



Food, Farming & Countryside Commission

Devon Locally Led Inquiry

New Entrants - Exploring the views of young people in Devon



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Preface

Launched in November 2017, the RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission is a major, two-year independent inquiry, funded by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

Chaired by Sir Ian Cheshire, with fourteen Commissioners from across sectors, the Commission is tasked with creating mandate for change across our food system, farming sector and in rural communities; shaping a long term vision for the future that's fairer, stands the test of time and aligns more closely with changing public values and expectations; and propose solutions to achieve the vision, identifying where communities and businesses can take a lead and where a national policy framework is required.

Role of the locally led inquiries

The issues covered by the Commission are wide-ranging and heavily influenced by context. From policy differences in the Devolved Nations, to cultural and topographical differences across the countries, it was clear from the outset of the Commission that seeking local perspectives would be critical.

In England, the Commission sought to set up three locally led inquiries. These inquiries would create a frame for the counties of Devon, Cumbria and Lincolnshire to investigate the issues of the Commission most relevant to them, with the aim of stimulating local debate and informing the national Commission.

Devon's locally led inquiry was chaired by Commissioner and Devonian, David Fursdon, who convened a group of expert stakeholders from across food, farming, agriculture, conservation, policy and health, with members from Devon

and neighbouring Cornwall. This Committee identified four key issues: Health and Thriving Communities; New Entrants; Devon's Grasslands, and Environment and Biodiversity. Each of these were explored by their own working group, chaired by a member of the Committee. Work took place between June 2018 and May 2019.

The Devon Committee were ably assisted by Professor Matt Lobley and Beth Dooley from the University of Exeter who acted as lead researchers and authors.

Each working group has produced a summary paper of their work, published in July 2019.

Next steps

The release of these papers coincides with the publication of the RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission's report *Our Future in the Land*. The insight from this working group has contributed to the body of evidence reviewed by the Commission and helped to inform their findings and recommendations.

The Commission runs until October 2019 and the next few months will see it work to bring its recommendations to life. This will include supporting the Devon Committee to publish a single report of their work and recommendations, designed to stimulate local action.

Introduction

The New Entrants working group has explored issues surrounding *who* will be the future of agriculture in the UK. This question is part of the broader conversation of what we want the future of farming and the countryside to look like in this country.

In terms of who will own and operate the farms, attracting new people into the sector must be considered. There will be a significant amount of farmland and farm business assets that will need to change hands in the coming decades. The median age of the farming population in the UK rose to 60 in 2016, with

a third of all farms held¹ by persons over the age of 65 and only 3 percent held by persons below the age of 35 (Defra, 2019). The industry in Devon faces these challenges.

Along this line, Defra included questions around encouraging and supporting new entrants in the public consultation on *Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit* (Defra 2018a), resulting in multiple comments from stakeholders highlighting the barriers to entry and systemic changes the Government could promote to address them (Defra, 2018c).

Having a generation ready to take over for outgoing operators as well as begin vibrant new enterprises within this important primary production sector is necessary to support domestic food security, rural economic vitality, environmental management etc.

This report describes primary data collection undertaken by the Devon locally led inquiry, to understand the opinions of careers in food, farming and agriculture held by teenagers in Devon, specifically those views within the context of the career ambitions of these young people.

This data was collected with the view to it being able to influence future plans for engagement of young people within the county.

1 “From 2009 onwards, England data relate to ‘commercial’ holdings only. The term commercial covers all English holdings which have more than 5 hectares of agricultural land, 1 hectare of orchards, 0.5 hectares of vegetables or 0.1 hectares of protected crops, or more than 10 cattle, 50 pigs, 20 sheep, 20 goats, or 1,000 poultry. These thresholds are specified in the EU Farm Structure Survey Regulation EC 1166/2008” (Defra 2019).

Agricultural careers and youth

In thinking about the issue of attracting young people into farming in Devon a number of questions arose:

Are young people aware of agriculture – and if so, do they only see it as farming? Or are they tuned in to the huge range of different agriculturally related careers along the food chain, related to processing, distribution (locally, regionally, nationally and globally), trade negotiations around import/export, researchers working on inputs or seeds R&D, for instance, advisors and service professionals, agronomists, etc?

Do they see these jobs as attractive, as research into the sector reveals that employees in the agriculture sector express high levels of job satisfaction around diverse opportunities, advancement and security?

Additionally, it was hypothesised that students choosing their GCSEs and planning for future education and career pathways would likely not have a clear understanding of the difference between what they envision is necessary for running a farm business, eg animal sciences, land management, etc and what modern farm enterprises require in terms of management skills, eg computer science, technology, social media, hospitality (if running a diversified operation, for instance), etc.

Finally, how do students in this digital era of instantly accessible information and social media receive and engage with information surrounding future job ideas?

In order to answer some of these questions, the working group partnered with the University of Exeter to design a survey to be administered to pupils age 14-15 throughout Devon.

Survey overview

The survey consisted of 20 questions and started off asking about the students' personal aspirations for their future employment: which features would motivate them to want to take certain jobs, what was least important to them, what education and skills did they feel they needed to have to be qualified for those jobs, and how had they heard of their envisioned jobs?

Next, the survey inquired about the extent to which the students knew about food and farming, had or would consider(ed) jobs in food and farming and, based on what they knew, whether they felt they were good career options.

Using the same features explored for the students' personal job aspirations at the start of the survey, the second half focussed on a comparative look at what the students think are defining features of agricultural jobs, what education and skills they think they would need to have in order to be qualified for jobs in food and farming, and what barriers they think would make it hard to work in food and farming careers. They were surveyed for general awareness about a range of different careers in agriculture, and to what extent they thought the jobs sounded interesting or were not something they would like to work in.

Lastly, returning to the question of who they receive career advice from, the students were asked to rank different options in terms of how they would prefer to receive more information about various career opportunities within the agriculture sector.

Administration of the survey

Outreach to the schools around the county was facilitated by the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership Careers Hub administered through Devon County Council, which works with schools to create opportunities for industry engagement.

The first step was finding a pilot school at which to run a test of the survey. This would allow an opportunity to modify the survey language and complexity to fit with age-level capabilities and length of desired engagement. The pilot group in North Devon consisted of 22 students age 14-15, and therefore on the brink of entering into the GCSE portion of their school career. This preparatory stage was chosen as the appropriate level to survey in order to determine whether agriculture featured on students' radars when they were choosing their long-term education path with GCSEs leading into A-levels.

All schools were contacted through mass email proposing the New Entrants survey as a way in which they could engage with a particular industry, and as it was sent out by the DCC Careers Enterprise Hub, the teacher or head at the school in charge of promoting such learning opportunities was directly targeted.

Ultimately, eight schools administered the survey (each school administering to different numbers of students) to their students age 14-15, which resulted in 314 students from around the county (urban and rural) taking

the survey. Some of the schools requested a presentation to the students prior to the survey being taken so that they could understand the context of what the questions were trying to ask. These presentations were all given by Elizabeth Dooley, PhD student at the University of Exeter, and were aimed at highlighting the overarching focus of the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission and locally led inquiry in Devon, as well as the specific questions around new entrants that the survey would be asking them about. Following the students' completion of the survey at the schools which asked for a presentation, a Q&A session was made available to the students in case they had any follow-up questions or comments about the survey or agricultural careers in general.

Survey results: key findings

Pay and reward is the strongest career motivation. However, over a quarter of students indicate that they wish to work for a cause they care strongly about

Students indicated that the most attractive features which would motivate them to work in their desired future employment were:

1. Good pay and perks (74 percent)
2. Flexible and/or choice of working hours (46 percent)
3. Good training provided (28 percent)
4. Rewarding work on something I care about (27 percent)
5. Opportunity for advancement/ promotion (27 percent)

Students are not motivated by high-tech work
When asked what the least motivating factors would be for them in choosing future jobs, perhaps surprisingly they indicated:

1. Working with complex technology (43 percent)
2. Involves an easy work load (32 percent)
3. Small team or workforce (30 percent)
4. Working with my hands and/or outside (30 percent)
5. Large company with substantial resources (25 percent)

This potentially challenges the assumption that younger generations are keen to work with complex technology, which is often heralded as the way forward in the agri-tech sector.

More than one in five students is not at all familiar with food, farming or agriculture

When asked how familiar they are with food, farming or agriculture:

- 53 percent indicated they know someone with a connection to a farm
- 22 percent however, indicated they are not at all familiar with food, farming or agriculture.

Less than half of students think they have a good awareness of job options in food, farming or agriculture

Whilst over 40 percent agreed or somewhat agreed they think they have a good awareness of the job options available in food and farming, almost 30 percent indicated they know only very little and 6 percent stated they know absolutely nothing about the different options.

However, students may have an outdated view of what these careers, in fact, entail

Students were asked what features they think apply to jobs in food, farming and agriculture. The highest feature ranking feature was ‘Working with my hands and/or outside (74 percent)’.

When it came to considering pathways into the career they have in mind and then pathways into careers in food, farming or agriculture, the students reported considerable differences. When asked to consider the most important subjects for their envisioned careers, they ranked mathematics (58 percent), English (56 percent) and sciences (biology, chemistry, physics) (47 percent) highest. For careers in food, farming or agriculture they ranked zoology / animal Science (61 percent), practical / hands-on skills training (59 percent) and environmental studies (51 percent) highest.

Additionally, for the skills they think they will need to be qualified for future jobs that interest them, they ranked Communication (38 percent), social media (29 percent) and public speaking (27 percent) the highest, whereas for food, farming or agricultural careers they thought those most required are food preparation / service (68 percent), marketing / sales (58 percent) and natural resource management skills (51 percent).

Each of these findings suggests that the students do not have an awareness of the range of jobs available within food, farming or agriculture.

Students are not confident that food, farming or agriculture offer good careers

Almost a third of the students were neutral about the statement “I think jobs in food, farming or agriculture offer good, competitive career options”, with another 25 percent disagreeing to some extent.

A significant proportion of the students do not find potential agricultural careers interesting

When presented with a long list of potential career options: eg, plant / animal breeder; machinery technician; environmental advisor / landscape manager; global grain trader; equipment sales; agronomist, food safety, packaging and labelling inspector; veterinarian; nutritionist for healthy human diets; policy advisor on national / international rules and regulations; dairy cooperative executive; carbon emissions advisor; etc, over one-third of the students stated that “None of these are potentially interesting to me”. When asked about barriers or things that would make it hard to work in food and farming, 50 percent of the students indicated “I’m not interested in the work”.

Significant misconceptions are held about careers in agriculture

Almost 60 percent of students stated that jobs in food and farming are too low paying as a barrier to working in the field, and a majority also indicated that the hours are too long and/or not set as a factor that would make it hard to work in food and farming.

Majority of students would not consider jobs in food and farming

When asked whether they have or would consider jobs in food and farming, over 50 percent of students stated they would probably not or definitely not. About one-fifth of students said they would maybe consider jobs in that field, but 7 percent indicated they have no idea because they don’t know what it would involve. Thus, low awareness of what different careers in the field would look like may be posing a barrier to students showing interest.

Most students turn to their family members for career advice. Although this is less likely when it comes to careers in food, farming or agriculture

When asked how they receive and/or seek out information about their envisioned future jobs, 66 percent of students indicated they became interested in or received advice/information from parent(s), guardian(s), or other family members. In comparison, 45 percent students had received advice / information about jobs in agriculture from the same source.

To encourage students into a career in food, farming or agriculture, efforts are needed to show students what jobs are like and how to enter them through traditional modes as well as increased social media outreach

In ranking the top three ways that they would like to receive more information about jobs in agriculture, students selected ‘Conversations with family or acquaintances’ as their number one choice (55 percent), followed by ‘Career counselling appointments’ (48 percent) and ‘Young people working / apprenticing in the field sharing their experiences’ ranking the highest third choice (47 percent). Other options had consistently solid rankings across the board, however, by over one-third of the students: short videos online by people explaining their jobs; social media posts by companies / organisations; presentations by companies / employees in person; fieldtrips / company tours; graphics showing education paths and skills related to potential jobs, and job shadowing that matches my interest. They all relate to giving a real-world insight into job opportunities and entry and should be explored for increased use.

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, the results indicate that young people, even in a rural county like Devon, are by no means guaranteed to understand the breadth of careers available within the agriculture sector, take an interest in jobs within food, farming and agriculture, or have a clear picture of what it takes to get the food from the field to their fork. Indeed, the results show that there is scope for improvement by the agriculture industry to promote itself and careers within it to young people within the county.

It is surprising to learn that over one in five of them reported that they have no connection at all to food, farming or agriculture. When paired with the information that over half of them state “I’m not interested in the work” and would probably or definitely not consider a career in food and farming, this suggests that there are many students in the county who are currently unlikely to consider the sector based on their current understanding of what options are available and the barriers they envision.

Increasing the prevalence of agriculture as an industry that career counsellors discuss with young people is one way to increase awareness, but as seen from the request by the schools to have an industry engagement exercise as part of the survey administration, students may engage more with real-life examples they hear from someone working in the field. Possibly young farmers who are closer to their age and have more recently gone through the steps it takes to enter the industry rather than just those higher up the employment ladder who the students might not identify as closely with. Increased use of social media, videos and direct experiences with jobs were seen as interesting as well and should be explored.

When asked to indicate which subjects would most likely lead to their desired careers, the students ranked maths, English and the sciences the highest. However, when asked which subjects would be most useful for careers in food, farming or agriculture they selected animal science, practical and hands on skills, and environmental science. This suggests that they lack awareness of the true range of careers and/or the skills that modern agriculture requires relating to different education and skills pathways, and that they may instead have an outdated view of work within the sectors. A lack of awareness risks a perception that the kind of career they want is not available to them within food, farming and agriculture.

The food, farming and agriculture industries need to work together more effectively to promote the range of career opportunities that are available to young people throughout the food chain, utilising not only social media messages but also coordinating at the school level with career counsellors to do industry impact engagement events as well as promote young people within the industry who can provide real-life examples of what their education and skills development pathways were to enter into the profession.

It is recommended that discussions are convened, in light of these survey results, to discuss how a Devon or South West approach to achieving this can be developed. This would need to include input from schools and colleges, industrial bodies such as the NFU, local smaller-scale farmers, recent entrants to the industry, education policy makers and administrators.

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