



Purdue News

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First class of food and agribusiness MBAs to graduate in August

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. – While most of their communication with professors and each other has been via the Internet, all the members of the first [agribusiness executive MBA](#) class are scheduled to be on hand for Aug. 5 graduation ceremonies at Purdue University's West Lafayette campus.

Two years ago, the Krannert Graduate School of Management and the School of Agriculture welcomed the first class of working professionals in the food and agribusiness industry to a largely Internet-based MBA. Class members will be coming in from all over the country to hear the strains of "Pomp and Circumstance" in person and pick up their degrees.

In fact, the class is coming in fresh off two weeks at the Wageningen Agricultural University and Research Centre in the Netherlands, where the American and Dutch students compared experiences and notes in the decidedly different American and European food and agribusiness markets.

"Our students heard from European operating managers, such as themselves, who are grappling with complex issues, such as GMOs and positioning themselves with the consumer," says Jay T. Akridge, the agricultural economics professor who directs the program.

"We learned from the Dutch students that in Europe, farming is not viewed as solely for food production," says graduating student Eric Perry, grain industry coordination manager for DuPont Specialty Grains in Johnston, Iowa. "Because of the population density in Europe, farming is viewed as part of the culture and everyday life."

Purdue's agribusiness MBA program is the only distance-delivered MBA in the nation with a focus on the food and agribusiness industry. The MBA underlines the new skill set needed to compete in the increasingly complex business of food production,

marketing and delivery in the global marketplace.

Akridge says, "Our courses focus on the study of food and agribusiness through a management foundation, industry-specific topics and the networking that occurs among our students who come from across the food and agribusiness industry."

The mostly wired MBA educational experience offers students a Web site for each class and weekly "lectures" made up of faculty-prepared PowerPoint slides, many with audio clips. The students post their questions and comments to online class discussions. In addition, the students have group projects they complete largely over the Internet. The food and agribusiness MBA is a two-year program.

But the students also have flown in to West Lafayette for a total of seven weeks of classes before the Netherlands trip. The on-campus activities included an orientation week and then three two-week sessions during each semester.

"The students in the first class have become very close," says Luanna DeMay, the executive MBA in food and agribusiness program manager. She says the students have taken their time on campus together to get to know each other. When they return to their jobs, they have spent untold hours online taking classes, doing team projects and "talking" to their professors and each other about the complicated, modern business of food.

The students have spent an average of 20 hours per week on the three classes per 22-week semester. During their first year, the students have covered food and agribusiness economics, markets, trade and regulation; accounting; quantitative methods for decision-making; human resource management and organizational behavior; and marketing management.

This year they've studied agricultural production and operations; financial and strategic food and agribusiness management; the legal environment of business; risk analysis and management; and international food and agribusiness strategy.

Perry says the wired MBA compares favorably with weekend executive MBA programs. Perry changed jobs and moved from North Carolina to Iowa during year one and year two of the program. "I couldn't have done that with a weekend program," he said.

"The program content and delivery far exceeded my expectations. It was also important that we had a committed group of students with a high drive to learn. There was great interaction throughout with both faculty and your classmates, who were always just an e-mail, phone call or conference call away."

The students, with an average age of 34 and 11 years of business experience, are all employed full time, which is why the program is called an executive MBA. They come from Dow AgroSciences, Hormel Foods LLC, Cargill Corp., seed companies and corporate farming operations from New York to California and Minnesota to Mexico.

The second class of food and agribusiness executive MBAs are one year into the program. This group, which includes a Ph.D. agronomist and a veterinarian, averages 39 years old and brings 16 years of experience from such varied companies as Deere & Co., Slim-Fast Foods Co. and Pioneer Hi-Bred International Inc.

For information and entrance requirements, prospective executive MBA students may contact DeMay at 1145 Krannert Building, West Lafayette, IN 47907; (765) 494-4270; or via e-mail at luanna@purdue.edu.

The Krannert Graduate School of Management, which began its executive programs in 1983, offers executive master of science degrees in management and international management. These are largely distance-learning, Internet-based programs, like the executive MBA in food and agribusiness. In addition, Krannert offers an on-campus executive weekend program leading to a master's degree in management.

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