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Agribusiness student case competition a refreshing addition to congress programme

The Agricultural Business Chamber (Agbiz) and International Food and Agribusiness Management Association (IFAMA) hosted the Agbiz/IFAMA Agribusiness Student Case Competition during the Agbiz Congress on 5 and 6 June 2012.

16 Top agricultural economics and agribusiness students from major universities across the country were selected to participate in this initiative, endorsed by IFAMA. Students represented the University of the Free State (UFS), University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), University of Pretoria (UP), University of Fort Hare (UFH), University of Stellenbosch (US) and the North-West University (NWU).

The first prize in the competition, sponsored by NWK, was claimed by the team of Adhil Goga (UKZN), Thembehlele Khanyile (UKZN), Musa Simelane (UP) and Werner Rossouw (UP). The second prize, sponsored by Astral Foods, went to the team of John Flanagan (UKZN), Tabisa Finiza (UFH), John Bashi (NWU) and Hailey Earley (US).

For the competition the 16 students were divided into 4 teams. Each team received the same case concerning the situation a real company (in this case Mosstrich Ltd) has to address. The company is operating in the ostrich industry which finds itself in a crisis situation due to the ban on exports to Europe after the outbreak of Avian Influenza (AI). The teams were given six hours to analyse the business case and to propose a business-oriented solution to help the industry survive the crisis.

At the end of the preparation period, each "team of consultants" was required to deliver a 10-minute presentation to their client (the judges) and the judges were allowed 5 minutes to ask questions and to interrogate the solutions. The panel of judges consisted of Dr John Purchase (CEO of Agbiz), Henk Agenbach (Managing Director of Humansdorp Co-operative), Erenst Pelser (Managing Director of Sentraal-Suid Co-operative) and Corwyn Botha (Agbiz Honorary Chairman and former CEO of Kaap Agri).

"Presenting to such important business people was nerve-racking," says Werner Rossouw, "but thinking back it was a pleasant experience and a privilege."

After presenting to the judges, the two finalist teams were announced at the Welcoming Event of the Agbiz Congress, which took place that same evening. The following day they had to present before an audience of 200 agribusiness professionals, senior managers and policy makers, who also got the opportunity to vote for the best team. The winning team was announced at the Gala Dinner.

“I would think that our main strategy was being a little more creative with the solutions we came up with rather than just stating the obvious,” says Adhil Goga, member of the winning team. “Also the length of each presentation had to be precise as we were allocated a fixed amount of time which was just enough to get our points through to the audience.”

Musa Simelane, also from the winning team, says their team respected each other’s capabilities in understanding the problem of the case and suggestions to the solution with respect to the area of each one’s field of specialisation. “We had a lot of ideas pertaining the problem and we strategically used diagrams and charts to condense the ideas into a more simpler and presentable format.”

John Flanagan from the runner-up team says: “I found the competition really stimulating and enjoyable. I think the benefit per se is found in the solving of a real world problem put in a real world way as opposed to a scientific study. Because of this it really helps drawing some close parallels between what we study and the real application of it. This is always very relieving!”

Lindie Stroebel, Agbiz Manager Economic Intelligence and Finance, who facilitated the competition says: “Both the two finalist teams emerged from their theoretical academic background to being innovative in proposing structured solutions, which the Ostrich industry and Mosstrich Ltd could actually consider. They did a splendid job, considering the very limited time they had and the fact that they only had access to the most relevant background information. They couldn’t even contact people from the industry to check their solutions, as they would have done in real life.”

“Congress delegates enjoyed the project very much, especially as a refreshing addition to the programme. Delegates suggested that we roll this type of initiative out to other major conferences and involve industry organisations as well. They recommended further engagements be facilitated and perhaps formalised between the business sector and academia to ultimately provide students with sufficient exposure to the business environment.”

Students received support in the form of sponsorships from the following agribusinesses: Absa Agribusiness, Agbiz, Kaap Agri, MGK, MKB, Talent Africa, Santam Agriculture, Sentraal-Suid Co-operative, Standard Bank and VKB. Agbiz also provided each student with a one year IFAMA student membership.

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