



Canadian Total Excellence
in Agricultural Management
(CTEAM) program:

Graduate Evaluation

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Preface

Agri-Food Management Excellence (AME) and Farm Management Canada (FMC) have long worked together. FMC and one of AME's principals were the originators of Canada's executive management course for top farmers in 1998. It made good sense for them to continue their work together on this project to evaluate how farmers use executive management programs.

For several years, the participant evaluations of each section of AME's CTEAM and CFAME executive management programs have provided evidence that participants were pleased with what they received, and often had good ideas for how to make improvements. Many of their suggestions were incorporated into the programs.

Never in the history of either of the two courses has there been in-depth analysis of the long-term benefits to participants of the programs. CTEAM was initiated with funding from FMC in 1998 and FMC has always regarded the course as Canada's national training program for agricultural managers. In the winter of 2013/14, conversations between AME and FMC led quickly to the idea for such an evaluation. FMC generously funded part of the evaluation of the course, its content, opportunities for improvement, the ongoing Alumni Program for graduates, and the marketing of CTEAM.

This document reports on the evaluation by graduates. Originally commissioned as an internal study, FMC and AME have chosen to make this report public to help shed light on the learning preferences and practices of Canada's farmers while also encouraging farmers to invest in their business management skills development as evidenced by the tangible results of program graduates.

AME is grateful to FMC for financing the study. We are also extremely grateful to FMC's Executive Director Heather Watson, for the leadership she provided in the conduct of the study and writing of the final report. Her knowledge of the literature on farm management training and learning is unparalleled. This knowledge contributed richly to the work.

Farm Management Canada (FMC) would like to thank Larry Martin, Heather Broughton and the entire Agri-Food Management Excellence Inc. team for the opportunity to work in close collaboration on this initiative. It has allowed the team to peer behind the curtain of CTEAM, Canada's only national farm business management training program, to look not only at the program's achievements on farms across Canada, but also for Canadian agriculture. It has also allowed the study of the fundamental elements of the CTEAM program in the context of the current and future agricultural industry as it relates to participant experience and opportunities for program enhancement, including elements of the Alumni program and lifelong learning opportunities.

FMC is a national organization dedicated exclusively to the development and delivery of farm business management information, resources and tools to enable Canadian farmers to make sound management decisions. CTEAM continues to be the premier farm business management core skills development program in Canada, and FMC is proud to support the CTEAM program and its commitment to excellence, as shown by this project.

FMC wishes to acknowledge Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Government of Canada for their support of this project under the Growing Forward 2 program.

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Canadian Total Excellence in Agricultural Management (CTEAM) program: Graduate Evaluation

Larry Martin, Heather Watson, Heather Broughton, Derek Albrecht and Tracey Werry¹

Executive Summary

In an ever-changing and increasingly competitive global marketplace, Canada's farmers require the appropriate resources and tools to capture opportunity – to anticipate, respond to, and plan for change.

Much of the solution to deal with these intensifying realities lies in applying proven business practices, and fostering innovative business thinking through skills development and building strong stakeholder networks. With farm business management skill, comes the ability to seek out, assess and take advantage of opportunities to succeed.

Agri-Food Management Excellence Inc. (AME) has played an integral role in equipping Canada's farmers with the business skills required to manage for success through practical learning provided by CTEAM and the Alumni program.

The CTEAM (Canadian Total Excellence in Agricultural Management) program began in 1998 and is recognized as the premier management training program for primary producers and ranchers in Canada. Participants from across regions and production sectors work towards developing a strategic and operational plan for their farm businesses as a mechanism to facilitate learning and retention of the subject matter. Participants also become part of a national network of leading-edge managers and farm business entrepreneurs, equipped with the skills to confront change with confidence and take advantage of new opportunities for innovation and innovative business thinking.

CTEAM is a two-year program administered in four, four-day sessions across Canada over a span of two years. A new course starts each year. Since its inception, CTEAM has honoured over 200 graduates from all across Canada, welcoming typically 15-20 participants per class. Many participants have been 'young farmers', defined as under the age of 40, having a prominent management role on the farm.

CTEAM uses practical learning, tangible outcomes and a Canada-wide experience, providing an opportunity to maximize adoption of beneficial management practices, while establishing a path for lifelong learning.

In an effort to evaluate the program's effectiveness and opportunities for enhancement, AME partnered with Farm Management Canada (FMC) in May 2014 to investigate:

¹ Larry Martin and Heather Broughton are Principals of Agri-Food Management Excellence, Heather Watson is Executive Director of Farm Management Canada, Derek Albrecht and Tracey Werry are Associates of Agri-Food management Excellence

1. CTEAM graduate feedback regarding the benefits of CTEAM and the Alumni program, and opportunities for enhancement
2. Comparable skills development programs
3. Marketing and promotional options for CTEAM and beneficial business practices in general

This report contains feedback from CTEAM graduates. The research was conducted in June and July 2014.

Participants were selected at random. These graduates were contacted by phone and email with an invitation to complete the survey interview. There were a total of 35 questions, including demographic questions. A total of 22 interviews were conducted with CTEAM graduates who completed the program between 2000 and 2014.

RESULTS

RESULTS: BENEFITS OF CTEAM

By all measures, CTEAM graduates benefitted from the program. Whether it is measured in terms of beneficial management practices gained, return on investment, improvements in various factors from profitability and confidence in their management ability, or access to capital, graduates very strongly indicate that they received and continue to receive significant benefits. The economic benefits exceeded the cost of participating in the program by a wide margin. Half of respondents reported a 20% (or higher) return on their investment in the program, while nobody reported an ROI less than 5%. In other words, it was worth it. Respondents also gave the program very high marks compared to other types of training and skills development opportunities they have received.

RESULTS: CTEAM PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND COMPONENTS

There is widespread satisfaction with the structure and components of the program. Over 80% of graduates ranked the program very good or excellent on duration, frequency, accommodations, social time, and classmate interaction. While cost and ease of travel ranked lower, 100% of the respondents agreed that moving the course across Canada adds significant benefit. In essence, the results indicate that the benefit/cost ratio is high and that the cost is worth it.

Over half of respondents had no suggestions for improving the program content. While respondents recognized program participants span across production sectors, suggested improvements included more consideration for the diversity of operations in ensuring content relates to all participants and data (such as financial) could be more easily compared across different types of operations.

Suggested module content improvements included a greater international perspective, different marketing strategies explored, and negotiation as a topic. Respondents also expressed a desire for instructor diversity throughout the modules.

RESULTS: ATTITUDES TOWARD THE CTEAM ALUMNI PROGRAM AND LIFELONG LEARNING

The majority of respondents have already participated in or have an interest in participating in the Alumni Program. The major stumbling blocks are cost, time and timing.

All of the respondents are interested in further learning opportunities and indicated a wide range of approaches to doing so would be acceptable. These include coaching, mentoring, benchmarking, online discussion forums, in-class workshops, peer networks and tours.

Many are pursuing other types of training. Respondents participate in and plan to participate in blended learning, using a combination of in-class and online learning and discussion groups.

The majority of respondents have considered taking CTEAM again, to brush up on their management skills. One respondent suggested creating an advanced CTEAM II program for graduates.

RESULTS: MARKETING THE CTEAM PROGRAM

Respondents gave a wide range of suggestions for improving the marketing of CTEAM including using social media, marketing through cost-share skills development programs, having a presence at ag shows and industry events, and using the Alumni to promote the program and encourage others to participate.

While the vast majority of respondents have recommended the program to others, it is important to observe that a few respondents noted that they either would not recommend the program due to the competition advantage they gain over competitors, or they are extremely careful to whom they recommend the program.

Respondents had a number ideas for communicating the benefits of the program, including demonstrating the tangible benefits to farmers (statistics like ROI), promoting farm business management and skills development in general as a necessity to survive, using testimonials from alumni to speak of their experience, working with other organizations and companies such as banks who can speak to the financial benefits of business skills development, addressing the fear some farmers may have of facing the reality of their farm business, and adding a scholarship or other component that speaks to social responsibility.

RESULTS: FINANCING THE CTEAM PROGRAM

The majority of respondents recommend continuing to align CTEAM to be eligible for cost-share funding opportunities provided by the Provincial and Territorial Ministries of Agriculture, or otherwise getting private companies and lending institutions to support client participation. However respondents felt it is important for participants to maintain some 'skin in the game' and finance a portion of the program themselves, to appreciate the program's value and take the learning opportunity seriously. Respondents note the program should continue to be priced based upon actual program value.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION: CONTINUED DEPTH AND DIVERSITY OF COURSE MATERIAL

AME should continue to provide broad spectrum course content and to ensure course content including examples and case studies related to the diversity of operations within a given class. AME should focus on instilling a broad understanding of agriculture and the diversity of operations, marketing strategies and management strategies (including negotiation) both domestically and internationally. AME should continue to seek top notch instructors, ensuring instructor diversity throughout the modules.

RECOMMENDATION: EXPANDED PROGRAMMING, BLENDED LEARNING, LIFELONG LEARNING COMPONENTS

AME should explore the range of options for expanded programming and blended learning for CTEAM participants, graduates and potential recruits. AME should explore enriching the benchmarking, coaching and mentoring, and workshops and adding peer networks, online discussion groups. AME should also explore the possibility of graduates taking CTEAM again, or developing a CTEAM II program. There may be a way to consolidate and focus these offerings into a logical and cogent package.

RECOMMENDATION: EXPAND MARKETING EFFORTS, UTILIZE ALUMNI AS PROMOTERS

AME should develop a robust communications and marketing plan, taking into account all of the suggestions from survey respondents, including but not limited to:

- AME should seek to use results of the graduate evaluation survey pertaining to program benefits to market the program.
- AME should endeavour to use diverse marketing channels to promote the CTEAM program, producer participation, and promote the benefits of business management practices and skills development in general.
- AME should reach out to diverse stakeholder groups such as alumni, advisors, agricultural organizations, farm organizations, input suppliers, academia, government and lending institutions to promote the program.
- AME should endeavour to use diverse media to promote the program including social media, physical presence at trade shows, conferences and industry meetings, and traditional media such as advertising and brochures.
- AME should encourage spouses, family and farm teams to participate together.

RECOMMENDATION: INTEGRATE WITH EXISTING COST-SHARE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

AME should seek to continue having CTEAM recognized for cost-share funding through the Ministries of Agriculture and integrated within or linked to other farm business skills development initiatives both domestically and internationally.

RECOMMENDATION: SEEK SUPPORT FROM BENEFACITOR INSTITUTIONS

AME should seek financial and promotional support for CTEAM from those institutions recognized as benefiting from investing in the business skills of Canada's farmers, most notably, input suppliers and lending institutions.

RECOMMENDATION: CONTINUOUS, ENHANCED EVALUATION

Finally, as noted in the introduction, this CTEAM graduate survey was perhaps long overdue, and has signalled an opportunity to not only improve annual evaluations from program graduates and stakeholders, but look into a scheduled follow-up survey of program graduates to measure the long-term benefits of the CTEAM program on an ongoing basis.

Overall, these survey findings signal an opportunity to enhance the CTEAM program in content, marketing and complementary learning opportunities. It will be important to test the new ideas with current and future participants, as well as current and potential supporters. Program administrators will take the recommended changes derived from the evaluation into account when evaluating the 2013-15 class, and preparing for each intake going forward.

Additional detail is provided in the report below or by written request to AME.

1. Introduction

The CTEAM (Canadian Total Excellence in Agricultural Management) program began in 1998 and is recognized as the premier management training program for primary producers and ranchers in Canada.

The CTEAM program is administered by Agri-Food Management Inc. (AME). Farm Management Canada (FMC), under whose auspices the program originated, continues to be a major supporter of the program. As the only national farm business management training program, CTEAM provides a foundation for farm management excellence by using practical learning, tangible outcomes and a Canada-wide experience. CTEAM both provides an experience to maximize adoption of beneficial management practices, while establishing a path for lifelong learning for participants. For FMC, CTEAM is also a means to study business skills development and how best to promote the adoption of beneficial management practices and farm business management as a whole.

CTEAM

CTEAM is a two-year program administered in four, four-day sessions across Canada over two years. A new program starts each year.

Participants work towards developing a strategic and operational plan for their farm businesses as a mechanism to facilitate learning and retention of the subject matter. Participants gain business skills and confidence in their ability to apply these skills to their farm business for continued excellence. Participants also become part of a national network of leading-edge managers and farm business entrepreneurs, equipped with the skills to confront change with confidence and take advantage of new opportunities for innovation and innovative business thinking.

Since its inception, CTEAM has honoured over 200 graduates from across Canada, welcoming typically 15-20 participants per class. Many participants have been 'young farmers', defined as under the age of 40, having a prominent management role on the farm. At the request of participants, AME initiated a life-long learning process through an Alumni program. CTEAM graduates are invited to participate in the Alumni programs.

Evaluating CTEAM

While CTEAM sessions are evaluated by participants at the time of offering, and the CTEAM proponents regularly seek areas for improvement, CTEAM has never gone through a thorough analysis of its program in its entirety.

FMC and AME decided to collaborate to conduct a thorough evaluation of the program.

The evaluation consists of three components:

1. Survey feedback from graduates of the program
2. Interviews and a literature review of comparable farm management training programs (Canada and international)
3. An evaluation of the marketing of CTEAM

This report pertains to survey feedback from graduates of the program and recommended next steps for CTEAM and Alumni program enhancement including best practices from other programs and marketing opportunities. However, separate reports are available for the literature review of comparable farm management training programs and evaluating the marketing of CTEAM as conducted outside of the graduate survey.

1.1 Objectives

The overall intents of the graduate evaluation of CTEAM are:

- To obtain an evaluation from graduates after taking the course to understand how the course has affected their management and operations
- To determine whether participants see improvements that should be made either to CTEAM or to the alumni program

The specific objectives of the work reported here are to evaluate the program in the following areas:

- Lasting impacts on graduates' farm operations
- Benefits realized as a result of CTEAM
- Areas for program improvement (including the Alumni program)
- Ongoing needs of CTEAM graduates
- Lessons learned from other farm management programs
- Opportunities in marketing the program

1.2 Methodology

While the graduate evaluation originally aimed for 30 to 40 participants, the project team began to see little variation between responses after 20 interviews. In the end, 22 interviews were conducted with CTEAM graduates who completed the program between 2000 and 2014. Participants were selected at random. These graduates were contacted by phone and email with an invitation to complete the survey interview. There were a total of 35 questions, including demographic questions.

To preserve non-biased responses and interpretation thereof, interviews were conducted by AME administrative staff members who had no previous contact with the graduates.

Mitigating Factors

To gather detailed feedback, the project team aimed to conduct all of the interviews by telephone. However, since producers were in their busiest season, and survey results were being used to inform marketing the 2014-2016 program, not everyone was available by phone. Sixteen of the 22 interviews were completed over the phone, while six were completed online. The questions asked in both the telephone and online surveys were identical. The survey questions were created jointly by FMC and AME staff based in part on literature that undertook similar analyses, and the online survey was created and administered using SurveyMonkey.

The CTEAM program prides itself on delivering timely and relevant programming by top notch instructors. As indicated in the Introduction, the instructional team reviews each 2-year Class upon completion in order to assess what worked and identify areas for improvement. Thus, each 2-year program or 'Class' is slightly different as the program team has consistently made improvements in every offering. The fact that alumni were interviewed from across classes that graduated between 2000 and 2014 means that each class had a slightly different program. It is important to note that quite substantial changes were made to the program before the 2012/2014 and 2013/2015 classes. As a result

of this, some issues identified by those in early classes have already been addressed in terms of course content.

2. Respondent Demographics

Survey respondents represent significant diversity across production sectors, age, industry experience, level of education, and financial performance.

Here is a summary of respondent demographics (by majority):

- 40% of respondents are 25-40 years old, while 45% of respondents are 41-55 years old
- 50% of respondents have a University Degree, 31% have a College Diploma, and 9% have a High School Diploma
- 59% of respondents have 21 or more years' experience in agriculture, while 37% have 10-20 years' experience in agriculture
- Respondents cover most production sectors (apart from aquaculture and greenhouse/nursery) including non-traditional and niche production
- 63% of respondents produce crops, grain and oilseed, 37% produce field fruit and vegetables, while dairy, hogs, poultry and tree fruit and vine are comparable at 10-12%
- 85% of respondents are in either an Expanding (54%) or Transitioning (31%) phase in their farm business
- 87% of respondents have gross farm sales/receipts over \$1 million. 50% of respondents have between \$1 million and \$5 million while 37% have \$5 million or more
- 13 of the respondents are from Ontario and nine are from the Prairie Provinces. This reflects the fact that the majority of participants are from those two regions, with a few each from Nova Scotia, Quebec and British Columbia.

When comparing to 2011 Census of Agriculture data, the above statistics become important to note.

According to the Census of Agriculture²:

- 48% of farm operators were aged 55 or older, while only 8% were under 35 years old
- 17% of farm operators had a University Degree, 19% had a College Diploma, while 26% had a High School Diploma
- 30% of farm operators produced crops, grain and oilseed, 18% produced beef, 6% produced dairy, 4% produced tree fruit and nuts, greenhouse and nursery, and 2% produced poultry and egg, sheep and goats and hog
- 3.2% of farm operators have annual gross farm sales/receipts over \$1 million and \$5 million, while 37% have annual gross farm sales/receipts of \$5 million or more.

Compared to the average farm operator in Canada, CTEAM attracts younger, more highly educated farmers with greater economic impact on the Canadian agricultural sector.

² Statistics Canada, Government of Canada. *2011 Census of Agriculture*. Online: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/ca-ra2011/index-eng.htm>

3. Summary and Interpretation of Survey Results

Summary results of the survey of CTEAM graduates are presented in this section.

Here are some of the key findings:

- All of graduates have recommended the CTEAM program to others, averaging 5-10 people. Many said they would recommend to producers who are “forward thinkers” and not “set in their ways”
- 77% of respondents have experienced a moderate or significant benefit in **Profitability** as a result of CTEAM
- 91% of respondents have experienced a moderate or significant benefit in **Confidence in their operation and their ability to manage** as a result of CTEAM
- 77% of respondents have experienced a moderate or significant benefit in **Opportunities for Expansion** as a result of CTEAM
- 91% of respondents have experienced a moderate or significant benefit in **Networking Opportunities** as a result of CTEAM
- 95% of respondents indicate CTEAM at least **met their expectations**, while 64% said the program **exceeded or greatly exceeded** their expectations
- The most valuable aspects of the program include:
 - Financial ratios, Planning, Networking, Quality instructors and that the course requires participants to create and follow through on a written plan
- Respondents overwhelmingly rated the content of the course as “very good” to “excellent” for Management and Financial topics covered, Quality of Instructors, Instructional approach and the Industry Tours
- 45% of respondents specifically mentioned they got the most out of the **Financial Module**
- 82% of participants indicate a **return on investment (ROI)** greater than 10%, with 50% achieving a **ROI greater than 20%**
- 100% of respondents indicated spreading the program over two years into four modules located across Canada enhances the program
- Most participants have participated or plan to participate in the CTEAM alumni program when time permits
- 100% of respondents have had at least some contact with fellow participants/instructors since completing CTEAM
- Participants generally found it difficult to answer how CTEAM can do a better job of attracting new participants. However, the most common response was to use Alumni to spread the word.
- Most participants indicate the cost of the course is not a problem, and in fact, should not be lowered because of the program’s value. Some expressed that lowering the cost would attract the “wrong kind of participant”

3.1 The Benefits of CTEAM

This portion of the report provides details on the perceived benefits of the CTEAM program.

Management Proficiency Improvements

The above results may warrant additional interpretation related to CTEAM participants’ predisposition to management excellence. CTEAM as a program generally attracts those producers who wish to pursue

management excellence and may have a predisposition towards adopting beneficial management practices. To help determine whether their management practices are a direct result of the program or attributable to their predisposition as advanced farm managers, graduates were asked to rate their management proficiencies before and after participating in CTEAM to determine the level of influence of the CTEAM program.

Proficiencies rated include beneficial management practices related to:

- Strategic/operational management
- Financial management, and
- Market management

Survey results indicate that prior to participating in the CTEAM program, respondents were comparable to the average farm population in terms of management practices. According to the 2012 Farm Financial Survey³, less than 20% of farmers have a written business plan, while much less having a written succession plan. The Agricultural Management Institute's Baseline Study of Farm Business Management Planning of Ontario Farmers⁴ echo these results. And, even though farmers may have a plan, less than half keep it updated to the farm business.

Comparatively, CTEAM graduates are significantly advanced in terms of adopting these management practices. For CTEAM graduates, the vast majority of these beneficial management practices are not only in place, but maintained as a regular business practice upon program graduation, far exceeding the management proficiency demonstrated by the general farm population.

Strategic/Operational Management

Before entering the program, only 14% of survey respondents had a formal written plan for their operation. In contrast, 55% of survey respondents indicate they have a formal written plan for their operation in place, while another 40% are working on it, exceeding the general farming population by 75%. On the surface, the 55% number seems low, given that all participants develop a plan for their farm as part of the CTEAM program requirement. However, in interpreting the data, one must bear in mind that for a number of participants, it has been a number of years since participating in the program. Many have experienced life changes including retirement and moving out of the agricultural sector. Several respondents are at a transition stage in their operations and need to update the plan they developed in the course. A few have a written plan, but it is becoming more detailed as more analysis is done. Some would say they have a written plan, others say it's not complete, so they answered that they are working on it. What is most clear is that in one form or another the vast majority of CTEAM alumni are using the planning process. This is consistent with later results that show the plan and planning process are among the most valuable parts of the course and graduates have adopted this beneficial management practice as part of their regular business routine.

Further, another 65% of graduates have a succession plan in place, or are working on it, while only 23% had one before taking the course. This is notable because a significant number of graduates are considered young farmers, under 40 years of age.

³ Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada & Statistics Canada. Government of Canada. 2012 Farm Financial Survey. Online: <http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=3450>

⁴ Agricultural Management Institute. Baseline Study on Farm Business Management Planning of Ontario Farmers. Online: <http://www.takeanewapproach.ca/Farmers-Baseline-Study.htm>

CTEAM graduates have embraced farm business management principles in their entirety, as evidenced by over 86% of respondents reviewing their plans and management policies on a regular basis. By comparison, less than 10% of the general farming population have adopted this management practice.

Financial Management

Financial Management proficiency is also demonstrated by the fact that the vast majority of participants are using and reviewing financial data to make management decisions. Benchmarking financial performance is relatively low in terms of having a formal process in place (29%), however this may partially be attributed to a lack of programs available in Canada to benchmark farm performance. And, remains well above the general farming population's management practices.

Marketing Management

Marketing Management proficiencies gained by CTEAM graduates demonstrate advanced management practices, well beyond the general farm population, whereby over 80% have a marketing plan in place or in progress, over 85% are reviewing market opportunities before production, over 76% are using commodity marketing tools such as forward contracts and hedging, while 95% understand and use price insurance programs. International marketing and trade practices are however substantially lower at 23% of graduates having a plan in place while another 23% are in process. This lower figure may be attributable to respondents producing different commodities. 24% of respondents indicated this management practice was 'not applicable' to their farm business.

Overall, as a result of the CTEAM program, strategic/operational management proficiencies and practices are either in place (45%) or are in progress (32%).

Overall, as a result of the CTEAM program, financial management proficiencies and practices are either in place (64%) or are in progress (18%).

Overall, as a result of the CTEAM program, marketing management proficiencies and practices are either in place (45%) or are in progress (32%).

These results reflect greater levels of exposure to and adoption of management concepts and techniques, which are carried into general farm management practices for program graduates, ultimately evidencing a fundamental change in management behaviour and ever-advancing management proficiency and practices.

Most Valuable Aspect(s) of CTEAM

Graduates were asked to identify the most valuable aspect of the CTEAM program using open-ended responses.

Using some interpretation, the most valuable aspects of the CTEAM program are as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Networking | 26% |
| Strategy and strategic planning | 26% |
| Financial analysis | 22% |
| Quality of instruction | 19% |
| Tours | 7% |

And in some of the respondents' own words:

"Access to best people/most knowledgeable people in field."

"Making us actually do the work. First time we actually followed through and got a plan in place. Strategic plan was very important. We had one done 20 years ago, but went on the shelf and gathered dust. Because we didn't really own it. We owned and developed new plan so has more meaning."

Further analyzing responses to the open-ended questions, it should be noted that AME aims to have an outstanding program presented in an unconventional format utilizing best practices for knowledge transfer and implementation while meeting the learning preferences and practices of its unique target: farmers. Part of the "unconventionality" is encouraging participants to use their own farm information in financial analysis and strategy development. The planning element is used as a mechanism to help retain learnings as participants apply concepts to their own farms. Survey results indicate the strategy/strategic planning and financial analysis components are ranked the most valuable aspect of the program, suggesting the CTEAM program is accomplishing its intent. Similarly, CTEAM uses top notch instructors and focuses on respondents establishing and expanding their national business networks. The open-ended responses further indicate program success on these fronts.

Least Valuable Aspect(s) of the Program

Graduates were asked to identify the least valuable aspect of the CTEAM program using open-ended responses.

It should be noted that a number of respondents (47%) indicated there were no least valuable aspects of the CTEAM program, while others (16%) rated least value to areas where they had previously received training or already had the management component in place.

Using some interpretation, the least valuable aspects of the CTEAM program are as follows:

- Production-specific management tools (not every sector could relate)
- Diversity of farm operations participating (making it hard to compare financial data)
- Agricultural policy and politics modules
- Individual concerns with specific modules taught by specific instructors*

**Note: As mentioned in the Introduction, graduates surveyed spanned programs offered from 2000 to 2014, during which time improvements were made to the program on a regular basis resulting from participant feedback. A number of the least valuable program aspects have already been addressed through subsequent program improvements. To date, the course evaluations suggests that these upgrades have been quite successful.*

A few respondents acknowledged that not everything would be applicable equally to everyone, but was valuable nonetheless:

"No weakness, found some value in all areas, something I could take away from each instructor/session"

CTEAM Comparison to other Programs (by Graduates)

Graduates were asked to comment on how CTEAM is better or worse from other skills development programming in which they had participated. Responses were open-ended.

Using some interpretation, respondents felt CTEAM excelled when compared to other programs as follows:

- It focuses on agriculture
- It balances practical learning with big picture, forward-looking perspective on agriculture
- It holds participants accountable to incorporate learnings into management plans for their own farms
- It allows participants to exchange insights from across regions, production sectors, and experience, forming peer groups for expanding knowledge and critiquing best practices
- It helps participants gain confidence in presenting goals, ambitions and plans to industry experts and peers
- Quality of instruction and instructors with real-life experience
- The fact that it is fairly expensive means participants are motivated to do the work to put the learnings into effect.

Respondents noted CTEAM is more expensive than other programs, however felt the expense motivated them to get the most out of the program. Participants acknowledged benefits from the program in terms of lasting ties with instructors and fellow graduates.

Respondents did not have any recommendations for program improvement when compared to other training or skills development programs.

Return on Investment (ROI)

Graduates were asked to rate their overall Return on Investment after taking part in the CTEAM program. It is important to note that response options were pre-determined as 0%, 5%, 10% or 20% and higher. Therefore, we cannot determine whether any respondent would have chosen above the highest response option.

Results show 50% of respondents rated their overall return on investment as greater than 20%. 32% garnered between 10% and 20% ROI, while 18% garnered between 5% and 10% ROI.

No respondents indicated their ROI was less than 5%.

Compared with operating returns in agriculture that are usually estimated in the 3-8% range, this is a very high return on investment.

And, given that 50% of respondents have annual gross farm sales/receipts of \$1,000,000 to \$5,000,000, while 37% have annual gross farm sales/receipts of \$5,000,000 or more, a 20% return on investment represents a significant gain for the Canadian agricultural economy.

Ongoing Benefits of CTEAM

Graduates were asked to rate the ongoing benefits of the CTEAM program from a list of options:

- Access to capital
- Profitability
- Confidence in your ability to manage
- Opportunities for expansion
- Networking opportunities
- Industry engagement

Confidence in their ability to manage, Networking, Profitability and Opportunities for expansion came out on top with 77% to 91% of respondents receiving moderate to significant benefits.

Responses were slightly lower for Access to Capital and Industry Engagement. The latter is not a particular target outcome and depends on the preferences of the individual manager. However, the former is a little surprising as a number of graduates have informally reported that the development and presentation of business and project plans to lenders resulted in obtaining financing they had otherwise not been able to achieve prior to taking CTEAM. Perhaps many of the participants already had significant access to capital.

Overall Experience

95% of respondents said CTEAM met or exceeded their expectations, of which 64% indicated CTEAM exceeded or greatly exceeded their expectations. Only one respondent felt CTEAM did not meet their expectations.

As testament to the value of the CTEAM program and participants' overall experience, the majority of respondents (72%) have recommended the program widely to their peers, however several, in recognizing the competition advantage they gain as a result of the program, are careful to recommend the program to potential competitors. Others are careful to whom they recommend the program, recognizing some producers are more progressive and would welcome the program, whereas others are set in their ways and would likely not benefit.

"We have recommended it to many people over the years but in a way that they have to want it to go after it. We want to "stay on top of the heap" so are careful in how we recommend it. We don't recommend it to our competitors."

"Only recommend to certain people - some people are more progressive so they would benefit - other people are set in their ways."

Of those who provided a quantifiable number, on average, respondents have recommended the CTEAM program to 7 others.

3.2 Structure and Components of the Program

This portion of the report provides feedback on the program structure and components of the CTEAM.

Program Structure

Graduates ranked the structural components of the program very highly, including duration, frequency, accommodations, social time and classmate interaction, averaging 80% ranked "very good" or "excellent."

Cost and ease of travel are the lowest ranked program features, however over 50% of respondents ranked these features "good" or greater.

Only one respondent provided an "unsatisfactory" ranking – this was for Program Duration.

Respondents were specifically asked to comment on whether spreading the four modules across Canada enhances or detracts from the program. 100% of respondents indicate the cross-Canada program structure enhances the program.

“Gets you out of own little world and see what ag is like in other provinces”

“Gives you a hands on feel of agriculture. See the diversity of the students. See so many similarities amongst diverse farmers”

“Get to see different parts of agriculture. I never would've seen a feedlot in AB or greenhouse in BC. Made me more confident and gave me a better experience”

Program Content

Over 70% of respondents feel the program content is either “very good” or “excellent,” with no “unsatisfactory” responses.

The highest rates aspects (“very good” to “excellent”) of program content include:

- Industry tours 91%
- Quality of instructors 86%
- Management and financial topics covered 82%
- Targeted content that is personalized and practical 76%
- Instructional approach 68%
- Course materials provided 68%

When asked from which module graduates gained the most, 53% gained the most out of the Financial modules, 21% responded Succession planning or Strategic planning.

The majority of graduates responding to the survey (54%) did not have any suggestions for improving the content. noting the current program is well-rounded and well executed.

Suggested module improvements include:

- A greater international perspective, including foreign policy
- Different marketing strategies explored
- Greater diversity of instructors within modules
- Add a negotiations component
- Include the spouse in at least one module
- Add a CTEAM II for Alumni

3.3 Attitudes toward the Alumni Program and Lifelong Learning

This portion of the report provides feedback on the Alumni program and lifelong learning.

Most graduates (68%) have participated or plan to participate in the CTEAM alumni program. The biggest challenge preventing participating is cost and time available. The program must be perceived as relevant.

68% of graduates would consider taking part in the CTEAM program again to update their core farm management training, citing reasons such as *“To re-engage myself and keep the business on track.”*

Of those who will not consider taking CTEAM again, the majority of graduates indicate they would encourage their children and younger managers to take the program. Others are seeking to try something different.

100% of respondents have had at least some contact with fellow participants and/or instructors since completing CTEAM. Many participants site regular follow-up with Larry Martin, program principal and instructor.

Lifelong Learning Ambitions

CTEAM currently provides accreditation towards a University of Guelph MBA or MA program. 2% of graduates are interested in or would consider taking an MBA or MA at the University of Guelph.

When asked what forms of learning graduates preferred, results are as follows:

- In-Class 36%
- Blended learning (workshops, online, in-class, etc.) 23%
- Workshops 23%
- Peer to Peer 14%
- Online including Webinars 14%
- Touring 2%

When asked what forms of learning graduates had taken over the past 2 years, results are as follows:

- Industry group involvement
- Hard knocks
- Harvard (OPM)
- Seminars, workshops and info days
- Webinars
- Online research
- One or two-day courses
- Conferences

Responses were evenly spread, with no form of learning exceeding others.

When asked what forms of learning graduates plan to take part in over the next 2-5 years, results are as follows:

- Experience
- Workshops
- Online webinars
- Online courses
- Conferences
- Travel
- Harvard OPM
- Dupont leadership program

Again, responses were fairly evenly spread, with no form of learning exceeding others.

Program graduates were asked about specific opportunities to improve the program through additional programming and lifelong learning opportunities.

Business Coaching

The majority of respondents (64%) were interested in receiving business coaching, however were not sure of the best structure. Some cited benefitting from group business coaching to compare and contrast against peers.

Benchmarking

A number of respondents (53%) would like to receive benchmarking assistance, while a number noted reliable and commodity-specific benchmark data would be difficult to find and use.

Mentorship

54% of respondents are in favour of a mentorship component to the program, citing New Zealand's use of monitor farms as a good example of group or peer-to-peer mentorship. Others felt CTEAM incited a natural mentorship program among ongoing Alumni and instructor relations, and a formal program is unnecessary.

Peer Advisory Group

Many respondents linked the idea of business coaching and mentorship to peer advisory groups. 59% of respondents are interested in starting and/or being involved in a peer advisory group. One respondent suggested peer advisory boards for their operations, while others thought geographical distance or a small number of producers in their production sector may inhibit success.

Online Discussion Forum

63% of respondents are interested in being involved in an online discussion forum, however noting that this may be a challenge during busy times in the season, it may be hard to keep everyone interested in all topics for discussion, and some topics (ex. financial) may be difficult to have online. Others suggested just using Twitter.

Workshops/Other Learning Events

72% of respondents are in favour of CTEAM hosting workshops and other learning events including a "mini-CTEAM" program and "CTEAM II." Some respondents cautioned against contributing to "meeting fatigue" and some suggested opening these additional sessions to non-CTEAM alumni as a recruitment tactic.

Out of the options presented for enhancing the CTEAM participant and Alumni experience, the preferred enhancement is additional workshops and similar learning events (72%), followed by business coaching (64%), online discussion groups (63%), peer advisory groups (59%), mentorship (54%), and benchmarking (53%).

3.4 Marketing the CTEAM Program

Graduates were asked how they heard about the CTEAM program.

Respondents cited Farm Credit Canada, George Morris Centre and the Outstanding Young Farmers' Program as leading sources (categorized under "other" and representing 46% of responses), while 28% of graduates cited colleagues, 22% cited advisors/consultants and 18% cited industry magazines and publications.

When asked how CTEAM can attract participants, the majority of responses were as follows:

- Advertise through Ministries of agriculture and cost-share funding programming
- Twitter and social media
- Outstanding Young Farmers' Program
- Having a presence at trade shows and industry events including AGMs
- Testimonials, Word of mouth from Alumni

And finally, when asked how the program team can do a better job of communicating the program's value, responses included:

- Demonstrate the statistics – the tangible benefits for farmers
- Promote that farm survival and success is dependent upon management skills
- Use testimonials from Alumni, to speak of their experiences
- Work with organizations and companies to promote the program, including banks who can speak to the financial benefits
- Address the fear of failure issue

Some respondents noted that if the program team has to do a better job of promoting the program, then potential participants are not ready to take it. Others noted producers have to be ready, and the program administrators can try to get them in the right place to recognize its value.

3.5 CTEAM Funding Opportunities

When asked to suggest financial support opportunities for CTEAM, graduates suggested:

- Aligning with GF2 funding
- Adding sponsorship or scholarship opportunities for participants
- Aligning with local financial institutions, including Farm Credit Canada

Some respondents looked unfavourably upon subsidizing program costs:

"It is a significant investment, but caused me to pay attention. Money was coming out of my pocket so I took full advantage. Wouldn't be in favour of subsidies for program. It is a business expense so helps with tax."

"If it doesn't cost something you don't learn anything."

"That shouldn't be a focus. If they're not willing to spend \$10,000 on something this beneficial, then they won't get value. Larry needs to charge more money, not just because the gov't will finance it. There are so many 1-day \$5000 courses because the government funds them. Don't price your program based on gov't funding"

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This section takes feedback gathered from the survey and speaks to the implications for AME and the CTEAM program expressed as recommendations and next steps for improving the program. The recommendations and next steps are organized in the same order as results were presented in section 3.0.

4.1 Benefits of CTEAM

By all measures, CTEAM graduates benefitted from the program. Whether it is measured in terms of beneficial management practices gained; return on investment; improvements in various factors from profitability and confidence in their management ability, or access to capital, graduates very strongly indicate that they received and continue to receive significant benefits and that the economic benefits exceeded the cost of participating in the program by a wide margin. In other words, it was worth it. Respondents also gave the program very high marks compared to other types of training and skills development opportunities they have received.

Implications for CTEAM:

- The current content of the course meets the standards of excellence that have been set. This produces a high level of learning and satisfaction in the graduates.
- AME needs to continue to monitor content, presentation and learning methods to ensure relevancy to each participant and within the greatest agricultural context and economic climate. While on-going class evaluations seldom found fault with the program, a few have and course managers have identified improvements that need to be made. As a result, the 2011-13 class received major improvements in the succession and public policy modules, and the 2012-2015 class also received major upgrades in finance, strategy and the coaching component. To date, these changes have been reviewed very positively by the next classes. The approach needs to continue to look for improvements and upgrades even before participants know they need them.
- One intriguing result of the survey is that all respondents have recommended CTEAM to others. The significance of this lies in Fred Reicheld's book, "The Ultimate Question", in which he describes how to integrate satisfied customers who recommend a product or service to their friends or colleagues as an integral part of the business, particularly in marketing. AME needs to understand this very high "net promoter score" and use it much more effectively. In its basic form, the net promoter score is measured from a customer survey that asks, "how likely are you to recommend our product or service to friends or colleagues"? It is measured on a ten point scale of likelihood, with 10 being most likely. Customers who rate the product or service 9 or 10 are "Promoters" and are likely candidates for assistance in both marketing and ongoing product design. In the present case, all 22 respondents, since they have already recommended it to friends or colleagues, would likely fall in the promoter category. This is extraordinary and is a force that should be harnessed by AME, along with the Marketing improvement opportunities mentioned below.

4.2 Structure and Components of the Program

There is widespread satisfaction with the structure and components of the program. Eighty percent or more ranked the program very good or excellent on duration, frequency, accommodations, social time, and classmate interaction. The only factors that were rated lower were the cost and ease of travel. However, 100% of the respondents agreed that moving the course across Canada adds significant benefit. In essence, the results indicate that the benefit cost ratio is high and that the cost is worth it.

Over half of the respondents had no suggestions for improving the program content, again indicating the level of satisfaction. While respondents recognized program participants span across production sectors, suggested improvements included more consideration for the diversity of operations in ensuring content relates to all participants and data (ex. financial) could be more easily compared across different types of operations.

Suggested module content improvements included a greater international perspective, different marketing strategies explored, and negotiation. Respondents also asked to ensure instructor diversity throughout the modules.

4.3 Attitudes toward Alumni Program and Lifelong Learning

The majority of respondents have already participated in or have an interest in participating in the alumni programs. The major stumbling blocks are cost, time and timing. All of the respondents are interested in further learning and indicated a wide range of approaches to doing so would be acceptable to some of them. These include coaching, mentoring, benchmarking, in-class workshops, peer networks and tours. Many are pursuing other types of training. Further, respondents participate in and plan to participate in blended learning, using a combination of in-class and online learning and discussion groups.

The implication of this for the current program is that a range of alternatives probably need to be explored and offered. At present, AME is offering benchmarking, some coaching and mentoring, workshops and tours. There may be a way to consolidate and focus these offerings into a logical and cogent package.

A relatively surprising result is that the majority of participants would consider taking CTEAM again. While only one person suggested a CTEAM II program, this may be a more logical implication rather than a repeat of the existing program.

4.4 Marketing the CTEAM Program

Respondents gave a wide range of suggestions for improving the marketing of CTEAM. They also had suggestions on how to communicate the benefits of the program. The latter includes:

- Demonstrate the statistics – the tangible benefits for farmers
- Promote that farm survival and success is dependent upon management skills
- Use testimonials from Alumni, to speak of their experiences
- Work with organizations and companies to promote the program, including banks who can speak to the financial benefits

- Address the fear of failure for participants who may not want to face the reality of the program’s analysis of their farm business
- Add a Scholarship or Sponsorship component to the program to attract investors who benefit from the enhanced business management practices of graduates (ex. financial institutions)

Taken together with earlier results, there are several implications of these findings:

- Marketing and promotion should use a diverse set of channels, including farm organizations and input suppliers, as well as alumni, social media and traditional media, and partnerships with organizations such as Farm Management Canada and the Outstanding Young Farmers’ program
- Encourage spouses, family and farm teams to participate in the program
- Ministries of agriculture should be involved in the marketing, promotion and financial assistance available for the program
- The kinds of benefits to graduates that are shown in this study need to be made clear to potential candidates for the course
- Having increased physical presence at industry events may help connect directly with potential participants
- Strong consideration should be given to providing more support for Alumni in recruiting potential candidates for the program.

These results as well as the discussion about net promoter score above strongly suggest that there may be a more active role for alumni in recruiting participants.

4.5 CTEAM Funding Opportunities

This report shows that CTEAM graduates have substantially improved management practices. This is obviously to their benefit, but it is also to the benefit of financial institutions, agri-businesses and food companies with whom farmers do business.

Respondents recommend continuing to align CTEAM to be eligible for cost-share funding opportunities provided by the Provincial and Territorial Ministries of Agriculture, or otherwise getting private companies and lending institutions to support the CTEAM program in recognition of the significant benefit input suppliers and lenders stand to gain as a result of successful farmers growing, expanding and sustaining their farm businesses.

However respondents also felt it is important for participants to maintain some ‘skin in the game’ and finance a portion of the program themselves, to appreciate the program’s value and take the learning opportunity seriously. Respondents note the program should continue to be priced based upon actual program value.

AME should seek financial and promotional support for CTEAM from such institutions that are recognized as benefiting from investing in the business skills of Canada’s farmers, most notably, input suppliers and lending institutions.

Concluding Remarks

Overall, these survey findings signal an opportunity to enhance the CTEAM program in content, marketing and complementary learning opportunities. It will be important to test the new ideas with

current and future participants, as well as current and potential supporters. Program administrators will take the recommended changes derived from the evaluation into account when evaluating the 2013-15 class, and preparing for each intake going forward.

Finally, as noted in the introduction, this CTEAM graduate survey was perhaps long overdue, and has signalled an opportunity to not only improve annual evaluations from program graduates and stakeholders, but to look into a scheduled follow-up survey of program graduates to measure the long-term benefits of both the CTEAM and CFAME programs on an ongoing basis.