The work with economic models also enabled me to work more effectively with agricultural economists.

Q. What advice do you have for individuals regarding the thesis process?

A. Do not allow any gap whatsoever between your coursework and the beginning of your thesis.

Q. How have you benefited from the MAB program?

A. The MAB program has provided a depth of knowledge of the agriculture industry and economics that has been a valuable tool whether I have been focused on developing policy or communicating policy.

Q. Why would you recommend the MAB program to others working in the industry?

A. Through the MAB program you will work with top professors and fellow students who, if you are open to it, will provide you with a perspective that is very different from your perspective.

Q. Other thoughts you'd like to share?

A. You should all see yourselves as ambassadors of agriculture. Do not be shy about bragging on the work that you and others in agriculture are doing. Also do not be shy about bragging on the work that goes on at schools like Kansas State.