



White Paper | WUR-TIAS Executive MBA in F&A programme

## Interview | Prof. dr. ir. Hans van Trijp, Academic Director EMBA in F&A from WUR

Hans van Trijp is the Chair of the Marketing and Consumer Behaviour Group at Wageningen University since 2001. A job he has combined for 15 years with a part-time affiliation as Senior Consumer Behaviour Scientist at Unilever Research and Development. In terms of his scientific research output he has contributed high level publications both to the disciplinary academic field of marketing science and consumer behaviour, and to the applied fields of food and agribusiness.



### What makes the EMBA in Food & Agribusiness unique

Let me start with saying that it is not a Food & Agribusiness EMBA per se. It is a general EMBA, an officially accredited one we organise together with TIAS the Business School of Tilburg University and Eindhoven University, highly ranked in the Financial Times.

What is special of this EMBA programme is that it provides a dual career perspective for young high potentials which either already have middle management working experience in food and agribusiness and / or have that deep interest in and passion for the sector.

During the two-years programme the candidates will gain skills in a variety of business disciplines that will prepare them

for general management jobs in any sector. However, in the form of three dedicated modules we provide them with the opportunity to integrate their skills in food and agribusiness. Consequently there is a strong emphasis on facilitating close interaction with experts from Business Sciences and the Natural - Plant, Animal, Environmental and Agrotechnology & Food - Sciences of Wageningen University & Research (WUR). This will result in the form of an accredited EMBA diploma with a special notification of the food and agribusiness track.

*"Together with TIAS we aim to develop leaders of the future who are able to navigate the food & agribusiness through current dynamic times and manage the challenges yet to come."*



## But is not food & agribusiness “business as usual”?

No, I think it is not. But that is probably because I share that passion for the food and agribusiness like so many others working in it. There are also quite a few examples of general managers that have entered the food and agribusiness at senior level without this specific experience and passion, and that has not always been successful. I am not exactly sure what is that specific “food and agribusiness attitude” but it is there I am convinced.

*“It is more than a general management attitude, it is a different mind-set that enables you to approach business issues in a particular way.”*

Overall, I believe that food and agribusiness is NOT business as usual. I know that people tend to think “if you have the general management skills to lead any business, you can also effectively lead the food and agribusiness”, but I don’t necessarily agree. I would rather turn it around: “If you can successfully lead food and agribusiness, you can probably lead any other business. Although you would probably do it differently”. I think, food and agribusiness today can best be characterised as the Champions League of general management.

## It may seem a bit arrogant, don’t you think?

No. Food and agribusiness is central to society. With a long history and a much stronger presence than people would recognize. This business is at the edge of a major transformation. If you look at the external factors having impact on the food and agriculture industry, there is an incredible potential for business leaders to show their leadership capabilities. It is way too important and central to be left to simple business logic. It is about how you organise the natural environment, it is about inclusiveness of small farmers, and about global streams and competitiveness. Business leaders in this sector must understand that every decision they make must include consideration about the impact on climate change, or economic, social and environmental issues in delicate balance. Responsible leaders in agrifood companies must recognize and act upon the very basic needs of food security and food safety, next to the more luxurious needs of

enjoyment, social interaction, health, sustainability, as well as moral considerations of how animals are treated and new technologies that some believe to be against nature (such as GM). At the same time, technology advancement is “knocking at the door” to indicate possible solutions. Nevertheless, that will have major impacts on society in terms of labour (ICT-based rather than hand-made), authenticity (“industrially” produced rather than “artisanal”) or disparity (developed economy’s high-tech vs D&E economy production).

*“To be short, future leaders in the F&A business will need general management capabilities, but with a food and agribusiness management touch of passion and dedication.”*



## What makes MBA in F&A candidates tick?

We recently interviewed a couple of our students and it is interesting to note how this proposition resonates. Indeed we seem to attract candidates who are fully committed to invest precious time and energy into their personal and professional development meanwhile they are strongly committed to have an impact in the food and agribusiness sector. In my opinion they are more like “bilingual” EMBA students; talking easily to

their peers coming from diverse backgrounds and industries and also finding their way to interact with those who are closely involved in food and agribusiness practice. Together with TIAS Business School we feel committed to help the candidates in their professional progression and provide the infrastructure to develop these bilingual competences.

## This sounds great but what does it mean in practice?

From Wageningen University & Research perspective we strongly believe that almost all business challenges in the field require a multi-disciplinary approach. In other words: to develop new potential solutions for food - and agribusiness challenges it is rarely sufficient to approach them either from a technological angle or from a social / business science perspective. It is most likely the interface between the two that makes the difference and that is what we will emphasise in the integration modules. Students will have the opportunity to work on their business cases from both the business science and relevant natural science perspectives, depending on their specific focus and area of interest. That holds for the integration module and certainly also for the Capstone project.

*"But what is crucial in implementation within food and agribusiness is the “trans-disciplinary” approach in “solution-analysis”. Openness to stakeholders and building up networks are key elements in this process."*

It is not that we provide solutions “for” the EMBA candidates but we provide them the means how to approach challenges and support them based on their insights and requests. This



multi-disciplinarity is certainly important in problem analysis. A business decision is never a “free ride” as it is always embedded in this complex interaction between the diversity of stakeholder’s interests, social impact and general discourse. It is literally “scientifically underpinned business impact on society”. This is also where TIAS and WUR focus on “science for impact” come logically together.

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## Personal consultation

Would you like to know more about the Executive MBA in Food & Agribusiness? Contact our programme adviser:



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