

FG Careers Special

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Jobs in Agriculture
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In this careers special, **Farmers Guardian** assesses the various opportunities for those inside and outside the industry to develop and grow their careers.

Earlier this year, *Farmers Guardian* partnered with Soil Ed, a campaign to get farming, food and nature embedded into the National Curriculum.

The campaign was started by former farmer and teacher Olivia Shave, who believes teaching children about food, the systems in which it is grown, nature and farming will equip the next generation to tackle the problems society faces, such as climate change, mental health and national health.

The campaign has been growing and making waves over the past few months and has gathered support from various people and organisations including MPs, food policy leaders and farmers.

On October 13, for the first time ever, a round-table was held in Parliament at the House of Commons, to bring leading voices from across society together to discuss how rural education should look and the benefits of introducing such topics on to the curriculum.

Empower

The aim is to empower children to successfully navigate the food system and understand the impact such choices could have on their own health and the environment and support them in a changing world.

Delegates heard how multiple changes needed to happen, within the education system and within the food system, particularly around school food.

One spokesperson said: "A strong food ethos fosters community, but that rarely integrates with

Focus on farming in the curriculum



Embedding farming within the National Curriculum could help children cope with many of society's problems, says Soil Ed.

school food policy and is rarely aligned with the curriculum. Children need to learn it, see it, live it –

that is where the magic happens."

Another said farm visits brought the curriculum to life, but the subject had to be embedded within the curriculum and not just influenced by one enthusiastic teacher.

Cross-curriculum learning was also mentioned throughout the discussion, highlighting how farming and sustainability can help to better deliver subject learning such as geography, history, maths and science.

The skills shortage the industry

faces was also mentioned. One spokesperson said farming was not a 'nice to have' and should not be just an afterthought.

Reflecting on the round-table, founder Olivia Shave said: "The departments that are shaping our children's futures may be absent, but farmers know the stakes.

"By teaching children where food comes from, the importance of soil health and how our food is produced, we can help inspire the next generation to pursue careers in agriculture."

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‘Once-in-a-lifetime’ contract for 23-year-old Carlisle farmer

Jordan Duddy, a 23-year-old farmer from Carlisle, has taken on the role of contract farmer at SRUC’s Acrehead dairy farm. The appointment is part of the college’s commitment to cultivating farming leaders.

“Acrehead Farm has huge potential to become a thriving dairy business – it just needs someone to care for it. The land is ideal for grazing, and I plan to make the most of its ability to grow quality grass,” says Jordan.

“Long term, I aim to transition to a smaller, grazing-suited breed and establish an autumn block calving herd. While that develops, I will continue looking after the existing cows, which the Barony, Acrehead and Crichton teams have worked hard to develop.

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to break into farming.



Jordan Duddy with her churn.

I am excited to get started and make a positive impact on the herd, the land and the business.”

Jordan has more than six years of hands-on experience in all aspects of dairy farming, from animal health and grazing systems to field work and milk production. She has a track record of delivering consistent yields and high herd welfare standards.

Scotland’s Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, Jim Fairlie, officially welcomed her to the role by presenting her with a traditional milk churn.

He says: “I am delighted for Jordan in securing the contract farming opportunity at Acrehead and am excited to see all she achieves.

“I would also like to congratulate SRUC for providing this land and – more importantly – the opportunity for a new farmer on publicly owned land. This Government is focused on delivering new opportunities for young farmers. We have to

encourage all of those considering a career in the agricultural sector and SRUC knows how vitally important it is to also provide them with support and access to building skills to nurture the next generation.

“I cannot wait to see what Jordan and the college achieve here.”

The role will see the young farmer contract manage day-to-day operations of Acrehead, receiving a share of the milk cheque dependent on farm performance, and the position includes access to a nearby farmhouse and is offered as an opportunity of five to 10 years.

SRUC will retain responsibility for the land and legal compliance and will provide the dairy herd and farm machinery. Researchers and teaching staff will also continue to receive valuable data from the dairy herd.

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The Future Farmer Programme, run jointly by Tesco and the School of Sustainable Food and Farming, gives British farmers under the age of 40 the chance to develop. **Farmers Guardian** reports.

Building up skills through collaboration

The Future Farmer Programme's nine-month training course aims to help farmers develop skills in a range of areas including sustainable agriculture, business and per-

sonal development. Those who take part are given the chance to learn about sustainable production and biodiversity through a mix of face-to-face sessions, online webinars, farm visits and expert speakers.

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CASE STUDY: JONATHAN HOCKLEY, 27

AS a fifth-generation farmer on his family arable farm in Hertfordshire, Jonathan Hockley joined the Tesco Future Farmer programme to help build the business while learning a bit more about himself.

Having studied agriculture at the Royal Agricultural University, Jonathan also spent time across the globe in New Zealand, gathering farm experience further afield before coming back home to farm.

Opportunity

Having heard of the Tesco Future Farmer Programme through a friend of his sister, it presented him with the perfect opportunity to further himself – he does, he says, like to do something like this every year.

Given it is him and his father who run the operation, mixing with other people and taking on new ideas is something that is important to him.

The programme provides

discussions and field visits.

For Jonathan, the potato sector is something he hopes to break into and he was given the opportunity to learn more during the programme's placement.

He particularly wanted to look at new markets within the potato sector, look at the gaps within the supply chain and how to increase margins.

He said it is the people, though, that helped to make his experience of the programme what it was.

Knowledge

He says: "I am a massive believer in knowledge exchange, to better business and myself as a person."

"I also think you need to know the reason why you are doing something – or why not."

"To adapt, you need to fully understand things."

"The programme was an opportunity to network and be among like-minded people and hear their ideas."

CASE STUDY: CATHERINE HOLBROOK, 20

ALTHOUGH Catherine Holbrook is from a farming background, she had mainly worked in social work and hospitality, which cemented her passion for food, food systems and how they all connect to community.

She had lived in the Netherlands long term before moving back to the family arable farm in Shrewsbury and, to get more insight, she has worked on various farms that put nature and social outcomes at the heart of their business.

"I wanted to get an idea of what I hoped to achieve on our small arable farm just outside Shrewsbury," she says.

Understanding

"It is only in the past couple of years that I am gaining a better understanding of the farm as I was not active on it as a child – unless climbing mountains of sugar beet counts."

"My studies were in English literature and anthropology – nothing farm-related in the slightest."

Catherine wanted to take part in the Tesco Future Farmer programme to further her passion for building better farming systems, but also to network.

Having never really been involved with the home farm, she felt like a new entrant and wanted to make sure she had the right foundations to build the business.

She says: "I was particularly nervous about being too far behind my peers in terms of understanding and being able to engage in meaningful discussions. To some degree this was true, but I was pleasantly surprised by how accommodating everyone was along the way, which really allowed me to get deep into the topics we covered across the nine months."

She says the programme exposed her to the 'big questions facing food producers', some of which she had not thought about given her career background and allowed her to reflect on what it takes to make changes to food and farming systems. But it has also allowed her to network.

She says: "I feel that being part of a cohort for this length of time has allowed me to work on my communication and storytelling skills in a supportive setting."

"Considering that social media and knowledge exchange are quickly becoming other key skills needed as a future farmer, I am quite chuffed."



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The McDonald's Progressive Young Farmer programme is aimed at deepening its participants' understanding of supply chains and offering them valuable insights and experiences across various roles within the organisation.

McDonald's gives next gen experience of supply chain

TOM AL-CHALABI

MY parents did not farm but my grandad was a dairy farmer in Northamptonshire.

With an environmental science background, I wanted a placement where I could see real-world change and work across varied projects. Agriculture and dairy are central to the UK countryside and the opportunities to influence environmental impact are exciting.

I was also keen to understand how the McDonald's supply chain operates and explore the business management side of it.

I aimed to deepen my understanding of agriculture, especially the complex McDonald's supply chain.

Education and exposure are key: getting people on to farms to see what really happens, alongside placements and programmes like this one which can bring people from



varied backgrounds and sectors into the industry.

Teaching agriculture helps people from diverse backgrounds see the opportunities in the sector and understand where their food comes from.

It is very important for building awareness and interest.

MABEL FROST

MY dad has always worked on farms, but it was not until I finished my A-levels that I even considered that I could get into farming myself.

Other than the on-farm side of things, I knew very little about what happened once the stock left the farm. Seeing that the Progressive Young Farmer programme covered the whole supply chain, I felt it would be a good chance to work in other areas of the agricultural/food industry.

Once I have completed my degree in agriculture next year I plan to work and travel overseas. After that I will be looking for a graduate role in either agricultural consultancy or as a data analyst.

Getting to try roles in the food and farming industry has given me a better idea of the jobs out there and the skills required to be successful in them. It has also exposed me to jobs that I did not even know existed.

Agriculture, food provenance, nutrition and production should be taught in schools. By teaching this,



people will be able to consider agriculture as a career option, hopefully make more informed food decisions, waste less food and ideally understand the importance of supporting British farmers.

When [I was] at school, I had not considered farming as a career path mainly because I did not know how to get involved. After my A-levels, I went and did a level two course in agriculture at Suffolk Rural College to learn more about farming and that is how I got my first job.

NATHAN McCLURE

I GREW up on our family dairy farm in Co Tyrone, Northern Ireland, so I have been in and around the agriculture industry from as soon as I could walk.

Growing up on the farm, I always knew that my future was going to be in agriculture, but for my undergraduate degree I decided to take a couple of years away from all things farming and study biochemistry at Queen's University Belfast.

When the time came for me to look for my year-long placement, I was more than ready to work my way back into the agriculture industry.

I was introduced to the Progressive Young Farmer programme by the careers team at my university, and after doing my own research, I decided that out of all the available agri-food placements it was going to give me the most varied experience



across all the different parts of the supply chain.

I did not really know what to expect, but I was hoping to learn a lot more about the beef industry in the Republic of Ireland, since that is where I was going to be spending most of my year. I certainly did not expect to be involved in so many other industry events - from the Oxford Farming Conference to

speaking at Groundswell - and getting more farm tours than I could count.

If we are really serious about attracting new people into farming, though, especially young people, we have to do a better job of acknowledging the negative aspects of the job that are currently holding us back, such as long and unsociable hours.

If we can improve some of these working conditions across the whole industry and really advertise the benefits that come with working in farming, I think young people would be far more willing to consider a career in agriculture.

My time as a Progressive Young Farmer really showed me the incredible depth of knowledge held by some of the experts in our industry. It has inspired me to spend as much time as I can

learning from more experienced people and hoping that some of their knowledge and insight rubs off on me. In the early part of my career, I am making a real effort to say yes to any opportunities that come my way and to give everything I do 100%. Hopefully this will set me up well for the future and give me a really well-rounded platform to build my career on top of.

I realised that there are opportunities to develop so many skills when working in the agriculture industry. From the really practical stuff such as learning to clip sheep, trim hooves and body condition score cows through to more industry-focused skills such as public speaking, managing customer relations and working with Government to shape future agricultural policy.

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Galebreaker, livestock housing specialists, recruited former placement student Chloe Rodriguez in September 2024. Since returning as an animal welfare specialist, she has had a significant impact contributing to research projects and launching its on farm advisory services. Here, she shares her top career tips.



Chloe Rodriguez

A career in animal health and welfare

TOP TIPS

■ **Leverage opportunities:** Having a grasp of what motivates you is a great starting point to navigating a career that delivers job satisfaction. In my experience, placements and scholarships are not just good for your CV; they can be a great way to extend your network within the industry, as well as helping you understand what you do [and do not] want to do. While studying bioveterinary science at Harper Adams, I reached out to Galebreaker's technical director, Andrew Gardner, to understand more about the group's new scholarship opportunity. This placement balanced time on-farm and in-office, offering a wealth of opportunities to gain insights

into what I really enjoyed and led me to find my niche.

Remember, even if a role does not tick every box, or align with your long-term goals, it is a step towards discovering what is right for you, so be prepared to be open-minded.

■ **Be proactive:** Showing initiative and enthusiasm will work in your favour. It is all about getting a foot in the door.

By asking lots of questions, volunteering for tasks such as presenting at universities and conferences, developing and leading Galebreaker's advisory services and hosting webinars, I have been able to gain invaluable industry experiences.

It is important to push yourself outside your comfort zone.

■ **Develop your skills:** Having a personal development plan is a great way to set yourself achievable goals.

I have benefited from pursuing opportunities such as CowSignals training which has shaped my approach to analysing animal welfare and is a globally recognised accreditation.

My current role sits between technical and sales, meaning it stays varied and develops my research and development and customer service skills. I now manage someone else, which has meant improving organisational and time management skills.

There is always more to learn, but enjoy the journey.

Passion for dairy drives success in agri-tech role

A PASSION for helping dairy farmers use technology to improve their herds is the driving force behind Aisling Downey, who is helping to spearhead the launch of SmaXtec's innovative ruminal bolus technology in both Northern Ireland and New Zealand.

Her background growing up on her family's dairy farm in Co Down has made her well-suited to her role as sales manager.

She says: "The dairy sector is in my blood; it has always been something I have been passionate about. I left school when I was 16 and went to Greenmount College to do a level three extended diploma in agriculture, and then a foundation degree in agriculture."

Each qualification took three years to achieve and included a year-long placement working in the industry and, once graduated, she worked full-time on another dairy farm for two years before joining SmaXtec in 2021.

Joining as sales representative for Northern Ireland gave her the responsibility for bringing the company's ruminal bolus technology to the market in the region.

"I was the first person to bring the technology to Northern Ireland and I spent two years building the business

and making it known here, while selling it to farmers and supporting them with it," she says.

"I was then given the opportunity to go to New Zealand and help them set up the subsidiary there. I spent two years there helping with staff training and bringing on new customers, before returning home in June."

Since first launching the technology in Northern Ireland four years ago, she has helped build the business's customer base in the region to 85 farmers. And her current job involves going out and seeing farmers as a salesperson, but also advising them on the best way to use the technology.

She says: "We have lots of discussions about the issues they are having on farm and seeing how the boluses can be used to help them. I am also involved in our marketing side of things and hiring staff in the area."

She says her career path is a prime example of the type of work someone with an interest in farming can do away from working directly on a farm.

She says: "It is all about mindset, determination and drive. I have been lucky enough to develop my career at SmaXtec and they have put a lot of trust in me, while being very supportive and offering great opportunities."

STUDY FARMING, HORTICULTURE & ENVIRONMENTAL



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For the UK's largest employer of veterinary professionals, retaining and attracting talent is a challenge – but an online training course is breaking down perceptions.

Diversity training helping to attract veterinary talent

With more than 1,000 practices and in excess of 3,500 vets across the country, IVC Evidensia is committed to fostering a more inclusive approach to its workforce.

Within its farm animal division, the organisation operates 52 practices with about 400 farm vets – but recruitment and retention within the profession, particularly in farm animal care, has become increasingly challenging.

The issue is compounded by a perception that the agricultural sector is not always welcoming to underrepresented communities, says Paul Horwood, group adviser for farm animals at IVC Evidensia.

“If we already have a recruitment problem and a perception problem, then we are at risk of ruling out people before they have even had a chance to try. That is a huge concern,” he says.

To help encourage more people to

see the sector as a viable and fulfilling career, IVC Evidensia has invested in a range of outreach activities, including student scholarships, on-farm boot camps and talks at vet schools.

The business is also seeking a structured, accessible way to help its teams engage with diversity and inclusion.

Offering online training, the course, developed by and for people in agriculture, focuses on inclusion and increasing understanding about diversity in the sector.

“One of the key reasons we liked the course is that it is positive and uplifting. It is not about blame. It is carrot, not stick, and focuses on celebrating progress rather than pointing out failures,” says Paul.

All farm vets at IVC Evidensia are encouraged to take the course, with the business covering the cost to remove any barriers to participation, and it is also being recommended to farmers, particularly those who work directly with vet students and early-career professionals during lambing and calving seasons.



‘Open eyes’

Paul says: “There has been no push-back. People have said it opened their eyes and helped them see things differently. That is exactly what we want.”

Beyond internal training, the course is also used as a recruitment tool to attract new talent.

“It shows we have thought about these issues, that we are open to change. It does not mean we are perfect, but it shows we care.”

Once participants have completed the course, they also have the opportunity to be included on the AgDiversity Database, which serves as a resource for those looking for placements or work opportunities where steps have been taken to improve awareness and understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion.

“For veterinary students from underrepresented communities who are looking for a placement within agriculture, the AgDiversity Database is a vital resource.”

NFU Education focuses on inclusion

In a bid to help foster a better culture within the industry, while also encouraging fresh talent from all walks of life into the sector, NFU Education has launched the AgriFuture Scholarship Programme, in partnership with the British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society (BVEDS), focusing on diversity and inclusion.

Chief education manager at NFU Education Josh Payne says young people should be able to see farming as a viable career for them, and that the industry’s stereotypical role models need to shift so that those outside the agricultural sector can see themselves represented within it.

The programme also hosts

residentials to give children from racially marginalised communities the chance to experience the countryside and all it has to offer.

Josh says: “It is also about creating safe working environments for those from minority backgrounds, and encouraging diversity and inclusion training in farm businesses – the AgDiversity course is a good place to start.”

The recent AgriFuture Forum gave the industry an opportunity to ignite the conversation on diversity.

Navaratnam Partheeban, vet, BVEDS co-founder, and Nuffield scholar who authored *Promoting and Supporting Black and People of Colour in Agriculture*, says: “The event

can normalise and highlight difference. Difference is positive and brings many advantages. Compared to other forms of diversity of people in agriculture, veterinary medicine and the environment, race and ethnicity is very rarely discussed or included.

“An event like this can make a huge difference by bringing this to the forefront. Our country is very racially diverse, and this is growing all the time, especially in the younger population of the UK, yet our sector does not reflect this or have many actions trying to make a change. This event space is a way to start the conversation and offer solutions for a more diverse and inclusive sector.”

“

We are at risk of ruling out people before they have even had a chance to try

PAUL HORWOOD

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