

Jonathan Adam Watson

Agriculture as a Career

In my opinion, agriculture is not merely a career, it is a lifestyle. How does one choose his or her occupation? Does a child wake one morning and say “I think I want to be a farmer when I grow up”? Maybe this happens..., anything is possible I suppose. I think it is more than that. For myself, I was born into a life dominated by agriculture. I grew up outside Trenton, a small town in Gilchrist County, Florida population: 1,767. Gilchrist County is not a major metropolitan area by any means, but this is how most people who live there prefer it. It is a community that prides itself on “Character”, it even says so on the welcome sign when you arrive. This is a town that exists here because of the agriculture industry that surrounds it. There are farms here that have remained in the same family’s hands for well over 100 years, including some of mine. My father was the town veterinarian and my mother an animal lab technician and his assistant. I grew up learning about animals as small as the lowly lab mouse to creatures as large as horses, and occasionally, when I went to work with my mother, baboons and other exotic animals at the University of Florida, her other place of employment. I also enjoyed a more traditional farming experiencing. My family called it gardening...if you call 20 acres a garden, then I call the Biltmore Estate a vacation home. However, I do not think I could trade the valuable life lessons I learned from agriculture for anything in the world. They are skills that vast majorities of residents in the United States never get to experience.

I never really thought about it when I was younger but my professional education started from day 1. Learning from my parents, I was given lessons in Animal Biology, Agribusiness and Economics, as well as Agronomy and Horticulture. Subconsciously I was also receiving educational lessons in fields such as Ecology, Hydrology, Sustainability and Environmental Science. Some of my first classes were Curtis Pecan and Muscadine Grape Recovery 101 as well as Swine and Poultry Anatomy & Physiology, usually from butchering them. All humor aside, what I was learning were the essentials of agriculture. Throughout my school years I did things many other adolescent American males did; I played sports, practiced guitar and piano, and became very active with other extracurricular activities. Yet, because of the role that agriculture played in my life, I never was able to get away from it, nor did I want to. For much of the year, I was involved in 4-H, and the grooming of show hogs for the annual Suwannee River Youth Livestock Show and Sale. This is a huge event that essentially closes down all public schools for the duration of 1 week in three adjacent counties. It is quite a big deal and a significant economic boom for the residents of Fanning Springs, where the event takes place. This is the point in my life where I started to understand the economics of agriculture, particularly when I sold my pig. It was a lesson and decision that all farmers from around the world face daily.

In conclusion, agriculture has led me to many places domestically and abroad. Currently I am attending the University of Florida, and I can honestly say that I have never been happier. I am attending the college that I wanted to go to since I was a boy. Agriculture has taken me all over the southeastern and mid-western United States for livestock fairs and dairy operations. Agriculture has also taken me abroad. I have studied energy sustainability practiced by Dutch farmers in the Netherlands, in which they supply much of their needed power with rows of giant windmills, to French agriculture and food marketing in Paris, France. I do not believe there is a more rewarding career choice or opportunity than agriculture. Where else can you provide food on your table as well as provide a means of living for yourself and your family? It has taught me valuable skills such as discipline, strength, and perseverance in order to be successful in life as well as a means to survive. Agriculture is and always will be a large part of my heart, heritage, and home.