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Agriculture as a Career

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The importance of agriculture is perfectly stated by Allan Savory, the creator of holistic farm management: "Agriculture is the foundation of civilization and any stable economy." This is a bold statement, yet there is no exaggeration; civilizations and countries cannot exist without a stable food supply, and food has been an integral part of trade since ancient bartering. The field of agriculture, however, is continuously receiving lesser credit than it truly deserves.

Whenever I inform others that I am a student within the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, there is the assumption that I grew up on a family farm in the South; as someone who was born in Brooklyn, New York and still lives in a suburb right at the periphery of New York City, I did not even touch a cow until my freshman year of college. Nevertheless, I still find a career in agriculture to be my way of improving the condition of the world. The key to understanding this is to realize that agriculture is not synonymous with farming.

Yes, as someone reads this there are currently thousands of farmers currently working in fields to make millions of bushels of crops and pounds of meat to feed the world—but the farm is not the be-all and end-all of agriculture. An example that comes to mind is my own major—food science. In food science (also known as bromatology), food is studied to a microcosmic level to its most basic chemical components, and then this knowledge is applied macrocosmically to learn efficient ways to produce it and keep it safe for consumers. One of the most cliché lines about the field is saying it studies food "from farm to fork", illustrating that the farm is only the beginning of a grand process to keep the populace properly fed.

Food science, however, is only one gear in the great agricultural machine. Agriculture can be considered the epitome of diversity; with biological applications in animal science and botany, ecological studies for environmental science, and even political science and economics for agriculture policy arenas, anyone can find a place in an agricultural field. My own career path requires multi-disciplinary knowledge; as someone who intends to examine and create national food safety policies for the federal government, I need in-depth knowledge of microbiological pathogens, chemical contaminants, the engineering principles behind food production, and the fundamentals of the legislative and executive political processes.

The great pool of talent that results from this diverse assortment is not only a fantastic luxury, but a dire necessity. The global population is currently booming, and in addition to those poverty-stricken areas where food is already scarce, there will be new people to feed every day. This is not an ailment that can be cured with a single bandage, but will require a variety of innovative solutions and the proper policies to enact those solutions. Agriculture, the foundation for civilizations and economies, will be the main player in this and will need a constant source of professionals to step up to the plate (no pun intended) to make it their career path.