

APPLIED RESEARCH

by Rebecca Frazier

One of the main pillars of Purdue's Center for Food and Agricultural Business is applied research. But what makes applied research different than any other research?

In general, applied research uses scientific theories and methodologies to offer practical solutions to real-world issues and tackle problems faced by different industry facets, says **Masi Keshavarz**, the center's research project manager.

"Within the center specifically, applied research is conducted to help agribusinesses better understand the buying behaviors of agricultural producers," she says. "This information is crucial to all sectors of the agricultural industry — especially the inputs suppliers whose goals are to align their company offerings with the needs of producers in ways that will bring value to their farming operations."

The information gathered from research conducted at the center can immediately be employed in businesses to better suit their needs, including increasing awareness of economic issues facing the agricultural industry along with analysis of the impacts these issues have.

DIFFERENCES IN RESEARCH

The reason and way in which research is conducted typically lands it in one of three categories: pure, applied or development. In pure research, the information gathered is driven by curiosity or interest in a scientific question. The main motivation for pure research to expand knowledge, rather than solving issues.

On the other hand, applied research is driven by the need to solve issues of practical problems in the real world. Development research takes it one step further to develop these discovered ideas or technologies into products. Simply put, pure research fills a knowledge gap, applied research takes the knowledge to solve a problem and

development research takes the problem-solving information to create a product.

In recent years, agricultural research has shifted a bit, trending away from pure to applied. This is due in part to the passion of researchers and push from the industry.

Not only are they investigating where issues have arisen, but also what solutions will be most effective in solving these issues. The industry is pushing to have these issues solved to optimize inputs and outputs, creating more value for producers. This trend in increasing applied research has proven successful in the agricultural industry.

CENTER RESEARCH

The Center for Food and Agricultural Business has had a focus on applied research from the start because of the value in building upon areas that the industry deems important.

The largest research project that the center conducts is the "Large Commercial Producer Project." This study is done every four years to explore the fundamental attitudes of commercial producers. It digs deeper to fully understand the buying preferences and behaviors of farmers as they make their agricultural inputs purchasing decisions.

The research gathered is used to benefit all aspects of the agricultural industry, ranging from manufacturers to retailers. These insights result in strategic opportunities for agribusiness companies and professionals in response to producer behaviors.

Other research initiatives that the center has recently conducted include the "Multi-Generational Farm Study," which looks at the buying behaviors and decision processes of farms in which multiple generations are involved in management, and talent management in agribusiness, which looks at strategy and talent

requirements, talent acquisition, performance management, learning and development, engagement and retention and succession planning.

The center conducts many other research efforts that explore a variety of areas in agricultural economics.

"The overall mission of the center's research is to help people in the food and agribusiness industries improve their management competencies to take on the challenges and opportunities of this ever-evolving business environment," Keshavarz said.

"We do this research partly to ensure that the information presented in the center's programs is current and accurate to address today's economic issues," she says.

FUTURE OF APPLIED RESEARCH

Michael Gunderson, Associate Director for the center, believes that there is great potential for the future of applied research. He stressed the importance of enhancing talent management to support businesses in their pursuit and retention of high-performing employees.

Gunderson also mentioned the fact that the structure of many farms is changing, which means there is potential for talent management research and implications to stretch beyond input suppliers and onto farms.

"Consolidation of smaller farms, leading to growth of larger farms, continues to change the way decisions are made and who makes them," he says.

"Research in talent management will be the next big push from the industry. "More information from research in this area will improve farming and make it more efficient and effective, improving overall performance," Gunderson says. **AM**