

# Unique Masters in Agribusiness Offered by KSU

By Rich Keller, Editor

When it comes to advanced education for ag lenders, Kansas State University Department of Agricultural Economics has worked hard to offer opportunities, and a program the staff is extremely proud of is the Masters of Agribusiness (MAB).

## M.A.B. K-State Master of Agribusiness

Although not limited to those involved in ag lending, many of the graduates from the program, which was initiated in 1998, are employed in ag lending. The MAB program is only offered through "distance education." Each class of students who are accepted begin their education in January and commit themselves to 2½ years of course work mainly using the internet, DVDs and online chat sessions. Face-to-face, one-week on-campus sessions also are completed twice a year so students can meet each other and faculty, learn the technology used and give presentations.

The program has evolved and expanded so that each class usually includes several international students. Until the January 2009 class of 31, class size had been limited to about 25. Applications for the January 2010 class are currently being accepted. Go to [www.mab.ksu.edu](http://www.mab.ksu.edu) for more information.

### Employment Required

"This is a professional degree. It is not designed for those individuals coming directly out of their undergraduate experience," explained Lynnette Brummett, coordinator of the program. "In order to apply, you have to have a minimum of two years of professional experience. It is a different type of graduate degree designed for individuals to come into the program prepared to participate in class discussion based on experience and to use the challenges within their company and industry to work on class projects. The work experience plays an important role in studies."

There are some individuals in the program that are employed outside of the food and agribusiness sectors and want to move into these industries, but employment experience is necessary to share in the group discussions and learning process.

### Specialized Focus

"Some academics have begun to be concerned with MBA programs that

teach general information without focus on an industry and whether they should develop more specialized programs where they work with the business skills and conditions prevalent within a particular industry. Probably the biggest difference between our program and a traditional MBA is the specific focus on the food system and adapting the business and economics to the biological and scientific realities of agriculture," said Allen Featherstone, professor and director of the Master in Agribusiness program.

The MAB is basically a merging of a typical Masters of Business Administration and a Masters of Science in Agricultural Economics, Featherstone and Brummett explained. Students go through typical core MBA courses, but even those are taught within a food systems context. As they proceed, the course work focuses even more on food systems and the supply chain. Additionally, they have more subject matter related to world trade and public policy than a typical MBA.

### Internationally Taught Course

During the dozen years of offering the degree program, communications technology has evolved for even better distance learning. The degree program requires earning 39 hours of credits, an industry-related thesis, and three additional hours of an elective. The most popular elective is the internationally taught "Comparative Food and Agriculture Systems" course.

Instructors for this course aren't even on the Kansas State campus — they live in seven different countries. The course

gives a global perspective of the worldwide food supply chain. Featherstone gave an explanation of how the course is taught. "The course is done with DVDs and live recitation sessions. Each week everyone logs into the course using the internet and essentially uses videoconferencing software to have a live question and answer discussion. It is just like a recitation session on campus with your instructor, except in this case the instructor might be in Russia and the students are logging in from their homes. And it works very well."

### Lifelong Networking Encouraged

As for limiting the size of each new class, Featherstone noted, "We don't want a lecture room feel. We want the individuals to develop networking contacts. We stress students develop these networks and take advantage of them throughout their career."

He said everything involved with the MAB program fosters developing relationships. He has been favorably surprised at how a student on another continent and ones in the U.S. can develop personal/business relationships by working on projects in teams. The technology of today allows them to talk and simultaneously look at the same spread sheet via computer software supplied by the university.

### Interest Nationally and Worldwide

Featherstone noted that the program receives applicants from across the U.S. as well as an increasing number of foreign student applicants, especially those in Asia, Africa and South America. There are alumni of the program in 35 states and 25 foreign countries.

The MAB program was originally investigated to establish a program for western Kansas residents to complete an advanced degree through KSU. "We quickly realized that if we were going to do this for western Kansas then let's do it on a broader scale," Featherstone said. There is no doubt it has accomplished much more in becoming a premier program. ♦