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Cornhusker Economics

Nebraska National Agri-Marketing Association and the Continued COVID Effect

The University of Nebraska's National Agri-Marketing Association (NAMA) student organization is one of more than thirty student chapters across the U.S. and Canada. The objective of student NAMA on campus is to learn first-hand from professionals in marketing, advertising, communications promotion, sales, and public relations, about the many career opportunities in agri-marketing. As chapter members, students develop valuable personal contacts and working relations with agri-marketing professionals and have meaningful opportunities to develop and practice their managerial skills and leadership abilities.

In a typical year, Nebraska NAMA hosts speakers at monthly meetings, coordinates field trips, conducts fundraisers, has socials, and works with the agri-marketing community. This year we could not do as much, but highlights include virtual lectures from NAMA alumni at John Deere and Gavelon, joint meetings with the Ag Economics/Agribusiness Club, and helping with the Nebraska Ag Expo Show in February. A select group of students also works throughout the academic year to develop a marketing plan for an innovative agricultural product/commodity or service that is an input for, or output of, an agricultural application, for which the return to a producer can be demonstrated.

The 2020 NAMA national conference was canceled due to COVID, but teams were invited to submit the written plan they had developed. Teams received feedback on their plans but did not have an opportunity to present. The 2021 experience moved to a virtual format and teams presented via Zoom. This

format was meant to emulate what marketing and agency professionals are currently experiencing in the extended COVID environment. Each student presenter was visible on camera through his/her own independent laptop screen. Three judges, a technical manager, and team advisors were also in a team's presentation session. Team presenters were advised to be prepared for technical issues. If one member lost connection, another member would have to jump in and continue the presentation—real-world stuff.

This year Nebraska NAMA's marketing team chose to market *Sweet Blu*, a lupin protein-based



drinkable yogurt. Lupin protein, a lesser-known non-dairy alternative in the U.S. market, has no cholesterol or gluten, no sugars, is low in fat, and high in protein and prebiotics. Lupins, a legume, contain three times more fiber than oats, three times more antioxidants than berries, three times more potassium than bananas, three times more iron than kale, and, like soy, is a complete pro-

tein. Unlike soy, lupins do not contain stomach irritants and estrogen-like compounds, a health concern for some Americans. Lupins are also a great option for Americans whose eating preferences are influenced by concerns about the environmental impact of almond production and the environmental footprint associated with dairy and meat production.



When teams choose a product, they need to make a number of decisions core to marketing it. One of the most important is deciding the target market for the product. *Sweet Blu* is considered a functional food as it provides a number of health benefits. Research shows that Millennials are the most likely to purchase functional foods and advertising is often directed toward their generation. However, team members considered the impact of COVID on America. Of the 500,000+ COVID deaths in America, 95 percent are Americans aged 50 or older. Team members spoke with parents and grandparents to understand changes they want to make based on the COVID pandemic experience. Many said they wanted to become healthier and build immunities. A 2020 *Food Technology Magazine* article, The Top 10 Functional Food Trends, agreed with the students' take on targeting Americans over age 50. It notes that lifestyle issues and conditions of aging for Americans aged 50 and older will drive functional food sales. *Sweet Blu* meets the immune-building needs of aging seniors who seek to improve their health and address chronic health issues including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and arthritis. It also meets the needs of seniors who are experiencing changes in appetite, taste, smell, and digestive issues.

On the producer side, lupins offer producers an excellent alternative to soybeans in their normal crop rotation. They are a legume that adds a nitrogen credit to the soil and improves yield in the following year. Australia produces 85 percent of lupins globally and the U.S. imports lupin products from Australia. The marketing plan competition requires that the



chosen product show a return to the producer. In order to meet this requirement, the Nebraska NAMA

plan included having soybean producers in a Wisconsin cooperative converting a portion of acres to lupin production with the promise of increased per acre revenue. The cooperative, which has three crushing plants, teamed with a local dairy cooperative to produce *Sweet Blu*. It was a move to help both cooperatives diversify in view of the market changes and fluctuations in the dairy, commodity, and biofuel industries.

The Nebraska NAMA presented their marketing plan in mid-April and advanced to the second round. They didn't make the final six teams, but all members agreed that it was a great learning experience. Two Nebraska NAMA members were recognized with national NAMA scholarships-- Brianna Gable, a second-year member was awarded a \$2,500 scholarship and Alice McDonald a senior member was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship. Moving forward, NAMA members are looking forward to next year and ideas for an

The Nebraska NAMA chapter was led by Brianna Gable (president), Kaleb Kindler (marketing plan vice president), Jeremy McAfee (programs vice president), and Micayla Freeman (secretary/treasurer).

Keep up with Nebraska NAMA on Twitter @UNL_NAMA on Facebook @NebraskaNAMA and on Instagram @Nebraska_NAMA

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