

## Early Career Members

# Preparing for an Agronomy Career in Industry

**D**uring these turbulent times, I consider myself quite fortunate to be involved in agriculture, specifically agronomy. While students in other majors struggle to find jobs after graduation, agriculture majors are encountering a much different scenario.

According to an AgCareers.com AgrowKnowledge Enrollment and Employment Outlook Report, there was a deficit of 9,317 graduates with agriculture degrees to fill open positions in the U.S. in 2008. This is also the case internationally, where agronomists, in particular, are in short supply. Furthermore, the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts an additional 16% job growth for agricultural and food scientists between 2008 and 2018.

As the earth's population continues to rise, I know there will always be a job for me in agriculture. However, just because there are jobs out there, does not mean there is not stiff competition for the good ones. If you're thinking about an agronomy career in private industry, here are some ways to get a head start:



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program for all of Carolina Eastern-Vail in the northeast. My office is less than 10 miles from my family's home farm in New York. My point is just because you leave the nest doesn't mean you can't come back later!

## Internships

Make the best use of your summer breaks from college. Obtain an internship every summer within your field of interest. Regular job websites, such as Agcareers.com, will have these listed as will your college career center. Don't be afraid to travel out of state for it—many companies will help subsidize the cost of housing. While interning, ask a lot of questions. Most industry professionals will be more than happy to share their experiences and knowledge with you, and it shows your interest in the company. If you are spending the summer doing field research, ask if you can spend a few days with a sales agronomist to broaden your experience (and vice versa). Remember, you are not merely labor for them—your internship is an opportunity for you to get to know the company and for them to get to know you. Make the most of it!

## Be Flexible

Open your mind and pack your bags because the best industry jobs will probably require you to relocate (at least in the beginning of your career). This is how you will gain your experience and show the company that you are eager and devoted. This is just a stepping stone and does not have to be forever, so consider it an exciting new adventure! When I started in the industry, I moved from New York to Iowa, to Illinois, and eventually to Michigan. Today, less than 10 years later, I manage an agronomy research trial

## Get Certified

If you are reading this magazine, you are probably already a member of one or all of the crops, soils, and/or agronomy professional societies—that's great! The next step is certification. Aside from the benefits of improved credibility in the field and annual education requirements, certification has some other advantages toward your gainful employment. Getting certified shows your employer or potential employer your integrity and commitment toward your work. Furthermore, if you are vying for a position against a similar candidate, it can be the one thing that sets you apart. Not to mention many employers actually require it.

## Work Hard

Farming is not a nine-to-five job and neither are any of the industries that support it. To be successful in the agriculture industry, you must be willing to put forth that extra effort. During the growing season, expect to put in longer hours. Be accessible to your customers and return phone calls and emails within 24 hours. Volunteer for special projects within your organization. Use your knowledge to be a guest speaker for university, cooperative extension, and retailer field days.

## Network

The world of agriculture is very small. Get to know as many people as you can, particularly within your specialty. Ask a lot of questions—people love to talk about themselves and what they do. Don't be intimidated by someone's position; remember, they are people too. They will be glad to know there are young, enthusiastic individuals coming into their organization. Be careful not to burn any bridges as you will probably run into these people again, and they will know more people than you. For instance, a colleague of mine from my Iowa days is now a northeast unit business manager whom I am working with again, several years later, in New York.

Using these tips, you should be well on your way to a long and successful career in the professional agronomy industry!