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K-State international agribusiness course wins award for innovation

MANHATTAN, KAN, September 18, 2007 – After 10 years of providing agribusiness distance education, K-State's Master of Agribusiness (MAB) program, its instructors and courses continue to win awards while developing agribusiness leaders. Over the years, the MAB program has been awarded a dozen national and regional awards and in October, the program will be awarded the Association of Continuing Higher Education's (ACHE) Distinguished Program Award for its Comparative Food and Agriculture Systems course. The course is being recognized for its original and innovative development and delivery.

Because it is important to understand the food and agriculture industry at a global level, Comparative Food and Agriculture Systems was developed. This award-winning elective course is delivered by professors from France, Russia, Uruguay, New Zealand and Thailand and includes sections on the European Union, Russia and the Former Soviet Union, MERCOSUR, Oceania and East Asia. Current professors include Allen Featherstone, a Kansas State University agricultural economics professor and director of the Master of Agribusiness program in Manhattan, KS; Daniel Conforte, a Universidad ORT business school professor located three blocks from MERCOSUR's headquarters in Montevideo, Uruguay; Pavel Sorokin, a Moscow State Agro-Engineering University professor who has served in Russian and Soviet Union embassies in the United States and India; Nicolas Habert, an Ecole d'ingénieurs Purpan professor with a background in the European banking industry in Toulouse, France; Yann Duval, an economist with extensive experience with Asia-Pacific trade and investment in Bangkok, Thailand; Ravipim Chaveesuk, a Kasetsart University professor with an agro-industry technology management background in Bangkok, Thailand; and Keith Woodford, a professor from Lincoln University in New Zealand with a background in farming systems, agribusiness and international rural development.

To give students an even broader international experience, new sections for sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and North America are in development. New partners include: Lisa House, Associate Professor and Undergraduate Coordinator in the Food and Resource Economics Department, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL; Theodora Hyuha, a senior lecturer at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda; and Rajinder Sidhu, an economics professor who specializes in agricultural policies analysis and farm economics at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, India.

“Students learn about other regions of the world they do not know. For example, they often have clichés about the European Union and realize that many issues are fairly similar in the US and in the EU. From my opinion, somebody can sell products to somebody else only if he knows well the history, culture, and way of life,” Habert said.

The course offers an in-depth view of the global food and agribusiness industry from people who have experienced it first hand. The original goal of the course was to give U.S. students an inside view of international agriculture taught by those with a lifetime of knowledge regarding the region.

“Each international instructor in AGE 710 brought their own unique set of issues and information to the discussion, pertinent to the region they represented, which gave a refreshingly authentic flavor to each segment. The format gave a healthy alternative to the American view of everything, and left me with a greatly improved understanding of the complex dynamics of global agriculture and agribusiness,” MAB Alumnus Rex Nelson, McCook, NE, said.

Each professor provides lectures, readings and an assignment for his/her module. Live weekly chat sessions are led by the international professors where students can ask questions and interact directly with faculty around the globe. The opportunity to question the instructors creates an interactive and engaging learning environment as well as establishes international connections.

“Everyone agreed I could have presented most of the same material, but it would not have been near as interesting or effective,” House said. “What made the course especially interesting to everyone involved were live chat sessions where the students had the chance to directly ask professors from around the world questions about agriculture in their region.”

The course is open to anyone around the world with a bachelor’s degree and an interest in the food and agriculture industry. In addition, international partners have the opportunity to offer the course to students at their home institutions. For more information about the international faculty or the course, go to www.mab.ksu.edu/gaen.

K-State’s Master of Agribusiness is an award-winning, distance-education degree program that focuses on food and agribusiness management. Students in the program are located in more than 30 states within the United States and 20 countries abroad. They range in age from 25 to 55 and work in every sector of the food and agribusiness industry. The program, launched in 1998 and now in its 10th year of agribusiness education, was the first graduate agribusiness program in the nation to be offered through distance education. The executive-style, distance education delivery breaks down barriers associated with earning a master’s degree, such as access to a university campus, job changes, relocations and job-related travel. For more information on the K-State Master of Agribusiness program please go to www.mab.ksu.edu, call 785-532-4495 or e-mail mab@agecon.ksu.edu.

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