

The Establishment of Agricultural Leadership Programs and the International Association of Programs for Agricultural Leadership¹

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Introduction

The Kellogg Farmers Study Program established agricultural leadership programs in 1965 (Miller, 1976). Today these programs, which are part of the International Association of Programs for Agricultural Leadership (IAPAL) (Lindquist, 2010), are used around the world to develop leaders for “continued or future service to their community—rural, agricultural, or otherwise” (Kaufman & Carter, 2005, p. 66).

Kellogg Farmers Study Program

As agriculture began to grow in complexity, there became a need for leadership to create a stronger tie between industry and the consumer. Following World War II, Michigan State University and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation recognized the continuing need for effective agricultural leadership and set out to establish a program to develop it. From 1965 to 1972, 150 Michigan farmers participated in the Kellogg Farmers Study Program (KFSP) (Miller, 1976). Through the KSFP, participants could increase their “understanding of political, social and economic systems, develop social skills, be effective spokespeople for their industry or community, expand individual networks, and develop future political, civic and organizational leaders” (Howell, Weir, & Cook, 1982, p. 52). Farmers, though knowledgeable in their

occupation, lacked understanding of social sciences, liberal arts, humanities, world economies, and politics (Miller, 1976). Issue awareness in these fields was deemed necessary for solving problems. Soon after the KSFP, agricultural leadership programs in California and Pennsylvania were established (Howell, Weir, & Cook, 1979). Over time, other states, provinces, and countries established agricultural leadership programs.

International Association of Programs for Agricultural Leadership

There are 39 active programs within the United States, Canada, Scotland, Australia, and New Zealand. IAPAL serves as the umbrella organization for these programs (Lindquist, 2010). Though the programs differ in some aspects, they share the goal of establishing effective leadership for the agricultural industry and local communities. To facilitate learning, each program establishes leadership classes made up of representatives from agriculture, natural resources, or rural communities. Classes consist of seminars that provide participants with an understanding of the political, social, economic, and cultural issues that impact their industry and community. Classes “encourage the development of effective and responsible agricultural

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leaders that are capable of addressing industry issues and becoming active participants in public affairs” (Kaufman & Carter, 2005, p. 68).

Each leadership program under IAPAL works toward different objectives as they operate to serve multiple stakeholders in their respective states, provinces, or countries. Differences and similarities can be found in the individual programs in terms of their history and structure, funding, evaluation methods, curricula, and alumni program structure. However, each of the programs has a common mission to “create a better understanding of content of the economic, political, and social framework of American society and apply this understanding to the complex problems and unique concerns of agriculture and rural communities” (Miller, 1976, p. 6).

Curriculum

Through a structured program curriculum, class participants are exposed to and interact with a variety of businesses, social settings, and political environments, both domestically and internationally. Agricultural leadership programs generally consist of workshops and travel seminars that provide participants with an understanding of political, social, economic, cultural, and agricultural issues at the community, state, national, and international levels.

Typically, leadership classes last about 21 months with an average of 12 seminars per class. Programs either establish classes each year or every other year with an average class size of 26 participants. Depending upon the state or province, programs accept between 10 and 30 participants per class.

Seminars are held within a program’s respective state or province and examine issues that impact the region. Most programs also contain a national seminar component. For most programs within the United States, this entails traveling to Washington, DC, and another state. For programs located outside of the United States, national travel includes visiting a major city within their respective country. Many programs also provide the opportunity to examine issues on a global level through international seminars.

The curriculum for the leadership program provides perspective on a variety of topics that impact agriculture and the community through a mix of lecture and field-based learning, panel discussions, tours, readings, and technology tools. Seminars cover a variety of topics, including leadership skills; personal development; agricultural, food,

and environmental issues; social issues; state and federal political processes; and communications.

Program Benefits

Benefits are measured through evaluation, and results are classified into two categories of program outcomes: program impact on the participant and program impact on the community.

Program impacts on participants include

- increased skill development in problem solving (Howell et al., 1979), critical thinking (Carter & Rudd, 2000), and communication skills, including public speaking and media training (Diem & Nikola, 2005);
- enhanced confidence to become involved in leadership roles (Diem & Nikola, 2005) and public affairs (Carter & Rudd, 2000; Diem & Nikola, 2005; Howell et al., 1979);
- improved awareness of the connections among multiple issues (Howell et al., 1979);
- increased network, relationship, and team-building skills (Carter & Rudd, 2000; Diem & Nikola, 2005; Earnest, 1996; Whent & Leising, 1992);
- broadened perspective on current issues (Abington-Cooper, 2005);
- increased opportunities for continued learning (Carter & Rudd, 2000); and
- better knowledge and understanding of other cultures (Diem & Nikola, 2005).

Program impacts on communities include

- educating others about issues pertaining to agriculture and natural resources (Strickland, 2011);
- increasing program graduate involvement in local community affairs through an examination of national and international issues (Howell et al., 1979);
- developing an increased awareness of the political process and issues (Carter & Rudd, 2000; Earnest, 1996);
- developing communication skills to increase community involvement (Diem and Nikola, 2005);

- developing seminars and community leadership programs for the industry or community (Strickland, 2011); and
- encouraging others to become involved in community issues (Earnest, 1996).

Agricultural Leadership Program Alumni

Some programs have a structured alumni program in place for program graduates. These alumni organizations enable program graduates to serve the leadership program in multiple capacities, such as by providing support, serving as board members, or recruiting future class participants. Alumni also have the opportunity to continue their own learning experiences through further leadership training and networking with alumni from their own classes and classes within their program, as well as with alumni from other programs in IAPAL.

The International Leadership Alumni Conference (ILAC) is another opportunity for alumni members to engage in the leadership process. ILAC meets once a year in a host state, province, or country and provides opportunities for program alumni to further their leadership development, network with others, and examine issues from multiple perspectives.

Conclusion

For agriculture and rural communities to remain viable and strengthen the tie between themselves and their urban constituency, leaders need to increase their skill levels, build upon their influential networks, and increase their knowledge base of issues and solutions. In their evaluation of the Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program, Dhanakumar, Rossing, and Campbell (1996) contended that leaders “must be able to view change in a broad perspective, and be prepared to provide the wise leadership that 21st century challenges demand” (p. 2). In the beginning, the Kellogg Foundation had a vision to serve the industry they were involved in for the long term. Through the preparation of leaders, IAPAL programs instill skills in their participants, increase understanding and appreciation of world cultures, and lead participants to greater opportunities to make a difference for their communities and industries as a whole.

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