

REPORT ON THE OUTCOMES OF THE MONASH UNIVERSITY TENTH
ANNUAL FOOD EXECUTIVE PROGRAM 2007
30 SEPTEMBER – 5 OCTOBER

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COURSE OVERVIEW:

The Monash University Food Executive Program was held at the Melbourne Business School campus in Mt Eliza, Victoria over five days. The course covered a range of lectures and group activities designed to stimulate the participants and further their leadership in and understanding of the food industry supply chain from producer to consumer.

The course providers offer three executive programs, this food program and a separate meat industry and horticulture industry program. This food program was targeted at the fast moving consumer goods supply chain, and the course participants included representatives, predominantly from companies directly supplying supermarkets with fast moving goods such as confectionary, milk, bread and from a seafood perspective canned fish along with representatives from the supermarkets that stock these products.

The course was designed to cover four key topics, the customer, the market, leadership and innovation.

The course began with the focus on leadership and innovative thinking. This was effective in opening up the participants and building trust amongst us. The facilitators used group activities to improve our engagement, allowing growth in the understanding of differing personalities and the dynamics associated with working in groups.

The course teachings on the customer and market were very valuable, with a range of very experienced presenters passing on key global trends and sharing successful case studies. Of even greater benefit was the external expertise the course drew upon to address the participants, including the Chairmen of Johnston and Johnston and Goodman Fielder, and the CEO's of Ritchie Supermarkets and Netsle New Zealand.

The group challenges were used to put the learning's from the lectures and case studies into practice and each of the groups participants were deliberately selected to ensure each group had a mixture of representatives from the various links of the supply chain.

By the end of the five days the course was completed with a group challenge in which we had to design a new retail product and pitch the new product to a retailer. Identifying the product required us to use the innovative thinking tools we had learnt. Designing the product captured required incorporating what we had learnt about the customer, and preparing the products pitch to the retailer required us putting into practice the market teachings. Ultimately the leadership training allowed us to undertake this task successfully working as a group, and the quality of the

presentations was surprisingly good given the short time frame with which to prepare them.

PERSONAL OUTCOMES:

The course was an excellent addition to the Advance in Seafood Leadership course, building on similar themes of leadership and innovation, but focussing more tightly on business issues related to the food industry. It opened my eyes to the importance of 'thinking like your customer' and considering the key drivers for their businesses when making decisions on how to structure yours. My background has generally encouraged a very "producer-centric" way of thought, and being able to undertake challenges with people outside of the production component of a food supply chain was very rewarding.

Whilst challenging, it made me want to focus more on engaging our customers with the Association.

The fast moving consumer goods sector also have a very strong focus on new product development, constantly adapting their products to reflect consumer desires. Nestle were a good example of this, being able to shift their company focus from being solely confectionary style products to a more balanced portfolio of these traditional products along with a growing range of health and wellbeing products in a relatively short period of time.

From a prawn farmer perspective, this is clearly a weakness, in that we have had one main product, a whole cooked prawn, which has not truly changed or adapted in over twenty years.

RELEVANCE TO THE SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

Whilst the course I undertook had a core focus on the 'fast moving consumer goods' (FMCG) food category the parallels that could be drawn with the seafood supply chain were very valuable.

With larger supermarkets representing such a significant proportion of the seafood retail business in Australia, it was very valuable learning how FMCG companies interacted with the supermarkets, and as mentioned above learning of the significant value they put into new product development.

We share the same ultimate customers in the retailers, and are competing for the same consumer's interests, and could stand to learn a lot from engaging more often with the FMCG part of the food industry.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

I believe it would continue to add value to the seafood industry by having representatives at both the Food Executive Program and the Meat Executive Program on an annual basis.

However my main recommendation is that the FRDC explore the possibility of a specialised seafood industry executive program with the course operators.

My justification for this recommendation is that the seafood industry has traditionally had weak relations between all members of the supply chain, and this course was particularly effective at building those ties, in addition to the valuable course components of leadership and innovation.

The course provides the opportunity for a significant number of participants (approx 30), which would allow more broad industry participation than other similar courses, and its five day intensive nature would more likely suit industry members, who may find it more difficult to leave their operations for irregular short time intervals.

I found the course to be of high enough value to organise for a member of the APFA Executive Committee, Catherine Chen, to attend the organisers Meat Executive Program the following month (Catherine has since completed the course and found it both stimulating and informative, and we are now working together to find ways to extend the course learning's to the broader prawn farming industry)

The facilitators expressed a keen interest in beginning a program for the seafood industry, and my personal view is that such a course would be of significant benefit.

There are several funding possibilities to make the course more accessible to industry members. It is a registered FarmBIS course, meaning participants from producing backgrounds can claim a 65% subsidy on the cost of the course.

MLA has a partial sponsorship program with the course organisers, which supports participation of their industries members, and often this is used to subsidise the cost of other supply chain participants such as retailers who are not entitled to the FarmBIS subsidy. FRDC could explore a similar proposal with the course organisers.

I believe the course offered good value for money, as along with the high calibre of the facilitators and speakers the \$5000 course fee included all meals and accommodation for the week (which would equate to approx - \$1500 in their own right).

I would like to thank the FRDC for sponsoring my involvement in the program, and hope that others in the seafood industry get the opportunity to participate in the future.