



Science
Societies

What can you do with a degree in agronomy, crops, or soils?

By Rachelle LaCroix, Lauren Schwarck, Paige Boyle

| June 2, 2021



Another traditional career path is going to work in industry, like this Bayer scientist shown here. Photo courtesy of Bayer AG.

So, you've realized how much you enjoy learning about agronomy, crops, and soils and are considering pursuing a degree in one of these fields. Undoubtedly, the program itself will be fulfilling and enjoyable since you'll be spending time doing what you're passionate about. But if you're unsure what type of careers a degree in agronomy, crops, or soils will prepare you for, we are here to offer some insight into different paths you should consider for the future.

Academia

A traditional path is to pursue higher education to become an educator. Typically, this means completing a doctoral program to pursue faculty positions at a college or university. Academic positions usually entail teaching, research, extension, or some combination of the three. These positions can be extremely competitive, and it's quite rare to find ones without research output expectations (i.e., papers, presentations, and well-trained students). If you're primarily interested in teaching, consider teaching at a two-year (i.e., a local community college) or a small four-year college. Depending on the department, some teaching positions at community colleges may only require master's degrees.

Government Positions

Working for a government agency as a research scientist or technician is a great opportunity for anyone who would like to have a career focused on conducting research. A surprising number of agencies have agronomy, crop science, and soil science research positions within them, such as USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and Forest Service. A few lesser-known departments include the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of

Energy (DoE), the Department of Homeland Security, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and any state Department of Natural Resources. These positions range from conservation and technician positions that require bachelor's degrees to research agronomist, soil scientist, and plant physiologist positions that generally require master's or doctoral degrees.

The best resource to use to find government positions is USAjobs.gov, where all official U.S. government jobs are routinely posted. Another avenue within the government to consider is governmental policy where you can work in the area of agricultural legislation.

Industry

Another traditional career path is going to work in industry, meaning working for a business or corporation in the agricultural sector. Some examples include Corteva Agriscience, Conagra Brands, Bayer, and Hawthorne Gardening Company as a plant breeder, weed scientist, agronomist, or even as a hemp scientist (seriously).

Opportunities in industry are endless and can have a variety of focuses (i.e., biotechnology, breeding, digital tools, and many more). You could also consider working as a sales representative or in a communications and marketing department if research is not your interest. Because of the variety of positions within these types of companies, there are opportunities to work in different areas of a business and learn new skills. This could mean working in a new position at the same location or moving to another worksite in another state or even country!

Non-profit Organizations

Another appealing option is working for a non-profit organization, such as The Nature Conservancy or the Rodale Institute. Depending on the type of organization, there are technician and conservation positions available that span a range of responsibilities.

For example, organic farm manager, crop consultant, or research technician positions at the Rodale Institute have been recently advertised with minimum education requirements of a bachelor's degree. However, there are also research scientist positions for candidates with doctorate degrees. Other positions with non-profit organizations also include communications and public outreach where you can engage with, and educate, the public about agricultural topics.

Consulting

This can be a great option if you like working one on one with stakeholders. Consulting can take on many forms—you can be a Certified Crop Adviser, work in science communication, or work as a research consultant. A growing field in consulting is precision agriculture, working directly with farmers to make recommendations that maximize their crop yields (and profits!). This path can allow for some flexibility and can take up as much or as little time as you have available. Plus, you have the option to work as an independent consultant (see below) or for an established consulting company.

Start Your Own Company

If you have an entrepreneurial spirit, this path could be the best option for you. Here, the sky's the limit if you have an idea of what you want to do! Some examples include starting a business that designs septic systems, or composts local residential food waste, or consults with farmers on soil health or crop rotations. Or perhaps you want to become a seed or farm equipment distributor. Maybe working in a laboratory is more your speed, and you open a lab that performs water and soil quality tests. Whatever your passion may be, you can certainly find a way to start your own business within the agricultural sector.

We hope this broad overview has demonstrated the wide breadth of options available upon completion of a degree in agronomy, crop science, or soil science. To keep up to date on open positions in any one of the above-mentioned career areas, check out the jobs board Societies' Career Center site: <https://careers.careerplacement.org/jobs>.

Career Opportunities Webinar!

After your graduate degree is complete, there are many different avenues to explore as you start your career. It may be difficult to narrow down or project where you want your career to be as you look 10 years down the road.

As there are advantages and disadvantages to every option, the Graduate Student Committee's Webinar Subcommittee (Taylor Berkshire, Fernanda Souza Krupek, Carlos Bonini Pires, and Lauren Schwarck) brought together a group of panelists (Dr. Jerry Hatfield, Dr. Rachel Owen, and Dr. Emilio Oyarzabal) to represent industry, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), government, and academia to discuss their career paths and advice for navigating the options.

This was part of the "Level Up Your Career" webinar series. Recordings can be accessed at www.agronomy.org/gradstudents/webinars, www.crops.org/gradstudents/webinars, and www.soils.org/gradstudents/webinars.

[More careers & education](#)

[Back to issue](#)

[Back to home](#)

Text © . The authors. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Except where otherwise noted, images are subject to copyright. Any reuse without express permission from the copyright owner is prohibited.