



## Food industry executive development program deepens managerial capacity

Food and agribusiness companies are finding their market environment to be increasingly complex, volatile and international, often with fewer managerial candidates who have a deep understanding of these changes. They are also often forced by competition to be lean, with little bench strength. Many find it difficult to find time to upgrade managers' training and/or to prepare them for succession, aggravated by the cost and time commitment of traditional MBA and similar university programs.

One solution is a management program that almost 200 people have completed, called Canadian Food and Agribusiness Management Excellence (CFAME).

CFAME's objective is to prepare prospective senior managers for general management in food and agribusiness: it is designed to broaden the training of people who have been on a specific professional path — such as operations, marketing or HR — so they are prepared for general management responsibilities.

To achieve its objective, CFAME is presented in modules on strategy development, strategic planning, financial management and marketing, as well as managing human resources, operations and risk, all in the context of the unfolding trends and realities of the agri-food sector. A team of hand-picked professionals who have both sound academic training and years of real world experience teach and “coach” in the program.

CFAME is taught in four intensive four-day segments across Canada, each

of which includes tours of outstanding agri-food management.

It is specifically tailored to the individual because participants develop a strategic and operating plan for their area of responsibility. As a result, an advantage is that they have the opportunity to get away from day-to-day pressures and systematically focus on the longer-term, often resulting in breakthroughs that improve productivity or marketing.

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In fact, when asked about the program's value, one of the most frequent responses is that it encourages participants to apply the management concepts taught in the course to their individual situations: providing greater retention and superior application. The program often literally transforms how graduates perceive and perform their management function. It provides a structured and disciplined approach to strategy, planning, and implementation that many find extremely useful. But it is not so structured that they cannot adapt it to their own preferences and businesses.

A second frequently cited outcome is that participants learn from other seasoned practitioners in the agri-food sector. The course attracts people

with at least five years' experience who are in middle management and want to move up, or who are CEOs and general managers with recently expanded responsibilities. It is expressly designed to maximize interaction among participants so they can learn from each other. Many comment that this is an improvement over in-house management courses that may cover similar material, but are couched in the context of the “mother company's” way of thinking. People hear different ways of thinking about similar problems from people who have faced them. They are often surprised by how much they learn from people in different industries, and seeing that someone in a grain-based industry has problems similar to someone in a vegetable-based industry, financial services, or even a not-for-profit.

Similarly, graduates like the exposure to the entire supply chain. Participants include primary and secondary processors, retailers, financial services and associations/not for profits. For many it is their first opportunity to see, and often be amazed at, the level of scientific, engineering and managerial sophistication of others in the supply chain. This is, of course, magnified by the course tours.

A final factor cited is the development of a like-minded network — from both course participants and an ongoing alumni program that is designed by Agri-Food Management Excellence, Inc., which offers CFAME. Several agribusiness and food companies also use CFAME as integral parts of their professional development platforms. 🍎

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