

Edited from

Young women give their opinions about their place in agriculture's future

By Warwick Long

2. Evie Murdoch, Third year agricultural science student, University of Sydney, New South Wales

Agriculture students are often told that there are more jobs than graduates for the industry they have decided to study. Those jobs are not just available on farms. The industry offers work in cities, the country, laboratories, offices, paddocks or driving high-tech equipment. So why does the next generation study agriculture, and what do they want to do? This farmer forum speaks to four women at the formative stage of their careers either in university, or just graduated, to get their thoughts on the industry.

1. Why did you choose to study agriculture?

Evie Murdoch: “Originally I studied agriculture at school, an elective subject which I absolutely loved. It allowed me to gain skills in an applied science in an area that I didn't really have any knowledge in already. Finishing school meant moving onto the next stage in my life; further education and expanding my knowledge base. Agriculture seemed the perfect choice for me as I had by this stage garnered a passion for an industry that is constantly changing and challenged by external forces. It was the combination of theoretical knowledge and practical aspects that I found most appealing. I could learn from a professional and experienced industry participant and apply my knowledge base in the field to improve production and efficiency. It is the new and the innovative elements of agriculture which particularly interest me; technology and innovation; however, I do appreciate that these are based on a stable platform of information and understanding about plants, animals, the soils and marketing and business management. Finally, I wanted to be a woman in a predominately male dominated arena who can, just as successfully, if not more successfully, perform agricultural functions and tasks.

“I am a city kid, with a passion for agriculture and I want to encourage others to see the importance of our food producers. Having grown up on a sheep farm my entire life it's in my blood. I followed dad around the farm like a bad smell for years, but why I love it is the people and the drive of the industry.”

2. Where do you want to work and what do you want to achieve?

Evie Murdoch: “Personally, I cannot see myself living on a farm in the near future. I believe that there is a lot the city has to offer me in terms of my goals and career in the industry for the time being. There are numerous education and research opportunities available to me in the city and while I am continuing the final years of my studies.

“Recently I have chosen to major in economics and have become more interested in the marketing and business side of agriculture. I hope that I can forge a career within that industry and in particular using technology and innovation within business management, marketing and decision making to help improve profitability, reduce costs and increase overall production.

“I am also very passionate about spreading the word about the quality and importance of buying home grown foods. That paying a premium for products produced and processed in Australia is something that we should all be looking to do. It would be great to see the government encourage this too. It will help increase Australian farmers' share in our own local marketplace and keep farming profitable. I would love to play a role in spreading this message and educating future generations about the importance of food production and buying local.”

3. How do you think agriculture is viewed in wider society?

Evie Murdoch: “Unfortunately I think that agriculture is commonly viewed in a negative light, in a doom and gloom fashion. A little negative media never helps either. However personally, I am full of a lot more hope! I think that there is so many positive aspects out there that need to be considered. The number of students enrolling in ag courses is increasing year by year.”

“Even at USYD [the University of Sydney], where I am the Ag Society secretary, we have increasing numbers of members year-in, year-out who are passionate beyond measure about the need to keep learning about and improving upon studies in agriculture.

“The world which we live in today is heavily reliant on technology and I think that this is one of the most fascinating areas encroaching upon the industry at the moment. Society should be adopting and viewing agriculture as a field in which technology can be applied to improve production and increase output to satisfy consumer desires and preferences.

“I think that also, as a woman, there is a large predisposition by some members of the industry still, that it should be a male dominated industry. I'm out there to prove them wrong! What every male can do, I can, or will learn to do it just as well and if not better!”

4. What issues is the industry facing that you think need to be addressed?

Evie Murdoch: “Buying locally, increasing education, embracing technology and being more welcoming to women in agriculture.

“I think there are a number of issues that could use support and further awareness. The scope is endless. Fertiliser overuse, climate change and increasing weather

variability, lack of infrastructure, education opportunities for rural and indigenous students, raising awareness about where food comes from and food miles, water use and preserving our water supply for future generations, declining farm numbers and increasing farmer age, that a farmer can be a her and not a him!

“Drug use in and depression among rural Australians, and the issue of low capital and debt collecting...the list goes on and on. However I don't mention all these in a negative light; a number of the issues are being addressed as we speak, and experts are working towards goals and solutions.

“I think you really need to look at agriculture with a glass half full attitude; yes, there are issues out there, but solutions are possible. I want to help make those solutions!”

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