



NEWS RELEASE

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Ag Week Spotlights Hot Careers in Agriculture Field

To help feed a hungry world, Missouri's agricultural industry needs more skilled workers. National Ag Week, March 15 to 21, and National Ag Day, March 20, will help draw attention to the great career opportunities in this growing field.

"With the world population soaring, the demands on agriculture, food and natural resources keep increasing," said Dr. Terry Heiman, director of Agricultural Education for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). "We need innovative students to meet the enormous challenges these industries will face in the next few decades."

Students who have little interest in farming might be surprised at how much interest other ag careers hold for them, Heiman added.

"This is a diverse industry that includes everything from the farm gate to retail to the plate," he said. "It also includes the conservation and improvement of our natural resources. There are careers in research and in providing new technologies to producers and food manufacturers to ensure our nation's and the world's well-being."

Agriculture Is a Growing Field

According to projections from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there will be more jobs in agriculture, food and natural resources in 2010 than there will be college graduates to fill them. For 2005 to 2010, the projected number of job openings for new graduates is 52,000, which is 2,700 more than the projected number of qualified graduates. Almost half (46 percent) of agriculture jobs will be in management and business, while a quarter of the jobs will involve science and engineering.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture anticipates some of the greatest opportunities to be in cutting-edge fields, such as precision agriculture, biotechnology, nanotechnology and biomaterials engineering. Opportunities in production, meanwhile, will be greatest for growers of horticultural crops, including fruits, vegetables and landscape plants, and growers of specialty crops that provide raw materials for medical and energy products. Fewer opportunities are expected for producers of traditional commodities such as wheat, cotton and cattle.

High Wages to Be Had

Students (and parents) who wonder about the earning power of agricultural careers might be surprised at the potential. The average annual wage of an experienced farm or

ranch manager in Missouri, for example, is \$83,700. For an experienced biochemist, the average wage is \$104,500; it is \$46,300 for an experienced agricultural inspector.

When it comes to farming, entrepreneurship is allowing small farmers to grow their incomes, said Loyd Wilson, director of Agriculture Business Development for the Missouri Department of Agriculture.

“Agritourism businesses such as corn mazes, pumpkin patches and wineries — all of those are examples of agricultural entrepreneurship that have affected the economy and increased the income of farmers,” he said.

Education Impacts Opportunities

The Missouri Hot Jobs List, put together by the Missouri Economic Research and Information Center, reveals a strong bias toward college-educated agricultural workers. Of the 18 natural resources and agricultural jobs on the list, only two require less than a bachelor’s degree. Compare that to the education requirements for the 35 hot jobs in the health services group: Of those, 21 require less than a bachelor’s degree.

“Unless students are interested in the lowest paying, least secure jobs in agriculture, they need to make education a priority,” Heiman said.

The 2008 Agricultural Education in Missouri report from DESE shows that enrollment in high school agriculture, a four-year program, has almost doubled since 20 years ago. The 2007-08 school year saw 26,254 students enrolled, 38 percent of whom were female.

“Students, schools and communities have recognized the value and opportunities in the food, fiber and natural resources system,” Heiman said. “Taking advantage of high school agriculture is paying dividends for them in this dynamic industry.”

Agriculture and agribusiness are foundational to Missouri’s economy. A 2008 report from MERIC showed that Missouri’s crop, livestock, processing and other agricultural sectors accounted for \$12.4 billion, or 7 percent, of the gross state product. Agriculture employs more than 1 out of 10 workers in Missouri.

To find out more about agricultural careers, visit www.MissouriConnections.org. This DESE-sponsored site offers several tools for career and education exploration, including more than 250 Missouri Occupation Profile Sheets grouped according to 16 career clusters. Each occupation profile provides an occupation description, employment trends, wage information, education requirements and programs.

To learn more about National Ag Week and Ag Day, visit www.AgDay.org.

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More information is available at http://dese.mo.gov/divcareered/missouri_connections_news_room.htm.

The Missouri Connections Public Outreach Partnership workgroup represents a collaboration of state agencies concerned with education and workforce development who are helping inform and build awareness among the public, particularly students and potential students, of targeted careers, educational and industry trends, and workforce development priorities. Workgroup members represent the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; Department of Higher Education; Department of Economic Development, Division of Workforce Development and Missouri Economic Research & Information Center; Missouri Center for Career Education; and Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Freelance writer is Anita Neal Harrison.