

# Internationally trained agrologists join Manitoba workforce



The Internationally Educated Agrologists Pilot Program at the University of Manitoba has finished its first year on a high note. Not only did the program win special recognition for its innovative program (see “Program receives learning award” below) but the first group of participants are working with Manitoba employers and are well on their way to their professional agrologist status.

The Internationally Educated Agrologists Pilot (IEAP) program is a skills-bridging program that integrates foreign-trained agrologists into the Manitoba agriculture sector and provides the Manitoba agricultural industry with a highly skilled experienced pool of professional agrologists, recognized by the designation of P.Ag. Agrology is the application of the sciences to the agriculture and bio-resource sectors. Agrologists are trained and qualified to provide advice on the production, processing and marketing of agricultural products, crops and/or livestock.

Participants in the IEAP program complete two terms of academic work in the degree program at the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences at the University of Manitoba and a minimum four-month employment term with an agricultural company. Successful completion of this 12-month program helps participants meet the education standard for the agrology profession in Manitoba.

Currently engaged in the four-month work term, this year’s IEAP participants are conducting seed trials, carrying out lab experiments, providing crop production expertise, assisting in livestock research studies and

demonstrating their knowledge and expertise in the Manitoba agriculture sector.

The IEAP program, which emphasizes Canadian-specific agricultural business practices and processes, is hitting the mark according to Jason Farrell, Human Resources Director, James Richardson International, Inc.

“We see the advantage that the program gives participants in better understanding agriculture here, which results in a smoother transition into the workforce and reduced training time for graduates to become fully engaged members of the team,” says Farrell.

The foreign-trained agrologists come from a variety of agricultural backgrounds and have much to contribute to the Manitoba agriculture sector. The 13 participants in 2007-08 have backgrounds in plant pathology, agronomy, poultry science and entomology for instance.

Oscar Perez, a Certified Crop Advisor in Western Canada and himself an immigrant from

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## Program receives learning award

The Internationally Educated Agrologists Pilot Program which was launched this past fall at the University of Manitoba was a recent winner of the 2008 PEARL Award from the Manitoba Prior Learning Assessment Network (MPLAN).

The MPLAN PEARL Award, which stands for “Pursuit of Excellence in the Assessment and Recognition of Learning”, is given each year to an organization, program or individual in recognition of excellence in prior learning assessment and recognition.

The IEAP program integrates foreign-trained agrologists into the Manitoba agriculture sector through a one-year program of coursework and work experience. It just completed its first year with 13 participants. The Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, the Manitoba Institute of Agrologists and Manitoba Labour and Immigration are partners in this initiative.



The 13 participants in the inaugural year of the program came from 10 different countries

Guatemala, was a guest speaker in the program this past year. He emphasized the value of foreign-trained agrologists making the transition to a career in their profession in Canada as smoothly as possible. Perez said this transition is achieved, in part, by acquiring the know-how of the new territory and by being able to make the right connections to enter into the Canadian workforce in a desirable time period.

Perez, currently Regional Marketing Manager at Mosaic Crop Nutrition, said, "This is a win-win situation, since the Canadian system gets enriched by recruiting foreign trained professionals that bring a vast array of knowledge and experience to work in this highly dynamic and always evolving industry. Nowadays the agricultural environment needs professionals who are willing to constantly change and this particular group has experienced critical changes that would make them perfect candidates to manage all-terrain situations. This program opens the doors and allows participants to engage with the new culture, tradition, and behaviours in the market place by placing them in real world conditions."

Perez goes on to add, "I wish I had a similar program when I immigrated to this country, because I have seen in the past many well-educated people struggling to get back to their professions. I would not hesitate to recommend this program to all newcomers and hopefully we can see this initiative extending into other careers and fields."

Brent Van Koughnet, Agri-Skills Inc., comments that the skills developed in the course Practicing the Profession of Agrology in Manitoba are critical to IEAP participants reaching their potential in Manitoba. The course focuses on refining English language and communication proficiency with an emphasis on preparing participants for the kinds of communication exchanges they are likely to have with colleagues, customers and others. Through this course, the culture of the agriculture sector is also explored. As Van Koughnet explains, "the technical gap is small; the cultural gap, the things that most of us haven't given much thought to, is often the biggest stumbling block."

The solid background in the science of agriculture often gives foreign-trained agrologists an advantage in the field. Doug Pryor, co-owner, Delta Ag Services, based in Portage la Prairie has hired Kennedy Appah, originally educated in Nigeria and Belgium, as a field agronomist.

"Everything is totally different here from what Kennedy is used to - there are lots of gaps but his strong science background allows Kennedy to learn really quickly. Does it require more time? Yes. Is it time well spent? Definitely," says Pryor.

Michael Hutton, Senior Agronomist with Viterra in Brandon, has similar findings. Working with Amir Farooq, whose agriculture career was based in Pakistan, has been a great experience so far, says Hutton.

"I'm really pleased with Amir's agronomic understanding. He didn't know a lot about Canadian crops and he is asking really good questions and picking up the agronomy quickly. I find I'm learning more because I'm being asked more interesting questions," says Hutton.



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As the program enters its second year, Angela Chotka, IEAP Director, notes that she is seeking further industry involvement.

"In addition to working with us to match IEAP participants with jobs, we are looking for companies

interested in providing job shadowing opportunities between September and April," she says.

She notes that the IEAP program is also seeking mentors for the participants. "There is so much that we do without even thinking about it when it comes to work – that's just the way it's done here. A mentor will be someone interested in explaining what is going on and how things work. It's a chance to consider more closely how you do things in the agricultural sector and your company and help someone else navigate your work world."

The Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, the Manitoba Institute of Agrologists and Manitoba Labour and Immigration are partners in this initiative. Manitoba Labour and Immigration funds the IEAP Program and the Manitoba Institute of Agrologists, the provincial accreditation organization for agrology, provides direction on the needs of the agriculture industry. The Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences at the University of Manitoba provides the academic component.

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