

“Agriculture as MY career”

Doctors, Engineers, Pharmacists, and Businessmen are constantly evolving out of this fast-paced institution we like to call *college*. But there is only one occupational field I can think of that provides the most relevant and promising opportunities: Agriculture. I reflect back on the stories my grandfather told me as a child and remember how proud he was that he witnessed his family plowing the fields, back in the 1930's. He witnessed changes in Agriculture from watching his father and uncles plow with mules to downloading farm data on his laptop via his GPS-enabled combine with on-board yield reporting information. The horizon for Agriculture provides an endless opportunity especially for emerging college students. This is the primary reason that studying Agricultural Economics instills such an excitement in me.

I recently attended the Agriculture Future of America Leadership Conference in Kansas City, MO. For the first time in my life, I was literally surrounded by hundreds of students and agribusiness executives who study, represent, and will shape the future of global agriculture. At this meeting I was challenged to define agriculture, and prior to that weekend, I had typically defined agriculture as my identity and part of my childhood. But the realization that no other career or industry in the world gives people a chance to economically and socially impact each and every life on this planet has helped me transition my definition of agriculture into a whole new meaning. I believe that it is my passion, my future, and will become my career. Just think, in 2005, who would have imagined or predicted the past few years worth of change and globalization in the marketplace? Who would have foreseen the volatile rise in food prices coupled by an ever-increasing dominant and demanding Chinese market? How about the use of corn, switch grass, or wood chips as a source to fuel your automobile for an average of 20 to 30 miles per gallon? It's hard to believe that anyone could have distinctly pinpointed nearly all of the global agricultural issues we have addressed in the past decade, which leads me to state that society can be no more successful in perfectly predicting an expeditious next decade. Therefore, we must prepare ourselves to answer a more relevant question. As a human race, how are we going to feed the world and **adjust** to the changing water supply, global environment, and the possible doubling of our world population? Worry not, history has shown that there have been numerous times when Mother Earth thought she was going to run out of food, and yet *agriculture* came through. The secret is going to lie within being open to the possibilities of change. As humans, we have to accept that the future is going to involve living significantly different than the way we do today. With dedicated and passionate leaders who are willing to contribute to not only American agriculture, but also to the opening of world commodity markets and the removal of trade barriers, we can together accomplish what may seem like a daunting task.

After a fast-paced and eventful year at the University of Illinois that included International Business and Agricultural Policy program trips to Europe and Washington DC, I feel ready and excited to further my education with a graduate degree in Agricultural Economics and a future career dedicated to Agriculture Policy. I have been very fortunate to travel with the former President of Illinois Farm Bureau, Ron Warfield, on a vigorous week-long trip to Washington DC in the spring of 2008. This program allowed my class to meet with policymakers and lobbyists, honing in on the controversial views of the current Farm Bill. During the same semester last spring, I enjoyed a course that researched and studied the differences between the United States and European Union supply chain systems with a focus on international agriculture. My particular group dove deep into the focus of biotechnology and genetically modified organisms as we researched some of the European GMO objections prior to our two week study tour in Europe. During our travels, we enjoyed discovering firsthand some of the reasons for differing consumer demand behavior through collaboration with farmers, consumers, and agricultural & multinational companies. Some of these issues are being addressed by research professionals with global companies such as Monsanto. Brett Begeman, Executive Vice President of Monsanto, proposes that if countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and India could increase their average corn yield to 100 bushels per acre, then the world supply of corn would potentially double the amount that is supplied and traded in the global marketplace today. And to think, only about one-half of the corn production in Mexico currently uses hybrid seed. It is small changes such as those described that are going to make a *world* of difference when we all start working toward a common solution. Plainly stated, the future of the world and its people relies on the success of future leaders in agriculture. Food, fuel, and fiber are all basic necessities of life. Efficiency and productivity are going to take special dedication to truly tackle root issues of globalization and international agriculture. At the current rate of population growth, we will face changes and challenges during the next decade that we could not imagine in our wildest dreams or put into words during the previous decade. I want to be a part of the generation that defines that change and shapes the policies that will make a difference.