



*International Food and Agribusiness Management Review*  
*Volume 15 Special Issue A*

## **The People Question: Creating Global Advantage through Global Talent Initiatives**

*Global Networks, Global Perspectives and Global Talent  
Discussions on the Development of Human Capital in Agribusiness<sup>1</sup>*

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### **Abstract**

As agribusiness has evolved from a local, generalized activity into a global, specialized industry, fewer of the stakeholders, from producers to consumers, really understand the food production system. Education is the key to navigating the challenges of global agribusiness.

**Keywords:** agribusiness, human capital, global

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<sup>1</sup> This Special Issue was made possible through the generous support of Alltech and Kincannon & Reed. The essay collection was distributed during a special session on human capital development presented during the IFAMA 2012 Forum in Shanghai, China on June 14, 2012.

## Introduction

Once the most local industry, agribusiness is now firmly a global industry, and one of its most serious challenges is ignorance of the modern food production system. There is an urgent need for greater understanding amongst all stakeholders: from consumers and food producers, to regulators and scientists, to people who work in the industry. Agriculture has changed so much that consumers generally do not understand the realities of how their food is produced, especially as more people around the world move away from agriculture and farms are consolidated.

In addition to the abundance of new technology and a near constant stream of new research to keep up with, food producers also face increasing pressure from both consumers and regulators, at home and abroad. There is a constant media presence craving sensational stories and easy-to-digest sound bites. Regulators have to manage political expectations as well as changing practices and new technologies on ever-smaller budgets in an ever-larger geographic region. As the agribusiness industry grows and becomes more technical, more global and more complex, attracting outstanding new employees becomes evermore challenging.

Each of these stakeholder groups—Customers (both industry customers and end consumers), Influencers (scientists, regulators, politicians), and Employees—have different experiences of agriculture and bring different perspectives, objectives and levels of understanding. Yet they all represent valuable human capital. Developing human capital is sometimes seen as an internal concern, largely focused on recruitment and retention, and to a lesser extent, training and development. This paper presents a different approach: one that places education at the center and expands the concept of human capital beyond employees to stakeholders. By emphasizing education, and taking the long view, Alltech believes it has found a way to positively influence the industry, while creating a competitive advantage.



1. **Customers & Consumers**—Companies purchasing Alltech solutions and using them to produce feed and food, and consumers of that feed and food.
2. **Employees**—A diverse global team of 2,800 people
3. **Influencers**—Companies and authorities such as politicians, regulators, journalists, and scientists who can change or shape the way animals destined for food consumption are being fed, raised and processed.

## Lifelong Educational Engagement

Agribusiness is an increasingly complex and technical field, requiring not just a high initial level of education, but substantive continuing education. Although people outside the Agribusiness industry may not see it as part of the 'knowledge economy,' the reality is different: innovation in both products and processes is fast-paced and often dramatic. Keeping up with these changes is demanding for people in the field. For consumers and regulators, it is even harder.

A core value at Alltech is education. It is the foundation for personal and professional growth and development. The company takes the long view, using education to help Employees grow professionally, to help Influencers better understand the complexities of Agribusiness, and to build an understanding of the industry in Customers and Consumers. All of these initiatives reflect the agricultural tradition of 'learning by doing' through the contemporary best practices of 'experiential' learning and 'multi-modal' learning. Further, the initiatives work to bring these disparate stakeholders closer together: many of these initiatives involve more than one constituency, in dynamic and integrating activities. These links will become apparent in the following sections, which outline some of the education-oriented initiatives that Alltech uses to develop the 'Human Capital' of its stakeholders.

### *Stakeholder: Employees*

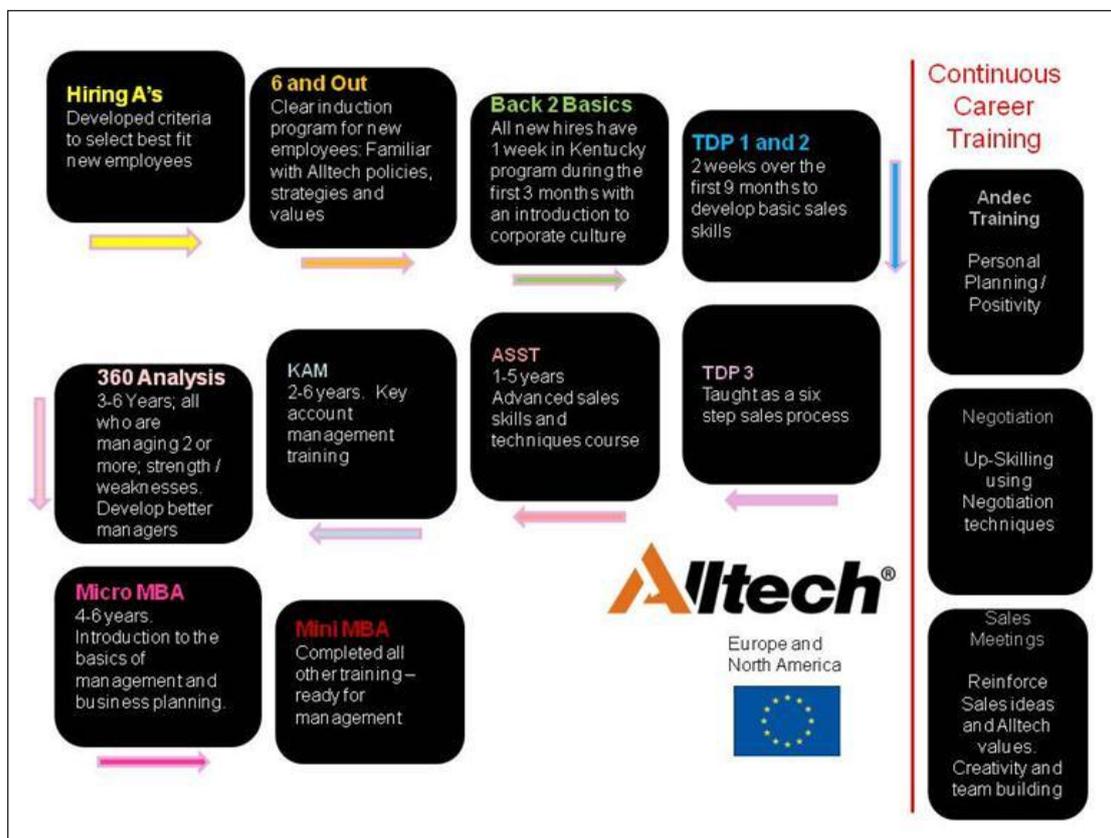
Employees are the baseline for Alltech: they create and produce the products, they are the primary contact with Influencers, Customers and Consumers, and the more they know, the more knowledge they can share. At every career stage, from new graduate to senior management, Alltech uses education initiatives to help employees be their professional best, and in turn, they become Alltech's best educators for the stakeholders in the industry. With operations in more than 130 countries, internal education initiatives are also an important part of building the shared vocabulary, shared sense of mission and shared corporate culture that enable a globally dispersed, culturally diverse organization to operate effectively.

One of the newest initiatives is the year-long *Alltech Graduate Program*. Designed to attract graduates who wish to work in a dynamic global context (notably including those who had not been considering going into the agribusiness sector), applicants must already be fluent in two (or more) languages. Through experiential learning, participants gain practical management skills and lay the foundations to a career that will be shaped by their own ambitions and skills. After early training sessions at the Alltech facility in Ireland, participants are posted to Alltech offices around the world. The expectation is that the strongest participants will be offered permanent jobs at the end of the program. These graduates will have had a global orientation from the very beginning of their careers and will be well positioned for the challenges facing Alltech and agribusiness.

Newly hired employees also learn quickly that education is an important part of Alltech's corporate culture. The *Talent Development Pathway* (TDP) begins with an induction program tailored to the different departments and corporate initiatives. A series of modules, with a timeline for completion, ensures that each new employee becomes familiar not just with their specific role, but how that role fits within the company, its products and the 'Alltech way'. The Lifecycle Diagram, below, outlines the process for salespeople. An important element to the success of the TDP is the marker points along the way that are specific enough to let both employees and managers know where they are but with ranges that allow for individualization. Also, in parallel with the individual TDP, there are continuous career development modules that reinforce both key skill areas and teamwork. Based on merit and performance, employees become eligible for advanced development programs, including the 'Mini-MBA' program. Originally designed to develop the management skills of talented employees in a more focused way than subsidizing participation in generic MBA programs, an invitation to participate in the Mini-MBA has become highly coveted by staff as recognition of achievement and potential for advancement. It is also valued by senior executives as an identifier of tal-

ent and as a retention incentive. Continuing refresher courses and invitations to analyze emerging issues for the company and/or industry are offered to mini-MBA graduates, extending the learning and benefits. The result is a program that offers the most motivated and talented employees, while providing an incentive to remain with the company, knowing that they will continue to grow and develop professionally and be rewarded for their commitment and contribution to the success of the organization.

### Alltech Training Lifecycle Diagram: Sales Example



#### Stakeholders: Influencers

Influencers in Agribusiness include such disparate yet highly linked groups as politicians, regulators, journalists, and scientists. These groups interact and influence each other in many ways (e.g., politicians often seek to influence the regulators), but equally, they are often at cross-purposes (as every scientist who has seen a complex piece of research reduced to a headline knows). Moreover, direct efforts to educate can be seen as dishonorable (for example, bringing politicians to see how a facility works can be seen as a junket; creating explanatory language for a regulator can be seen as trying to tilt the field to your advantage). Yet, in a complex and changing field, policies and rules made without understanding can damage the industry. Similarly, headlines can misinterpret research results to the point of leading to misplaced policies. Alltech has found that creating forums in which Influencer stakeholders and Customer stakeholders can come together and learn together is a potent way to share knowledge and create understanding.

Alltech has hosted an international symposium, a forum for sharing information and discussing industry issues for 28 years. Customers listen to leading scientists from around the world present the latest research. They see scientists, politicians and regulators participate in vigorous debates on issues such as sustainability, technology and industry trends. Everyone has the opportunity to ask each other questions, to see other aspects of the industry, and to learn in a neutral arena. Participants meet in a variety of settings, as well,

within specialities and across disciplines, in small groups and large gatherings, formally and informally. In 2012, 2,966 attendees from 72 countries and 46 US states participated in the symposium, with simultaneous translation in five languages.

### *Stakeholders: Consumers and Customers*

The people who will become agribusiness employees, customers, and influencers all start out as consumers, so education initiatives that help inform consumers today also help to develop the stakeholders of tomorrow.

Consumer understanding of agribusiness tends to come from what is learned at home, which is often out of date, or whatever is in the media, which is often fragmented or incomplete. Customers in the agribusiness community are typically familiar with current and emerging practices and issues in their specific sector, but the pace of change makes it difficult to keep up, much less develop an awareness of changes in the larger community. Both customers and consumers are important stakeholders for agribusiness organizations, yet they tend to have isolated pockets of knowledge and not a good view of the larger picture. Alltech has developed educational initiatives designed to reach and inform consumers and customers across ages and around the world. These programs include working with grammar schools, universities and professionals.

## **Agriculture for the Next Generation**

Alltech Kidzone was created to engage and inspire students (ages 4-17) by demonstrating the role of agriculture in modern life through an online learning model ([www.Alltech.com/Kidzone](http://www.Alltech.com/Kidzone)). Developed originally in Ireland with Agri-Aware, Kidzone provides online and classroom based interactive games designed to inform children about how food is produced and the role of farming in protecting our natural environment.



SCHOOL

## **Transition from Academia to Practice**

Alltech's Bioscience Centers (USA, Ireland, China) partner with local universities to tackle agricultural challenges. This collaborative research environment bridges academia and industry, enabling ambitious young scientists to apply their talents in the real world. Graduate students attend classes and work with their professor while participating in Alltech in core research projects with access to senior researchers and state-of-the-art equipment. They receive their Ph.D. or Master's Degree from an accredited national university with a global overlay and relevant experience.



UNIVERSITY

**Alltech Young Scientist** is an international competition for science students at the university and post-graduate level. Students are asked to submit a scientific paper on a topic such as veterinary science, animal nutrition, feeding technology or agricultural management. A panel of judges reviews each paper and finalists travel to Kentucky for formal presentations. Undergraduate and graduate winners receive a scholarship of \$5,000 and \$10,000, respectively, as well as a trophy, during Alltech's International Symposium.

**The Margin of Excellence Fellowship Program** provides post-graduate students in Kentucky with a substantial stipend and includes bonuses for published work, funding for visiting other laboratories and a retention bonus if the recipients stay in Kentucky for three years post-graduation.

**Developing Strong Ag Journalists** is essential as agribusiness becomes more technically complex and interconnected globally. The Alltech-IFAJ recognizes young agricultural journalists and supports their professional development. Open to journalists in more than 30 countries, recipients receive a €1,000 (\$1,324 USD) scholarship to support their participation at an IFAJ Congress. They also contribute a 500-word story or three-minute broadcast about the Congress to IFAJ News or the Federation's website, [www.ifaj.org](http://www.ifaj.org). More than 60 journalists have received the award since the program's inception.



Each of these educational initiatives have both traditional and experiential learning aspects, and are part of developing the 'human capital' needed for all of the stakeholders – *Employees, Influencers, Customers and Consumers* – to play an active, informed role in the process of growing and processing the food we all eat. They are 'global' in their essence; they operate across national, cultural and language boundaries, and they are bringing global talent together, developing global networks and providing global perspectives.

Most importantly, these programs work. The range of programs outlined here are indicative of how important it is to reach across traditional boundaries and specialized silos. By focusing on education and reaching out to stakeholders from producers to consumers, Alltech is addressing the serious issue of limited, incomplete and outdated understanding of the global food system. For all the changing technology and evolving consumer expectations, it is still people that are at the heart of agribusiness.