

CAREERS THAT FEED THE WORLD

by Erika Brandt, AgCareers.com Marketing and Communications Manager

Have you ever had someone mistakenly believe that their milk came from the grocery store versus a cow? Or, that tell you that because you work in agriculture you must be a farmer?

As silly as these may seem, there are still many people that have these misconceptions of agriculture and the career opportunities available. As a student pursuing a degree in agriculture, you have the power to positively impact a peer's life and the agriculture industry as a whole by becoming an advocate for agriculture and its careers. Careers that help feed the world!

"This isn't just a good time for students to be excited about careers in agriculture — this is an excellent time for young people to be associated with this industry," says **Mike Gaul**, Director of Career Services for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at **Iowa State University**. "The changes and advancements occurring within the agriculture industry today are truly amazing and the demand for young people is most impressive."

Similarly, **Owen Roberts**, Agricultural Communications Instructor at the **University of Guelph**, shares that agriculture careers are careers of the future and present.

"Agriculture is absolutely a career of the future," says Roberts. "There is more and more interest by a growing number of people who are becoming aware that they are using agriculture products. As well there is a new found and growing support for local food and the domestic agriculture industry is poised to grow and is growing now as a result of consumer and government interest."

While the economy has slowed and job opportunities in many industries are on the decline, agriculture has remained steady. Job posting traffic on AgCareers.com, the leading online job board for agriculture and food, over the first two quarters of 2009 compared to the first two quarters of 2008 showed a 3% increase. And, job appli-



cations for this same time frame jumped by nearly 40%.

When looking at employment within agriculture, the industry as a whole does not tend to experience the same highs and lows as other industries do. While this is not reflective of all sectors within agriculture, the ag industry produces products that will always be needed by a global population.

Agribusiness competes with many negative stereotypes, one of the largest stereotypes that the industry must overcome to recruit more young people into the industry is the realization that there are more career opportunities beyond being a farmer or on the production side of agriculture. While these are important and critical to the survival of the industry and the world, there are

many additional facets to businesses within agriculture. There are sales representatives, human resource managers, financial analysts, research scientists, truck drivers, millwrights, veterinarians, and so many more.

Rick Parker, AgrowKnowledge Director, said the greatest challenge without question is getting young people and their parents to see agriculture as more than “cows, plows, and sows.” “People in general have a limited vision and understanding of the scope of modern agriculture,” says Parker.

Similarly, Gaul expressed the same frustration. “Without a doubt, the biggest challenge about enticing young people to pursue a career in agriculture is getting students to look beyond the ‘cows, plows, and sows’ stereotype association with agricultural careers. The average person has no idea of the diversity of majors and careers associated with this industry as well as the significant role agriculture plays in our daily lives.”

OUTLOOK

When looking at job opportunities on AgCareers.com there are more than 60 industry types to choose from and over 70 career types that jobs are currently being categorized under. What does the outlook look like for you as a college student?

“Most all areas of agriculture look very promising for students entering this industry,” says Gaul. “But a few I think that hold tremendous potential include agronomy, food science, agricultural education, ag business as well as careers requiring strong science backgrounds relevant to biotechnology and biorenewables. Job placement remains strong and this is comforting news for college graduates entering the ‘doom and gloom’ of the real world!”

Beyond the sheer need for agricultural jobs, Gaul attributes some of the potential due to many sectors within agriculture being top-heavy with the “Boomer” generation, which will allow today’s students to climb the corporate ladder faster than any previous generation. Obviously, potential for growth in a com-

pany is one of many reasons students should be excited about jobs in agriculture.

BRIGHT CAREERS

Parker, who works with one and two year degree programs through his work with AgrowKnowledge, shared that bright careers are present in agriculture, food and natural resources for those with technical education such as one or two-year certificates and degrees. These include, agronomy, green agriculture, environmental, sustainable agriculture, biotech, food safety, geospatial, and renewable energy.

Roberts shares the importance of joining networks to further your experience and education and said that learning from those in the business is the best way to do so. Joining organizations like the **National Agri-Marketing Association (NAMA)**, **American Agricultural Editors Association**, the **International Federation of Agricultural Journalists and Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow (ACT)** are four groups specific to agricultural communications students. There are groups such as these for all focuses within agriculture.

“If I was a young professional or upcoming student, I would do all I could to align with these types of organizations that focus on professional development and life-long learning,” says Roberts.

Careers in agriculture offer a wide variety, but also are very rewarding. The stereotype is that careers in agriculture offer limited pay and require a lot of hard work.

Hard work is part of all jobs no matter the industry, and yes, there are some professions that require additional work during particular seasons. But, employers have gotten creative in how they reward staff or help manage those peak seasons to appeal to a wider audience of job seekers.

In terms of agriculture not paying well, talking with professionals within the industry in all varieties of career types and industry sectors, rarely will you hear bad pay being of concern. The agriculture industry as a whole has gotten better at being competitive with pay and/or offering additional benefits and perks — it has

been necessary to recruit and retain the best and brightest talent.

“Are career opportunities in agriculture rewarding? Yes, absolutely,” said Parker. “First, it means being involved in the most basic and most noble of all the professions — feeding and clothing people. Second, agriculture is rewarding because of the variety of career opportunities. And third, being in most aspects of agriculture today means using the latest technology to improve how the world is fed and clothed.”

Parker, who is a 40+ year veteran to the industry, says when asked where his passion comes from when working to help recruit new young people into the industry is that it is from the many employment opportunities he’s held that have allowed him to work with the best people. He says that he’d like new recruits to the industry to have that opportunity in their lifetime. He also said that his passion stems from making sure the food and fiber system is in reliable hands that will keep it moving forward and secure in coming years.

EXCITEMENT

“For me it is the constant excitement of the news that is always present within agriculture,” explains Roberts of his passion for agricultural journalism. “It is always constant and is such an exciting industry to be a part of. There is great interest in agriculture research that is being done and how it can impact the lives of people and how we communicate that.

“When you can make the link for people between agriculture, food, environment and health, you’ve got people right where you want them.”

There are plenty of opportunities within the agriculture industry for you and your peers. Be proud to be a part of an industry that helps feed and clothe the world. Advocate to others about the rewarding careers in agriculture and how agriculture is making its mark on the world.

Encourage a friend to consider a career in agriculture. And, together we can continue to grow an industry full of innovation, dedication, and top talent that will take this world to new heights!