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2014

Advice to Students from Our Alumni—Part II

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Van Tassell, Larry W., "Advice to Students from Our Alumni—Part II" (2014). *Cornhusker Economics*. 675.
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Cornhusker Economics

Advice to Students from Our Alumni—Part II

Market Report	Year Ago	4 Wks Ago	6/20/14
Livestock and Products.			
Weekly Average			
Nebraska Slaughter Steers, 35-65% Choice, Live Weight.	121.50	144.53	149.15
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb.	168.90	254.33	254.00
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb.	140.35	191.47	207.17
Choice Boxed Beef, 600-750 lb. Carcass.	199.83	230.48	238.39
Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price Carcass, Negotiated.	100.40	107.90	120.03
Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass 51-52% Lean.	105.85	113.89	124.66
Slaughter Lambs, Ch. & Pr., Heavy, Woolled, South Dakota, Direct.	118.00	147.50	154.75
National Carcass Lamb Cutout FOB.	285.17	364.24	359.20
Crops.			
Daily Spot Prices			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Imperial, bu.	7.12	6.75	6.56
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Nebraska City, bu.	7.12	4.60	4.43
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Nebraska City, bu.	15.39	15.21	14.05
Grain Sorghum, No.2, Yellow Dorchester, cwt.	12.09	7.91	7.73
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Minneapolis, Mn, bu.	4.20	3.95	3.80
Feed			
Alfalfa, Large Square Bales, Good to Premium, RFV 160-185 Northeast Nebraska, ton.	*	160.00	193.75
Alfalfa, Large Rounds, Good Platte Valley, ton.	210.00	120.00	*
Grass Hay, Large Rounds, Good Nebraska, ton.	85.00	105.00	100.00
Dried Distillers Grains, 10% Moisture Nebraska Average.	225.00	204.50	145.00
Wet Distillers Grains, 65-70% Moisture Nebraska Average.	85.00	62.50	52.00
*No Market			

During the Spring of 2012, we sent a survey to the alumni of our department for the purpose of collecting information to assist students and aid in student recruitment. We surveyed 2,899 alumni and had 789 responses.

At the end of the survey we asked, “What advice would you give our students who wanted to follow your career choice?” Responses were varied but centered on the following six themes:

- Work Internships
- Develop Leadership Skills by Engaging in Extracurricular Activities
- Improve Communication Skills
- Challenge Yourself in Your Schooling
- Employment Advice

A previous Cornhusker Economics article focused on the first two themes. This article will focus on the remaining three.

Improve Communication Skills

Every study I have seen that has asked the agribusiness industry what qualities they look for in potential employees has ranked communication skills at the top. Advice from UNL Agricultural Economics alumni was no different. Several respondents’ “#1 tip” was to develop communication skills. This included written, oral, and digital communication. They stated that communication skills trump technical expertise. Along with coursework in writing and public speaking, our alumni suggest students



refine their communication skills by practicing communicating through their social networks and by taking time to edit all written communication.

Challenge Yourself in Your Schooling

In essence, our alumni feel students will get out of schooling what they put into it, and their effort will pay future dividends. They suggest students go beyond the minimum degree requirements and take a variety of courses to see the “BIG picture” of how the world is connected. Students should take as many “hard” classes as they can; that the “easy ones don’t do anything for you.” The hard classes include those that help students learn critical thinking skills; classes that “make them think and reason for themselves.” Alumni suggest students learn to discipline themselves in college by making studying a priority. This character trait will translate into success in the workplace. A number of respondents advised students to keep their GPA high enough to distinguish themselves from other students.

Employment Advice

Finding the first job out of college can often be a stressful undertaking and many alumni advised against rushing into this decision. They suggest making sure students interview with several companies to get an idea of potential opportunities. They reminded students that the likelihood of spending your entire career in your first job is minimal. Students should remain open-minded and not be afraid to be a bit adventurous at the beginning of their career. They should remember that their first job out of school will continue to be an extension of their education. Some alumni suggest that if students cannot find exactly what they want right away, they look for a job that provides them an opportunity to develop general business skills that will be of value later in their career. Students should remember that every job, whether perfect or not, is an opportunity to learn and prepare for the next opportunity. Many alumni stated that finding a good mentor early in their career was an important key in their success.

Many alumni expressed the importance of looking beyond salary when students choose their first job. They suggest students consider job training and advancement as important concerns, emphasizing that learning does not stop with obtaining the degree, but should be a life-long pursuit. Employer-provided benefits, such as medical and retirement programs, were another item that ranked high as an important consideration.

Students should be reminded that there are many great jobs beyond the state border and to be receptive to the opportunity for relocation. Many noted that those willing to relocate during their careers had greater upward mobility. A willingness to transfer overseas was especially associated with upward mobility as a global perspective was deemed as being critically important in many companies

Alumni felt it was important for students to keep in mind that while their degree is necessary to open employment doors, it does not entitle them to start in mid-to upper-level management positions. Students should not get discouraged if their first experience on the job is very basic; which is typically for a good reason. Students were advised to be patient in their first job and promotions will be forthcoming.

Most companies are looking for an employee who can learn quickly, is a self-starter, is not afraid to fail, can learn from mistakes, has high ethical standards, has good interpersonal skills, and is willing to “roll up his/her sleeves” and do what it takes to get the job done. Many alumni remind students that success is not an entitlement but comes to those who sacrifice and work hard. Students should not expect instant gratification.

Alumni were quick to suggest, though, that if you aren’t having fun, you are in the wrong career. It should be fun to go to work each morning. One alumnus shared the old cliché, “if you love what you do for a living, you’ll never work a day in your life.” You must have a passion for working in your area, if not, forget it and find what you have a passion for. They were also quick to remind students that all jobs will have their downside and that it is important to emphasize the positive aspects of your job and employer. In many regards, happiness is earned and nobody is going to give it to you on a silver platter.

A handful of alumni engaged in farming suggested that students should obtain experience in agribusiness before going back to the farm. Some stated it allowed them to learn what life is like on the other side of the fence so they did not have later doubts about returning to the farm. Students also need to recognize that equity must be built before success can be reached in production agricultural, and building that equity typically necessitates living very modestly during the process.

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