AGRIBUSINESS LEADERSHIP OF THE FUTURE

A Snapshot of Strategic Priorities and Talent Needs in Asia Pacific

A rapidly growing regional population and ever-increasing demand for high-quality food coupled with greater regulation and food safety issues present simultaneous challenges and opportunities for innovative, fast-moving agribusinesses. Over the past five years, the region has seen significant acquisition activity as agribusinesses around the world pursue new avenues of growth. In addition, forces such as globalization and digitalization will continue to reshape the agri-food industry. What do all these changes mean for leadership and talent?

Spencer Stuart surveyed leaders of 200 companies in the industry — many with head offices or strategic hubs in Asia Pacific region — about the impact of these issues on their strategic priorities and the types of leaders they will need going forward.

Agribusiness leaders’ top strategic priorities

1. Pursue joint ventures, alliances, acquisitions
2. Expand presence in international markets
3. Develop new products
4. Develop cooperative relationships with farmers, suppliers and customers
5. Develop new sales channels
6. Build upstream/downstream capabilities to increase vertical integration
7. Dramatically reduce costs

What skills are required in the senior team?

> Strategic planning, business development, M&A expertise
> Marketing, brand management, consumer insight expertise
> Supply chain management expertise
> Management experience in international markets
> Research and development, biotechnology expertise
What are the most important capabilities for leaders today?*

- **71%**: Ability to implement change
- **54%**: Effective leadership
- **45%**: Strategic thinking
- **35%**: Excellent communication
- **29%**: Strong team-building

*Respondents were allowed to choose multiple responses.

71% of agribusiness leaders believe that the ability to implement change is the most important capability for industry executives.

The greatest challenges when building the senior team*:

- Availability of qualified talent from other agribusiness companies
- Availability of qualified talent from within the organization
- Ability to attract talent from outside the industry
- Ability to effectively integrate new talent
- Ability to meet compensation requirements

“The ability to implement sustainable change is enabled by strategic thinking and leadership capabilities. In particular, the cultural aspect and people engagement have enormous potential in Asian businesses that are still biased toward a top-down management approach.”

—Senior executive of an Australian agribusiness

*Respondents were allowed to choose multiple responses.
We need to address operating a ‘Western-driven’ business culture in Asia, where we were not having much success in developing senior talent. There tends to be an under appreciation for the diversity in cultures in Asia and even within specific countries.”

–Agribusiness CEO, China

**TWO STRATEGIES FOR SECURING TOP INDUSTRY TALENT**

**Focus on identifying and training tomorrow’s top leaders.**

Agribusiness companies need to identify high-potential executives early in their careers, both within and outside their organizations, and create tailored programs to attract, develop and retain them. In-house leadership development programs and executive coaching are effective tactics for grooming future leaders.

**Invest in your employer brand.**

In a fiercely competitive environment, companies must be able to sell the opportunity to candidates and tell a compelling story about the organization’s distinctiveness.
About the author

Michael Thomas is a consultant in Spencer Stuart’s Industrial, Consumer, Financial Services and Financial Officer practices. He brings 25 years of firsthand leadership experience in global agribusiness and the food industry to his client work. Previously, Michael served as CEO of AsureQuality, Asia Pacific’s largest food safety, quality assurance and biosecurity company, and held senior leadership roles with PGG Wrightson, New Zealand’s largest agribusiness, and AWB, Australia’s leading grain marketer.

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