



Purdue News

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EMBA in Food and Agribusiness offers flexibility, quality

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. – The number of female executives in the food and agricultural business industries has been on the rise in the past few years, with women now comprising nearly half of all management positions.

This upward trend of female managers also is beginning to show up in Purdue University's two-year executive MBA in food and agricultural business program, due in part to the flexibility the program offers.

Sarah Vacek, a marketing associate at Monsanto Company for its swine genetics business, earned the EMBA in August 2001. She was the only woman in the first Purdue EMBA in Food and Agribusiness class.

"Women face so many demands on their time and tough choices that it makes some traditionally structured EMBA programs seem unrealistic," Vacek said. "The flexibility provided with the Purdue EMBA program allows for a high-quality education while helping students maintain other life commitments."

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were more than three times as many male executives in agriculture than female just 10 years ago. Last year, male executives in agriculture numbered 50,000. Female executives were not far behind at 46,000, or 48 percent of managerial staff.

The program has not seen this distribution demonstrated in its first three classes, but the number of female students is steadily increasing. Classes since Vacek's have each doubled in the number of women enrolled. The second class has two women, while the third class, which will graduate in August 2003, has four.

"I found this program more appealing than others I looked at for two reasons," said Deborah Hoyt, a food microbiologist at Cryovac North America in Duncan, S.C., who is in the third class. "First, it is geared specifically toward individuals in food and agricultural businesses. I did not find another program, online or otherwise, like it out there. Second, I

liked the mix of online class work and on-campus time."

Seventy percent of the coursework is Web-based, so students can learn from home or while traveling for their jobs. All students in a class take the same set of courses. The degree is divided in four modules with students taking three classes per module over a two-year period.

The program Web site includes links to courses, biographies of faculty members, biographies of other students and forums where students can discuss assignments. There also are chat rooms where students can visit with each other on a social level. Courses are archived for at least one year so those students returning to the workplace can access them.

Luanna DeMay, EMBA in Food and Agricultural Business program manager, said while there is no dissertation or thesis required, students do complete a major project during the program's final module.

"The capstone project is designed by the student to address a problem they are facing at their company," she said.

"They're expected to use the concepts, tools and ideas they have taken from the EMBA program and put them to work in addressing a significant problem or opportunity at their jobs."

Students meet face-to-face in the classroom for a total of nine weeks over the two year span – a one-week orientation and three two-week sessions at Purdue's West Lafayette campus. They also spend two weeks at Wageningen Agricultural University in Holland.

Purdue's EMBA program in Food and Agricultural Business is a joint effort between the School of Agriculture and the Krannert School of Management, whose executive programs were ranked 14th in the nation by Business Week. The EMBA program also won an "Outstanding Contribution to Distance Learning Program" award from R1.edu.

"The awards are great, but the success of the program really comes through in the evaluation by the students," DeMay said. "And their evaluations are fabulous."

Vacek said the program provides valuable insights needed to tackle tough managerial problems.

"Clearly, the strategy and international strategy classes provided concepts that took my thinking to a new level," she said. "One concept that was reviewed in two courses, called real options theory, has helped shape and expand my thinking about unique business approaches."

Ariana Cohen, a student in the second class, agreed with Vacek's evaluation.

"I recommend this course to any person who wishes to have better tools for understanding how to run a business in today's environment," she said. "The course opens the mind and updates you with the current events and changes in the business world."

Purdue's EMBA in Food and Agricultural Business program is the only one of its kind offered in the United States. The degree is accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. Applications are currently being accepted for the next class, beginning in July 2002.

Program information on the EMBA in Food and Agricultural Business is available on the Web at <http://www.emba-agbus.purdue.edu>. For additional information, contact DeMay at 1145 Krannert Building, West Lafayette, IN, 47907; (765) 494-4270; or via e-mail at luanna@purdue.edu.

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