

SUCCESS IN THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

by Justina Frost, Iowa State University Student and AgCareers.com Marketing Intern

Editors Note: Learn how one young professional found her success with a career in agriculture and what she did to get there.

Name: Amy Garrison
Education: Agriculture and Natural Resources Communications, Michigan State University
Position: Grain Buyer, The Andersons, Inc.

Growing up in a small farming community in southeastern Michigan, Amy Garrison graduated from high school in 2003 and furthered her education at Michigan State University (MSU) where she received her bachelor of science degree in agriculture and natural resources communications. Garrison is currently employed with The Andersons, Inc., where she is an Account Representative buying corn, beans and wheat from her 130 or so farmer customers.

BACKGROUND OF THE ANDERSONS

The Andersons, Inc., began as a single grain elevator with the premise of making it as easy as possible for regional farmers to take their corn to market. From there the company has grown to include agribusinesses such as grain and plant nutrients as well as railcar leasing and repair, industrial products formulation, turf products, retailing and most recently, ethanol operations. The Andersons has built their business model of serving others, primarily the customer, as the foundation on which the company was built.

AgCareers.com: What motivated you to pursue a career in agriculture?

AG: Between my dad farming, and growing up in a farming community, agriculture has been a big part of my life. My dad has always farmed and given my siblings and me ample

opportunity to get involved. I'm from a small town, Onsted, MI, where I was in 4-H for ten years and very involved with FFA.

It seemed, between baling hay and picking up rocks in the summer to working with my 4-H steers in the winter, agriculture was a huge part of my everyday life.



Garrison

While in high school I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to do when I grew up, but I knew I wanted to work in the field of agriculture. This led me to choose the best possible agricultural college (in my eyes, but I'm partial), Michigan State University.

AgCareers.com: What work/volunteer experience do you have? How did these experiences prepare you for your current career?

AG: While I was in college, I always worked a part-time job, sometimes two. Jobs I've had range from working for the Michigan Department of Agriculture to working in the MSU meats lab.

I also had a semester long internship working for AgCareers.com as an MSU campus liaison. During that time, I gained public speaking experience and marketing and communications knowledge. The experience I've gained through each of my jobs has

helped me build my interpersonal communication skills and agricultural knowledge.

AgCareers.com: What activities were you involved in on campus at MSU?

AG: I was a member of Block and Bridle, Collegiate Farm Bureau, and was a College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Ambassador. I got involved with these activities with friends who were also in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

AgCareers.com: Is there anything you wish you would have done to better prepare for the workforce?

AG: I had a pretty good transition from college to the real world workforce. I began my first full-time position while I was still going to college and worked part-time until I graduated.

But, if I were to go back and do it all over again, I would say there are two extremely important things to a young adult's future. The first is gaining as much work or internship experience possible. Taking those four years of college and using them to your advantage and experiencing as many avenues as possible.

The second thing is networking. And I know I used to hear it all the time while I was in college, but the only reason I am where I am today is because I talk to people. I didn't get my job from seeing an opening and applying. I was working at a trade show and simply talked to The Andersons employees in the booth next to me, and later got a call about a possible position!

I can't stress enough to young adults how important it is for them to get out there and make connections.

AgCareers.com: What was the biggest setback you had while job searching?

AG: I was very lucky to have graduated just as the Michigan economy started its descent, because at that time there were still jobs to be had. Although, a setback that I had was not having a strong grasp of what it was I wanted to do once I graduated.

As graduation approached, I realized that I was about to leave college with the same goal I started with, I knew I wanted to work in the agriculture field. I didn't know what exactly I wanted that job to entail, or who I wanted to work for. I just knew I wanted to be directly involved on a producer level.

So, that was my biggest challenge. That's why if I would have forced myself to narrow down my goals and interests while in college, I might have had a better idea of what I was looking for after graduation.

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— Amy Garrison, *The Andersons, Inc.*

AgCareers.com: *What do you look for in a perspective employer?*

AG: The first time I read over The Andersons, Inc., "Statement of Principles" I was hooked. I knew this was a company I would be lucky to consider myself a part of.

They recognize family and communities as vital aspects of our society, and they are a large part of what The Andersons base their core fundamentals on. While I've only been with the company a little over a year and a half, I think they have a very strong set of core values that also align with my own.

Finding a company whose values and beliefs match yours is important and will create a bond and mutual respect that will lead into a long lasting career and relationship. The interview process is not a one-way street. As a prospective employee, you also need to interview the company and make sure they are a good fit for you.

AgCareers.com: *What is "A day in the life of Amy, a grain buyer" like?*

AG: I come into the office check e-mails and messages and then look over all of the loads my customers delivered the previous day, and make sure everything looks right.

I then read through the marketing comments and form my own opinion based on my resources of what the commodity markets will do that day.

I make phone calls to some of my 130 customers to relay to them what I've read and things that I believe are important for them to think about while deciding when and how to market their grain.

I help my customers set up a grain marketing plan with price objectives and ways to diversify

their marketing. I buy corn, beans and wheat from producers all over the state. I try to provide outstanding customer service along with meaningful market ideas in order to help them sell their grain at profitable levels.

My goal is helping my customers to improve their bottom line.

AgCareers.com: *What advice do you have for graduating seniors looking for a job?*

AG: For graduating seniors from high school, look at college as building your future. If you go through it like a cake walk you're not pushing yourself hard enough.

Set goals for yourself and push yourself to the limit. College is expensive, and if you have to pay for your education yourself as I did, I guarantee it'll mean more to you and you will not take it for granted.

Take the summer after your senior year of high school and start trying to



figure out what kind of a career you want to go into if you don't already know. Even if you do know, get a related job, and make sure you haven't changed your mind. Try to narrow down the scope of what you are interested in, and begin now.

If you're about to graduate from college and haven't found a job yet, get out and talk with people. Stay in touch with people you've networked with and let them know you're looking. If you have a reputation of being a hard worker, there's a good chance word will get around and they will recommend you to others.

Keep your resume up to date and post it on job search sites such as AgCareers.com.

Don't turn down an interview, even if you don't think you're interested in the job. The more interview experience you have the better off you'll be.

Don't get lazy after you graduate. If you're still looking for a full-time position, get a part-time job, and continue to search for a permanent one. It's easy to get out of the swing of things fast, especially when you justify it by how hard you've worked the last four years in college.

Keep yourself motivated and always stay connected with your mentors and those in the workplace that can help give you an "in."

Garrison is very involved in her community and local FFA Alumni Association. She spends her free time outdoors snowmobiling and skiing in the winter months and hunting, fishing and helping on her family's farm during the summer.

She attributes much of her success to the environment she was brought up in and hopes to raise her future family in much of the same way, with a diverse agricultural background and strong values.