

# A Food Industry Rapidly Turning Global Suggests Internationalizing the Food Industry Curriculum

Herbert W. Ockerman

## Abstract

*A survey of the top fifty food companies in the United States would suggest that they are already global in nature or rapidly moving more in that direction. It would seem appropriate, and the food industries surveyed suggest, that the curriculum of university students specializing in the food area should be internationalized.*

The question of how internationalized a university food curriculum should be has become a matter of debate on most university campuses. In previous published research (Ockerman, 1988) it was found that undergraduate university food students could locate on a blank world map only 35-40% of the countries recently in the news. When four countries were presented, only 6 to 7% of the student could locate all four correctly. Thirty-three percent of the students did not place Nicaragua in either North, Central, or South America and 12% did not place France in Europe. When shown photographs of landmark buildings that are symbols of specific countries, only 4.5% of the university students knew which country they were from. When international students were members of a class, only 44% of the domestic students at the end of the quarter knew their home countries. Even if the international student's country was known, little knowledge

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Ockerman is a professor in the Department of Animal Science, The Ohio State University and The Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, 2029 Fyffe Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1095.

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who answered the questionnaire may have interpreted their choice of responses differently. Some participants might have rated what they learned as very good while others who learned approximately the same amount of material may have rated knowledge gained only average or fair. Additionally, some respondents may have simply forgotten how much they learned in a specific area of the course.

The results of completing the second objective (comparing importance of activities with knowledge gained) showed that goal sections and financial sections of Farming to Win were rated in a similar manner. Both received a very high importance rating and a moderately high rating of knowledge gained. The results of the statistical operations proved that in general, importance ratings were significantly higher than knowledge gained in both the financial and goal setting areas of the course. Therefore, participants stated that overall, the course covered important aspects of a farm business operation, but may still need improvement in increasing knowledge gained.

## References

Farming to Win Management Committee. "Final Project Report." Regina, Saskatchewan: March, 1990.

about the international student's country, such as size, which hemisphere, the capital, religion or agricultural products was transferred. To summarize, this previous survey would strongly suggest that the current interaction of domestic and international students does little to internationalize American students and that American students have minimal knowledge of things outside of the U.S.

The next question becomes, "How important is it for a university food student to possess knowledge of an international nature?" This report is an attempt to answer the question, "How internationalized are the large food companies in the U.S. today?" To assist in determining this, the largest food companies, as listed in the July issue of Prepared Foods (Messenger, 1987), were surveyed. Of the 50 largest food companies, 49 had American addresses and the other had a London address. Therefore, only 49 survey forms were mailed. The survey was kept short and included non-threatening questions in order to encourage responses. It contained 10 yes-no answer questions and one question requesting comment. All yes-no questions were designed to solicit information on the internationalization of the company and covered such areas as ownership, operation of divisions outside of the U.S., export and import practices, desire to hire people with international education, and importance to a company of an international perspective. A request for a copy of the summary of this global food industry survey was included. To rank companies on a provincial to international scale, a percentage of positive answers to international questions was also calculated.

## Results and Discussion

Of the 49 surveys sent out, 55% were returned and 45% contained useful information (Table 1). This was considered a very respectable response and shows the food industry's willingness to help guide the education of their future employees.

Table 2 shows the percentage of returned surveys with responses concerning international organization and export-import activities. Fifteen percent, or one in every 6.6 of the U.S. largest food companies, are owned by multi-national conglomerates or by a company whose parent corporate headquarters is located outside the U.S. Three out of every four (77%) of these large food companies operating in the U.S. own or operate divisions outside the U.S. and 86% of the companies export some of their product either directly or via brokers. Importation is a little harder to track particularly if the product passes through several hands and is not labeled as to country of origin, but responses ranged from 35% of the companies importing some of their packaging material to 95% of the companies importing some of their raw material and with both imported production equipment and imported

**Table 1: Percent of Companies That Responded to International Food Survey.**

	<u>Percentage of 49</u>
Percent returned	55%
Percent returned with survey responses	45%
Percent returned without survey responses*	10%
Percent not returned	45%

\* All company policy against responding to surveys.

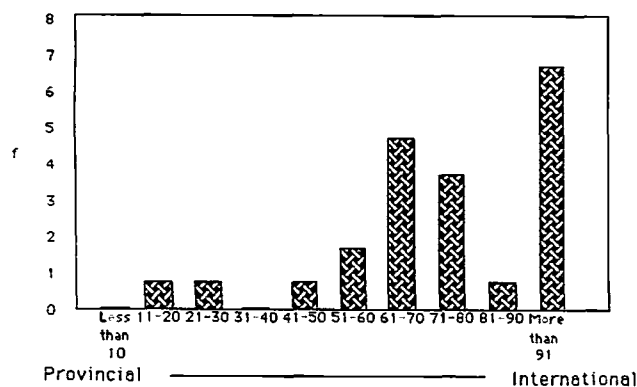
laboratory equipment running in the low eighty percentage range of companies. It is obvious that organization and export-import activities of America's largest food companies are to a large extent, global in nature.

Table 3 tallies the responses to international perspective questions. Sixty-four percent of these food companies would give a preference to a prospective employee who had some international experience compared to an equally qualified individual without this experience. Probably the most important question on the survey suggested that 86% of the companies thought they will need an international perspective to remain in the top 50 food companies 10 years from now.

**Table 2: Percentage of Returned Surveys With Responses Concerning International Organizations and Export/Import Activities.**

	<u>Percentage</u>
Is your company owned by a multi-national conglomerate or by a company whose parent, corporate headquarters is outside the U.S.?	55%
Does your company own or operate a division outside the U.S.?	77%
Does your company export products or sell to a broker who exports your products?	86%
Does your company import or do your suppliers import and sell to you:	
Raw material (including spices)	95%
Packaging material	35%
Production equipment	82%
Laboratory equipment	81%

Responses to suggestions on internationalizing food students' education may be found in Table 4. Responses to this question were particularly enlightening. Since many of the executives took time to write a letter in addition to filling out the survey expressing their attitudes on this subject. The ones who responded to this question were almost unanimous in



**Figure 1. Frequency of Companies With a Percentage of Positive International Answers.**

**Table 3: Percentage of Returned Surveys With Responses Relating to the Importance of an International Perspective.**

	<u>Percentage</u>
Would you give a preference to a prospective employee who has some international experience (minimum one quarter) compared to an equally qualified individual without international experience?	64%
Do you think an international perspective will be necessary for a food company to be in the top 50 food operation ten years from now?	86%
Would you like a copy of this international survey?	79%

their support for internationalizing education and in their belief that the U.S. food industry is rapidly moving in a global direction.

To obtain somewhat of a total perspective, the percentage of no (provincial) - yes (international) answers for a company was computed. A frequency distribution of these percentages can be found in Figure 1. This plot would suggest that the distribution is negatively-skewed and that 77% of the companies responding scored 61% or higher on this provincial-international scale. It is interesting that no responding company scored less than 10% on this scale. It is also revealing that the greatest number of companies scored greater than 91% on the provincial to international scale.

The summary of this survey would suggest that the American food industry is already global in nature and is rapidly moving further in that direction. It would, therefore, seem appropriate for universities training food students to internationalize their curriculum.

## References

Messenger, R. 1987. Consolidation re-shapes industry. *Prepared Foods*, July, p. 41.

Ockerman, H.W. 1988. Transfer of information Between International and American Students in a University Agricultural Class Environment. *NACTA Journal*. Vol. 32 (1), p. 35-37.

**Table 4: Responses to open-ended question on Internationalizing Food Students.**

- "We (food company) need to know and understand the difference in taste, foods, technologies etc. that exist between countries of the world."
- "An international knowledge and expertise provides one the opportunity to expand and add to the potential range of raw materials, foods, and technologies available within and between countries."
- "Internationalization can provide added opportunities to expand the range of potential consumer products and/or improve the quality and value for many existing products."
- "--numerous requests from more than 155 countries to take part in surveys, questionnaires and research efforts."
- "Beginning to develop international knowledge and understanding at the undergraduate and graduate level would be of value to the food industry."
- "We would be interested in -- " exchange of thoughts and ideas on what might be done to enhance the internationalization of students you are training for the food industry."
- "We take on graduates for General Management Training and part of their course is up to one year abroad working at one of our overseas subsidiaries."
- "Our company's international business is primarily staffed by local nationals."
- "MBA entry level would require an international perspective."