

Opportunities Ahead

With planning and preparation there are future ag career opportunities on the horizon.

by Kindra Gordon

There's no question the economy has been challenging at best during the past year. Layoffs and job cuts are frequent headline-makers. So how is all this affecting the ag and natural resource job market, and what is the outlook for careers in agriculture?

Jill Brown, a career specialist with the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL), says she's seen the agricultural and natural resources job market remain stable and is optimistic for the future.

"While I have not seen a large spike in new opportunities," Brown says, "there are still a wide assortment of full-time jobs and internships available to those seeking employment following Spring graduation."

Brown reports that, historically, a large portion of UNL graduates secure their full-time positions in late fall or early winter, which was the case for the 2008-2009 school year as well.

Looking forward, Brown is particularly upbeat for the future of ag and natural resource-related careers, and says, "I see a wide assortment of career areas growing rapidly in the next three to five years."

As examples, she says there will always be a need for people to pursue education

in traditional fields such as agronomy, agribusiness, environmental studies and animal science. "Those opportunities continue to abound. Plus, they continually take on new forms, such as one of our alumni who works in Sea World training killer whales with her animal science degree," Brown says.

Other growing jobs in these traditional degree areas include the pet food industry, ag lawyers, and environmental studies, which are largely being driven by the world's interest in being earth friendly or "green."

As well, many completely new career areas are emerging. In fact, Brown reports that greater than 60%

of the jobs that students will take when they leave college weren't even created when they started college.

Examples of newer programs in CASNR include forensic science; professional golf management; and hospitality, restaurant and tourism management — all of which relate to natural resources and agriculture. For instance, forensic science is highly tied to the study of insects; hospitality and tourism relates to careers such as managing a winery or vineyard.

"These programs are just gaining momentum in their first couple years of existence, but the need for people trained in these areas is definitely there," Brown says.



Jill Brown

Study the options

As students prepare to go to college and declare a major, Brown says it is important to do some homework first.

"Find something you are passionate about," she says.

To do this, evaluate what you enjoy. Is it working with people, being outdoors, research, sales? Once you figure out what your interests are, locate someone who has a similar job and ask to shadow them for a few hours, she suggests.

"The earlier and more frequent the exposure to various careers, the more likely a student is to be successful in school, work and life," Brown says.

In addition to academics, Brown says it is important to get involved in organizations at both the high school and college level. "Becoming actively engaged in these groups presents tremendous networking and personal growth opportunities," she says. They may also provide some insight into future career options.

As well, Brown recommends participating in at least one internship while in college. "Spending a summer experiencing the 'real world' is a great way to test-drive various career options," she says.

"The job market is dynamic and in need of good people," Brown concludes. "The ultimate key to success in a career selection is being well-prepared as a college graduate and having a willingness to look beyond some of the traditional career paths."

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More veterinarians needed, too

Veterinary medicine is another industry facing a serious shortage of qualified graduates. The high cost of veterinary school tends to be one deterrent preventing more students from pursuing the degree. Thus, in April 2009, the American Association of Bovine Practitioners (AABP) and Pfizer Animal Health announced the launch of the AABP Foundation-Pfizer Animal Health Scholarship, aimed toward providing veterinary students with the opportunity to receive one of several scholarships.

"These scholarships, which come at a time when the large-animal veterinarian industry is experiencing a shortage, will help recruit outstanding students for

careers in bovine veterinary medicine," said Gatz Riddell Jr., DVM, and executive vice president for AABP, in a news release.

Offered to third-year veterinary students in the United States, the scholarship program will support students interested in food animal medicine. As part of the scholarship, recipients will receive a travel stipend to the annual September AABP conference.

For more information about the program visit www.aabp.org. Applicants must provide information regarding their cattle industry background and provide answers to several essay questions pertaining to the role of large-animal veterinarians in today's society.

