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Research Article

CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF UNDERGRADUATE AGRICULTURE STUDENTS

ANSARI I.H. AND ANSARI M.A.*
Department of Agriculture Communication, College of Agriculture, G. B. Pant University of Agriculture & Technology, Pantnagar, 263153, Uttarakhand, India
*Corresponding Author: Email - aslam1405@gmail.com

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Abstract: Choosing a right and relevant career path is very important for the youth of today. Everyone aspires to achieve something unique in their life. The present study was conducted in a premier State Agriculture University (SAU) in Uttarakhand to find out career aspirations of Undergraduate Agriculture students. The study sample comprised of final year students of Undergraduate course, *i.e.* B. Sc. Agriculture. Following census method of sampling, the study included all the final year Undergraduate Agriculture students (n=126). The study findings revealed that" pursing higher studies, *i.e.* doing M.Sc. /Ph. D." was found to be the most preferred career aspiration of Undergraduate Agriculture students followed by "becoming a scientist in ICAR (Indian Council of Agriculture Research) system", "securing an administration position in SAU/ICAR", "securing job in central government" whereas "becoming a Professor/Teacher in an SAU" was the least preferred career choice. Further, student's academic performance, family background, parent's occupation, parent's annual income, mass media exposure, and achievement motivation displayed a positive and significant correlation with career aspirations of the undergraduate agricultural students. The study findings will be helpful for higher agriculture educationists, agriculture policy makers and planners to understand the nature and extent of career aspirations and accordingly devise suitable policies and promote alternative occupations.

Keywords: Career Aspirations, Higher agricultural education, Occupational choices of Agriculture graduates, Career goals, Undergraduate agriculture students

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Introduction

Career aspiration is a path that an individual wishes to follow in order to plan his/her future life and lifestyle. It is one of the vital decisions that everyone, especially an Undergraduate student, has to make. Career aspiration can be defined as the choice of a job or profession for which one undergoes specific education and training over a period of time and scale-up his/ her competencies in terms of knowledge and skills required for a particular job. It therefore refers to the choice and preference of an individual for seeking a job/work after completing their education. Agricultural education today has become highly complex and specialized, and offer many opportunities to plan and choose variety of career by its recipients. Many agricultural universities/ colleges offer a wide range of degree courses, and they can choose them depending upon their intent and professional aspirations. Due to its professional and career potential perceived by the youth, agricultural education is almost the next choice of those science students who fail to get admission to course like medicine and engineering. Those who seek admission in agricultural Universities/College therefore constitutes the pool from which the country will derive the needed work force for most part of the agriculture sector either as teachers, researchers/scientist and/or extension workers in the near future. Students also seek out schools/colleges that are well known for that most important discipline or trade. Mcglynn (2007) [1] observed that most of the students are nowadays more concerned with the amount of money (salary packages) they can earn. On the other hand, there are a few students in the society who pursue it as their dreams. Domenic and Jones (2007)[2]reported that career aspirations can be influenced by gender, socio-economic status and family support. According to Patton and Creed (2007) [3], the career aspirations of adolescents have been viewed as significant determinates of both short term educational and long term career choices. Besides, they have also been regarded as important career motivational variables which are predictive of later career attainment levels

The present study entitled "Career Aspirations of Undergraduate Agriculture Students" was undertaken with the following specific objectives: (a) To study socio- demographic profile of undergraduate agriculture students, (b) To determine career aspirations of undergraduate agriculture students and, (c) To find out relationship between selected socio- demographic profile of undergraduate agriculture students and their career aspirations.

Material and Methods

The study was conducted at a premier State Agriculture University, *i.e.* G.B. Pant University of Agriculture & Technology, Pantnagar, Uttarakhand. Established in November 1960, it is currently ranked as number one among more than 70State Agriculture Universities (SAUs), and was also ranked third overall among more than 100 educational institutions providing higher agriculture education in the country. The college of Agriculture of Pantnagar University offers a 4-year Undergraduate degree course, B. Sc. (Agriculture) which has also been recently recognized as a professional degree by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India.

The study sample included all the students (N=133) studying in the fourth/final year of their Undergraduate degree programme. The reason for including only the final year students in study sample was that it is at this time they are actually and seriously thinking about their career choices. It was thought that by this time the students may have been adequately sensitized about various career choices/avenues available and their potential for matching their career aspirations. A structured pre-tested questionnaire was administered to all the selected respondents. However, out of 133 students, only 126 students returned the completely filled questionnaire. Analytical research design was adopted for this study. The data collected was analysed using SPSS.

Result and Discussion

Socio- demographic profile of Undergraduate Agriculture Students

Finding out the Socio- demographic profile of Undergraduate Agriculture Students was one of the study objectives. The results obtained are given in [Table-1].

Table-1 *Distribution of the respondents based on Socio- demographic variables of Undergraduate Agriculture Students(n=126)*

SN	variables	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender		
	Male	58	46.04
	Female	68	53.96
2	Caste		
	General	81	64.28
	OBC	19	15.07
	SC/ST	26	20.63
3	Family Background		
	Rural	43	34.12
	Semi Urban	42	33.33
	Urban	41	32.53
4	Place of residence		
	Rural	31	24.6
	Semi Urban	41	32.53
	Urban	54	42.85
5	Medium of Instruction (School)		
	Hindi	14	11.12
	English	112	88.88
6	Academic performance		
	Low (<7.02)	25	19.84
	Medium (7.02 to 7.98)	78	61.9
	High (> 7.98)	23	18.25
7	Family type		
	Nuclear	99	78.57
	Joint	26	20.63
	Extended	1	0.79
8	Family size		
	Small (5)	46	36.5
	Medium (5 to 10)	74	58.73
	Big (10)	6	4.76
9	Family educational status		
	Low (8.77)	15	11.9
	Medium (8.77 to 15.85)	64	50.79
	High (15.85)	47	37.3
10	Parent's annual income(Lakh per year)		
	Low (<2.98)	18	14.28
	Medium (2.98 to 11.76)	83	65.87
	High (11.76)	25	19.84
11	Mass media exposure		
	Low(<9.8)	16	12.69
	Medium (9.8 to 16.32)	92	73.01
	High (>16.32)	17	13.49

It is clear from the [Table-1] that majority of the students (53.96%) were female and the male students were only 46.04 percent; more than half of the students (64.28 %) belonged to General Caste followed by 20.63 percent belonging to Schedule Caste/Schedule Tribe (SC/ST) and only 15.07 percent were from Other Backward Castes (OBCs). Thus, we can conclude that majority of the students in study sample were female and belonged to General Caste. Further, about one-third (34.12 %) of the students belonged to rural background followed by almost an equal number (33.33 percent) belonging to semi urban background whereas 32.53 percent belonged to urban background. Regarding the place of residence, majority of the students (42.85 %) belonged to urban background followed by 32.53 percent from semi urban background and only 24.60 percent belonged to rural background. As regards medium of instruction in school, majority of the students (88.88 %) came from English medium schools whereas only 11.12 percent from Hindi medium.

Academic performance of Undergraduate Agriculture Students indicates that majority of the students (61.90 %) had medium academic performance followed by 19.84 percent having low and 18.25 percent having high academic performance, respectively. Family type revealed that that a large majority of the students (78.57 %) came from nuclear families while 20.63 percent from joint families and only 0.79 percent came from extended family. Further, the results regarding the family size, majority (58.73 %) of the students belonged to the medium sized family while 36.50 percent of the students belonged to small size family and only 4.76 percent of the students belonged to big size family.

Family educational status revealed that a majority (50.79 %) of the students belonged to the medium family educational status while 11.90 percent of the students belonged to low family educational status and 37.30 percent of the students belonged to high family educational status. Size of land holding indicated that a majority (74.60 %) of the parents of the students has small sized land holding *i.e.* less than 2.76 hectare. However, 14.28 percent of them had medium size land holding, *i.e.* between 2.76 to 8.31 hectare; and only 11.11 percent students' parents' had big sized land holding *i.e.* more than 8.31 hectare. Parent's occupation indicated that majority (42.85 %) of students' father were in occupation of government service followed by 19.04 percent doing private service, 29.36 percent engaged in doing business and remaining 4.76 percent were doing farming. On the other hand, majority (60.31 %) of the mother's of students were not working and were engaged as housewife. However, 15.07 percent were engaged in government service followed by 11.11 percent doing private service and the remaining 13.49 percent of the mothers have their own business. The results indicate that majority of students' mothers were housewife; and housewives have crucial role to build up the aspirations of their children.

Further. parent's annual income indicated that large majority (65.87 %) of the respondents' parents' were earning between Rs. 2.89 to Rs. 11.76 lacks per annum which comes under medium level of annual income, whereas 19.84 percent had high level of annual income *i.e.* More than Rs. 11.76 lacks per annum and only 14.28 percent were in low income category, earning less than Rs. 2.89 lacks per annum. Regarding media exposure, a large majority of the respondents (73) had medium mass media exposure followed by 13.49 having high and 12.69 low media exposure.

Sources of information about the job

Students, concerned as they are, seek information about the available jobs from different sources. These sources were categorised into three broad categories – Personalised sources, Institutional sources and Mass media. Results obtained are given in [Table-2].

Table-2 *Distribution of respondents about sources of information about the jobs*

SN	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
A.	Personalised Sources		
1	University Teachers	83	65.87
2	Seniors	103	81.74
3	Juniors	9	7.14
4	Parents	75	59.52
5	Friends	94	74.6
6	Relatives	48	38.09
7	Neighbours	8	6.34
B.	Institutional Sources		
1	University placement cell	75	59.52
2	ICAR institutions	35	27.77
C.	Mass media Sources		
1	Internet	109	86.5
2	Magazine	22	17.46
3	News paper	63	50
4	Television	29	23.01
5	Radio	4	3.17
6	Books	23	18.25
7	Journals	17	13.49

A perusal of the results indicates that "internet" (86.5%) was the most sought-after source of information about jobs across all the three categories. In the 'personalised' sources of information, it was closely followed by seniors (81.74%), friends (74.6%), University teachers (65.87%) and parents (59.52%). Among the institutional sources, University placement cell was reported by 59.52 percent as an important source. Further, among the mass media as source of information, after internet, Newspapers was mentioned by 50% students as an important source.

Career Aspirations

Students' career aspirations refer to their orientation towards a particular occupation or position in the contemporary society. Agriculture graduates' career aspirations reveal about their thinking and perceptions regarding various job alternatives. The results of the study are presented in the [Table-3].

Table-3 *Distribution of respondents according to their career aspirations (N=126)*

Categories	Percent	Rank
To pursue higher studies (M. Sc / Ph. D)	24.6	I
To become a scientist in ICAR institute	20.63	II
To secure administrative position in an Agriculture University	15.07	III
To secure job in Central Government	13.49	IV
To become a Teacher / Professor in an SAUs	12.69	V

It is evident from [Table-3] that 'pursuing higher studies' was ranked first by agriculture graduates and it was preferred by 24 percent of the respondents whereas 'becoming a scientist in ICAR institute' was ranked second and preferred by 20.63 percent. Further, to secure administrative position in Agriculture University' was ranked third and it was preferred by 15.07 percent respondents. 'Secure job in Central Government' was ranked fourth, and it was preferred by 13.49 percent respondents. Lastly, 'becoming a Professor/Teacher in a SAU' was ranked fifth by 12.69 percent respondents as it was least preferred by the students. The results are supported by Waman et al. (2000) [4] who in their study of 'aspirations and employments of agricultural graduates' revealed that 50.00 percent of the respondents were aspiring for post-graduation, 30.00 percent were aspiring for Ph. D degree and 20.00 percent aspired to go for MBA. Saini and Singh (2001) [5] also concluded that majority (90%) of the respondents aspired for 'Government services' and only 10 percent aspired for 'Private services. Further, Jyothi (2011) [6] in a research study on 'aspirations of out-going B.Sc. (Ag) students of agricultural college' observed that girls aspired mainly to work in a University as a scientist (34.30 %) followed by State Department of Agriculture (28.10 %) whereas in case of boys, majority of them aspired to work in State Department of Agriculture (40 %) followed by multinational companies (24 %).

Relationship between students' characteristics and their career aspirations

The study sought to find out if there exist any relationship between profile characteristics and their career aspiration. The findings are given below in [Table-4].

Table-4 *Relationship between selected profile characteristics and career aspirations of Undergraduate Agriculture Students*

SN	Independent Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)
1	Gender	-0.163
2	Caste	0.124
3	Family Background	-0.031
4	Place of Residence	-0.132
5	Medium of Instruction	-0.098
6	Academic Performance	0.198*
7	Family Type	-0.059
8	Family Size	-0.048
9	Family Educational Status	0.205*
10	Parent's Annual Income	0.249**
11	Mass Media Exposure	0.247**

*Significant at 0.01% level; ** Significant at 0.05% level; NS- non significant

A careful perusal of the results presented in the above table reveals that students' academic performance, family educational status, parent's occupation, parent's annual income, mass media exposure and achievement motivation were found to have significant positive relationship with career aspirations. However, age and caste have positive non- significant relationship with career aspirations but gender, family background, place of residence, medium of education, family type and family size exhibited a negative but non- significant relationship with career aspirations. Sarita (2000)[7] revealed a non-significant relationship between academic performance and aspirations of girl students and Jadhav (2008)[8] revealed a significant relationship between family education status and aspirations of students. Rahim and Nataraju (2009)[9] while studying factors influencing occupational aspirations of students studying at University of Agriculture Sciences, Bangalore reported that gender, family background and medium of instruction had negative but non-significant association with undergraduate students' career aspirations.

Conclusion

The study findings have reiterated that the major career aspirations for Undergraduate Agriculture Students were either to join higher studies or serve in ICAR-SAU system. Besides, government services (State/ Central) still holds lots of importance for the youth in their search for careers. It is surprising to note that a number of career choices in banking and private agribusiness sector exist; it has failed to capture the attention of graduating students. Besides, the governments have been emphasizing on educational institutions "to produce job providers, not job seekers" it hasn't made any significant impact. Further, lots of emphasis has been, of late, put on promoting entrepreneurship or alternative agriculture-based career vocations, it has still not hit the right chord among the student community to become one of their career aspirations.

This may serve as a reminder to the policy makers and planners to make alternative vocations more attractive, secure and well paid. The findings of the study have practical importance for SAU/IACR system as a genuine reference point while planning to implement career aspirations. The SAU/ICAR system needs to redesign new courses/ course curriculum so as to align it with agriculture industry requirements. Besides, the system needs to make prospective students aware of the new/ emerging avenues in agriculture sector. The study has also served as a reminder for agriculture educationists to re-orient and re-focus the direction and pace of changes/reforms in agriculture education sector.

Application of research: Career planning usually starts at school and the period of undergraduate studies is crucial as it is given final thought and, pursued seriously and meticulously. The research will be applicable to the incumbent students who aspire to pursue higher agriculture education from State Agriculture Universities (SAUs) and Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) Deemed to be Universities (e.g. IARI, NDRI, IVRI, etc) and many other agriculture institutions in the country. The study will provide alternatives to the society's thinking and perceptions about future career avenues as most of them are obsessed in making their sons/ daughters doctors and engineers by presenting alternative career in agriculture sector.

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