

# Choice of a lifetime

College offers 14 majors for career preparation

The food industry is one of the largest and most important industries in the United States, so the choices for careers in agriculture are nearly unlimited.

The education provided in agriculture at Oklahoma State University encompasses all aspects of the agricultural industry from production to consumption.

With so many career choices, students may find it difficult to decide what to do for the rest of their lives. They often change majors after realizing the one they initially picked just wasn't right for them, said Louann Waldner, director of CASNR Student Career Services.

One of the advantages of attending the OSU College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources is that it is part of a comprehensive university, said Daniel S. Tilley, agricultural economics professor. Students are able to change majors without changing campuses.

"My advice to most students is to have patience and understand that they may not know what they want to do for the rest of their life when they are 18 or 19 years old,"

Tilley said. "Changing your mind and being uncertain should be expected."

CASNR offers a variety of majors. For example, the forestry department has a specialized curriculum focused on natural resources such as water, recreation, and range and wildlife management.

A graduate holding a forestry degree can work for a federal forest and wildlife agency or an association promoting the use of forest products. Some forestry graduates choose to be self-employed, while others do timber and land appraisals or work for special services.

Jennifer Bryant, forestry and wildlife management senior, said her goal after graduation is to join the Peace Corps and focus on agri-forestry. She would like to specialize in farming responsibly in rain forest areas, which entails educating people on how to grow food crops in the forest understory as opposed to cutting all of the trees down before farming the land.

"It's a really good major," Bryant said. "You learn how to utilize the land's resources responsibly."

Bryant said her experience at OSU will stay with her for a long time.

"The forestry department is a close, family-type department," she said. "I will always have these ties."

By choosing forestry as her major, Bryant found a unique career she will enjoy. But forestry is just one major; there are 13 more in the college that can be paired with a minor in any of 10 areas.

Students can choose from a number of academic programs: environmental science, forestry, horticulture, agricultural communications, agricultural education, animal science, biochemistry and molecular biology, agribusiness, biosystems and agricultural engineering, agricultural economics, entomology, landscape architecture, landscape contracting, and plant and soil sciences.

Minors are available in agricultural economics, agronomy, animal science, biochemistry and molecular biology, entomology, food science, forestry, horticulture, leadership education, rangeland ecology and management, and soil sciences.

Having a variety of majors and options allows students to tailor an educational plan specifically related to their career and life goals, Waldner said.

*Matriculation sheets available in the CASNR office list all of the classes required to complete each major. Kelli Armbruster, agricultural communications/animal science major, picks one up on her way to enroll. (Photo by Angie Gastel)*



Waldner said CASNR also provides opportunities to develop organizational, communication and teamwork skills.

"I think there is good preparation by the faculty in our college for whatever you want to do," Waldner said.

Students who lack an agricultural background but are interested in an agricultural major should educate themselves about the level of diversity and opportunities in the college, Waldner said.

Sometimes students have unusual reasons for choosing a major. Waldner said some students receive a scholarship and simply decide to try the major out.

Bryant, who grew up in Oklahoma City, chose forestry for what she described as a funny reason.

"I took a calculus class in the basement of Ag Hall, and I saw all of the pictures on the walls about the forestry department," she said.

She thought it looked like an interesting major, and that is what she ended up choosing.

Bryant's decision was based, in a way, on exploration. If students are not sure if a field in agriculture will be interesting, they should explore classes to find out if the field captivates them.

"Exploring is the key," Waldner said.

Students can explore different areas by adding one class to their core schedule each semester and trying out a different department each time, said Waldner. Monetary and time costs are involved, but they are worth it.

Students should think about what interests and goals drive them to be successful and consider their hobbies, likes and dislikes when deciding where to test the water, said Waldner. They should ask them-

selves what classes were enjoyable in high school and which ones brought them the most success.

They should also consider long-term goals such as where they would like to live in the future and where they want to raise a family; if it is in a certain geographic region, some majors may not be as practical.

"When you try more options before settling on a major, you may take longer to be graduated and there is an opportunity cost to your time," Tilley said. "But, sometimes that time is well spent finding out what you really like to do."

Waldner said it is helpful to read magazines and newsletters related to a major of interest and to attend club meetings. Membership is often not required to attend, and the experience will help determine if a student will like the people and activities he/she will commit to for the next few years. Each major also usually has a professional-type event or club in which students can compete on a regional or national level.

Involvement in these events can help students meet professionals in their chosen field of study, Waldner said.

The diversity in the college is unique because its departments present many opportunities for scholarships, leadership and, ultimately, success in a chosen career, Waldner said.

Academic advisers in each department, combined with the Career Services office on the first floor of Agricultural Hall, can help students make a connection between their goals and interests and make the voyage down their career path a smooth one.

By the time students are ready to start taking major courses, they should have a good idea of what is interesting and which major will lead to personal success.

*By Angie Gastel, Jasper, Mo.*