

Edited from

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

By Warwick Long

4. Laura Bruce, First year agricultural science student, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, NSW

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?

Laura Bruce: “I've loved science from a very young age, however as I grew up, I never quite knew how to apply that to a career. When it came time to start thinking about university, I realised that I could combine my love of science, animals, and the rural lifestyle all in one if I were to study agriculture. From here I've learnt about the unlimited number of career paths from an agricultural degree, and my focus has matured beyond livestock into other sub-industries such as policy, representation and looking even further into international agriculture opportunities. My interest quickly evolved into a passion, and now I couldn't imagine being on any other career path.”

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

Laura Bruce: “When I started exploring career options within agriculture, I was surprised to see how many paths there are to explore. I'm currently interested in both agricultural policy and international agriculture. My dream would be to educate farmers (particularly women) in third world countries to empower them and support their families, which would in turn increase the food security levels for their communities.

“I can see that the key to reducing food insecurity worldwide is by providing education and infrastructure for family farms. I do also hold interests in other fields, including politics, genetics and agronomy. I would also love to have my own farming business in the future.”

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

Laura Bruce: “When asking metropolitan citizens what their stereotypical farmer is, I'm often given an image of an older male in a battered old akubra [*typical Australian hat*] either sitting in the tractor or with his loyal kelpie [*sheepdog*] by his side.

“While the average age of farmers is increasing, there is an entire facet of the industry that consumers just aren't becoming familiar with. We have research scientists, bankers, policy developers, marketers, stock and station agents, shearers, and journalists, to name a few professions within the industry that don't exclusively involve the use of a tractor or have a median age near retirement.

“In my opinion, it's up to us to give consumers the education they need to make choices to assist agriculture as a whole, and improve their overall perception of agriculture and the people within it.”

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

Laura Bruce: “Being such a unique industry, we also face an array of unique challenges, like leaving our livelihoods in the unpredictable hands of mother nature, or attempting to feed double the population with our current amount of arable land.

“However I see that the issue with the simplest solution is providing comprehensive education to all aspects of the community. I believe it begins with our youngest consumers. We need an effective and supportive primary and secondary education system to begin teaching children where their foods come from and what products they can make.

“Higher education in agriculture for students such as myself must be accessible, affordable and integrated into the industry. The statistics show that there is a large amount of job options available to the small number of agricultural graduates coming out of universities around the country every year, but somehow we're not conveying this to students interested in applicable life sciences.

“To add to this, the current issue of university deregulation is an extra pressure for high school leavers to consider when choosing a career path. In this ever-evolving industry with such large challenges ahead, it's crucial that we start securing our innovators, leaders and agriculture professionals for the future. We also need to keep educating our current, developed producers and professionals in order to keep up with changing trends.”

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2015-04-17/ag-students-farmer-forum/6400520>