

AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: INSIGHTS AND EXPERIENCES FROM CANADA

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ABSTRACT

In Canada, agriculture and its related industries are undergoing rapid and significant changes. Among the many issues facing farmers and other agri-business people are the development of biotechnologies, the decline of on-farm and rural populations, the emergence of new public policies, concerns over food safety, globalisation of markets, sensitivity to environmental issues, and the influence of regional and global trade agreements. Given the complexity of these issues, and the distinctiveness of various regions, sectors and commodities produced in Canada, there is a need for national agricultural leaders who understand the issues, and have the skills and networks to construct effective responses to those issues.

The Canadian Farm Business Management Council has supported the development and pilot testing of a national leadership development program known as Canadian Agriculture Lifetime Leadership (CALL). CALL is a two-year program that selects men and women with demonstrated leadership potential and commitment to the agricultural industry, and provides those men and women with an opportunity to become more effective leaders. In addition to CALL, Ontario and New Brunswick have provincial leadership development programs targeted to agriculture. This paper introduces the context of agricultural leadership development programs in Canada. It then provides a short review of the CALL program and its provincial counterpart in Ontario. Based on this review, and on the perspectives provided by program graduates, a vision for the future of agricultural leadership programs in Canada is presented.

AN INTRODUCTION TO AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS IN CANADA

Context

Diverse and dynamic are two good adjectives to describe the agriculture industry in Canada. Canadian farmers produce a large number of commodities, and the major ones are grains and oilseeds, cattle, dairy products, hogs, poultry and eggs, greenhouse products, specialty crops and potatoes. The marketing structures in place to organise the sale of these commodities are virtually as diverse as the commodities themselves. There are quota systems in place for dairy products and eggs, single-desk marketing systems for wheat, open market systems for cattle, and contractual production systems for potatoes. Input industries, value-added processing, transportation, wholesaling and retailing systems also vary substantially for different products. In addition to commodity-specific or sectoral diversity, Canadian agriculture varies markedly between different regions. Given Canada's large size, differences in climate, soil type, history, public policy and proximity to markets have produced regional variation in agricultural systems. Sectoral and regional diversity are reflected in the large number of farm and commodity-specific organisations that have developed in order to further the political and economic interests of producers and other actors in the agricultural industry in Canada.

Along with diversity, dynamism characterises Canadian agriculture. In Canada as elsewhere, agriculture and its related industries are undergoing rapid and significant changes. Among the many issues facing farmers and other agri-business people are the development of biotechnologies, the decline of on-farm and rural populations, the need for new public policy, concerns over food safety, globalisation of markets, sensitivity to environmental issues, and the influence of regional and global trade agreements. Given the complexity of these issues, and the distinctiveness of various regions, sectors and commodities produced in Canada, there is a need for national agricultural leaders who understand the issues, and have the skills and networks to construct effective responses to those issues.

Leadership development programs in agriculture

The majority of agricultural producers in Canada operate firms that are relatively small in comparison to the overall size of their industry. The political and economic challenge of the predominance of small and medium-sized firms is reflected in the tendency of such firms to establish collective lobbying and marketing organisations, and co-operatives. This industrial structure also makes it difficult for producers themselves to organise formal leadership development opportunities such as those frequent in industries characterised by the presence of larger corporate or public sector structures. However, leadership is no less important to the agricultural industry than it is to the automobile industry (for instance) in Canada. Historically, the need for leadership development in Canadian agriculture has been addressed by a variety of initiatives, including the 4-H and co-operative movements, various “young farmers” programs, and the activities of university-based and public sector extension programs.

In recent decades, the recognition that agriculture has distinct leadership development needs formed the basis for the evolution of a new model of leadership education. In the early 1960s, the Kellogg Foundation supported an agricultural leadership program developed by Michigan State University. This program has evolved into a model of leadership education that is used quite widely in the United States. The International Association of Programs for Agricultural Leaders (IAPAL) currently involves leadership programs from one-half of the states in the U.S.A. The Kellogg Foundation provided start-up funding to many of these programs. While there are substantial differences between these programs, they share certain common objectives and structures. State leadership development programs typically recruit between twenty-five and thirty promising leaders, and gather these leaders for between eight and twelve seminars over an eighteen-month or two-year period. In addition to in-state seminars, these programs typically involve educational travel to both Washington, D.C. and an overseas country. The core objective of such programs is to select young rural or agricultural leaders, and develop their knowledge, skills and networks so that they can realise their potential as leaders of regional and national organisations. The two Canadian programs which share the most similarities with the IAPAL model are the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program in Ontario (established in 1985) and the New Brunswick Agricultural Leadership Program (established in 1994).

ONTARIO'S ADVANCED AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM (AALP)

A Basic description

The Ontario Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program was established by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), University of Guelph, Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Foundation for Rural Living. AALP is an executive development program for people who want to broaden their horizons and expand their network to help shape the future of the agriculture and food sectors. AALP is administered by the Agricultural Leadership Trust.

Participants develop leadership skills, increase their knowledge of the agri-food system and develop their perspectives on critical issues in the industry. The value of the program is further enhanced as participants expand their network across the agri-food and rural sector, through their national and international study tours.

Eligibility criteria for the program include demonstrated leadership qualities and a potential for further leadership development. A commitment to Ontario agriculture and rural communities is required. Participants pay one quarter of the total program cost. The balance of the funding is provided through partners and sponsors of the program. Graduates are expected to assist in the continuation of the program through fundraising and advocacy, and to identify and mentor future participants.

After 15 years of operation, the Advanced Agricultural Leadership program has a proven track record. There are now 240 graduates who are influencing and directing change in rural Ontario; building coalitions across the agri-food and rural sectors; strengthening the industry with a stronger and better informed voice of Ontario agriculture; and contributing significant economic returns.

Estimates of economic impact

Return on investment in leadership programs like AALP is very high. In 1996, the University of Guelph conducted a study to assess the economic returns to AALP. The

economic impact of AALP was assessed by interviews with graduates and key informants, and through reviewing secondary data describing the economic returns to programs in which graduates were involved.

Graduate interviews permitted individual contributions to be measured and aggregated. The net present value of benefits to the agricultural/rural sector from 1987 to 1995 was \$21,242,536. The net present value of benefits to society, excluding transfers to the agricultural/rural sector was \$16,155,932. Total cost for 64 participants amounted to \$1,950,002. Ratio of benefits to cost is therefore 11:1 for the agricultural / rural sector and 8:1 for society. Projected benefits for society to 2005 total \$48,267,533. The ratio of costs to benefits would therefore be 25:1.

A recent study by the Angus Reid group found that 97% of the graduates believe this program made them better leaders. They have applied their leadership skills to their own businesses and home communities, commodity and rural organisations, municipal and provincial governments.

CALL: DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE LEADERS FOR THE CANADIAN AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

History

The Canadian Farm Business Management Council (CFBMC) was established in 1992 with funding provided by the Canadian government through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The CFBMC brings together industry and government to identify and share ideas regarding key management issues in agriculture. Its Board of Directors is composed of one farm manager and one provincial government representative from each of Canada's ten provinces, as well as one representative from the Yukon and Northwest Territories and one representative from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. As Canada's only organisation devoted exclusively to effective farm management, the CFBMC has adopted the following mission statement: "As a champion for farm business management, CFBMC supports Canadian Farm Managers through building partnerships and facilitating the development and sharing of innovative business ideas." The CFBMC supports,

produces and distributes state-of-the-art training and information materials specifically for farm managers (<http://www.farmcentre.com>).

The University of Saskatchewan (<http://www.extension.usask.ca>) initially approached the CFBMC in 1995 with a proposal to conduct leadership development activities in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. The CFBMC suggested further background research, and consultation with other stakeholder groups. The outcome of such research and consultation was eventually a proposal for the CALL program. This proposal was approved in late 1996, and from September 1997 through April 1999 the first cohort of CALL participants undertook the program.

The initial thirty CALL participants represented all ten Canadian provinces, and were distributed across the following general regions: Atlantic Canada (6); Quebec and Ontario (7); Manitoba and Saskatchewan (9); and Alberta and British Columbia (8). There were sixteen men and fourteen women, and over two-thirds of the participants were involved in agricultural production. The remaining participants all had agriculture or agri-business employment and leadership roles in the public, private and third sectors. All of the major commodities produced in Canada were represented with at least one participant in the CALL program. The participants had a wealth of experience with agricultural leadership in farms, agri-businesses, non-governmental organisations and rural communities. Their leadership roles involved organisations as diverse as the National Farmers' Union, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Farm Women's Network, Dairy Farmers of Canada, Canadian Pork Council, the Western Canadian Wheat Growers, the Quebec Potato Producers, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, the Alberta Agriculture and Food Council, and the Conservation Council of New Brunswick. Twenty-eight of the thirty participants graduated from the program, and a great majority of these graduates attested that the program was very beneficial to their development as leaders for the agriculture industry in Canada.

The initial pilot experience was judged to be largely successful, yet it fell short of being a truly national program because it was offered in only one of Canada's two official languages. In Canada, about 15% of farmers and about 25% of the general population speak French as their first language. The federal government has an official languages policy, which affirms that programs and services offered by the federal government will

be offered in both English and French. It became clear that a second pilot project would be necessary in order to determine how to most effectively integrate francophone and anglophone participants into one national program. L'Université Laval (<http://www.ulaval.ca/dgfc/dgfc.htm>) in Quebec City was invited to become the French-language institutional partner in CALL. During 1998 and 1999, l'Université Laval and the University of Saskatchewan worked to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the initial CALL pilot, and to develop a pedagogical structure that could accommodate both anglophone and francophone participants. In late 1999 the CFBMC approved funding for CALL / PCLA (Programme Canadien de Leadership en Agriculture) 2000 – 2002. In addition to its bilingual nature, the second CALL pilot project differs substantially from the first by offering its participants individualised leadership competency assessment, planning and coaching services. This innovation was inspired by participants' evaluations of the first CALL pilot project, and designed through the efforts of a team at l'Université Laval. At the time of the IFMA Congress in July 2001, the CALL program will be at the mid-point of its second pilot project.

Like the Kellogg Foundation in the United States, the CFBMC is not going to be involved in the long-term delivery of CALL or any other leadership development program. Its role has been to provide financial and organisational support to the development and pilot testing of the program in both of Canada's official languages. The University of Saskatchewan and l'Université Laval have the responsibility to work with the alumni of the pilot projects to ensure the sustainability of the program.

Mission, objectives and strategic vision

The mission of the CALL Program is to develop effective leaders for the Canadian agri-food industry. Within this mission, the program has four overall objectives:

1. Recruit candidates with personal leadership qualities and competencies, and improve those qualities and competencies through activities directed at their knowledge, know-how, and personal development so that they become better leaders and ambassadors for Canadian agriculture.

2. Create a network of leaders to positively influence the development of the Canadian agri-food industry and the productivity of Canadian agricultural businesses throughout Canada and the world.
3. Develop a pool of leaders who will act on an ongoing basis to transfer leadership competency and capacity to their communities, businesses and agri-food organisations.
4. Improve the quality of leadership in local and regional communities, regional, provincial and national agri-food organisations, and agricultural businesses.

CALL is a leadership development program with a vision of translating a strategic investment in key individuals into widespread development of leadership capacity in Canadian agriculture. The two steps in this process are developing the knowledge, skills, networks and personal qualities of the direct participants in the program, and structuring a process whereby those participants develop leadership capacity among agricultural organisations and farm managers across the country.

Making the strategic vision happen

The first step in the CALL leadership development strategy is to enhance the knowledge, skills, networks and personal qualities of the participants in the program. The curricular focus of the program is on four areas:

- Broadening horizons of knowledge about leadership, agricultural issues, and other issues of critical importance to national agricultural leaders in Canada.
- Developing and practising the arts of leadership, including public speaking, working with teams, analysing issues and using information technologies.
- Developing effective networks through extended interaction with other CALL participants, and through contact with leaders and resource people at each seminar.
- Promoting personal growth and development through challenging experiences and a personal development planning and coaching process.

This leadership development curriculum is delivered through four basic methods:

- A personalised leadership competency assessment / planning / feedback / coaching process.
- Six thematic seminars, designed with the participation of the participants themselves, around specific issues in leadership and agriculture.
- Computer-mediated conferences designed to support in-person seminars, facilitate peer networking and group projects, and enable group discussion of leadership and agricultural issues.
- A transfer of learning process (to be discussed below)

The second step in the CALL leadership development strategy is to structure a process whereby the direct participants develop leadership capacity among agricultural organisations and farm managers across the country. This transfer of learning process involves the following methods:

- The recruitment and selection of participants holding leadership positions with major national, provincial and regional agricultural organisations enables CALL participants to both improve the immediate quality of leadership of those organisations, and through role modelling and mentoring other leaders, enhance those organisations' future leadership capacity.
- A formal agreement requires each CALL participant to disseminate the benefits of his or her participation in the program to other agricultural leaders, in a manner that both enables the practice of leadership skills and enhances his or her role as a leader in the industry (e.g. presentations, newsletter articles, mentoring).
- The process of each in-person seminar involves key leaders and resource people from the region in which the seminar is hosted.
- The program raises the profile of agricultural leadership issues in Canada, and encourages the development of similar programs across Canada.

This review of the objectives and strategies of the CALL program gives the reader an indication of the potential value of the program to agriculture in Canada. Although it is too early to conclude whether the program will fulfil its mission, there are indications that CALL is helping to build a network of effective leaders whose activities are influencing the future of a significant number of businesses, organisations and communities across Canada.

A VISION FOR AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN CANADA

The CALL program will be recognised as an important means through which leaders in Canadian agriculture expand their horizons, build their leadership competencies, and develop effective networks. More provinces will join Ontario and New Brunswick in delivering excellent leadership development programs with goals and structures similar to CALL. Graduates from these programs will form an expanding network of leaders to serve the businesses and organisations that will direct the future of agriculture in Canada. The outcome of this network will be a thriving agricultural industry at the forefront of the sustainable production and marketing of goods and services demanded by consumers around the world.

PERSPECTIVES FROM PROGRAM GRADUATES

Reflections from the initial CALL graduates

The graduates of the first CALL program have indicated that networking and diversity of people in the program, a national focus, confidence building, personal growth and becoming more tolerant of diverse opinions were all strengths of the program. It was also mentioned that the travel component provided a “real” practical perspective to the learning, and an exposure to experiences that one would never have otherwise.

A survey held recently among the graduates found the following benefits:

- “The single biggest benefit has been the fabulous network of people I now have across the country.”
- “Careful evaluation of why people do certain things, and if that needs to continue that way.”
- “Thinking outside the box.”
- “More focus on achieving a balance between personal, business and community issues.”
- “Providing vision and be part of solutions, as opposed to accepting the status quo.”
- “Choosing to work on a project out of interest and the desire to make a difference, rather than out of a sense of duty.”

- “A greater understanding of our country, agriculture and the human component of agriculture, (human resources would be agriculture’s best kept secret). A greater understanding of myself, my skills and my abilities, and my passion for agriculture.”

One concrete result of the program has been the formation of a national consulting firm by several CALL graduates.

A personal perspective from Corry Martens

I am a graduate of the AALP. I joined the program in 1993, inspired by a recent graduate from my community. I became part of Class 5, a group of thirty people with very different backgrounds and experiences, all linked in one way or another to agricultural and rural Ontario.

Over a period of 20 months, we attended 9 three-day sessions, in different parts of Ontario. Study topics included government and political systems, marketing and economics, environmental impact, national and international trade, communication and organisational skills, decision making, consumer and social issues, working with the media, trends in the agri-food industry and society, globalisation and the dynamics of change.

Part of the sessions always was a field trip, where we learned about the local economy and agri-food industry. We toured the desolate sites of the nickel mines in Sudbury, where an intensive greening program is changing the face of the earth; we toured Reid’s Dairy Co. Ltd, a family owned company distributing a full line of dairy products; we were guests at the Canadian Forces Base where the Lieutenant Colonel told us: “Leadership is a matter of attitude - yours”. We visited the Ontario Provincial Police in downtown Toronto, the Ontario government buildings, the largest soup kitchen and a centre for homeless men in the heart of this three million people city. Our international study tour took us to Mexico and California. Stereotypes were shattered upon touring Mexico City (population of 20 million), rural Mexico and farm villages. The impressions and experiences of these tours provide a much better understanding of international trade issues, politics, and environment. Impressions that never leave you after you go back to your everyday life.

We debated the values of leadership with people like the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario and the President of the United Steelworkers of North America. We learned about the dynamics of change; the skills of conflict resolution and negotiating; communication techniques; the interaction between government and people; marketing and economics; environmental impact; consumer and social issues; and globalisation.

The biggest impact of the program is in the study tours, where we were exposed to agricultural and rural issues in another setting. Broadening of our horizons, adapting practice and ideas to our own operations, understanding the issues we face from a completely different perspective are all benefits that come venturing out to see what the world looks like outside our farm gate.

I cannot stress enough how the leadership program has helped me to become a better manager in our own operation. I have learned to anticipate change, and how to manage for results. I have decided that we better make things happen, rather than wait until something happens, and then scramble to cope. I have a much more focused and balanced approach to personal, business and community involvement.

I have a passion for agriculture, I have no trouble expressing my opinions, and I want to be part of the decisions made for the agri-food industry and the rural community.

In closing, I want to remind you how I was inspired by one person to take this leadership program. As a result of that inspiration, I am here today, to testify in person about the value and benefits of leadership training. It is like throwing a stone in a pond, there is the impact where the object hits the water, and then you see the ripple effect get wider and wider. You can't stop that process, once the stone gets out of your hand the movement of the water continues till it hits the shoreline.

It is my hope that some of you will feel inspired to take action with regards to leadership development in your community. I would feel honoured to help to keep the water moving.

Biographical Sketches

Corry Martens is a farm business manager and agricultural advocate. The Martens' farm operation includes livestock and crops. She is the owner/operator of "Flagg Creek Country Store" an on-farm retail outlet, which sells quality meats, gourmet foods and unique gifts. She is the Vice-Chair of the Canadian Farm Business Management Council (CFBMC); Executive Board Member of Ontario Agricultural Training Institute (OATI); Board Member of Women and Rural Economic Development (WRED) and President of Dundas Federation of Agriculture. Corry Martens is a graduate of the Ontario Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (1995).

Scott McLean is the Director of Community Development Programs at the University of Saskatchewan Extension Division. From 1997 through 1999 he co-ordinated the first CALL pilot project. In 2000 – 2001, he served as a Visiting Expert with the Education, Extension and Communication Service of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.