

# As the World's Farmers Age New Blood is Needed

By Danielle Nierenberg

**A**griculture has an image problem. For the majority of the world's youth, agriculture isn't an attractive avenue of employment. Most youth think of it as back-breaking labor without an economic pay-off and little room for career advancement. This week in Des Moines, the World Food Prize has honored and highlighted youth in agriculture education programs.

With an aging population of farmers, it's clear that agriculture needs to attract more young people. This is a global challenge: half of the farmers in the United States are 55 years or older and the average age of farmers in sub-Saharan Africa is around 60 years old.

The United Nations' International Labour Organization predicts that, globally, there will be 74.2 million unemployed young people this year, an increase of 3.8 million since 2007. The agricultural sector offers huge potential for job creation and communicating this to youth can radically change their image of agriculture.

Youth across the world are already turning to farming and the food system for careers. Agriculture in the 21st century means more than subsistence farming. Today, young people can explore career options in permaculture design, biodynamic farming, communication technologies, forecasting, marketing, logistics, quality assurance, urban agriculture projects, food preparation,

environmental sciences, and much more.

"Increased access to education and new forms of agriculture-based enterprise mean that young people can be a vital force for innovation in family farming, increasing incomes and well-being for both farmers and local communities. Young people can transform the agricultural sector by applying new technologies and new thinking," explains Mark Holderness, executive secretary of the Global Forum for Agricultural Research. Farmers, businesses, policymakers, and educators need to promote agriculture as an intellectually stimulating and economically sustainable career while making jobs in the agriculture and food system attractive to youth.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden recently announced resources and policy changes designed to improve the financial security of new and beginning farmers and ranchers, including a new online portal that will be a one-stop resource where farmers can explore the variety of USDA initiatives designed to help them succeed.

In Iowa, the Practical Farmers of Iowa's beginning farmers' program is growing more than just crops; it is cultivating the next generation of farmers. The program helps families transition their farm to beginning farmers by writing business plans, facilitating access to capital, providing marketing education, offering online seminars, on-farm

field days, and more.

In Africa, One Acre Fund provides a holistic set of services to help small-scale farmers and new agriculturalists succeed by distributing feed and fertilizer on credit, offering training, and facilitating market access. By 2020, they hope to not only represent Africa's largest network of smallholder farmers but to also provide services to at least 1 million farming families.

The Young Professionals for Agricultural Development is an international network of young farmers contributing to innovative agricultural development. The network is shaping the future of agriculture by providing resources and tools for the next generation of farmers to be successful. Members can attend events, discussions, workshops, and contests; find a mentor; and raise awareness of agricultural careers.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development Rural Youth Talents Program in South America is publicizing and sharing knowledge learned from rural youth agriculture programs. Their goal is to establish and strengthen networks of youth involved in food and agriculture.

With the growth of these and several other projects and resources, we can make agriculture not only "cool" but also economically and environmentally sustainable for the world's youth.



