

Farmer/Farm Manager

Snapshot

Career Cluster: Agriculture; Business Administration; Natural Resources Development

Interests: Agriculture, business practices, being outside, working independently

Earnings (Yearly Average): \$73,210

Employment & Outlook: Decline Expected

OVERVIEW

Sphere of Work

Farmers and farm managers, also called farm operators and agricultural managers, grow food for personal consumption and for wholesale and retail consumers. Farmers and farm managers oversee agricultural production and financial operations at farms, nurseries, ranches, and greenhouses.

Farmers and farm managers grow crops, livestock, poultry, and aquatic animals. Although specific tasks vary by type of agricultural work, all farmers and farm managers are responsible for ensuring the care of crops and animals from conception to market. Farmers often perform the hands-on labor of planting, cultivating, operating farm machinery, harvesting, and



marketing and selling crops and animals. Farm managers hire, train, and supervise farm staff to complete these tasks.

Work Environment

Farmers and farm managers work in farms, nurseries, ranches, and greenhouses that they own or lease. Farmers and farm managers do not have set work hours and instead must work until tasks are complete. Crop farm work is seasonal. During non-growing seasons, crop farmers and farm managers focus on repairing farm machinery, planning next year’s crops, and marketing and selling efforts. Animal farmers and farm managers work steadily throughout the year to care for their livestock, poultry, and aquatic animals.

Profile

Working Conditions: Work both Indoors and Outdoors
Physical Strength: Medium Work, Heavy Work
Education Needs: On-The-Job Training, High School Diploma with Technical, Education, Junior/Technical/Community College pprenticeship, Bachelor’s Degree
Licensure/Certification: Usually Not Required
Physical Abilities Not Required: N/A
Opportunities For Experience: Internship, Apprenticeship, Volunteer Work, Part Time Work
Holland Interest Score*: ESR, REI, RIE

* See Appendix A

Occupation Interest

Individuals attracted to the farming profession tend to be physically strong and detail-oriented people. Successful farmers and farm managers exhibit stamina, resilience, organizational abilities, integrity and ethics, independence, and effective time management. Business acumen and familiarity with computer technology is becoming increasingly advantageous. Farmers and farm managers should enjoy physical labor and have a strong background in agriculture and business.

A Day in the Life—Duties and Responsibilities

Farmers and farm managers perform different daily occupational duties and responsibilities depending on their specialization and work environment. They may specialize in the production of crops, beef, poultry, pork, dairy, or aquaculture. On crop farms, farmers and farm managers oversee activities related to the planting, tending, and harvesting of crops. These tasks may

include preparing soil and managing its nutrient levels, using natural or chemical methods to eliminate pests, irrigating and draining fields, weather forecasting, and storing fuels and chemicals. Crop farmers and farm managers promote and sell crops to distributors and food-processing companies, retail customers in farmers markets or farm stands, or shareholders in a community-supported agriculture (CSA) program.

Animal farmers and farm managers oversee meat production operations. They raise beef cattle, chickens, turkeys, ducks, game birds, goats, or pigs. Animal farmers and farm managers must ensure proper breeding and birthing and feeding, housing, transportation, and slaughtering. Those who work with beef cattle and pigs medicate and vaccinate the animals as needed. On poultry farms, they also manage the hatchery, establish egg or meat-bird production effort, adjust the lighting in poultry buildings to promote molting or egg laying, and match stock size to seasonal demand. All animal farmers and farm managers are responsible for promoting and selling meat products.

Dairy farmers and farm managers direct tasks related to the production, collection, and sale of milk. They must ensure the proper care for milk cows. These farmers and farm managers oversee the establishment of a feed storage system for corn silage, alfalfa, hay, cottonseed, and soybeans. They also supervise the construction and maintenance of a milking parlor, a milking and milk storage system, and a manure management system. Dairy farmers and farm managers promote, transport, and sell dairy products.

Aquaculture farmers and farm managers oversee aquaculture production tasks. They or their staff stock ponds or floating nets with eggs, shellfish, or juvenile fish, feed fish stock, and protect fish stock from predators and contamination. Like their meat and dairy counterparts, these farmers and farm managers are responsible for the promotion and sale of their products.

In addition, all farmers and farm managers are responsible for purchasing supplies, maintaining farm machinery, ensuring the cleanliness of farm facilities, and educating themselves about government regulations and business trends affecting their industry.

Duties and Responsibilities

- Planning crops to be planted or livestock to be raised
- Preparing soil for planting
- Cultivating and irrigating crops
- Spraying crops with insecticides and fungicides
- Harvesting and marketing produce
- Tending and marketing livestock and poultry
- Handling business functions as needed to keep the operation running

OCCUPATION SPECIALTIES

Livestock Ranchers

Livestock Ranchers breed and raise livestock such as beef cattle dairy cattle, goats, horses, sheep and swine to sell meat, dairy products, wool and hair.

Poultry Farmers

Poultry Farmers raise chickens, turkeys or other fowl for meat or egg production.

Vegetable Farmers

Vegetable Farmers plan and plant vegetables according to weather, type of soil and size and location of the farm.

Tree-Fruit-And-Nut Crop Farmers

Tree-Fruit-And-Nut Crop Farmers plant and cultivate fruit producing trees.

Nursery Managers

Nursery Managers supervise plant nurseries which produce plants for sale to wholesale or retail customers.

Farm General Managers

Farm General Managers operate farms for corporations, cooperatives or other owners.

Fish Farmers

Fish Farmers spawn and raise fish for commercial purposes.

Horse Trainers

Horse Trainers train horses for riding or harness.

Organic Farmers/Farm Managers

Organic Farmers/Farm Managers grow crops, control pests and maintain soil health without the use, or the limited use, of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Physical Environment

Farmers and farm managers work in farms, nurseries, ranches, and greenhouses. Farming tends to be very physical and require extensive hard labor, walking, lifting, and bending. Farmers and farm managers are at high risk for back strain, pesticide exposure, and machine accidents.

Human Environment

Farms, nurseries, ranches, and greenhouses tend to be remotely located and isolated. However, farmers and farm managers interact with farm workers, families, customers, landholders, bankers, veterinarians, and government inspectors. The amount of human interaction often depends on the scale and business model of the farm operation. Farm managers typically report to a farmer or corporation.

Relevant Skills and Abilities

Interpersonal/Social Skills

- Cooperating with others
- Working as a member of a team

Organization & Management Skills

- Coordinating tasks
- Managing people/groups
- Performing duties which change frequently

Research & Planning Skills

- Analyzing information
- Developing evaluation strategies

Technical Skills

- Applying technology to a task
- Performing manual labor and technical work
- Using technology to process information
- Working with data or numbers
- Working with machines, tools or other objects

Technological Environment

In the course of their work, farmers and farm managers use farm machinery and equipment such as animal feeders, hay balers, mowers, trucks, irrigation systems, tractors, chain saws, and milking machines. In addition, farmers and farm managers use computers, Internet communication tools, accounting and farm management software, and spreadsheets to assist them with the business tasks of farming.

EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND ADVANCEMENT

High School/Secondary

High school-level study of agricultural science, biology, chemistry, and business can provide a strong foundation for work as a farmer or college-level study in the field. High school students interested in this career path may benefit from internships, apprenticeships, or part-time work with local farms that expose them to the diversity and challenges of farming responsibilities.

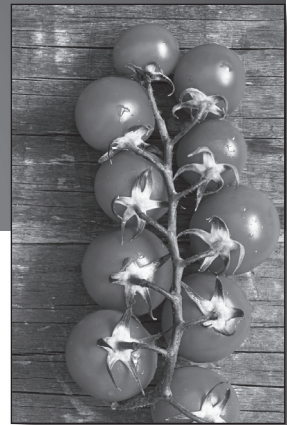
Suggested High School Subjects

- Agricultural Education
- Applied Biology/Chemistry

- Bookkeeping
- Business
- Economics
- English
- Forestry
- Mathematics

Famous First

The first tomatoes eaten by European descendants in America were from a batch grown in Virginia in 1745. Until that time, colonists thought tomatoes to be poisonous. It took a physician, John Siccary, to examine this red fruit of the nightshade plant and declare it edible to convince people of the tomato's worth. Later, Siccary's fellow Virginian Thomas Jefferson raised tomatoes on his plantation, Monticello, and publicized their safety.



College/Postsecondary

Although a postsecondary degree is not strictly necessary for farm work, aspiring farmers or farm managers should pursue the associate's degree or bachelor's degree in agriculture, farm management, agronomy, and dairy science. Formal postsecondary studies afford students a better understanding of the work and industry and provide greater opportunities for advancement. Postsecondary students can gain work experience and potential advantage in their future job searches by securing internships or part-time employment with local farms.

Related College Majors

- Agricultural Business & Management
- Agricultural Production Workers & Managers
- Agricultural Supplies Retailing & Wholesaling
- Farm & Ranch Management
- Horticulture Science
- Horticulture Services Operations & Management
- International Agriculture
- Plant Sciences

Adult Job Seekers

Adults seeking employment as farmers or farm managers should have, at a minimum, a high school diploma or associate's degree. Some farm manager jobs require extensive experience, on-the-job training, and a bachelor's or master's degree. Those seeking farm manager positions should educate themselves about the educational and professional requirements of their prospective employers.

Adult job seekers may benefit from joining professional associations to help with networking and job searching. Professional farming and agricultural associations, such as the American Farm Bureau Federation, the American Society of Agronomy and the American Society of Farm Managers & Rural Appraisers, generally offer job-finding workshops and maintain lists and forums of available jobs.

Professional Certification and Licensure

Certification and licensure is not required for farmers but may be required of farm managers as a condition of employment, salary increase, or promotion. The Accredited Farm Manager (AFM) certification, offered by the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers, is the leading option for voluntary farm manager certification. The Accredited Farm Manager certification requires a minimum of four years of farm management experience, a bachelor's degree in agricultural science, a sample farm management plan, and the successful completion of a national exam covering farm business, finances, and law.



Additional Requirements

Successful farmers and farm managers will be knowledgeable about the profession's requirements, responsibilities, and opportunities. The US Environmental Protection Agency requires farmers and farm workers to be trained in agricultural pesticide safe practices. Operating licenses for farm vehicles may be required for some types of agricultural work.

Fun Fact

Could there be some good news down on the farm? Though the U.S. has seen a long-term trend of fewer farms, the decline of less than one percent between 2007 and 2012 was the third small-est decline since 1950, according to the 2012 Census of Agriculture. Crop sales increased 48 percent in the five years between the 2007 and 2012 censuses, and livestock sales increased 19 percent.

Source: http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Preliminary_Report/Highlights.pdf

EARNINGS AND ADVANCEMENT

Earnings depend on the size of the farm, type of crop grown or animal raised, the weather during the growing season, market prices, cost of materials, labor costs and management ability. Mean annual earnings of farmers and farm managers were \$73,210 in 2013. The lowest ten percent earned less than \$34,000, and the highest ten percent earned close to \$120,000.

Farmers and farm managers may receive paid vacations, holidays, and sick days; life and health insurance; and retirement benefits. These are usually paid by the employer. Farmers and farm managers may also receive free housing, transportation and farm products. Self-employed farmers and farm managers must pay for their own benefits.

States with the Highest Employment Level in This Occupation

State	Employment ⁽¹⁾	Employment per thousand jobs	Hourly mean wage
California	780	0.05	\$45.02
Iowa	260	0.18	\$31.93
Texas	240	0.02	\$33.88
Illinois	230	0.04	\$31.16
Florida	230	0.03	\$36.52

¹ Does not include self-employed. Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

EMPLOYMENT AND OUTLOOK

Farmers and farm managers held about 95,000 jobs in 2012. About 80 percent were self-employed. Employment is expected to decline through the year 2022. This is due to the long-term trend toward the consolidation of farms into fewer and larger farms. The majority of job openings will result from the need to replace farmers who retire or leave the occupation for economic or other reasons.

Employment Trend, Projected 2012–22

Total, All Occupations: 11%

Other Management Occupations: 4%

Farmers and Farm Managers: -19%

Note: "All Occupations" includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections Program.

Related Occupations

- Farm & Ranch Advisor
- Farm Worker
- Forester & Conservation Scientist
- Range Manager

Conversation With . . .

PETER JOHNSON

Farmer Owner Pete's Greens, Pete's Pastured Meats,
Good Eats CSA, Craftsbury, Vermont
Farmer in business 17 years

1. What was your individual career path in terms of education/training, entry-level job, or other significant opportunity?

I've always been involved in growing things. Even as a kid, I had a small pumpkin operation. I got a bachelor's degree in environmental studies from Middlebury College and after college, I got right back into farming. I returned to my parents' land in Greensboro (Vermont) and cleared $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre to start my farm. For the first four years, Pete's Greens produced only salad greens. Then we began to di-versify, which required land. I rented 10 acres from a friend, about six miles away. For five years, I looked for a farm to buy. I struck gold in 2003. It has 190 acres, a huge house and beautiful barn. Today Pete's Greens is a four-season or-ganic vegetable farm. In the Northeast, 80 acres of vegetables is a lot, but on a na-tional and international level, we're small.

The locavore movement has been huge for us. Our Good Eats CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) is probably the most profitable part of our business. Peo-ple buy a share and we deliver food to sites where they pick it up. We had a healthy, strong business before we started the CSA, but it's helped us grow.

2. What are the most important skills and/or qualities for someone in your pro-fession?

Endurance is probably the biggest one. For the kind of farm that I have, that relies on staying ahead of the curve. You have to have vision, be adaptable and be in-novative. But that's different from what a lot of farming requires. For most farm-ing, you have to have endurance, the ability to make good financial decisions, and be reliable and steady.

3. What do you wish you had known going into this profession?

I wish that I had been able to recognize the extremely low prices land was selling for and had been able to figure out a way to buy some of it, because not only was it cheap, but it was available. In our area, a new wave of agricultural ventures is driving up prices. I've been very much a part of that, and it's been incredible, but it's kind of hurting us now.

4. Are there many job opportunities in your profession? In what specific areas?

Oh yes, there are plenty of opportunities in farming for smart, capable, hardwork-ing, common sense people. Unfortunately, a lot of young Americans don't really have those traits. I don't know a farm that isn't always looking for help. Once you get there, you can very quickly move up. It's a very quick, very clear path to get close to the top. And actually, right now in Vermont, we have a wave of folks with really nice vegetable farms who are thinking about retiring. A lot of them are working on succession plans that don't involve people who are related to them. I read that the average age of a farmer across the country is 57. Some of them have kids that love it, and some have kids that don't want anything to do with it.

5. How do you see your profession changing in the next five years? What role will technology play in those changes, and what skills will be required?

We're all using our smart phones more and more. I monitor my cooler tempera-tures with it. I communicate with my customers with it. I sell things with it. In the future, we'll probably be using more GPS technology for fertilizing, watering, things like that, which is already common on bigger farms.

The ability to communicate in real time has really changed things. It's amazing. I hardly ever go into the office or use my computer anymore. I can be sitting on the tractor doing business.

We can't afford some of the automated equipment that much bigger farms use, so I've been looking to China and India for niche products.

6. What do you enjoy most about your job? What do you enjoy least about your job?

What I enjoy most is having a problem with an important crop and through re-search or intuition or some other means coming up with a solution that leads to genuine success with the crop down the road. It's difficult, but it's very gratifying. You can't get it in a book—books can help, information can help you—but no one's situation is exactly like yours in terms of soil, temperature, pests. You have to spend time in the field.

What I enjoy least is people management. It's not my strong suit. It's a really big part of my job.

7. Can you suggest a valuable "try this" for students considering a career in your profession?

Go find a farm and get a summer job. Oftentimes, you know pretty quickly whether this is something you're going to enjoy or not.

SELECTED SCHOOLS

Many agricultural, technical, and community colleges offer programs related to farming and farm management. Interested students are advised to consult with their school guidance counselor or to research area postsecondary schools and training programs. For those interested in pursuing a bachelor's degree, a state land-grant college is often the best place to start.

MORE INFORMATION

American Farm Bureau Federation

600 Maryland Avenue, SW
Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20024
202.406.3600
www.fb.org

American Society of Agronomy

Career Development & Placement Services
5585 Guilford Road
Madison, WI 53711
608.273.8080
www.agronomy.org

American Society of Farm Managers & Rural Appraisers

950 South Cherry Street, Suite 508
Denver, CO 80246-2664
303.758.3513
www.asfmra.org

Center for Rural Affairs

145 Main Street
PO Box 136
Lyons, NE 68038
402.687.2100
www.cfra.org

National Agri-Marketing Association

11020 King Street, Suite 205
Overland Park, KS 66210
913.491.6500
www.nama.org

National FFA Organization (Future Farmers of America)

P.O. Box 68960
6060 FFA Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46268-0960
317.802.6060
www.ffa.org

**National Institute of Food and
Agriculture**

800 9th Street SW
Washington, DC 20024
202.720.4423

www.csrees.usda.gov

**National Sustainable Agriculture
Information Service**

P.O. Box 3838
Butte, MT 59702
www.attra.org

USDA Farm Service Agency

1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250
www.fsa.usda.gov

Simone Isadora Flynn/Editor