

Agricultural Careers – Opportunities DO Exist

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During times when the economy is sluggish and the unemployment rate is elevated, a bit of pessimism can set in when it comes to seeking employment, including in agriculture. This is true whether the job seeker is a new high school or college graduate, or someone considering an occupational change within agriculture. The primary focus first needs to be on the path or direction one wants to head with their life (career). This must be both emotionally satisfying and one that can provide the desired (within reason) standard of living. Then, one needs to identify the job opportunities within this arena.

It is a different mode of function to be seeking a career versus seeking a job. Oftentimes, young people go about the process of seeking a job, when they haven't really decided on a career. Today, college graduates change jobs more frequently than previous graduates. They initially struggle (worry, talk to many people, wait, worry, talk some more) with finding or deciding on their first job, then opt to change positions with much less anxiety and conversations with others, sometimes taking a totally different type of job.

It is difficult today for young people to decide what to do with their lives, even at the junior or senior years of college. It is no longer the paradigm that they will have the same occupation as their parents, likely due to the parent(s)' occupation or business not being transferable to their offspring, and children often have little clue about what their parents actually do on a day-to-day basis. Sometimes, the child is convinced that they do not want to have the same occupation as one of their parents, but then with passage of time (e.g., third or fourth year of college) and experience, they may reconsider that potential career path.

The agricultural field continues to offer many career options for young people. The current world population of about 7.4 billion is expected to reach about 9.2 billion by 2050, about a 24% increase. Feeding a world population of this size offers some challenges based on the current food production system. Many new innovations, improvements in efficiencies, reliance on other resources, and the engagement of more people in the production, processing, and distribution of food will be needed.

A USDA study (Employment Opportunities for College Graduates in Food, Renewable Energy, and the Environment, United States, 2015-2020) estimated that the agricultural, food, and renewable natural resources sectors will generate 57,900 annual position openings for individuals with baccalaureate or higher degrees between 2015 and 2020, with:

- 46% of the openings in management and business occupations,
- 27% in science and engineering,
- 15% in food and biomaterials production, and
- 12% in education, communication, and governmental services.

It is expected during this same time period that an additional 5% of graduates in food, agriculture, renewal natural resources, and environment will be needed compared to the previous 5-year period. Actually, a shortfall of graduates is expected in some of these areas. The Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts a 10.8% increase in the U.S. labor force between 2012 and 2022 due to job growth and openings from retirements and other replacements.

Some of the primary forces that will affect the market for graduates in the next 5 years will be: 1) macroeconomic conditions and retirements, 2) consumer preferences for nutritious and safe foods, 3) food, energy, and environment public policy choices, and 4) global market shifts in population, income, food, and energy.



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Since 2006, enrollment in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) at The Ohio State University has increased 30.6% (about 3% per year; 1833 students in 2015) and enrollment in OSU Animal Sciences has increased 47% (about 4.5% per year; 706 students in 2015). About 50% of the students in CFAES are male (17% male and 83% female in Animal Sciences). Among 2013-2014 CFAES graduates, 92% were placed, with graduates hired in 26 states and three other countries; among 279 companies and organizations, and attended 16 different universities to continue their advanced education. The average salary at that time was \$41,261.

Many young people have the ambition, either on a full or part-time basis, to own/operate a farm. In 2012, the average age of farm operators in Ohio was 56.8 years, with only 7% of operators being less than 35 years of age. There are opportunities to enter farm production, but the major concerns of young people are access to farmland, input costs, and marketing (Top Producer, December 2010). This population will increase their use of smartphones and web based resources compared to the older generation, thus access to information will be more rapid and the group will expect immediate access. This is an important consideration for allied industries, universities, and others providing information.

Bottom Line:



With increased growth of the world population, career opportunities in agriculture continue to be very positive. Young people are encouraged to consider a career in agriculture, and to explore all of the job opportunities within the agricultural field whether they are interested in a position in the sectors of production, processing, or distribution of food. This generation of employees will expect rapid access and dynamic sources of information so that personal and business decisions can be made quickly and with validity, which needs to be a focal point in how agricultural industries and educational institutions communicate to their respective clientele.

Additional DIBS are available on-line at <http://dairy.osu.edu>.

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