Agriculture as a Career

A career in agriculture is not for the faint of heart, weak of conviction, or shy of adversity. Twenty-first century agriculture is both remarkably similar to and radically evolved from the first stationary cultivation of crops in the Levant thousands of years ago. The cardinal concepts still hold true: people have to eat and public opinion still expects clothing, but the burden on modern agriculturalists is much higher. Today, we like to picture modern agriculture as combines, wheat fields, and maybe a family dairy. Then we have the actual representation of agriculture: a vastly diverse collection of livestock geneticists, highly-educated businessmen and women, quantitative analysts, trade lawyers, seed developers, and cybersecurity professionals that serve to feed and clothe a burgeoning population in the face of the newer and bigger challenges of a globalized world. The going is tough and the stakes are high; quite literally, the entire population depends daily on a fraction of individuals that is, in the United States, ever dwindling. Agriculture as a career should be promoted as a viable and enticing option for almost anyone of any skillset interested in impacting the world around them.

In a time where production is constrained by land use, input costs, and increasing food and fuel demands, the necessity of the age-old adage to think ‘smarter not harder’ could not be more emphatically stated. The call for quality, capable leaders must be answered by the agriculture industry. There is no room to perpetuate the idea that a career in agriculture is static, antiquated, or exclusive to rural areas or populations. Increased trade, technological advances, and evolving demand have fundamentally altered the way food and fiber are
produced and marketed. Times are changing, and it seems that even the safest and most secure food supply in the world often finds itself on the defense, a trend that must be reversed if the United States is to continue to hold that distinction. Careers in agriculture benefit from a diversity of perspectives, experiences, skills, and motivations to catalyze innovation. Although resources are inherently critical to agricultural production, the people making the decisions on how to utilize those resources are the aspect of the industry that can most easily influence yields. When presented with a fixed amount of resources, only human innovation and creativity can address the problem of distributing and utilizing those resources most effectively to feed the world sufficiently and sustainably. Agriculture needs to recruit talented, motivated individuals to invest in the industry (all the way from the farm to the fork) through their career choices and equip them to keep up with the pace of change.

Agriculture as an industry is incredibly different than it was fifty or even twenty years ago. The scope of careers in agriculture is changing too, and conditions will continue to call for the incorporation of a broad range of skills and perspectives from all disciplines. Realizing and acting on this impending need sooner rather than later will greatly benefit the agriculture industry in proactively addressing the challenges that tomorrow will inevitably bring.