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Ag Industry Failing to Attract Next Generation

Land O'Lakes, Inc. survey shows only 3 percent of college grads have or would consider a career in agriculture

MINNEAPOLIS (March 15, 2016) – The world's demand for food will surge by 2050, with a projected 10 billion people requiring a 70 percent increase in food production. The question is, who will lead the way to find solutions for this demand and ensure the world's people will be fed?

Today, on National Agriculture Day, the stark shortage of agricultural talent as well as lingering misperceptions about Ag careers are of pressing concern to agricultural groups, universities and agriculture and food companies.

A recent nationally representative survey conducted by ORC International on behalf of Land O'Lakes, Inc. shows there's a startling lack of young people planning to work in the agriculture industry. In fact, only 3 percent of college grads and 9 percent of Millennials surveyed have or would consider an Ag career. When compared to other industries, respondents were least likely to indicate that they have or would consider a career in agriculture (6 percent), with healthcare and technology at the highest career interest (each at 21 percent); followed by education (20 percent); marketing and sales; finance; and manufacturing and engineering (all at 12 percent).

[USDA job reports](#) underscore these findings: more than 20,000 agriculture jobs go unfilled each year. Despite this fact, the majority of survey respondents – 54 percent – think it is difficult or very difficult for recent college graduates to get a job in agriculture.

“We will need to produce more food in the next 40 or 50 years than in the previous 500 years combined,” said Lydia Botham, executive director, Land O'Lakes Foundation. “Our priorities are clear – we must focus on attracting the next generation of Ag workers to the highly skilled, well-paid career opportunities. Failing to do so may lead to severe consequences.”

According to the survey, 76 percent of respondents do not think or are not sure if a career in Ag pays well. This misperception is prevalent across geographies (85 percent in the Northeast, 82 percent in the West and 71 percent in the Midwest and South). However, 35 percent of Millennials –

significantly more than any other generation – think Ag careers do pay well, (compared with 21 percent of Generation X and 17 percent of Baby Boomers), which may be a promising sign of attracting college students to the field.

“People still think you have to wear boots and overalls to work in Ag,” said Botham. “But modern agriculture has evolved to become one of the most vital and technologically advanced fields there is today. And the career choices are as dynamic as the industry itself – from seed geneticists and soil conservationists to supply chain analysts and economists.”

To attract new college graduates, Land O’Lakes, Inc. created the Global Food Challenge – [Emerging Leaders for Food Security™](#) program to engage future leaders in the challenges and opportunities facing agriculture. The yearlong fellowship program provides selected college students the opportunity to learn more about global food security, and includes travel to U.S. farms, to Washington, D.C., to understand policy, and to smallholder farms in rural Africa. Students are selected from a wide range of education disciplines, from agronomy and environmental science to nutrition, finance and marketing.

Trey Forsyth, a 2014 Emerging Leader, believes that programs like the Global Food Challenge will encourage the next generation to get involved in agriculture – and to tackle global hunger. His trip with other Emerging Leaders to meet policymakers in Washington, D.C., was a revelation.

“I saw a whole new side of agriculture that I never knew existed, and it was fascinating,” Forsyth said. “Now I’m thinking of pursuing a career in ag policy.”

Learn more about the Global Food Challenge and join the conversation at <http://foodchallenge.landolakesinc.com>.

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About Land O’Lakes, Inc.

Land O’Lakes, Inc., one of America’s premier agribusiness and food companies, is a member-owned cooperative with industry-leading operations that span the spectrum from agricultural production to consumer foods. With 2015 annual sales of \$13 billion, Land O’Lakes is one of the nation’s largest cooperatives, ranking 203 on the Fortune 500. Building on a legacy of more than 94 years of operation, Land O’Lakes today operates some of the most respected brands in agribusiness and food production including LAND O LAKES® Dairy Foods, Purina Animal Nutrition and WinField Solutions. The company does business in all 50 states and more than 60 countries. Land O’Lakes, Inc. corporate headquarters are located in Arden Hills, Minn.

About the survey

The online survey, conducted by ORC International’s CARAVAN® Geographic Omnibus from February 8 – 10, 2016, polled a demographically representative U.S. sample of 1,020 adults, comprising 505 men and 515 women 18 years of age and older.