

For thousands of students this month is critical. Many will be sitting exams which they hope will give them the opportunity to pursue fulfilling and lucrative careers. But this year life beyond the cosseted world of full time education is less certain.

Newspapers are full of reports stating that graduate vacancies have halved in the same year that a record number are leaving to seek employment. This will be hard on many not least because the previous decade has been so prosperous. Most can't remember the last serious recession because they were under 10 years of age when that happened. Instead they have been brought up to expect that everything will come easily – well paid jobs, generous lines of credit, luxury holidays, cars and so on. But those times have ceased, at least for the time being, and many are now faced with the prospect of not being able to find work at all, never mind the well paid jobs they were promised when they started their chosen degree courses.

Recent events might also have caused some to reconsider which industry to aim for. A career in merchant banking was until last year a glamorous option with rapid wealth growth guaranteed. Not now. Those particularly driven by the desire to become rich and famous might even have considered politics particularly as it seems it was more lucrative than most of us could have imagined!

So perhaps the last twelve months have made some of those bright young things rethink their futures altogether. With the quick buck not quite so readily available a solid and reliable industry producing something needed by everyone could be considered a safer and more attractive bet. Is it possible to imagine that young people might actually start to say again "I think I might want to be a farmer"

This is of course a preposterous sugges-

An exciting career in farming?

tion. Anyone from the outside looking in would dismiss this industry immediately. Evidence speaks for itself: frequently published statistics reporting the declining number of farmers, agricultural colleges all but extinct, a complete absence of government funded research suggesting an industry with no future, food health scares, livestock disease outbreaks and so on. Not a happy picture.



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But perhaps this gloomy analysis doesn't tell the whole story. A student without preconceptions might first pose the question "what is a farmer?" The answer from Wikipedia – that modern day internet based 'Encyclopaedia' – reads "the term farmer usually applies to a person who grows field crops, and/or manages orchards or vineyards, or raises livestock or poultry such as chicken and cows. Their products are usually sold in a market or, in a subsistence economy, consumed by the family or pooled by the community." No doubt you will all identify with this!

That definition may be relevant in parts of eastern Europe and other third world countries but has little or no relevance to the industry we recognise today. So how do we now define the job of the farmer and make it attractive to those contemplating a career in agriculture?

First and foremost a farmer is a food producer – this is something all will understand. But perhaps less obvious is that farming also involves:

- Production that is not only limited to wheat, milk, beef and lamb but also includes vines for the growing wine

industry, specialist oil crop production for the farm based oil crusher, high value vegetable and salad crops, alpacas, rare breeds for specific products such as buffalo for mozzarella cheese, and so on;

- Produce marketing – a part of the job which has become much more complicated due to market volatility and fragmentation. For some this means the exploitation of sophisticated grain selling tools such as Options while for others this involves the development of local outlets such as farm shops and farmers markets;
- Environmental management – for those that are interested, Stewardship Schemes provide the young farmer with the opportunity to farm in harmony with the environment and to benefit financially from enhancing specific habitats;
- Production subsidies – e.g. Single Payment Scheme. When these schemes are reformed they can present opportunities for the informed to maximise income;
- Property management – 40% of the revenue for the average farm business comes from diversification enterprises – mainly from let property. Skills in building conversion, planning policy and tenancy legislation are important and will be increasingly so in future.

This brief summary simply reconfirms that the farmer of today is far more than the grower of crops or the keeper of livestock. Successful farmers need to be dynamic, informed, dedicated and determined. Despite the risks and difficulties the farming industry is full of individuals who have succeeded to create successful and profitable businesses. In other words farming is definitely an exciting career for those prepared for the challenges.

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