

Go get that job!

Advice from pros on how to move from school into ag careers

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Indiana Correspondent

ATLANTA, Ind. — Agricultural colleges and universities are preparing their students well to hunt jobs after they leave school, according to representatives of companies that may end up hiring their graduates.

Potential employers often first come into contact with students on campus or when they apply for internships. Many businesses use internships as a way for both the student and employer to be sure the intern is the right match with a particular job and company, according to officials with several agriculture-related firms that offer internships.

Beck's Superior Hybrids, based in Atlanta, Ind., hires 30-35 interns each summer depending on need, said Bethany Gremel, the company's human resource manager.

"Our universities provide a great foundation in the classroom for the students," Gremel said. "But we've found the most prepared and most successful students are finding additional vehicles to get experience with internships, interaction with professionals and through campus leadership. It's important that students hear that message."

Beck's recruits in its market area, which generally is in the Midwest, Gremel said. The interns it hires fill positions in sales, research, agricultural production, marketing, finance and accounting. "We have a strong internship program," she noted. "We really try to focus on having a value-added internship experience for the company and the intern. It helps them to have a great real life experience."

The Midwest is blessed with strong agricultural colleges, and Beck's heavily recruits from those schools, she said. Potential interns should be passionate about the jobs for which they might be hired, she added.

"We look for attitude and work ethic," she explained. "We look for a great academic performance, if they're a



On a tour at Beck's Hybrids in 2011, Practical Farm Research Coordinator Toby Ripberger presents data on corn yield to farmers and others. Beck's and other seed companies are on the lookout for research and other kinds of interns, some of whom can become employees later on.

(Ann Hinch photo)

leader or involved on campus. Are they making a positive impact in their area of study?"

It's also important potential employees understand the company and agriculture in general, she noted.

"Internships are a great opportunity for students to bring what they've learned in the classroom and apply it to real-world situations," Gremel said. "We're pretty passionate about it. It's good for us and good for the interns. We feel that we can teach them a lot."

It's the company's goal to convert its outstanding interns into full-time employees if it's the right match for both parties, Gremel said. Beck's has about 350 full-time employees and several hundred part-time and seasonal workers.

For students still in school, she said it's important for them to gain experience in their area of interest. "With experience, they come out of college with a better idea of what their interest is, what their passion is," she noted. In addition to the classroom, that experience may be gained

through internships and through interaction with mentors in a student's area of interest.

"Communications skills are also especially critical, in order to listen to the customer and to satisfy the needs of the customer," she noted. "We're looking for students who have the ability to relate to our customers."

The overall outlook for careers in agriculture is outstanding because the industry as a whole is expanding and because members of the Baby Boomer generation are beginning to retire, Gremel said. While there is growth in production agriculture jobs, the biggest increases will be in life sciences and biosciences.

Bill Richardson, director of the Food, Agriculture and Education Information System (FAEIS), said the number of jobs is increasing for graduates of colleges of agriculture in part because of the growing farm economy and high values for agricultural commodities. FAEIS is part of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech.

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"Wireless connectivity has made a difference because your potential job may take you to a rural area, but you aren't as isolated as you were in the past," he added.

Colleges and universities strive to get their students ready for a career after they graduate, Richardson noted. "Institutes are focused on job preparation in the field. They work closely with the industry to send them graduates that are ready to go to work."

Midwest values, realism are key

A lot of college and university officials are listening to what potential employers say they need in graduates, said Tim Ingle, vice president of human resources and corporate strategy for Red Gold, Inc.

"They're doing a better job in preparing students," he said. "They're talking up the value of internships. I see that gap (between what we need and what they're taught) getting better."

Graduates looking to impress potential

employers should have good organizational skills, be good listeners, make good eye contact and be effective with communication, Ingle explained. "These are simple things, but the detail things that help the students stand out," he said.

Students should also be realistic about their potential climb up the corporate ladder, he stated. "They're not going to get an internship, graduate and then become a CEO," he said "But we are looking for students with Midwest values and work ethic. They should show they've been an over-achiever and have done different things. They should show initiative and drive. They should want to come in and prove themselves."

Red Gold, based in Elwood, Ind., generally hires 5-6 interns each summer for a variety of jobs including engineering, food sciences and agriculture and ag systems management. Many of the company's interns come from Michigan State University, The Ohio State University and Purdue University, Ingle said.

Red Gold regularly hires its interns and

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has many former interns who were offered full-time jobs after graduation, Ingle noted.

"We recommend for internships that students don't get caught up with a particular program or niche, but follow your passion," he said. "If you're excited about agriculture, get aligned with a specific company. It's not where you start, but where you finish. Students should remain flexible; it's an important thing."

Internships are valuable to get the experience, Ingle said, but added they also may help students decide that particular a job or company isn't where they want to be.

In addition to traditional summer internships, Red Gold is looking into offering extended internships that would allow students to work into the fall, Ingle said. Despite the longer commitment, students may eventually be able to leverage the extra experience later in their job searches, he said.

Because Purdue's Anderson campus isn't far from Elwood, students have the option of working for Red Gold and also maybe taking a couple of classes, he pointed out.

Red Gold has 1,350 full-time employees and about 60 part-time and 600 seasonal workers, Ingle said.

Interns hired by Fair Oaks Farms are prepared for their internships and have a good handle on the necessary basics and core items, said Gary Corbett, the company's CEO.

"It's never a perfect transition, because the real world is a little different than the classroom," he explained. "There are opportunities you just can't get in the classroom. But they all come out with a core competency and they're good to go."

Because the course background for most students is sufficient, Corbett looks at



Having a background in formal agricultural study can help in career continuing education courses, as attendees of the 2010 Feed Industry Institute (left) found. Selling livestock feed and nutrients requires knowledge of animal nutrition, as updated by instructors like Dr. Kevin Halpin (above), at the time vice president of International Ingredient Corp.

(Ann Hinch photos)

intangibles when determining which students might make the best interns for his company.

"We're looking for a lot of passion and a lot of enthusiasm," he said. "We offer experience in a lot of different areas. There are a lot of opportunities for people of varying backgrounds."

Fair Oaks, based in Fair Oaks, Ind., has about 450-475 employees. Another 150 or so work with the farm's agricultural tours and about 80 percent of those are part-time, Corbett said.

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Agriculture takes some people into public speaking, which may benefit from higher education. At left, Elaine Froese of Canada is a farm planner and motivational speaker; below, Summer Goldman, regional vice president of Farm Credit Mid-America, leads a finance course for farmers. (Ann Hinch photos)



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The company has occasionally hired interns in the past and has three this summer. Fair Oaks hopes to hire more interns in future summers and is working to set up a program with colleges that would allow interns to receive credit for their internships, he said.

Corbett doesn't know how many interns the company might hire each summer, but said he hoped the program would begin next year. The three interns working for Fair Oaks this summer were hired to help with the farm's Pig Adventure display, scheduled to open in August. The students are working in areas such as agricultural communications, tourism and recreation – and all have a background in pigs, he noted.

The interns are helping set up the Pig Adventure venue, assisting in training other staff and crafting various messages to be displayed on the tour, Corbett said. Fair Oaks has expressed an interest in hiring one of the interns, who has indicated a desire to work for the company after graduation.

Leadership skills vital

Cargill employs about 100 interns annually for agriculture-related jobs and hires hundreds more in other areas of the business, said Heather Benson, the company's North American university recruiting manager. The goal is to hire about 70 percent of the students for full-time jobs after graduation.

"Our internships are our primary sources for college hiring, and we're finding they're our best source," Benson explained. Cargill, headquartered in Minneapolis, Minn., has 142,000 employees worldwide.

The company offers agriculture-related internships in such areas as sales and marketing, operations and commodities, she said. Jobs in specialized positions like poultry science and food science are also available. In addition, Cargill has internships in non-agricultural areas like engineering, finance, quality assurance and information technology.

Many of its interns in agriculture-related areas do have a background in agriculture, Benson noted. "It's more beneficial with retention and their general career path interest," she said. "It's turned out really well for us."

Cargill has long-term relationships with several colleges and universities nationwide, including Iowa State University, OSU and Purdue, Benson said. But the company doesn't just hire interns from those universities, she added.

"When we receive a résumé from a student, we hope we've already had some interaction with them," she said. "A student's best bet (to gain an internship) is to have prior interaction with us on campus. Our recruiters are on campuses and that's a good time for them to meet with students."

It's important for potential interns to take advantage of the opportunities available to them, she noted. For example, they should be aware of what's happening on their campuses, attend job fairs and meet with company representatives. They should know something about the companies that visit campus and what they have to offer.

Students looking for an internship with Cargill should have leadership skills, determination to get a job done, resourcefulness and creativity, she said. "They should step up to take on leadership opportunities," Benson pointed out. "That doesn't necessarily mean you're leading your fraternity or sorority. It can also mean something like speaking up in class or leading a class project. As long as they have a passion, we'll work with that."

She said the interns Cargill does hire are "very well-prepared. They bring a strong work ethic and they bring humility. They're ready to jump in and go to work."

Senator seeks to boost ag education

An amendment seeking to improve educational opportunities in agriculture for some students before they reach college has been added to the proposed Strengthening America's Schools Act of 2013.

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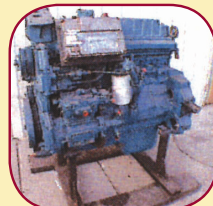
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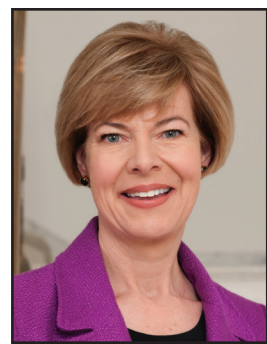


According to the FAEIS, students who graduate from college are on the rise as new hires in ag-related careers. (Bill Matnev photo)

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The amendment was put forth by U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.). The proposed legislation, including Baldwin's amendment, was passed out of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee last month. Under the Strengthening America's Schools Act, states would be awarded grants "to continue to build teacher capacity and allow access for low-income students to a well-rounded education" in areas such as the arts, financial literacy, civics and music, according to a statement from the senator's office.



SENATOR BALDWIN

Baldwin's amendment added "agricultural education programs" to the list of covered subjects. The grant program would require states "to identify and target gaps in low-income students' access to a high-quality, well-rounded education," including in the selection of courses and the quality of standards and curricula, the statement said.

"Agriculture education programs concentrate on the development of essential technical skills that are vital to the success of people entering a career in agriculture," Baldwin explained. "These secondary-school programs educate students for their future careers, as well as impart vital life skills."

The grants will support the future of agriculture education and of agriculture in general, she noted. "Wisconsin has a rich agriculture tradition that has been carried on from generation to generation. I believe it is important that we support and invest in innovative agricultural education programs so we can continue to carry on that tradition."

The Strengthening America's Schools Act would replace the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Baldwin said she's hopeful the new legislation will move forward in this Congress.

FAEIS: College grads in ag on the rise, through 2015

BLACKSBURG, Va. — The number of college graduates in agriculture-related programs will continue to increase through 2015, according to a recent study by the Food, Agriculture and Education Information System (FAEIS).

The study tracked the number of baccalaureate, master and doctorate degrees in agriculture, family and consumer sciences and natural resources and conservation from 2004-11, the most recent year for which complete statistics are available. The agency has also projected the number of those degrees in 2015.

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Information for the study came from 175 land grant and non-land grant universities. FAEIS is a part of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech.

- The number of baccalaureate degrees in agriculture, agriculture operations and related sciences increased 16.1 percent from 2004 to 2011 (14,968 to 17,381). FAEIS has projected that number to be 18,961 in 2015.

- For baccalaureate degrees in family and consumer sciences and human sciences, the number awarded was up 24.7 percent from 2004 to 2011 (17,213 to 21,461), with 24,438 projected in 2015.

- In natural resources and conservation, the number of baccalaureate degrees increased 19.5 percent from 2004 to 2011 (5,302 to 6,337), and is projected to be 7,022 in 2015.

- Master's degrees awarded in agriculture, agriculture operations and related sciences were up 11.4 percent from 2004 to 2011 (2,743 to 3,056), while FAEIS has projected 3,270 in 2015.

- For family and consumer sciences and human sciences, the number of master's degrees increased 25.5 percent from 2004 to 2011 (1,573 to 1,974), with 2,300 projected in 2015.

- Master's degrees in natural resources and conservation were up 11.1 percent from 2004 to 2011 (1,233 to 1,370). FAEIS has projected 1,465 in 2015.

- Doctorate degrees were up 0.4 percent from 2004 to 2011 (1,049 to 1,054) in agriculture, agriculture operations and related sciences. The number is projected to be 1,062 in 2015.

- In family and consumer sciences and human sciences, the number of doctorate degrees was up 2.3 percent from 2004 to 2011 (349 to 357), with 373 projected in 2015.

- There was no change in the number of doctorate degrees in natural resources and conservation from 2004 to 2011, as the number remained at 367. FAEIS has projected 375 in 2015.

FAEIS uses codes designated by the USDA to determine how various areas of study are classified, said Bill Richardson, FAEIS director.

FAEIS has also looked at agriculture-related baccalaureate degrees awarded by region of the country. Seventy land grant universities were surveyed for the report. The North Central Region includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan and Ohio. The South Region includes Kentucky and Tennessee.

- From 2007 to 2011, the most degrees awarded in agriculture, agriculture operations and related sciences were in the South, with 17,967 (2007) to 20,857 (2011). The North Central Region ranked second, with 16,066 (2007) to 18,798 (2011).

- The Northeast had 9,914 (2007) to 10,972 (2011), and the West, 7,781 (2007) to 9,752 (2011).

- The most degrees in family and consumer sciences and human sciences were in the North Central Region, with 16,259 (2007) to 17,340 (2011). Even though the South Region saw a drop in the number of degrees during that time period, it still ranked second with 13,535 (2007) to 13,356 (2011).

- The West had 9,740 (2007) to 10,829 (2011), while the Northeast had 6,566 (2007) to 7,157 (2011).

- In natural resources and conservation, the West Region had the most degrees from 2007 to 2011, with 5,062 to 7,197. The South had 5,016 (2007) to 6,122 (2011), and the Northeast, 3,900 (2007) to 4,901 (2011).

- The North Central Region had 3,460 (2007) to 4,271 (2011).

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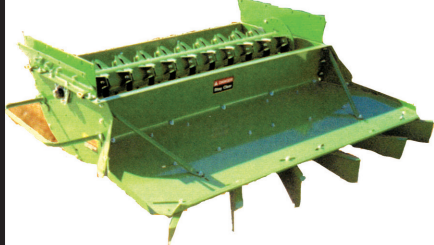
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