

# The Syllabus

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

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## Professional development and alumni reunion event scheduled for August at Cargill in Minnesota

The agricultural industry has come off a period of sustained profitability, and history has shown that periods of high profitability don't continue indefinitely. High prices often cure high prices. The Kansas State University Master of Agribusiness (MAB) program is hosting Agribusiness: What Could Go Wrong?, an event to interact with experts in the agribusiness industry regarding potential "black swans" on the horizon.

The 5th MAB Professional Development Conference will be August 8 and 9 at Cargill's Headquarters in Wayzata, Minn. The agenda includes key topics addressed from different perspectives: food pricing and risk, decision making uncertainty, productivity, and the potential for expansion of arable land.

The event will kick-off Thursday, August 8th in the afternoon with professional programming and plenty



of opportunity for fellowship, fun and networking with classmates and fellow agribusiness professionals.

Here's a sneak peek at the agenda:

### Thursday, August 8

- Food Pricing & Risk
- What Could Happen?
- How Humans Think About and Make Decisions,
- Social time & dinner at the Sheraton Minneapolis West Hotel

### Friday, August 9

- Energy
- Improving Productivity (Crop Yields and
- Technology)
- Global Implications: They Aren't

Making More Land, Are They? MERCOSUR Region, Russia and the Former Soviet Union, and Sub-Saharan Africa

- Lunch
- Where Do We Go From Here?
- Wrap-up & Program Evaluation by 2:00 p.m. and depart for Tours

The event is open to all agribusiness professionals interested in learning more about the current global agriculture industry, so invite your friends and colleagues to attend.

**Registration fee for the conference is \$175 until July 19th** (\$225 after July 19) and includes meals and materials. Interested individuals can register online at [www.mab.ksu.edu](http://www.mab.ksu.edu) or contact Mary Bowen ([mjbowen@ksu.edu](mailto:mjbowen@ksu.edu), 785-532-4435) for more information.

**Hotel Accommodations:** Sheraton Minneapolis West Hotel, 12201 Ridgedale Drive, Minnetonka, MN 55305, 952-593-0000. The MAB rate is \$99/night. Mention KSU (Kansas State University)/Cargill when making your reservation. **Reserve by July 24th.**

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# Alumni Spotlight

## Keith Harris

Class of 2006  
Assistant Professor, Agricultural Economics  
Kansas State University  
Manhattan, Kansas

### From industry to academia: an MAB Alum shares his experience in a Q&A

Keith Harris finished his Master of Agribusiness in 2006 while employed by Farmland Foods. He has since completed a Ph.D. from the University of Missouri-Columbia and is now teaching in the MAB program. We asked him to tell us about his experience from industry to academia.

**Q.** Tell readers a little about your background and work experience.

**A.** I am a city kid that was exposed to opportunities in agribusiness at an early age. My dad worked in the flour mill and grain elevator for ADM in Kansas City, MO. I learned more about hard red winter wheat than most kids my age. Though he never suggested I get into his field of work, I grew to understand the importance of what he did for a living. As I began to think about college and what I wanted to study, I learned about agricultural economics. At the time, a lot of kids my age were studying business administration. I wanted to distinguish myself from the competition, so I learned about all the opportunities in the food industry. I guess that was the first career decision I made to set myself apart from the competition in the labor market. I eventually graduated with a B.S. in Agribusiness; had an internship in banking in agricultural lending during my summer years; and volunteered to be a Peace Corps Volunteer in Honduras, Central America. I was an agribusiness advisor and was exposed to tropical agriculture. Afterwards, I continued my career in the

*"Another reason I chose the MAB program was its thesis component. Believe it or not, I was eager to delve into a problem that had research and business implications."*

assignment with Farmland Foods was the Director of Corporate Procurement where I had supply chain cost and P&L responsibility for segments of pork operations.

**Q.** Why did you decide to pursue the MAB program?

**A.** While managing my career, I understood additional skills and insight into managing firm resources were critical to my success. I had started two other graduate programs, but was unable to complete them because of my moving to a different state. The MAB program gave me the comfort of knowing that if I had to relocate I could still benefit from the complete offerings of the program. I also liked the KSU brand. KSU is well respected across the food industry and I expected the MAB to be no different in terms of it providing a quality experience. Remember I worked with some highly branded companies, so I understood the benefits of branding my own career.

**Q.** How have you benefited from the MAB program?

**A.** Although I run the risk of sounding "cliche", I will say that the network of people have provided me inroads into opportunities that would have otherwise been difficult to experience. Another

reason I chose the MAB program was its thesis component. Believe it or not, I was eager to delve into a problem that had research and business implications. Also, I wanted to experience the process of academic rigor, so I could decide if the Ph.D. was for me.

**Q.** Why did you decide to continue your education and earn your Ph.D.?

**A.** There were three primary reasons and the last point weighed heaviest in my making a decision:



*Dr. Keith Harris, MAB Alum and Faculty*

1) I had a strong desire to add on to my experiences in the food industry. My career in industry was fantastic. We solved problems to meet our goals and we launched projects that were interesting and exciting to watch grow. However, I wanted to have a profound understanding of the problems to bring about longer lasting solutions. Under this premise, I felt my investment would require more thought, analysis, and collaboration.

2) I believed my perspective in volunteering, industry and academia would add to the student classroom experience. To me the college professor has the best opportunities to help students craft their careers. My undergraduate degree taught me how to function in agribusiness. My master's degree taught me how to manage agribusiness, and the Ph.D. helps me to research agribusiness. In many respects, I view the Ph.D. as my service degree. When I combine it with other life experiences, I felt I would have a lot to offer to students and industry. I really enjoy the classroom experience and look forward to engaging students.

3) The freedom to grow in knowledge and understanding is more than a notion. I felt the academic life provided that opportunity, more so than other occupations. I also really like the pace of change and collaborations taking place in industry. The academic life gives me a great opportunity to experience both.

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I like to say I want to have and maintain relationships with both business and academia in the food industry.

**Q.** Have you enjoyed teaching in the MAB program? Describe the experience.

**A.** I enjoy the MAB courses for similar reasons other professors in the department enjoy it. Students bring a more developed sense of their business opportunities and constraints to the class and are eager to learn and be more successful/productive in their environments. But, I just might have a little bit more satisfaction than my esteemed colleagues in our department. For some students, I could represent a living testimony of someone who graduated and extended his role in the food and agribusiness industries.

Describing my experience... hmm.... I taught my first MAB course AGEC 700 Applied Agribusiness Economics this summer. The first time I met with the students was in the same classroom I sat in eight years ago. I have taught other graduate level courses including a competitive analysis course that uses managerial economic concepts, so I was

prepared for the course content, but I must admit I had a little more anxiety during our first meeting than I typically have for other courses. I quickly settled into using the technology as an instructor. The technology is different than when I went through the program as a student, and it requires a lot more involvement from an instructor than it does from the student. The students were patient with me and I appreciate that.

**Q.** How does academia compare to industry?

**A.** This is a great question I get asked a lot by my colleagues in industry. Organizationally, they are very similar in terms of the use of incentives, hierarchy, goals and constraints. There are business and social aspects academia and industry with [surprisingly] seemingly similar degrees of importance. I really like the idea of the freedom to choose your own work in academia. This is probably the biggest difference I can see at this point in my career.

**Q.** What suggestions/advice do you have for anyone considering making the move from industry to teaching?

**A.** It is kind of funny, but I have had some

ask me why I changed careers. I don't look at it as changing my career, but more so of adding on to my career. The teaching and research are merely an addendum to my career in the food industry.

1) Seek the advice of people who love you, who want to see you be successful and have the insight to guide you spiritually, professionally, and financially.

2) Be very clear and honest about why you want to pursue this. Your mind can put you into a lot of situations, but it is your heart that gets you through the tough times. Believe me there will be tough times. Earning the Ph.D. was one of the most difficult things I have done regarding my career.

3) Have faith. For me this journey was my biggest faith walk yet.

4) Be flexible and resilient, things don't always go as planned.

5) Develop a model for your success. Lay out the explanatory variables that will influence your goal and then list your assumptions. Continue to re-run that model as new information becomes available or your assumption become true or false. Adjust, Adjust, Adjust.

## Students complete thesis projects

To read current or previous thesis projects, go to <http://krex.k-state.edu/dspace/> and search by author, title or keywords (no log-in required). To read a thesis written before 2008 or view thesis defense, log onto K-State On-Line, [www.online.ksu.edu](http://www.online.ksu.edu), with your eID and password. Go to the MAB Community Page, go to Files & Content and click on Theses.

**Aaron Bartholomay** ('13), *Analysis of Machine Failure Codes and the Impact on Customer Satisfaction*

**Dana Brooks** ('13), *Potential for Methane Digesters on U.S. Dairy Farms*

**Chris Bursiek** ('13), *Factors Influencing Aftermarket Parts Sales in China: The Case of an American Manufacturer*

**Nanci Daesch** ('13), *Identifying the Finance Skills Sets Needed for a Large Multi-National Agricultural Company*

**Travis Davis** ('12), *General Merchandising LLC's Colleagues' Perceptions of the JMTP Program and its Effectiveness: The Case on How to Produce Effective Leaders*

**Brandon Garrett** ('13), *Impacts of the Recession and Horse Slaughter Ban on the U.S. Thoroughbred Industry*

**Juan Finelli** ('13), *Feasibility of a Commercial Instant Noodle Production Line in Argentina: A Journey to a Fascinating Value-Added Product*

**Grant Good** ('13), *Feasibility of Diesel-Electric Hybrid Drives for Combine Harvesters*

**Beth Holmes** ('13), *Assessing Regional Volatility and Estimating Regional Cotton Acres in the United States*

**Michael Kempke** ('13), *A Logistics Optimization Study for Garden City Co-Op, Inc.*

**Sally Long** ('13), *Evaluating Farm Management Strategy Using Sensitivity and Stochastic Analysis*

**Sosthenes Mwansa** ('13), *Comparative Investment Analysis for Small Scale Broiler and Layer Enterprises in Zambia*

**Ron Vargas** ('13), *Feasibility of Custom Strawberry Farming in Oceanside, California*



# MAB program now offering cohort for animal health professionals at Olathe campus

The MAB distance degree program is now offering an MAB tailored to individuals working in the animal health industry. The one-week “on-campus” portions of the program will be held at K-State Olathe (Olathe, Kans.) in August and October of each year.

“We are pleased to offer the Master of Agribusiness program at the K-State Olathe campus to those working in the animal health sector. The goal of the program is to take people who work in the industry and allow them to learn business and management skills from instructors who understand the animal health and vet medicine industry,” said Dr. Allen Featherstone, Professor of Agricultural Economics and Director of the MAB program.

“Students in the program will learn from faculty with extensive experience in the animal health industry. They will benefit from the opportunity to research the industry more deeply, and will also benefit from the knowledge

and experiences of their classmates who work in the global animal health industry including the companion animal segment, all while developing a network of contacts at the same time.”

The MAB program has been a leading provider of business and management skills for food and agriculture professionals since 1998 and is expanding to add a focus on the animal health industry. The program includes courses in finance, economics, risk management, management, marketing, strategy, policy and others



*K-State Olathe Campus, southwest of Kansas City, KS*

with each course geared toward application to the animal health and agribusiness industries for maximum applicability.



*Veterinarian & MAB Alum Todd Marsh*

“As a practicing large animal veterinarian and owner of a multi-doctor practice I quickly realized that I needed further knowledge in the management of the business of veterinary medicine. At the same time, I realized that the decisions I was making for my large animal clients had important

financial implications that I was not always aware of. K-State’s Master of Agribusiness program provided me with the depth of business skills and exposed me to the broader food system on both a national and international scale,” said MAB Alum Todd Marsh, Veterinarian, Reserve, MT.

Companies in the animal health industry also benefit from having students complete the Master of Agribusiness program. For most MAB students, the thesis is a company-related issue. In essence, while

completing the thesis, the student is solving a problem for their employer. They both gain from the direct application of the business and economic skills to everyday work situations.

Don Hecht, retired Director of Sales & Marketing of Elanco Animal Health believes the company-related thesis is an important aspect and sets the Master of Agribusiness program apart from other programs. “Having worked in the Animal Health Industry for over 25 years I found that the K-State MAB offers some really unique professional growth opportunities for people in our industry. There is no other Master’s program with the proven track record of students integrating their business and economic coursework into a professional thesis which is targeted to be of value to their own business or employer’s business issues.”

Applications are now being accepted for the cohort starting in August. If you know any one who might be interested in joining the Animal Health cohort, or if there are companies we should meet with to share information about the program, please contact Deborah Kohl at 785-532-4495, e-mail [dkohl@ksu.edu](mailto:dkohl@ksu.edu) or go to [www.mab.ksu.edu/AnimalHealth.html](http://www.mab.ksu.edu/AnimalHealth.html).

# Agribusiness tour of Brazil and Argentina planned for February '14

The 6th MAB international agribusiness tour will be of Brazil and Argentina. Scheduled for February 16 - March 1, 2014, the trip includes stops at crop and cattle farms, as well as professional visits to agricultural and food related industries. Guided sightseeing tours will be arranged along with free time to explore Buenos Aires, the waterfalls at Puerto Iguazu, and Sao Paulo.

## Agriculture in South America

Participants on the trip will visit the very heart and soul of the MERCOSUR region's agriculture and agribusiness. Touring farmlands and interviewing farmers, agribusiness executives and experts will allow trip participants to develop a first-hand understanding of MERCOSUR's booming agriculture.

Allen Featherstone, director of the Master of Agribusiness program thinks people will enjoy getting a different perspective on agriculture. "While MERCOSUR is a direct competitor for U.S. agriculture, their

perspective on many issues is very different than the U.S. perspective," Featherstone said. "Understanding management challenges in a region that deals with turbulent macroeconomic conditions, no formal government support, and few formal insurance markets will provide a keen insight into one of the biggest challengers to the U.S. agricultural system. Understanding the process used by the South American livestock sector in dealing with animal traceability will also be educational."

We hope you will join us as we explore all the region has to offer. A tentative itinerary will be available soon at [www.mab.ksu.edu](http://www.mab.ksu.edu). For more information, contact Mary Bowen, [mjbowen@ksu.edu](mailto:mjbowen@ksu.edu) or 785.532.4435.



## Calendar of Events

### July 14-16

Institute of Food Technology Expo in Chicago

### July 19

MAB Professional Development Event  
Early-Bird Registration Deadline

### August 8-9

Professional Development/Alumni  
Reunion Event in Minneapolis, Mn.

### August 11-16

MAB Animal Health Campus Session at  
K-State Olathe

### August 16

Final electronic copy of thesis due  
to Graduate School to be summer  
graduate

### August 18-23

MAB Campus Session in Southeast Asia

### August 21-22

Risk & Profit Conference hosted by  
K-State Agricultural Economics

### August 24-26

CVC Tradeshow in Kansas City

### October 4

Deadline to complete iSIS application to  
graduate in fall

### October 20-26

MAB Animal Health Campus Session at  
K-State Olathe

### October 27 - November 1

MAB Campus Session in Southeast Asia

### October 29

Deadline to schedule oral defense to  
have name printed in commencement  
program

### November 8

AFA Career Fair in Kansas City

### November 22

Final electronic copy of thesis due  
to Graduate School to be fall graduate

### December 13

Final electronic copy of thesis due  
to Graduate School to be Spring '14 grad  
without enrolling for spring hours

### December 13

K-State fall commencement at Bramlage  
Coliseum

## Visit MAB at IFT in Chicago

The Master of Agribusiness will have a booth at the Institute of Food Technologists Annual Meeting and Food Expo July 14-16 at the McCormick Place Convention Center in Chicago. MAB will share booth #2319 with the K-State Food Science Institute.

If you're going to be at IFT, stop by and visit Deborah and Mary at booth #2319. We'd love to see you!





## Congratulations to our Spring 2013 Graduates!



MAB students pictured above attended the Commencement Ceremony in May. Left to right: Travis Davis, Brandon Garrett, Nanci Daesch, Sage Kim, Juan Finelli, Dana Brooks, Chris Busiek, Aaron Bartholomay, Ron Vargas and Michael Kempke.

## in the news...

**Leah Suellentrop**, ('02), and family will be relocating to Singapore for the next five years where she will be opening an office for Hoogwegt. They are making the move July 13th.

**Robert Deraas**, ('03), was named President of CHS Sunflower on June 17th. Previously he had served as operations manager. He assumed the position July 1st. Robert joined CHS in April 2006.

**Timothy Loh**, ('03) has changed jobs and now is Deputy Regional Director of the U.S. Soybean Export Council in Singapore.

**Brent Johnson**, ('04), is plant manager of a Bay State Milling Plant in Platteville, CO that makes organic flour for Whole Foods Market. Whole Foods Market awarded Bay State Milling for being the best supplier of Commodity Ingredients.

**Ryan Bennett**, ('15), was married on July 6th in Frederick, MD.

**Matthew Smith**, ('12), and wife Kristy welcomed a baby boy, Jace Louis Smith, on June 6.

**Emmanuel Foko**, ('08), has a new job in Oneonta, NY. He is now the Production Planning Manager for US Plants at CHOBANI.

**Charles Loubersac d'Hotel**, ('12), has a new job as Managing Director of Perten Instruments France Sasu.

**Natasha Sadofsky**, ('12), accepted a job with the BNSF Railway as a Trainmaster Trainee and will be moving to Lincoln, NE.

**Audra Weber**, ('12), and her husband had a baby boy, Rhett Aiden Weber, on March 2.

**Emily Barwick**, ('13), married Shane Bass on April 13 in Hickory, NC.

**Marvin Goertz**, ('12), has accepted a new job as Technical Services Manager at Canyon Bakehouse in Loveland, CO.

**Kevin Black**, ('15), was promoted to Market President of Pinnacle Bank in Palmer, NE as of May 16th.

**David Bahre**, ('14), and wife, Kim, received final approval to open Wheat State Distilling in Wichita this summer. They plan to produce multiple alcoholic beverages made, for the most part, from Kansas wheat.

**Jacob Bailey**, ('14), has changed jobs. He still works for CHS, but now works as Grain Merchandiser in the Grain Marketing Division at the Pekin, IL location.

**Christy Wipperfurth**, ('14), and her husband, Jose, welcomed baby Emma Grace on May 11th in Kenosha, WI. Emma was 18.5 inches long and weighed 6 lbs. 8 oz.

**Brook Mitchell**, ('15), changed jobs and now works for Agrigold Hybrids.

**Blake Hansen**, ('14) and his wife welcomed a new baby on July 5.