

## Strengthening University Capacity for Education in Agribusiness Management

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Agricultural higher education can make important contributions to the growth of agribusiness. Strong linkages with the private sector ensure that programs are practical, business-relevant, and produce high performing professionals. These linkages are fundamental for reorienting programs to improve relevance and ultimately produce graduates who are in high demand. The model for building these linkages consists of a series of activities to engage the private sector in student learning. Pedagogically, the model promotes active learning and involves higher level skills development.

Masters in agribusiness programs can strengthen their programs by following the sequential process outlined in the activities below.

### Strategic engagement with private sector

**1. Survey of Agribusinesses** - The survey familiarizes faculty with business activities and private sector stakeholders with university staff and their programs. It allows faculty to get out of the “ivory tower” by engaging them in a dialogue with agribusiness managers. This step 1) initiates dialogue; 2) promotes collaboration; and 3) introduces stakeholder human resource needs into curriculum development.

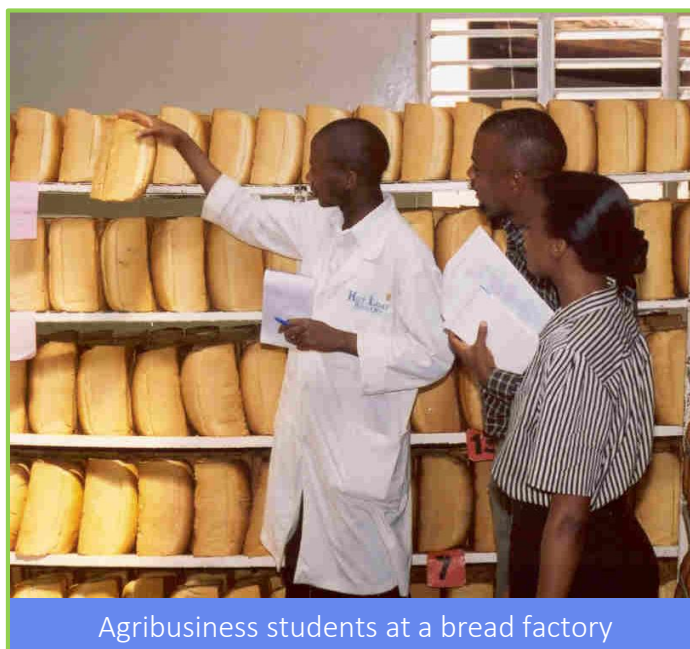
**2. Creation of Agribusiness Advisory Committee (AAC)** - AAC membership should include agribusinesses, NGOs, and government parastatals. Its purpose is to formally integrate private sector inputs into a masters’ program. Participation may include (but needn’t be limited to) identification of specific program goals, desirable outreach efforts, and key agribusiness constraints which the program can help address.

### Student learning

**3. Curriculum Review** - The agribusiness curriculum review should build on inputs from the agribusiness survey and the AAC. This review will increase program relevance for the agribusiness sector and opportunities for students to undertake practical, field based learning experiences.

**4. Case Study development** - The relevance of the graduate program is increased by original research on agribusiness needs in the form of case studies. Case studies consist of gathering the facts surrounding real business situations, structured data analysis, problem solving, and communication of solutions presenting the information. The pedagogical purpose behind these cases is to present students with real world challenges in a dynamic business environment.

**5. Agribusiness Classroom Contributions** - Agribusiness representatives are invited to interact with students in the classroom. Typically, they discuss business problems and issues which they confront in real life. This contributes to student learning by exposing them to real business situations, and enhances the relevancy of the training program.



Agribusiness students at a bread factory



Agribusiness workshop participants

**6. Student Internships/Attachments** - Student internships with stakeholder organizations represent an opportunity to apply and refine skills gained in the classroom, thus reinforcing and enhancing classroom instruction. Internships also allow students to explore employment opportunities and for employers to evaluate students as potential employees.

**7. Agribusiness Case Study Graduation Requirement** – Students are required to complete a case study based on real life business situation faced by agribusinesses. Typically, this would replace the traditional thesis.

## Short-term training

**8. Training for agribusiness professionals** - University programs are encouraged to provide short-term training inputs for agribusiness professionals, based on identified needs. These programs represent an opportunity for faculty and students to help agribusinesses improve their operations as well as to maintain linkages with the private sector. Outreach activities may include business plan development, finance, or product marketing.

## Applying the model

The strengths and challenges of implementing this model have been explored with higher education institutions in Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. This model has been used to successfully establish a Master’s Degree in Agribusiness Management at Sokoine University of Agriculture in Tanzania, and Egerton University in Kenya. Egerton also established a successful agribusiness outreach program. The model has proven to be flexible and with adaptation could be used by other universities to improve their linkages with the private sector and increase the relevance of their training programs.

## Further reading

Erbaugh, J.M. (2014). Overview and Introduction to Workshop on Agribusiness Plan Construction, presented at Trilateral Project sponsored Workshop on Business Plan Construction, Merica Hotel, Nakuru, Kenya, March 11 and 12, 2014.

World Bank. (2007). Cultivating knowledge and skills to grow African agriculture: A synthesis of an institutional, regional and international review. Report no. 40997-AFR. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

Linkages between companies and universities provide mutual benefit

Egerton University in Kenya collaborated with The ABC Super Feed Company to hold a workshop to better prepare graduate students for careers in the agribusiness sector. ABC agreed to provide financial, marketing and asset management data for a case study supporting the workshop.

Faculty designed the workshop based on initial industry survey findings revealing that business development plans were a priority training need for many employers. During the workshop, agribusiness graduate students were able to prepare their own financial and marketing plans to learn the process. Patrick Njuguna, the ABC company’s Assistant Production Manager, who participated in the workshop noted that the company had improved its business practices as a result.