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Teaching case studies for food and agribusiness management courses

Special issue: Teaching case studies in food and agribusiness management

EDITORIAL

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The International Food and Agribusiness Management Association (IFAMA) and its journal, the International Food and Agribusiness Management Review (IFAMR), has a long and rich history of promoting the use of teaching case studies in the food and agribusiness management profession. IFAMA has encouraged the use of cases in instruction through sessions focusing on teaching with the case method as well as case writing and development. It has also provided an opportunity for students and instructors to showcase students' analytical skills through the student case competition at the IFAMA annual meeting.

The IFAMR regularly disseminates case studies focused on the food and agribusiness industry through its peer-reviewed journal. To this end, this special issue of IFAMR is dedicated solely to teaching cases. While the cases published in this issue were all developed as teaching cases, it is also important to acknowledge that case studies make valuable contributions to a variety of audiences. Case studies are important research tools, providing insights into policy and management issues. They may also be a convenient means to learn about an industry, specific organization, or business practice.

The cases published in this issue cover a wide-range of topics and sectors within the food and agribusiness industry. Sectors include input supply, food manufacturing, wholesale, food service, retail, and trade organizations. A wide range of topics are covered, including marketing, finance, supply chain management, strategy, organizational structure, sustainability, innovation, and acquisitions, among others.

I hope that these case studies will provide educators with a valuable source of industry information, which may be used to enhance classroom instruction. Authors provided teaching notes for all of the cases, although instructors must contact IFAMA in order to access some of them. The teaching notes provide helpful teaching strategies and analyses to aid in facilitating classroom discussions. The following paragraphs provide brief summaries of each case and the major issues they address.

The lead case in this issue is “BASF: differentiating on service innovation.” The case involves the North American division of BASF, which provides crop protection products. To increase demand for its products and promote differentiation, BASF created the role of innovation specialist to ensure that product innovations are conveyed by distributors and retailers to farmers. The case focuses on market segment prioritization, industry relationships, how BASF can best increase its market share, and what role innovation specialists should play. It also addresses challenges that occur when the innovation specialists’ goals conflict with those of the farmer or retailer.

Another input supply company, United Agriculture Cooperative, is faced with an unsolicited offer to purchase its agronomy division in “United Agricultural Cooperative: considering the sale of the agronomy division.” The case encourages readers to conduct an analysis and make a recommendation in response to the purchase offer. Questions such as how business decisions within a cooperative should be made and who should make major decisions, such as the sale of a division, are also asked.

The case, “Hutten Catering: how to organize innovation for vital consumers in a sustainable food system?,” focuses on Hutten Catering’s innovation center, Food Squad. Hutten Catering, a family-owned Dutch catering company, founded Food Squad to collaborate with its partners in the development of innovative ideas that prepare the company for its role in a rapidly changing food system in which health and sustainability are much more important than they were in the past. The key decision in the case revolves around whether Hutten should spin off Food Squad, opening the center to additional investors and government subsidies.

ConAgra is a large, publicly-held food manufacturing company that sells many products and brands to supermarkets, restaurants, and food service establishments. The case, “ConAgra Foods: valuing a potential recipe for success,” describes the potential acquisition of Ralcorp, a large private label food manufacturer. Readers are asked to evaluate the proposed acquisition from a financial perspective and to assess the strategic fit of the purchase.

King’s Hawaiian, another food manufacturing company, needs to rethink its supply chain strategy, particularly in the face of the avian influenza outbreak. In the case, “King’s Hawaiian: managing the supply of aloha spirit for every household, every day,” readers gain insights into the challenges facing a fast-growing, family-run business. The focal points of the case include identifying risks and opportunities in the management of the supply chain as well as the relationship between the supply chain and long-term strategy.

The “IKEA: global sourcing and sustainable leather initiative” case focuses on a sustainability initiative in the global sourcing of leather at the large Swedish-founded, Dutch-based manufacturer and retailer. The case offers readers the opportunity to learn and discuss the implementation of sustainability initiatives in the context of global sourcing. More specifically, the reader is encouraged to consider the strategy and structure of global sourcing at IKEA and the management of internal and external resources to implement IKEA’s sustainable leather project.

The GASA Group Germany, a subsidiary of the DLG group (Denmark), is one of the largest potted-plant wholesalers in the German market. The case, “Meeting the growth challenge: developing the next level organization for GASA Group Germany,” asks readers to consider several issues, chief among them how the company’s organizational structure and business processes should change to accommodate past growth and future opportunities. A related issue concerns how the family-like culture might be maintained in spite of the growth in the number of employees.

The “Karoo meat of origin certification scheme: a silver bullet?” case focuses on the development of a certification program for lamb from the Karoo region of South Africa. The purpose of the certification program is to allow producers to differentiate and promote the region’s unique lamb products and enhance farmer returns. The case focuses on a range of issues including the development of the certification program, vulnerabilities of the claims under certification, supply chain challenges, and regulatory issues.

“The Brazilian cotton marketing initiative – ‘*Sou de Algodão*’ case” describes a program designed to encourage the use of cotton in Brazil. The program was developed by ABRAPA (Brazilian Association of Cotton Producers) with the goal of increasing the volume of cotton utilized throughout the value chain with the support and participation of several members of the cotton value chain. The case explores issues including the sustainability of the successful program, marketing, finance, and governance.

