Agricultural job market remains strong

We are a nation of trendsetters and trendwatchers. We follow trends in our lifestyles—from the way we dress to the cars we drive. We also look for trends in the economy and job market, hoping they will point us in the right direction. While some trends are harmless, others can influence our lives and livelihood, if we accept them without first checking their validity.

One example that we have seen over the years is the trend for enrollment in schools of agriculture to fluctuate up and down with the farm economy. Students who have always planned for a career in agriculture suddenly may change their minds and opt instead for another field.

The perception of agriculture changes during difficult economic times for our nation’s farmers, even though related jobs may not be affected. We need to look no further than the employment rate of Purdue Agriculture graduates to find evidence of this. Ninety-two percent of May 1998 graduates were employed, as of our annual employment survey last October. In fact, fewer students are going directly into graduate school now because the commercial job market is so strong.

Starting salaries also are on the rise. Agricultural and food process engineering graduates lead the way with an average starting salary of $41,356—a $4,000 increase over just three years. Salaries are up for food science, at $34,426, and agribusiness, at $29,141, as well. Natural resources jobs are holding fairly steady from last year, with an average starting salary of $23,250.

While traditional disciplines may be affected by negative economic news in agriculture, the nontraditional ones more than likely will not be. Most of the employers who come to campus to recruit our students share this view. They don’t see major changes on the horizon. Our annual career fair, which attracts representatives from some 100 agriculture-related employers, provides a valuable exchange of information about the current and future climate in the job market.

Agriculture is becoming even more closely integrated with science and business. The strongest areas for jobs in the agriculture industry are in the post-harvest areas—food process engineering, food science and marketing. That won’t change as long as we utilize raw agricultural products. Financial services, computer information systems and other emerging technologies, landscape architecture and horticulture, the seed industry, and dairy and swine herd management are among the industries with a stable employment outlook.

The strong job market for Purdue Agriculture’s ‘98 graduates continues a trend established earlier this decade. Since 1994, more than 90 percent of our graduates either were employed or were continuing their education within four months of graduating. We anticipate that this trend will continue for our upcoming 1999 graduates, as well as those who follow in the future.

Victor L. Lechtenberg
Dean of Agriculture
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Cover photo by Tom Campbell
Globalization—the right thing to do

David J. Sammons, Associate Dean and Director, International Programs in Agriculture

Recently an acquaintance described a bumper sticker that he had seen on a car near Indianapolis that stated: “The trouble with the global village is that there are so many village idiots.” Although amusing, an important truth is embedded in that message: we simply do not know one another as we should. This highlights a major goal of our international activities in the School of Agriculture, namely to diminish global ignorance by affirming that we are part of the global community to which we contribute and from which we benefit. That’s why Purdue puts so much time and energy—and so many resources—into international programs.

We know that the world is our marketplace. We know that we all must be able to live and work in a world in which national borders have diminished meaning. The worldwide economy, geopolitics, global interdependence and current patterns of human movement impose a global imperative on us that we dare not ignore. Put simply, we focus on the world because it is the right thing to do—for our students, faculty and staff, and for Indiana.

A recent publication of the American Council on Education underscores this point: “America’s future depends upon our ability to develop a citizen base that is globally competent. Our nation’s place in the world will be determined by our society—whether it is internationally competent, comfortable and confident. Will our citizens be competent in international affairs, comfortable with cultural diversity at home and abroad, and confident of their ability to cope with the uncertainties of a new age and a different world?”

The message is clear. Our national future depends on the ability of our schools and universities to help prepare citizens for this new world order. Let me highlight some of what we are doing in the School of Agriculture as we press toward this goal.

**Studying abroad**

Starting from a base of barely one student per year in the late 1980s, we now send more than 70 agriculture students abroad annually through nearly 20 programs in 14 countries. This international exposure helps prepare students for the global workplace. **Strengthening curriculum**

The new “international understanding” component of the undergraduate curriculum, which emphasizes concepts that lead to broader understanding of human populations, includes coursework that lies mostly outside of traditional agricultural disciplines—economics, geography, history, political science, anthropology and foreign languages. Through this requirement, students are exposed to the world beyond our borders.

**Educating international students**

Nearly 300 international students are enrolled in Purdue Agriculture. Their presence adds important diversity to academic life in the classroom, in both research programs and social settings. Additionally, interacting with these students helps all of us to strengthen cross-cultural sensitivity and understanding—characteristics that are increasingly important professionally. Upon their return home, they join an expanding network of Purdue alumni.

**Conducting research overseas**

Our faculty and staff are involved in research all over the world, underscoring the fact that knowledge knows no geographic boundaries. For example, recent research with international partners has increased access to genetic material for domestic crop improvement; broadened our knowledge base in pest management before new pests reach our shores; improved our competitive position in international markets; strengthened our abilities in animal waste management; and challenged our skills in soil erosion prevention.

**Helping internationalize Extension**

Through programs organized jointly with Purdue Extension, we have introduced county staff and on-campus specialists to the international arena, emphasizing the stake that Indiana has in the global economy. Our intent is to provide new global perspectives that will in turn be conveyed to the public at large. Workshops have stressed the importance of the international marketplace for Indiana’s economy and the implications of recent changes in the state’s demographics.

All of these activities are part of the ongoing effort to enhance our understanding of our place in the global village. Each activity contributes to an increase in global competence among our various constituencies. Each offers the opportunity for us to know each other better. Each helps position us for a global tomorrow.

Perhaps most important, our efforts in the global dimension help us to recognize that our lives are connected to the lives of those who live elsewhere. This recognition links us as global citizens.

I am reminded of the words of a contemporary philosopher who, in reflecting on the global village, noted that “…We have a history together…We are molded in the hands of one another, which means we must act with care…Your history is mine…and mine is yours. We belong to each other.” This, finally, is the lesson we all must learn. Globalization is, indeed, the right thing to do.