



Farming must raise its promotional game to attract 60,000 new entrants in next decade

British agriculture must recruit 60,000 new entrants in the next ten years to maintain its current workforce - and it must do that at a time when competition for entrants with other industries will be at its fiercest.

The Royal Agricultural Society of England+ has commissioned a report on the issues surrounding new entrant recruitment into farming and related sectors. Its conclusion is that unless the industry raises its game in promoting itself as an attractive, rewarding career destination it is likely to lose out in the battle for a diminishing pool of available entrants.

Report author, Alan Spedding, says: "Farming is perceived as weak in public relations and communication skills. It must get across to potential entrants that the industry is complex, technical, challenging and satisfying. The industry's current recruitment and promotion efforts do not compare well with image building for competing careers in the armed forces, NHS, teaching, science, engineering and the motor retail business.

"Many of these groups are better resourced than farming ever could be so there is a real need to make up for this by putting more effort where there will be most impact and, most important, by working together across the industry disciplines."

The report acknowledges that the NFU made a start through its Why Young People Matter to Farming campaign launched in 2007 but agriculture in its broadest sense is unlikely to make a major impact as an industry unless all sectors - farming, agricultural engineering, agricultural science and all the support sectors up-stream and down-stream from the farm, come together to promote their career potential.

Mr Spedding says that predicting the numbers of people the industry will require as new entrants is difficult but it looks like farming must recruit in excess of 6,000 a year for the next decade of which perhaps 1,000 each year will be for salaried management roles.

The available statistics indicate that only between 50% and 70% of the recruits needed by employers are currently emerging from further and higher education, creating a shortfall in numbers coming forward.

The good news is that the 6,000 new entrants farming needs is fewer than 1% of the total pool of young people which will be available to enter UK industry every year between now and 2020.

However, that does not take account of the managerial, skilled and unskilled jobs that will be created in ancillary and support industries such as agricultural engineering, crop and animal protection, veterinary, merchanting, retail and extension.

Commenting on the report, RASE Director of Communications and Marketing, Denis Chamberlain, said it posed many challenges which the industry needed to address as a matter of urgency.

“Farming and its related sectors must work harder and work together to attract the numbers needed to ensure that one of the biggest and certainly one of the most vital industries in the UK maintains its ability to produce more food, manage the environment, produce renewable fuels and play a significant role in coping with climate change,” said Mr Chamberlain.

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Notes for Editors

New Blood - Attracting the Best People to UK Agriculture

Producing more food as well as some of our fuel and continuing to improve our landscapes, soils and wildlife are huge challenges for the agricultural industry. We will have to achieve these goals for increasingly discriminating consumers in volatile world markets and against a background of often unpredictable climate change and uncertainties arising out of unstable world finances.

The investigation, commissioned by the Royal Agricultural Society of England, has assembled some facts and figures about how many new entrants the industry needs. It has also collected views from within and outside the industry to find out how farming can become more attractive to people who will have the imagination and energy we need to meet these challenges and looked at some examples of effective initiatives at home and abroad which point the way forward

The Author

Alan Spedding, BSc, BA, ARAgS is Honorary Editor of the Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England. He produces RuSource a weekly e-briefing for agricultural professionals and the Members' Agri-bulletin for RASE. He was the Society's Communications Development Manager between 1991 and 2002 and Chairman of Council of the British Institute of Agricultural Consultants between 1999 and 2001.

A full copy of the report is available in electronic form here.

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