



# Alumni Spotlight

## Michelle Evosovich

MAB Class of 2006  
Quality Supervisor, Land O'Lakes  
Portland, Oregon



by Cristina Mansfield

*The Alumni Spotlight focuses on an MAB alum and is written by Cristina Mansfield, a 2004 graduate.*

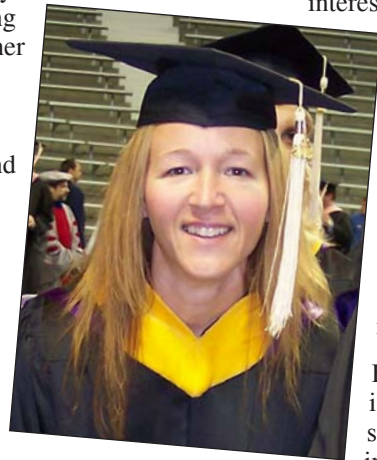
Michelle Evosovich grew up on a farm in Lowell, Indiana, and studied Animal Science at the University of Illinois where she considered pursuing veterinary medicine. After graduation, her life took a different turn when APL in Urbana, IL hired her to make chemicals using metal halides, which is used in street lights, stadium lights, and high-end car head lights.

In 2003 and after nine years with APL, Michelle submitted an online application for a position at Land O'Lakes where a recruiter directed her towards manufacturing. Today she is a Quality Supervisor and is responsible for ensuring that one of two Portland plants are up to standards set by Land O'Lakes Purina Feed (LOLPF) and that all documentation is in place for product traceability.

An article in the Land O'Lakes Cooperative magazine inspired Michelle to research online agribusiness programs and lead to K-State's MAB. In her opinion one of the best aspects of the MAB was the networking. "I met people from many different industries and feel I can call them if I have a question." In this sense the program opened a lot more doors for her for future growth.

Michelle holds the distinction of being one of the few MAB students to finish her thesis early. This was due mainly to the relevance of her topic to current Land O'Lakes strategic thinking. In other words, they were eager to hear her findings. Currently, there are several large dairies in Portland but few feed plants, making Land O'Lakes one of the main feed producers in the area. The Tillamook Creamery is the largest local dairy cooperative and many of the producers for Tillamook are Land O'Lakes customers. Since many producers are moving towards organic production, Land O'Lakes decided to examine the implications of organic conversion of one of its feed plants.

Entitled *Feasibility Study: Converting a Conventional Feed Mill to Organic*, Michelle analyzed demand



According to regulation, **organic livestock** must receive feed ration of organically produced and handled (if applicable) products. This precludes the use of:

- animal drugs/hormones
- excessive feed supplement/additives
- plastic pellets for roughage
- feed formulas containing urea or manure
- mammal/poultry by-products to feed mammals/poultry
- additives/supplements in violation of federal regulations.

Organic feed must have all organically-produced ingredients unless not available in organic form.

for livestock feed, consumer demand of organic livestock products, and the cost of conversion and continued operation of the Ross Island Mill in Portland. To assess demand for livestock feed, Michelle sent a mail survey to certified producers in Oregon and Washington states listed as raising feed crops, pasture, and/or livestock. The response rate for the producer survey was 42%. Michelle found that based on survey results, organic production of grain, forage, and livestock appears to be increasing. Comments suggested that availability of feed would influence decision of herd size. Additionally, not many farmers are obtaining feed in the area and import it from California.

On the consumer side, Michelle used the Kansas State Web Survey System to develop an online survey to assess consumer interest in organic products. She then asked various websites with audiences pre-disposed to organic products to post a link to the survey. Sites included local radio and television stations, Think Local Portland and others. While only 4 of the 17 agencies approached posted the link, 265 responses were received -- some from very far away. The survey did not result in any surprises and generally confirmed media reports that consumer demand for organic dairy products will increase, particularly among people with young children. Consumers most interested in organic products are from middle and upper income levels.

Finally, Michelle's budgeting and simulation exercises indicated a substantially greater profit potential by switching to organic production. Her analysis consistently indicated that Ross Island Mill would likely be profitable from year 1 and recommended conversion.

How great was the change in moving from the Midwest to the Northwest? There

were not many changes in the pace or the workplace, but learning to function in a union environment was a challenge. Michelle joined Land O'Lakes just as the acquisition of Purina Feed took place. Takeovers invariably generate animosity and coming on board during a transition is never easy. The effects in this case were mitigated by a management decision to

incorporate Purina standards into their plants. Michelle trained at a Purina plant in Gainesville, GA - which placed her in the Purina camp in the eyes of Land O'Lakes staff. While it took a lot of time and effort to get the plant up to standards, getting people on board was not that difficult and Michelle found that she had a lot of support. Michelle attributes her success to her open attitude: "I avoided being critical. I just kept asking questions, tweaking them until people reached the conclusion I was looking for on their own."

**Land O'Lakes** was incorporated as the Minnesota Cooperative Creameries Association in 1921. In 1924 a contest was held to find a more marketable name. The \$500 prize went to Mrs. E.B. Foss and Mr. George L. Swift who came up with the name as a tribute to Minnesota's lakes. Today the cooperative processes the milk of 4,000 dairy farmers across the country. While primarily known as a producer cooperative, Land O'Lakes also acts as a consumer co-op, selling feed, seed and nutrients through a network of 1,200 independently owned and operated farmer cooperatives. In 2001, Land O'Lakes purchased Purina Mills, which is not affiliated with the dog and cat brand pet foods. (LOL and Purina websites)