

Agriculture as a Career

By Skylar Christensen

“Agriculture... is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals & happiness.” – Thomas Jefferson

As a young man fresh out of high school I thought I had my whole life figured out. As cliché as it sounds, I wanted to change the world for the better. Political science, philosophy and other humanities all seemed like promising paths. I dabbled here and there, but something was always missing.

The answer, as I would find out years later, was in front of me the whole time. It was in the worn faces of the old timers down at the local café. It was in the strong family ties that had sustained my family for generations. It was in the summer rains, the winter snows, freshly cut hay and fall harvests. It was sitting around a table as a family enjoying the bounty of the earth. It was in every hour spent on the farm with my grandfather who, while never rich by worldly standards, was truly wealthy.

Agriculture, our wisest pursuit as Jefferson put it, has been changing the world for the better since the dawn of civilization. Indeed, it could be described as the defining career of our species. Societies that practiced it thrived. Language, ethics, art, and everything else that enriches life developed as a result of the cooperation and free time agriculture granted to these early cultures.

Sadly, a great disconnect has emerged between our modern world and agriculture. For whatever reasons, we've forgotten our rich heritage. Ignorance and apathy towards agriculture can be found everywhere. Last year, an article published by Yahoo News declared agriculture the number one useless degree. Animal science was number four with horticulture at number five. But it's not only the media to blame. There are many in the academic community who question agriculture's place in a university setting. As we continue to push aside our wisest pursuit, I believe we can expect to see a decline in our real wealth, morals and happiness.

Now more than ever we need people to choose agriculture as a career. Just think of how many challenges facing our world might be solved through the cooperation agriculture encourages between individuals, communities and nations. Food shortages, climate change, resource management, energy production and other obstacles can all be addressed through the various agricultural sciences. I hope as I pursue my own career in agriculture that I can one day enjoy the real wealth and happiness that Jefferson and millions of others have come to understand.