



Alumni Spotlight

Sarah (Chess) Childress

Class of 2008
Marketing Specialist
USDA, GIPSA, Packers & Stockyard Program
Aurora, Colorado



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



Sarah and Eric on their farm in Castle Rock, Colorado

MAB Grad shares experiences in cattle industry

Sarah Childress grew up on a cow-calf operation in Eastern Colorado and today lives in Castle Rock, south of Denver. At John Brown University in Northwest Arkansas, she studied business with an emphasis in marketing. After graduation, Sarah began working for a small local bank, but her long-term aspiration was to apply her business skills to agriculture. When she started seeking opportunities to switch careers she hit several road blocks because she was told by companies that she since she did not have a degree in agriculture they were not interested.

Sarah saw an advertisement in a local farm journal for K-State's MAB program and decided to join the program and get a master's degree in agriculture, hoping that would help her in future career opportunities.

Initially nervous about doing an online program, Sarah soon felt very much a part of the school community. The MAB program allowed her the luxury to work and study at the same time. "All the class projects were able to be related to what I was working on in real life." She used her thesis to examine beef marketing practices and then created an online tool to help producers with cattle marketing decisions. Cattlemen could use it to

assess their marketing strategies, identify opportunities to set their product apart, and locate marketing programs that they could use to market their cattle.

Shortly after enrolling in the MAB, Sarah was offered a job in the membership department at the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (www.beef.org). NCBA is a contractor for the Beef Checkoff Program in which producers contribute

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\$1 per head for state and national advertising, research, and advocacy for the industry. One of their popular slogans is, "Beef, It's What's For Dinner." They also have a separate division that represents cattlemen's interests in Washington DC.

Sarah recommends that producers join one of the many county, state, and national livestock associations in their area. It allows ranchers to look beyond what lies within their own fences and get involved in issues that will impact their operations. Being a member of a trade association raises awareness and provides an opportunity to communicate with others in the industry and to make sure views are represented at county, state, and national levels. "The livestock

industry today is a global industry, and producers need to see their product as a global product."



Just before completing her MAB, USDA offered Sarah a job in the Packers and Stockyard Program (www.gipsa.usda.gov). Charged with implementing the Packers and Stockyard Act of 1921, the agency regulates packers, livestock and poultry dealers, and auction markets as part of their mandate to protect producers. For example, USDA requires packers, auction markets, and dealers to carry financial instruments that function somewhat like insurance: if for any reason one of these entities fails to pay for livestock, the financial instrument is in place to protect the producers financially and will pay toward what they are owed. The agency ensures that scales that are used to sell livestock across are accurate and requires packers, auction markets, and livestock dealers to pay producers in a specific time frame. They also follow up contracts to verify they are implemented as written.

Sarah never imagined working for the government, but enjoys working for the Packers and Stockyards Program

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because they are still involved with producers at a grassroots level. She particularly enjoys visiting auction markets and meeting producers from around the country. She has also learned a great deal more about the livestock meat processing industry.

Growing up on a ranch, Sarah was familiar with the cow/calf segment of the livestock industry. Working for the USDA has introduced her to the entire supply chain and other types of livestock. "I appreciate the important role that each person plays in the supply chain.

Packing houses get a lot of bad media, but they do a good job of providing nutritious and safe food. Food safety is a major priority to them. It is also important for cattle producers to remember that packers and retailers are really important to their operation because they are the ones that move our product from 'gate to plate'." Without them there would be no way to get our beef product to the consumer.

Her job at USDA has allowed Sarah to learn how conditions differ for livestock operations in the various regions of the country. The climate in eastern Colorado

is dry and the grass does not grow tall. A livestock operation will require 30+ acres to run a cow/calf pair. Conditions in the South, however, allow running a pair on as little as 1-2 acres. In contrast, in Arizona a producer once told Sarah that he runs a cow or two per section – that is 640 acres!

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- Sarah Childress

In another example, people might think it would be heaven to be a rancher in Hawaii, but in reality there are limited opportunities for marketing. There are no auction markets and producers have only two or three options to sell their calves, putting them in a situation where they have to take or leave a price. It takes several

days to ship the calves to the mainland. Older cows would not survive the trip, so ranchers have to rely on selling their cull cows to a limited number of small packers on the islands.

On July 17th, Sarah celebrated her second year of marriage with husband Eric Childress. She and Eric have small cattle operation where they raise a heard of Charolais cross cattle. Managing a ranching operation is something they enjoy doing together. It is an exciting time in the cattle industry as we are seeing record high prices but the input

costs and land prices are extremely high as well. They look forward to expanding their operation and carrying on a family business that has been handed down through the generations.

MAB staff would like to thank **Cristina Mansfield** for writing the Alumni Spotlight article for the last few years! The articles have provided an interesting look into the lives of our alumni.

This is her last Spotlight article as she is focusing on a law degree. If you are interested in engaging with program alumni by writing the Spotlight, please contact Mary for more information about this opportunity.

Calendar of Events

July 31- August 13

MAB International Agribusiness tour of France, Italy and Switzerland

August 10

Final electronic copy of thesis due to Graduate School to be summer grad

August 16-17

Risk & Profit Conference hosted by K-State Agricultural Economics

October 1

Deadline to complete iSIS Graduation Application

October 15

Applications due for the cohort starting January 2013

October 30

Deadline to have name printed in commencement program

November 27

Final electronic copy of thesis due to Graduate School to be fall grad

December 7

K-State fall commencement at Bramlage Coliseum

December 7

Final electronic copy of thesis due to Graduate School to be spring '13 grad without enrolling for spring hours

Theses continued from pg 1

Mark Davis, class of 2012, *Make or Buy, Feasibility of Intermediate Good Production*

Tyrell Fickenscher, class of 2012, *Precision Agriculture Adoption by Growers in South Central Nebraska*

Katlin Hall, class of 2012, *Feasibility Assessment of Alternative Supply Chain Designs*

Erin Jordan, class of 2012, *Inbound Wheat Railcar Loading Optimization: An Opportunity Cost Study for ConAgra Mills*

Brandon Laws, class of 2012, *Effects of FluidGro on Centennial Ag Supply;*

Implementing Effective Marketing Strategies to Enhance Sales and Profitability

Charles Loubersac D'Hotel, class of 2012, *Damaged Starch in the Flour Mill: How to Reduce the Electricity Bill*

Seth Post, class of 2012, *A Financial Analysis of Placing Fixed Grain Assets in Northern Kansas*

Matt Shekels, class of 2012, *A Feasibility Study of a Diesel Maintenance Program at North Arkansas College*

Matthew Smith, class of 2012, *Trend Yields and the Crop Insurance Program*