

# The Syllabus

A newsletter for  
Kansas State University  
Master of Agribusiness  
students, alumni & friends

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## MAB tours France, Italy and Switzerland



*During two of the numerous stops, tour participants visited the Colosseum in Rome and Eiffel Tower in Paris. See the next page for more trip photos.*

### MAB's 5th international agribusiness tour

Twenty-two MAB alumni, faculty, staff, friends and family members participated in the 5th international agribusiness tour sponsored by the Master of Agribusiness program in August. Traveling to France, Italy and Switzerland gave tour participants an opportunity to get a look at major producers of grains, beef and dairy.

"Our sample of European agriculture was a unique experience and likely representative of the smaller scale farms that typify Europe. For example, we visited a dairy of water-buffalo cows for Mozzarella Cheese production; a cattle farm producing Piedmontese branded beef; and a family-owned vineyard marketing their own label of wine. The 'boutique' nature of many

western European farms and the product chains they supply likely parallels specialized niche production here in the U.S.," said Tracy Brunner, MAB alum and Owner of Cow Camp Beef in Ramona, Kansas. "Many of our group were interested in how European farms and their profitability were influenced by the complex scheme of quotas and subsidies."

During the 13-day tour, stops included visits to cattle, buffalo and crop farms, dairies, wineries, cheese-making facilities, chocolate factories, Cargill Italy's Animal Nutrition headquarters, and a Swiss farm research facility to name just a few. Seeing a wide variety of

**Europe Tour continued on pg 2**

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#### *In this issue:*

- **Alumni Spotlight** 3
- **Thesis projects** 4
- **New instructor** 4
- **In the News** 5
- **Calendar of events** 5

Europe Tour continued from pg 1

operations gave travelers a good picture of how the industry is similar or different to U.S. operations.

"I really enjoyed learning about the European ag sector. I knew it was on a much smaller scale, but I didn't realize just how much smaller farms are in Europe than in the U.S. It was really neat to see how their producers have improved production with limited land resources available," said Matt Smith, MAB alum and Insurance Account Specialist for Farm Credit Services for America in Huron, SD.

Brunner also found the smaller scale an interesting comparison to U.S. farming.

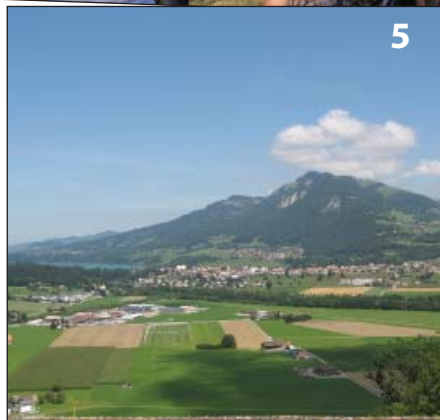
"Reported productivity per hectare seemed quite good, and in many ways the technological advancement of European producers seemed extensive. In our view though, larger scale commodity production in western Europe is apparently discouraged by relatively higher cost of land and especially its widely disbursed ownership and control in smaller tracts. Since many of the trends that encourage evolution to this smaller scale production structure are prevalent in parts of the U.S. today, our tour perhaps gave us a snapshot of some future agriculture in our own country," Brunner said.

The trip was not all business, as sightseeing was also worked into the schedule. A few of the highlights the group visited included the Vatican, Collesium, and catacombs in Rome; shopping in Milan; the Chapel Bridge and the Lion Monument in Lucerne; the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame in Paris; plus free time to explore during other stops.

"My favorite tourist attraction was the Colosseum in Rome. It was neat to see it because it was the center of ancient Roman games for so many years," Smith said.

The next trip will be in 2014 with the location to be determined after the first of the year.

"I think the KSU Master of Agribusiness group assembled an excellent tour that was not only interesting and educational, but really enjoyable," Brunner said. "We saw many of the world-class sights of Rome, Milan, Lucerne, and Paris; few tours could ever boast so much in such a short time!" Brunner said.



1. Group at Giles Abry family farm in Leugny, France
2. Tracy Brunner and Limousin cattle in France.
3. Aging cheese in Switzerland
4. Matt Smith inspecting feed at Brown Swiss dairy
5. Countryside in Switzerland
6. Group listening to presentation at Pallavicini wine makers outside of Rome, Italy
7. Gary, Dianna, Terry and Marilyn Kastens and Ron Suppes inside a Cargill grain elevator in Italy.
8. The Abry family prepares lunch for the group at their farm



# Alumni Spotlight

## Earl Biggers, Jr.

Class of 2009  
Manager, Price Risk Management  
Dairy Farmers of America  
Kansas City, Missouri



by Mark Seitz

*The Alumni Spotlight focuses on MAB alumni and is written by Mark Seitz, a 2003 graduate.*

### MAB alum is passionate about dairy industry

Earl Biggers is an Ohio native, growing up in northwest Ohio. Earl is the son of a Methodist minister and his mother's family was in the dairy business. His grandfather and two uncles were dairy farmers and he grew up always wanting to be a dairy farmer or to be involved in the dairy business. His mother's family's connection to dairy is what sparked his interest and it has kept him involved throughout his career.

Earl attended Penn State University with the intention of earning a degree and going into the dairy business. Upon graduation many years ago (he did not say when) he moved to Yoder, in central Kansas and ran a 45-cow dairy farm for 12 years. He chose central Kansas because land was cheaper than in Ohio and he felt there was a lot of community understanding and support for the dairy business, and agriculture in general compared to other places he has lived. While he loved the lifestyle, milking cows, raising his kids on the farm, etc., the economic reality of being a small dairy farmer, working a full-time job in town, age, time and other factors took their toll. He said, "I do miss the cows and will always be a dairyman at heart".

Earl sold the cows in 2000 and went to work in field service for Dairy Farmers of America in Ohio for several years. Eventually he accepted

As a risk management manager, Earl feels the MAB program and his experience as a dairyman have been valuable assets to assist his members bridge the gap between the realities of their farming operations and what goes on at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange.

a supervisor's position in South Dakota. In 2011, he was promoted to Manager of Price Risk Management to help their dairy farmer members find ways to decrease the level of risk they endure in marketing milk and running dairy farms.

Today, he works at the Dairy Farmers of American headquarters and lives in Kansas City (on the Missouri side). He says successfully completing the MAB program has helped to get him to where he is today. As a risk management manager, Earl feels the MAB program and his experience as a dairyman have been valuable assets to assist his members bridge the gap between the realities

volatility. He says managing volatility is a critical factor for those who will stay in the business. The tools he learned in MAB have helped him help his members be better managers.

Although he spends most of his days on the phone, Earl enjoys meeting DFA members face to face more than anything else in his job because it helps him better understand their needs. Even more so because it gets him out of the office and close to the cows and the dairy farms he loves so much. For him, if he cannot milk cows himself, helping those that are still doing it is the most gratifying aspect of the work he does.

Regarding his time in the MAB program, Earl enjoyed the experience.

"I was thrilled to have the opportunity to be part of the collegiate structure and be part of the total learning experience. I loved having the opportunity to be



*Earl at the DFA office in Kansas City, MO*

of their farming operations and what goes on at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. Forward contracting of milk is relatively new and for many dairy producers, it is an entirely new concept. He says his job is all about helping DFA members manage

around so many people from across the agriculture industry. I loved hearing the different perspectives they had on our industry and that I had the chance to share in their knowledge. I greatly appreciated those in my MAB class who had the knowledge and skills they did. I felt that the national and international perspectives my classmates brought to the table, from a myriad of agribusiness

**Biggers continued on pg 4**

## Biggers continued from pg 3

backgrounds, made it the best broad-spectrum experience I could have asked for. It made me realize that no matter how demanding my job was, we all have a lot in common. I was able to see the similarities in the problems between industries and the vast differences, but most of all I relished the chance to engage in conversation with everyone. At every one of the class sessions I was the last one to leave, almost wishing I could have another day to learn more. Driving home from the on-campus sessions gave me a better high than I could have gotten from any amount of caffeine I might have consumed."

As a fellow MAB alumni (Class of 2003) I really enjoyed having a chance to chat with Earl to write this story. It by no means begins to capture the details of our conversation, but his insight into the MAB program and his knowledge about the dairy industry brought back a lot of great memories for me. Not enough to want to re-enroll in MAB a second time, but enough to remind myself of how incredibly knowledgeable and talented the individuals are who go through the program but how much you gain as you go through.

In closing, I think I can speak for Earl when I say every MAB alumnus owes the K-State MAB faculty a great big thank you for their foresight to create the program, for keeping it fresh and up to date and for attracting the best and brightest people from around the world to learn from and be part of it.

## MAB Alum returns to program as Assistant Professor

Keith Harris completed the Master of Agribusiness program in 2006 and has returned to the program as an Assistant Professor. Harris is taking over the Applied Agribusiness Economics (AGEC 700) course from Dr. Michael Langemeier, who has left Kansas State University.

"I am excited to return to Kansas State University and I look forward to providing an academic and a practitioner's perspective to your agribusiness learning experience. 'One's work may be finished some day, but one's education never' (Alexander Dumas, c 1856)," Harris said.



Keith Harris, Class of 2006

After graduating from the MAB program, Harris entered the Ph.D. program at the University of Missouri-Columbia in the Division of Applied and Social Sciences. He taught courses in Agribusiness Management Strategy and Managerial Economics.

Prior to an academic career, Harris worked in commodity risk management, international procurement, and supply chain management strategy for General Mills, Sara Lee Foods, and Farmland Foods. He has also been a Peace Corps Volunteer. He served as an Agribusiness Advisor to the Honduran Ministry of Natural Resources where he helped develop agribusiness opportunities for tropical agriculture.

## Students complete thesis projects

To read current or previous thesis projects, go to <http://krex.k-state.edu/dspace/> and search by author, title or keywords (no log-in required). To read a thesis written before 2008 or view thesis defense, log onto K-State On-Line, [www.online.ksu.edu](http://www.online.ksu.edu), with your eID and password. Go to the MAB Community Page, go to Files & Content and click on Theses.

**Muhin Abdi**, class of 2012, *Comparative Analysis of Errors in Pre-Pick and Bulk Order Volumes at Frito-Lay*

**Mauro Bergerman**, class of 2009, *New Grain Discharge Terminal at Santos Port, Brazil*

**Brent Johnson**, class of 2004, *Benefits of Flour Storage as Related to Process Efficiencies in Milling*

**Kevin Newkirk**, class of 2012, *Financial Performance Comparison for ABC Farm*

**Christy Pepple**, class of 2012, *Foreign Direct Investment Decision Making Using an Investment Index*

# in the news...

**Jeremy Larson**, Class of 2014, has accepted a position of Market Planner within John Deere. He is now working with their Strategic Marketing group and is responsible for the Hay and Forage platform for US/Canada/Australia/New Zealand.

**Kyle Patten**, Class of 2014, and his wife are expecting their first child in March 2013.

**Katlin Hall**, Class of 2012, and her family were graced with the arrival of Eli, a few days late, on June 23rd.

**Seth Harrison**, Class of 2013, and his wife would like to introduce their new daughter, Genevieve Adelyn Harrison. She was born on September 1st, at 6 lbs 14 oz and 19" long.

**Tene Mouphtaou**, Class of 2013, welcomed her son Solomon Grant Toure on September 14th. He was 6 lbs 13 oz and 20" long.

**Ben Smith**, Class of 2011, recently accepted the position of Division Manager, Pricing within John Deere. He is still located at the Olathe Sales and Marketing Office.

**Juan Angel Orozco Muñiz** and his wife welcomed their son, Angel Andres Orozco, on August 22. Juan has also accepted a new position in Mexico with Pig Improvement Company as a technical on-site manager.

**Nicole Peter**, Class of 2014, has been promoted to the position of Continuous Improvement Manager for Feed Business. Nicole started her career with Land O'Lakes in 2008.

**Cortney Bally**, Class of 2011, and her husband, Adam, welcomed their new daughter Brook Caitlyn into the world on July 16th. Cortney was also just promoted to National Account Manager in the Fresh Pork Sales group within Hormel Foods.

**Grant Good**, Class of 2013, was promoted to Product Proving Supervisor for combines at AGCO. He is now responsible for orchestrating all combine field test operations globally for the Hesston, KS engineering facility.

**Ryan Roloff**, Class of 2013, has moved with John Deere to Grand Junction, Colo., as a Territory Customer Support Manager, handling product, customer and dealer support for the Ag and Turf equipment. He covers Colorado, Utah, and southern half of Wyoming.

**Tyrell Fickenschner**, Class of 2012, will be taking a position with Pioneer as a field agronomist covering southwest Nebraska.

**Mike Wisner**, Class of 2011, has accepted a position as Risk Manager with Hill's Pet Nutrition in Topeka, Kansas.

## Calendar of Events

### November 27

Final electronic copy of thesis due to Graduate School to be fall grad

### December 1

Scholarship applications for January 2013 due

### December 7

K-State fall commencement at Bramlage Coliseum

### December 7

Final electronic copy of thesis due to Graduate School to be spring '13 grad without enrolling for spring hours

### January 6-11, 2013

MAB Campus Session

### January 21-25, 2013

MAB Thesis Campus Session

### March 1, 2013

Deadline to complete iSIS Graduation Application

### March 17-22, 2013

MAB Campus Session

### April 2, 2013

Deadline to schedule oral defense to have name printed in commencement program

### April 7-12, 2013

Southeast Asia MAB Campus Session

### April 26, 2013

Final electronic copy of thesis due to Graduate School to be spring grad

### May 10, 2013

K-State spring commencement at Bramlage Coliseum

### May 10, 2013

Final electronic copy of thesis due to Graduate School to be summer '13 grad without enrolling for summer hours

### June 23-28, 2013

Southeast Asia MAB Campus Session

### July 14-16, 2013

Institute of Food Technology Expo in Chicago

## Be watching for more information on Professional Development Event for 2013

We recently surveyed MAB students and alumni about the 2013 Professional Development/Alumni Reunion event to gauge interest in timing, location and topics. Thank you to everyone who completed the survey. If you did not get a chance to weigh in, send your thoughts or ideas for the future event to Mary at [mjbowen@ksu.edu](mailto:mjbowen@ksu.edu). Planning is in the early stages, but be watching for more information after the first of the year.