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Attitudes of Spouses Toward Job and Family Responsibilities of Professionals in the Agricultural Education and Communications Profession

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ATTITUDES OF SPOUSES TOWARD JOB AND
FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES OF PROFESSIONALS IN THE
AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION & COMMUNICATIONS PROFESSION

By

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A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
May 2011

RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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Adrienne M. Jackson Gulley

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Science
in the field of Plant and Soil Science

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ATTITUDES OF SPOUSES TOWARDS JOB AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES OF PROFESSIONALS IN THE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATIONS PROFESSION

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Dexter B. Wakefield

The field of education, specifically the profession of teaching, is one of the most visible and underappreciated professions practiced today. Though improvements with recognition towards teachers have increased over time, the demands and expectations of teachers have also increased. In the growing profession of agriculture, the demands and challenges of an agriculture teacher bring both positive and negative outcomes in the life of an individual. The purpose of this study was to determine the job satisfaction of spouses toward job and family responsibilities of individuals in leadership positions within agricultural education and communications. This study was significant because it analyzed the perceptions of individuals' attitudes toward the agriculture profession and the importance thereof. The study found that agriculture professionals, as in many other professions, were capable of becoming emotionally drained and/or stressed as they attempted to balance their personal and work lives but were not likely to leave the profession for this reason alone.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Most people who are not living on a farm or have not been raised on farms may be familiar with the term agriculture but are unfamiliar with the scope of agriculture, how it affects people on an everyday basis and how important it is to our society. The profession of agricultural communications was created out of a need for people to be properly informed about the news and other information as it relates to the field of agriculture. Agriculture communications refers to the communicator's aim to talk about agriculture with both agricultural audiences and those who are not of the profession. The need for knowledge in this area is critical to our society and individuals since the industry is growing at such a rapid rate. It is also important for the quality of life in the areas of crop production, soil and water conservation and other various aspects of agriculture. More importantly, agriculture communications may be the solution in helping to inform those who work in the profession. It may also be a key to balancing their personal and work lives while meeting the needs of such a demanding field.

Within the agricultural profession are countless important careers. One critical position is that of an agriculture teacher, which was dominated by mostly the male gender in the past. The results of a study conducted by Tritz & Martin (1998) indicated women felt agriculture was a field largely including production and hard labor positions. Yet, the agriculture industry includes a number of positions that are led by women. In order to be an effective teacher in the classroom, teachers gather mental, emotional and intellectual resources. (Tucker, Whaley & Cano, 2003). Teachers often find themselves working well past a 40-hour work week as they supervise student projects, judge various self-

improvement contests, coach career development teams, evaluate student work and prepare lessons (Straquadine, 1990). The long hours at work, combined with the stress of teaching could eventually lead to incapacitating health problems (Vaughn, 1990).

Additionally, the dangers of laboratory instruction are aggravating stress factors that often lead to persistent health problems and absenteeism from the classroom (Lee, 1990).

As a consequence, agriculture teachers are prone to experience a condition called “burnout”, which is common in a number of other professions as well (Lee, 1990).

Other studies have shown concerns in marital relationships among spouses who hold leadership positions in the industry of agriculture. Characteristics have been identified to show a major focus on the work/family relationship and the difference between the two roles. The results of some studies referenced in this paper confirm the strong role in the attitudes of spouses towards managing the work-interface concept. The importance of mutual spousal support and affirmation to successful dual-career marriages cannot be overemphasized. Spousal support not only involves valuing and affirming a partner’s abilities and goals, but it also involves emotional support, emphatic listening, and the ability to nurture (Gilbert, 1995). Any type of emotional support given from one spouse to the other are important factors in making a marriage successful when there are extensive responsibilities for job requirements involved. This study investigated the marital and job satisfaction of agricultural leaders and their spouses in an effort to find a well defined balance between the two.

There are times when couples are often faced with working out a balance between their career and family responsibilities, both individually and as a pair. Satisfaction with a particular balance of roles is highest when each partner perceives the arrangement as

fair regardless of the distribution of labor in the household (Gilbert, 1995). It is assumed couples that see their family responsibilities equal are more satisfied and happy than those who see their responsibilities unequal. In order to have a positive relationship between a husband and wife, the responsibilities of the family ought to be equally shared. The balancing act for couples and families has often been an issue for society and researchers who consider finding ways to deal with the rapid changes of the way men and women handle job and family responsibilities. Attaining a reasonable balance between family and work affects an individual's choice of their occupation, employer and their involvement at the job (Valcour, 2007).

The demands and workload in the field of agriculture extend well beyond that of a "normal" work day. In an earlier study orchestrated by Moore & Camp (1979), the long hours that agriculture teachers lead may be why some individuals leave the profession to find alternate careers. This paper was an attempt to show the demands of the agriculture profession in comparison with other professions and how spouses worked through the challenges of balancing various responsibilities.

This study examined the satisfaction of spouses toward job and family responsibilities of individuals in leadership positions within the agricultural industry. This study discusses areas for individuals currently working in leadership positions to determine parts of concerns toward job satisfaction and workload, as it relates to family structure. The expected outcome of this research was to establish a list of concerns to be presented to agricultural leaders (advisors, directors, teachers, consultants) to enhance the home, school and society.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A study conducted by Barry Croom (2003) of North Carolina State University, raised attention to the idea of teacher burnout in the profession of Agricultural Education. The researcher organized this study around a theoretical framework (Figure 1) which employed aspects from both Maslach & Jackson's study (1981) and Croom's study (2003).

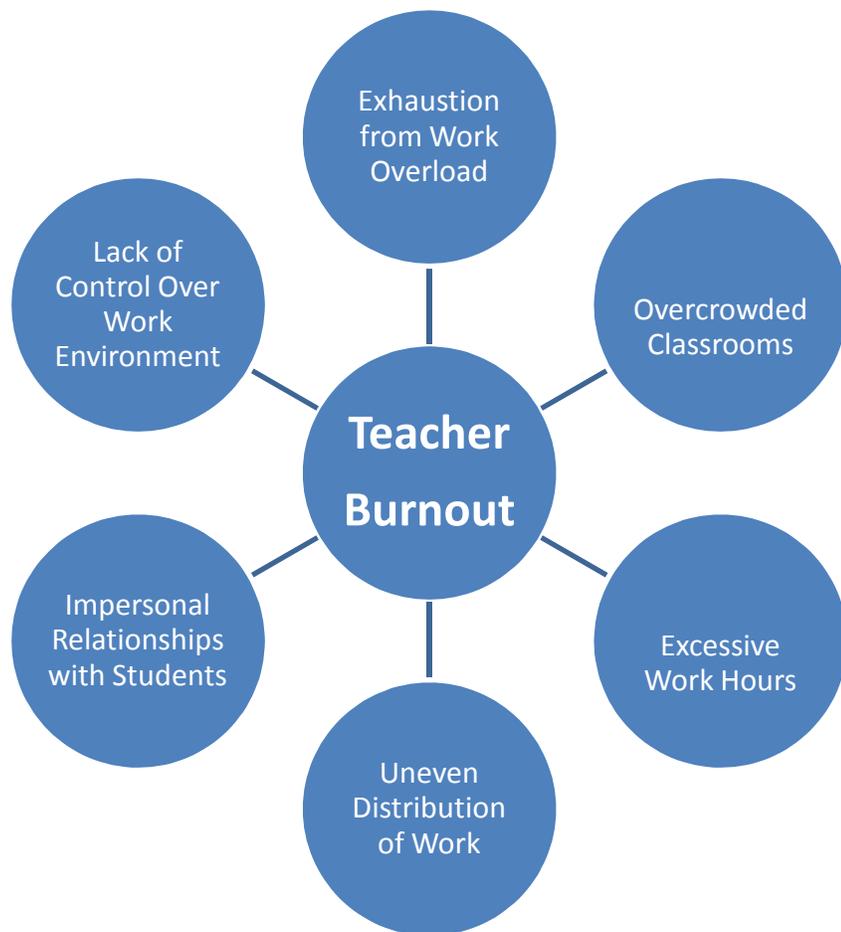


Figure 1. Contributing Factors to Teacher Burnout Model.

The study used the Maslach Burnout Inventory Educator's Survey to identify what things agriculture educators experience in such a high demanding career. The study found that teachers in this field encounter periods of exhaustion, impersonal relationships with their students and co-workers, as well as high levels of accomplishment in and from their work. The study indicated that burnout usually happens in occupations dealing with long hours and periods of extreme stress in such fields as education, medical services and security and safety. The appearance of burnout is most visible during times of work overload, uncontrolled work environments, a lack of social ability and communication of teachers in the school, unequal distribution of rewards, unappreciative work environments and the lack of fairness within the workplace (Maslach, 1981).

Teachers are often expected to handle the duties of more than just giving instruction at the front of the classroom. They are frequently expected to act as the "do everything and fix everything" people in addition to their already hectic and busy day. Teachers are driving forces of transformation for many young people as they face social problems including drug and alcohol abuse, corporal abuse, and psychological abuse (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996). Balancing these issues at the work place, combined with those who have families and must balance the responsibilities of their personal lives for those who have families are growing concerns for this profession. The results of conditions such as these have been the cause of some teachers leaving the profession (Malach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996).

The study also found that in the 24% of overcrowded classrooms in America's schools, teachers were still expected to provide group and individualized instruction, in addition to the other daily activities and demands that come with the job (United States

Department of Education, 2000). Regardless of the high expectations, teachers must continue to perform despite the lack of economical and human resources that are made available (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996). Though significant improvements and adjustments are being made on behalf of the teacher as students strive to reach the higher standards of society, more continues to be expected from teachers and those expectations may continue to be prevalent.

Objectives

1. Describe the knowledge of spouses toward the agricultural profession.
2. Describe the pros and cons of job and marital satisfaction of spouses toward the agricultural profession and various related barriers.
3. Determine what could be utilized to balance an agricultural profession with marital satisfaction.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the satisfaction of individuals and their spouses toward job and family responsibilities of leaders within the agricultural industry and to inform about the profession in hopes of encouraging more individuals to become advocates of the industry. This study was important because it analyzed the perceptions of individuals' attitudes toward the agriculture profession and the importance thereof. The expected outcome of this research was to identify characteristics to be researched further that may be presented to leaders in the agriculture profession in order to enhance the home, school and society

Limitations

Limitations of this paper were the lack of studies previously conducted on this particular topic. The researcher found few studies that concentrated on the attitudes of spouses toward job and family responsibility as it related to any profession within the agricultural realm. Further and more in depth studies using research methods consisting of focus groups, surveys and interviews need to be completed in order to gain a greater understanding of the advantages and challenges families face within the agriculture field.

Due to time restraints, comparisons to other professions of similar caliber were not conducted. Surveys or questionnaires were not sent out. These could have added to the awareness, or lack thereof, of this topic. Studies as they relate to the demands of the profession, hours worked, and duties and responsibilities would also be necessary to acquire a better understanding of the agriculture profession and how it compares to other careers.

Definition of Terms

To limit the opportunity of misinterpretations of terms, the following terms and their definitions have been used in this study.

Agriculture Communication – Communicating about the field of agriculture to agricultural audiences and non-agricultural audiences

Agriculture Profession – A position within the field of agriculture

Burnout – A combination of negative aspects due to the demands of a job

Career Indecision – An individualized educational and career choice

Leader – A person who had commanding authority or influence

Leadership – The office or position of a leader

Marital Satisfaction – A case of being satisfied within a marriage

Spouse – A married person

Work-life balance - The maintenance of a balance between responsibilities at work and at home

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature reviewed in this study showed concerns in marital relationships among spouses who hold leadership positions in the industry of agriculture. Studies have also shown concerns on a public level of occupational burnout and dissatisfaction that trickle into the personal lives of individuals who work in this field. Characteristics, such as a spouse's perception of their mate's job, the prestige one receives from the job, and the flexibility one has at his/her job are just a few that have been identified to show a major focus on the work/family relationship and the difference between the two roles (Herbert & Kotrlik, 1990).

This review of related literature included sources from journal articles that discuss the personal life factors and job satisfaction of individuals as it relates to leaders (mainly teachers) in the field of agriculture. The review was split into several sections, which are as follows: the importance of the agriculture industry, career indecision within the agriculture area, attitudes of spouses towards the agriculture profession, and a description of perceived barriers of agricultural professionals. The purpose of this study was not to portray agriculture as a negative career field, but rather to bring awareness of the importance of the field and how some positions within the field are demanding and may cause an imbalance in the personal lives of individuals working in the agriculture field. The expected outcome of this research was to identify characteristics requiring further research that may be presented to leaders in the agriculture profession in order to enhance home, school and society.

The Importance of the Agriculture Industry

“The agriculture industry is significant for up and coming agriculture professionals, because occupational opportunities are not limited to the United States but worldwide” (Merideth, 2004, p. 15). This very well may be the reason why more people are choosing to have careers within the agriculture field. Agriculture is everywhere and entails so much more than just the traditional farming and production that most people think of when they think of agriculture. An estimated 70% of the world's poor rely on agriculture for all or some of their household income (Ag Careers, 2007). Agriculture includes everything from farming to production, food and nutrition to community development and forestry to animal science to name a few of the areas.

Agriculture has an overabundance of career opportunities in both the public and private sector. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the public sector and is responsible for “...the two percent (2%) of our nation who farm, as well as everyone who eats food, wears clothes, lives in a house, or visits a rural area or national forest” (Richardson, 2000, p. 2). Its mission is to assist rural Americans to increase their economic opportunities and improve their quality of life. The USDA oversees a number of agencies, government corporations and many other entities that employ more than 100,000 people at over 15,000 locations in all 50 States and 80 countries. It is known as being the third-largest civilian department of the area of agriculture (Richardson, 2000).

The private sector is responsible for the private industry from small farm enterprises to worldwide corporations. More than 22 million jobs are generated through the area of agriculture and most of those jobs are located off of farms (Ag Careers, 2007).

In fact, a small percentage of “traditional” farms are responsible for the employment of individuals who have a career in the field of agriculture.

Today’s agriculture offers over 200 rewarding and challenging careers. Agricultural careers may be divided into various categories. These include: Agribusiness Management, Agricultural and Natural Resources Communications, Building Construction Management, Parks Recreation and Tourism Resources, Packaging, Horticulture, Forestry, Food Science, and Fisheries/Wildlife. (www.agriculturecareers.com)

Career Indecision within the Agriculture Area

As with any choice an individual makes within his/her career, the career choice is highly important because it affects both the work and personal life of a person. In a study conducted by Levon Esters (2007), the indecisive levels of students enrolled in the College of Agriculture were observed. Esters concluded that students need opportunities to enhance their self-awareness of their choices in careers. This can be accomplished by offering intensive career exploration experiences that will allow them to learn about work and the workforce. Career exploration may also give them experience with career development and give them a sense of the occupational options they have. Esters also stated that students should gain decision-making skills in efforts of making wise choices when it comes to the type of work they want to do. The skills students are taught will help them deal with career indecision in an effective manner so that the indecisiveness does not negatively disrupt their career development (Esters, 2007). Commonly, the occupation individuals choose has momentous long-range implications on their lifestyle, the friends with whom they socialize, the vocational activities in which they engage, and hence their quality of life (Gati & Asher, 2001). Therefore the “simple” decision of

choosing a career, turns out to be not so simple anymore, but instead a make or break decision.

Career decision-making has become prevalent as it relates to individuals making educational and career choices. Career decision-making examines how people make decisions as well as an individual's beliefs that he/she can successfully accomplish behaviors that will lead to desired outcomes, better known as decision-making self-efficacy. An area of vocational research that has been a focus for many years is career indecision. Career indecision refers to the issues individuals may encounter when making their career decision (Slaney, 1988) in addition to the originating circumstances that may influence or hamper a career choice (Swanson & D' Achiardi, 2005).

In an attempt to assist students in their career decisions, the Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) program was formed. Originally known as the farm project, SAE has been an important component in the advances of the agriculture field that has forever changed the face of this area. The SAE program is vocational education based and is responsible for allowing students to learn by doing. The program literally provides opportunities for students to learn while working in the agricultural field, giving them a sense of ownership and pride which cannot be accomplished within the classroom. Students in this area of study are learning about computers, animal science, environmental science, forestry, wildlife science, crop science, farm production and many other facets of the industry.

It would seem important for individuals to carefully examine their reasons for entering the field of agriculture, and especially positions of leadership, as the hours are

long and activities are extreme, which may cause stress and strain on the personal and work life of those involved.

Attitudes of Spouses Towards the Agriculture Profession

Research on the relationship between work and marriage indicates internal and external factors that can either directly or indirectly affect a relationship. In the case of an agriculture professional, for whom the hours are long and demanding, the impact may be greater than for individuals who are not involved in or associated with the field. In an average week, the working adult spends more time at the workplace than in any other activity, no matter what profession they choose. The home life is sometimes affected by the emotional and physical energy it takes to hold down a productive job due to its time and energy one must put into it (Bischoff, 2006). In the field of agriculture where teachers and other leaders within the profession spend countless hours with contests, conventions and workshops, the job can very well have a negative impact on both personal and professional levels.

Several studies have shown that spousal support of those who are teachers and other leaders in the agriculture field is an important factor in levels of stress, overall well-being, and marital satisfaction for both men and women (Barnett & Marshall, 1992; Greenberger & O'Neil, 1993). It is about finding a balance between the job and the home life since the home is the primary source of life satisfaction for most working people in the world. One purpose of this study was to determine how individuals who work in this demanding profession find satisfaction within their marriage at the same time that they are finding satisfaction at their job. Recommendations intended to encourage traditional household roles was addressed on both individuals involved. In a research study on work and family relationships (Bischoff, 2006), the author found that the more each

partner positively felt about their own work schedules and how well their needs were met, the greater their job satisfaction was. This was the case for both men and women. The important element to remember as it relates to spousal support in the agriculture career field is for individuals to have a working relationship and positive understanding about the career field in order to remain obligated towards the profession. In a research study conducted in 1983 by Cooper & Nelson, the results showed that spouses responses to job obligation and unhappy spouses with the vocational agriculture profession were some of the reasons for people leaving the profession to inquire other possibilities. Agriculture professionals should realize, recognize and emphasize personal life factors that make them have positive attitudes about the job they are doing and the profession they have chosen.

In an effort to better understand the characteristics of job satisfaction, the perception of an individual's job, the variables that help them enjoy the job, burnout and drive were studied to find solutions (Church & Pals, 1982; Kanter, 1977; Marshal, 1987; St. Pierre, 1984). "When a person is satisfied with their job, we could reasonably expect that their work satisfaction would spillover with positive contributions at home" (Bischoff, 2006, p. 91). The importance of having a balance between responsibilities at home and at work is confirmed through research. Authors Cook and Rousseau (1984) explained the interaction process between the family and work roles. They stated that the interactions of family and work role demands are often negative and occur as follows:

The stress created by pressures to work extra hours can most easily be reduced by allocating more time to work – related activities. However, this coping strategy becomes more difficult to implement as the size of one's family

increases and expectations multiply. Thus, family roles are likely to moderate the relationship between work and expectations and personal overload; people who are married and those who are parents have available progressively fewer degrees of freedom for reducing stress caused by increasingly demanding work expectations” (p. 253).

For example, according to Pittman and Orthner (1983), the potential for conflict between work and family roles is greater among people who are employed. Inconsistency takes place when individuals search for distinction between their personal lives and professional roles. If this is the case, then leaders in the agriculture profession should recognize the personal factors within their lives that may possibly impact the job they are doing.

Barriers of Leaders in the Agricultural Profession

When making a career choice, one usually has many influences and some education that impacts the path in which they will proceed. The importance of the decision of choosing agriculture for students begins well before their high school years. Individuals must be introduced to the field early and be highly involved in the activities related to agriculture in order to hold the interest and become leaders in this area. One particular study stated that introducing agriculture at an early age may assist in gaining higher interest among individuals who will then understand the aspects of the career (Jones and Larke, 2001). “Not only are problems of initial entry into agricultural careers an issue, but problems related to individuals who exit agriculture-related occupations have been the focus of recent research” (Esters and Bowen, 2005, p. 24).

The lack of women in the agriculture industry is an issue because women are underrepresented in this profession. The lack of female leaders as role models makes it

difficult for women to be a part of or enter the profession and advance to higher levels in the profession. Within the last ten years, women have begun to become more prevalent in this area, which is a positive change. Agriculture is a dynamic area and encompasses a variety of outstanding professions that allow longevity within their area. Women are involved in a number of these positions, yet are still not equally represented in the agricultural profession. One of the outcomes of the 1994 First International Women in Agriculture Conference highlighted the underrepresentation of females in the agriculture profession. There are more statistical reports on the production of livestock than there are of the agricultural contributions from women (Ferrari & Mckinnon, 1998).

Lastly, a barrier that highly affects the agriculture field is the perception of the industry. One perfectly good reason for the need for agriculture communication leaders is to inform individuals of the importance of agriculture. It is through the efforts of agriculture communications that could change what people believe about the profession of agriculture. Through this stream, the negative perceptions could forever be changed.

As with any life decision, a career choice decision is one that rests very importantly in the life of an individual. “Work plays a central role in the development, expression, and maintenance of psychological health” (Blustein, 2008, p. 228). Speaking from experience, one’s career choice and the role that work plays in the life of an individual are extremely important. In the article, *The Role of Work in Psychological Health and Well-Being* (Blustein, 2004), the importance of work as it applies to the psychological health is discussed. Author David Blustein discussed how important work is to the mental health of a person as it is linked to self-efficacy, self-esteem and other more serious health concerns. Basically Blustein stated that the importance of work and

the career choice of a person have long-term effects on many levels. The support of a spouse towards the work and career choice of the opposite spouse is just as important as having a job to begin with. In the field of agriculture, the attitude of the spouse towards the profession has an increasing effect on the well-being of all persons involved.

In searching for a better understanding of one's decision to enter the field of agriculture, many reasons were found for the importance to express a certain attitude of the agriculture field as it relates and plays a part in the personal and work life of those involved. It is necessary to conduct further research to find out how the attitudes of spouses towards the profession of agriculture apply to the attitudes of other professions that require long hours and also have demanding positions. It is further necessary to find solutions to help in these areas.

CHAPTER 3

SUMMARY

The researcher's intent was to establish areas of interest, inquiry and opportunity to further study the characteristics to assist in a healthy balance of work and family of those who work in the field of agriculture. In no way was the research for this study capable of solving issues individuals and couples may encounter when attempting to find balance in their lives as they involve themselves in the careers of the agriculture profession. This study may be able to serve as a point of reference for leaders in this profession in order to initiate possible strategies to help make adjustments where necessary when it comes to balancing their personal lives with their careers.

The study may also add to the span of research in agricultural careers and how they affect a person's well-being. As the field of agriculture continues to cultivate, individuals may benefit from the growth of agricultural communications to help them better understand the profession and to gain the interest of more teachers and leaders entering and being retained in the profession. Agricultural Communications may also play a part in providing vital information to those in the profession on positive ways to find a healthy balance between the responsibilities of work and home life.

For those who have chosen the agriculture industry as their life's work, an attitude of commitment and dedication is necessary. For the spouses, an attitude of understanding and support will lead to a successful relationship. Communication between the professional and the spouse is the key to balancing an agriculture profession with marital satisfaction.

Conclusions/Recommendations

This study indicated that the field of agriculture is no different from other professions that require long hours and dedication that may interfere in the personal lives of its employees. To achieve a better understanding of the career and what is expected, educational programs and training should be developed and implemented in order to prepare men and women of the possible duties and responsibilities involved in this profession. Promoting agriculture in the early stages of one's career choice, and in some cases at a younger age, will be key in achieving such positive outcomes in the success of a person's enjoyment of working in this profession.

It is recommended that the information obtained from this study be incorporated into agricultural education training sessions and agricultural communication media outlets to alleviate misunderstandings of the importance of the profession and the responsibilities and demands of it as well. Incorporating perspectives into such training would be valuable for everyone involved in this type of career. Publicizing the information would be helpful to those who are naïve of the field of agriculture and would bring much needed awareness to the field, its position and the importance the agriculture industry holds in society.

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