

Filling Critical Workforce Needs: Preparing Today's Youth for Careers in Agriculture

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INTRODUCTION

There are several national agriculture education programs, such as 4-H, FFA, and Grange, and pipeline programs for college students to enter careers in agriculture. However, significant deficits in filling the nation's need for skilled, agriculture workers prevails (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2015).

Research indicates that contextual influences such as family, peers, programs, school, and work experiences shape youth's career choices (e.g., Braverman et al., 2002; Ferry, 2006; Karr-Lilienthal et al., 2014; Luckey et al., 2013). There is also some evidence that youth's stereotypical views of agriculture careers may steer them away from such careers (e.g., Clause & Jost, 1995).

To date, no study provides a comprehensive assessment on the impact of contextual factors on youth's career choices in the area of agriculture and how perceptions affect interest in pursuing an agriculture careers.

AIMS

The purpose of the study was to determine what characteristics and experiences are related to people planning to enter a career in agriculture. Research questions guiding the study were:

1. Do agricultural education programs predict plans to pursue a career in agriculture?
2. What characteristics of agriculture education programs influence plans to pursue a career in agriculture?
3. Are career choices influenced by negative perceptions held by self and others about agriculture and careers?
4. Do family, peers, school and work experiences predict plans to pursue a career in agriculture?

Questionnaire

- Demographic and background factors of the study participant, mother and father
- Family, peer, and school experiences
- Experiences in agricultural education programs
- Experiences with agriculture
- Perceptions of agriculture and careers
- Career goals
- Knowledge of agriculture jobs and degrees

METHOD

Sample

Youth and young adults ages 12 and older enrolled in:

- 4-H
- FFA
- Grange
- Community College

Surveys were disseminated by email

Participants

- 398, ages 5 to 66 ($M = 16.02$; $SD = 9.56$); 80% ages 9-21
- 63% female
- 72% White, 11% other, 10% Latino
- 61% live in urban areas
- 11% middle school, 50% high school, 32% community college, 5% CSU/UC, 2% other
- Parent socioeconomic status ranged

RESULTS

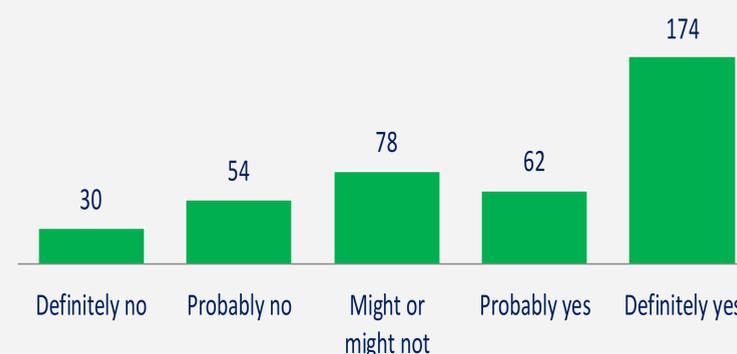


Figure 1. Number of participants who reported whether or not they planned to have a career in agriculture ($n = 398$).



$p < .01$

Plan to pursue an Agriculture career

Significant predictors in the multiple regression analysis:

- Parents would feel negative if participants entered the field ($\beta = -.43$)
- Parent or guardian working in agriculture ($\beta = .69$)
- Frequency talking with family about careers in agriculture ($\beta = -.44$)
- Parental expectations about having opportunities within one's career ($\beta = .41$)

DISCUSSION



Contextual factors, including 4-H and FFA participation, preconceptions and stereotypes of agriculture careers, understanding of agriculture-related careers and college pathways all predicted plans to pursue a career in agriculture. However, when family factors were added into the equation only family factors emerged as significant predictors of whether or not survey participants planned to have a career in agriculture.

Extension strategies that engage families in agriculture education programs or include tips for families on how to talk about agricultural careers with their children may help to increase the number of youth that enter agriculture careers. In addition, it is important to expose youth to agriculture-related careers and college pathways as part of agriculture education programs.



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4-H Youth Development Program