

## **Agriculture as a Career**

Since the beginning of time, agriculture has been an important part of our world. Growing up in Northwest Arkansas, I was always aware of the presence and influence agriculture had on the state, and even the nation. Whether it was driving by many large scale poultry producers on my way to school every morning, or driving through the Delta and seeing miles of row crops, agriculture was always present. Growing up on a small hobby farm, I had the mindset that jobs in agriculture were limited to those I saw everyday on my way to school, poultry producers, dairy farms, and small scale vegetable gardens. However, this all began to change when I met a recruiter who informed me about the opportunities the University of Arkansas offered in the field of agriculture. As a result, I decided to pursue Agricultural Economics in college, a decision that changed my entire future.

If I thought agriculture had only a small impact on my life, I was proven wrong when I began to learn about the many aspects of it during my college career. Thomas Jefferson once said, "Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bands." At the time that Jefferson said this, agriculture dealt largely with farmers who did every task by hand, without the aid of modern technology. However, in our present world agriculture is so much more than your average farmer. While agriculture is a small scale hobby farm complete with your average farmer, it is so much bigger than that. Agriculture is now thousands of farmers, competing and cooperating in a global market, for the greater good. Whether dealing with international trade policies for agricultural commodities or creating school lunch programs in developing countries, agriculture is now a multifunctional aspect of our global world.

During the past two summers, I have worked with the University of Arkansas in collaboration with Peacework, participating in a service learning project in Dangriga, Belize. The first summer I worked on the project, my eyes were opened to a whole new world. With the aid of UA students and faculty I helped create a sustainable school garden for St. Matthew's School in Pomona, Belize. Our goal was to provide an extra source of income for the school, and in later years to provide an additional food source for the school to use in their lunch program. My experiences in Belize opened my eyes to how big of a role agriculture plays in the daily operations of a developing country.

After two years of experience with the Belize project, I realized how limited my view of careers in agriculture truly was. I had always classified agricultural jobs into two categories: the manual labor jobs which included, farmers and people who worked out in the field, and agricultural business jobs, people who worked at companies such as Tyson and JB Hunt. I had always known that there was a huge realm of agricultural jobs, but until that experience I had not realized how vast that realm was. A realm that can begin with an average student in Arkansas, who travels to Belize for a service project, and comes back with dreams of making a difference in developing nations. Once I realized how extremely vast the agricultural sector is, I was better able to examine career fields that fit both my interests and career goals.

In the future, I hope to work for an organization, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development. As our world becomes more globalized, it is important to insure that developing countries receive attention and aid so that they can stand on their own in the future. I believe that people like myself, who have been educated and trained in agriculture, can impact both the world we live in today and also the world that future generations will inherit. Individuals who pursue agriculture truly are our nation's most valuable citizens. They alone can impact not only the American consumer who buys food for their family, but also a little girl in Belize who will not have to go without lunch, as a result of food from a sustainable school garden. Agriculture is a field that is full of endless possibilities, possibilities that can be modified to fit every individual's personal goals and dreams.