

Job surplus in agriculture attracts urban employees

LITITZ — If you want to work in agriculture don't go near the farm. Many American farmers are having economic problems, but those who either sell to the farmer or market their products are experiencing a boom.

Consequently, jobs are plentiful for those with an agricultural or a business background, according to a 1980 U.S. Department of Agriculture study.

A job surplus exists because agriculture is changing, its economic base shifting from the farm to the food and agricultural corporations.

American agricultural exports are steadily increasing, and the U.S. Farm Export Education Project in Washington anticipates that farm exports could more than double by 1985, creating at least a million new jobs.

Agriculture will be the growth industry of the 1980s, according to Gordon Rausser, professor of agricultural economics at the University of California - Berkeley.

Agribusiness employers agree that there are job openings in agriculture.

"I can't prove it but I think there may be more jobs than in any other industry," said Marvin Vinsand of the U.S. Feed Ingredients Association, which often helps grain companies fill job vacancies.

Vinsand explained that increasing numbers of people with urban backgrounds are working in agriculture. The demand exists for computer technicians, com-

munications specialists and machinists, to name a few.

In state universities, 30 percent of the agricultural majors now come from urban areas. Ideally, said Vinsand, companies are looking for a hybrid, someone with an understanding of rural life and the business savvy to compete in the international market of agricultural companies. But since this is a rare combination, most agricultural companies offer extensive on-the-job training programs.

Lynn Galbraith came to the Cargill Corporation fresh from the Army and was trained to be a grain broker. Seven years later, he now buys and sells oil for Cargill on the international market.

"I know people with college degrees in English literature and Italian Renaissance history who were trained by Cargill for the grain business. One was just transferred to work in the Chicago futures market."

Agricultural companies employ people in their sales forces to consult with farmers on technical and managerial problems, and these are the jobs that come the closest to farming.

Bill McCullough, a cattle feed salesman and regional manager for the MoorMan Feed Company of Quincy, Illinois, explained that interpreting agricultural research is one of the most interesting aspects of his job.

"We try to find the nutritional research that fits the cattle operation; there is no lack of

research findings, but a lack of people to fit it to the feeder's needs. McCullough was trained as a scientist, but likes his current advisory work better.

"A lot of young people want to go into research," he says, "but in research you don't get the satisfaction of seeing it implemented."

Traditionally, research has been one of the few areas in agriculture that was open to women. But today, according to Vinsand, women are probably the fastest growing part of agricultural employment, especially in marketing.

Animal sciences is also a popular field for women, and McCullough notes that it is not uncommon to see women working in cattle feedlots.

Women seem to have a sixth sense for identifying sick animals," he explains. "Lately, I have noticed that there are more women in the dairies handling dairy cows, and I know they are in demand in the large swine areas."

Chuck Bearden, who recruits employees for the MoorMan Company, reports the feedback from his managers is that some of the women have what it takes to make good salespeople.

They work in the research barns, they feed and castrate the pigs and work in the nursery. But what is the farmer's wife going to think when a young saleslady and the farmer are down at the barn?

"We're an old and conservative company, and it was a long time before we sought and encouraged

women to be involved in sales," he says.

Don Sutton, who is director of Career Services at Colorado State University, says that, "We are still seeking resistance from a lot of farmers to women in sales and consulting."

He thinks that women working in sales "may not make it up to becoming district managers."

Lisa Anderson is Ralston Purina's first territory manager for hog feed in Iowa, a job which involves both sales and technical consulting. She came to the job with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Animal Science and spent a year in company training "doing everything from cleaning hog barns to arranging meetings."

She firmly believes that sales is a good road to management in agriculture.

"Many of our people in research or marketing go through sales. They may not be in it for long because they may not be suited for it, but it gives them a chance to see what's happening out there in the field."

A starting salary for a salesperson, she estimates, ranges from \$12,000 to \$14,000 a year.

"After that you work for commission," she said.

Teaching is another field which is wide open in agriculture. In fact, there is a critical shortage nationwide of high school and college agriculture teachers, according to Richard Tenney, assistant professor of agriculture

and occupational education at Cornell University.

Tenney said the number of students enrolled in college and high school agriculture courses has increased three fold since 1960.

Students at Redwood High School in Humboldt County, California, even petitioned their school to offer agriculture classes. They claimed that since the state of the economy in that semi-rural area was such that they could not be sure of finding jobs, they at least wanted to know how to grow their own food.

Adult education classes in agriculture are being added to community college schedules to update people in agriculture-related jobs on new techniques.

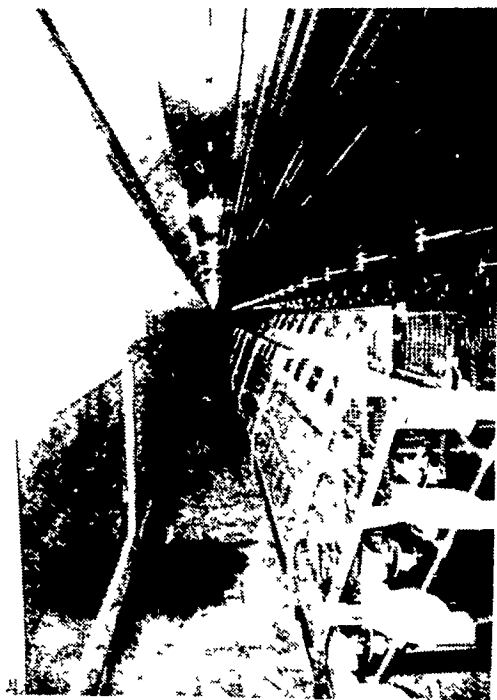
Tenney explained that accredited teachers who would like to become certified to teach agriculture can enroll in a summer program at Cornell so they would not have to quit their existing jobs.

Unemployed auto workers may be able to find jobs with farm implement dealerships repairing and assembling farm machinery.

"Almost every dealer has been looking for good mechanics," said Max Sauder, Managing Director of Mountain States Hardware and Implement Association. "Today's tractor or combine is as complicated as a Cadillac," he explained, and said that the dealers need diesel mechanics, and hydraulic and electrical specialists.

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