

BOOK REVIEW

'E' Issues in Agribusiness *The 'What,' 'Why,' 'How'*

By Kim P. Bryceson

CABI, 2006. 372 pages

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The book is one of the few notable books on agribusiness that I came across in recent years. Kim Bryceson has vast experience in the agribusiness and energy sectors. She is a Senior Lecturer in Agribusiness from the University of Queensland (UQ), Australia. UQ is one of her country's sandstone universities while Queensland is an agribusiness region.

The book has two-fold objectives: (1) to identify, explain, and summarize the concepts, technology, industry, and management issues facing agribusiness today in an electronically enabled business landscape; and (2) to create an awareness of current and potential electronically enabled business application in the agricultural, agribusiness, and rural management.

The underlying theme of the book is the "What, Why, and How" of e-Agribusiness. She explains: *What* is the electronically enabled agribusiness? *Why* would an agribusiness want to embrace it? *How* does one go about doing it? She claims that the book "pulls together a number of the major issues facing people moving to an electronically enabled agribusiness environment." And that "it is both an introduction to electronic business issues and a comprehensive guide to more detailed business process and strategic planning matters associated with the technologies involved." In particular the following key areas are addressed: concepts; technology in business; electronically enabled business models and "e" strategies; and management concepts.

The book has nine chapters. Chapter 1 discusses agribusiness in the eLandscape while Chapter 2 covers creating value. Meanwhile, Chapter 3 talks about the knowledge, information, and data; Chapter 4 deals on agri-food chains, Chapter 5 discusses managing uncertainty; Chapter 6 explains food tracking and traceability. Chapter 7 focuses on the readiness of agribusiness to implement an "e" strategy. Chapter 8 explains how to make things happen; and finally, Chapter 9 deals on e-governance and legal issues. Each chapter is illustrated with examples but each contains four to five *Byte Ideas*, which are more detailed descriptions of companies that have experience in using electronic technologies. Many are in agribusinesses but some are classic electronic businesses such as Amazon.com and eBay.

The author concludes that to compete in agribusiness in the 21st century, there is need for expertise in one's specialty area – be it production, processing, or retail. Moreover, there is need for awareness of the interdependence between businesses, the technologies that have evolved, the strategies, the processes, and the laws of the electronic environment.

Has the book lived up to its two-fold objectives? Certainly. The book is a good addition to the libraries of universities and business. The framework is sound and contents are well thought of, the *Byte Ideas* are excellent learning tools, and the book is very relevant considering the ever increasing

importance of information and communications technologies (ICT) in the agribusiness world.

Evidently, this book could have benefitted from many Asian experiences (e-enabled or just in transition) such as those of Charoen Pokphand (Thailand), San Miguel (Philippines), Sime Darby (Malaysia), Indofood Sukses Makmur (Indonesia), and Vinamit (Vietnam).

Also, there is a wealth of experience that Asia can give the world: China's successes as a world player in agri-food products with exports nearing US\$30 billion a year; Indonesia is a giant in palm oil, rubber, coffee, coconut, spices, etc; Malaysia in palm oil and rubber; the Philippines in coconut, banana, pineapples, tuna, carrageenan; Thailand in rice, rubber, pineapples, tuna, shrimp, tropical fruits, etc; and Vietnam in rice, coffee, catfish, cashew,

shrimp, and dehydrated fruits. With successes come the challenges they face with respect to traceability and food safety standards in European Union (EU), Japan, and USA.

The importance of ICT is well put in the book. The readers might also want to read on the e-Choupal experience in Prahalad's best seller, *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid* (Wharton Publishing, 2006).

The importance of agribusiness and agriculture is well – reiterated by the latest World Development Report (WDR) 2008, released by the World Bank, where the subject is agriculture development. This WDR provides a good macro view. Ms. Kim's book provides a clear micro perspective.