

Agriculture has Many Fields

Many people think of farmers when the term the “agriculture industry” is mentioned. Brett Sattazahn, Jenna Noble and Ashley Mohn are examples of the approximately 20 percent of our labor force that have critical careers in our food system but are not farmers. This story follows three Sattazahn grandchildren that used their farm experiences to develop their future. This article is the last that follows the Sattazahn families of western Berks County. The other three can be found in the last three months of the Country Living.

Brett is a Soil Conservationist for the Natural Resource Conservation Service and helps farmers and landowners improve the natural resources on their property. Jenna is a Senior Accountant on the Ag and Agri-Business Team at Acuity Advisors and CPAs, LLP., where she prepares financial statements, tax returns, and provides bookkeeping and consulting services, primarily for large dairies. Ashley is an Administration Services Coordinator for Horizon Farm Credit, which covers over 100 counties across PA, MD, DE, WV and VA. She provides meeting and event management support and execution on special projects. Ashley also assists executes various strategic, collaborative support functions and administrative tasks that impact various groups within the organization.

You may wonder how growing up around an extended family involved with all areas of agriculture guided their future. Ashley mentions that, “Spending time on my grandparent’s farm and being involved with 4-H and FFA have taught me many valuable life lessons. I learned discipline at an early age. Some of the characteristics I took from the farm are being a hard worker, the ability to find a solution even if it takes longer than expected and having drive, patience, and passion.” Jenna states, “Having an understanding of what happens on a dairy farm and the terminology dairy farmers use makes it a lot easier to tell if transactions are recorded correctly and that we are accurately portraying what is happening on the farming operation.” Brett talks about, “Being raised on a farm helps me relate to and understand farmers. I am able to better understand their goals and daily chores. It helps me to picture and explain to farmers what the new system we are trying to develop will actually look like. It also aids in thinking of ways we may be able to help them improve their operation.”

When asked what advice they would give to young people interested in careers in the food industry their answers included: Jenna mentioned, “I would tell people interested in a career in the agricultural industry that they don't necessarily need to major in something ag related to play a meaningful role in the agricultural industry.” Ashley mentioned, “DO IT! The agriculture industry sector is full of possibilities. Don’t be afraid to try new things, get your hands dirty and step outside of your comfort zone. There are many people already involved in the ag industry willing to mentor you and provide experiences for you. I’m always willing to share my experiences with others.” Brett said, “There are lots of opportunities to work in the agricultural sector, I recommend internships or job shadowing so you can experience what the job would actually be like. If you're interested in working for the federal government, I suggest looking at USAJOBS.com to see what is required for specific jobs.”

In asking their thoughts as to what is needed for the future of the agriculture industry in Berks, this is what they said, Brett mentioned, “To sustain the agricultural and food industry in

Berks and surrounding counties we need to make sure that blocks of agricultural land are protected. As developments/warehouses pop up, agriculture land can become fragmented and that can make it dangerous and difficult for farmers and townspeople. It is hard to farm on an island and it takes longer to get from field to field when you have to travel further up the road to get to your next 30 acres.” Jenna said, “I think increased awareness of the quality of agricultural products that are produced locally and increased accessibility to truly local agricultural products at the bigger grocery stores would be great to see in Berks and the surrounding areas.” Ashley stated, “Social media’s effect on the agricultural industry can pivot on a dime’s notice. We need it to play a valuable tool in promoting the agricultural industry. We need to share our story firsthand. Many people turn to Google for their expertise. I’m not saying Google does not play a vital role, but for accurate and reliable agricultural information, people involved in the day-to-day operations of agriculture need to be the ones sharing on social media platforms. Berks County plays a vital role in producing crops, fruits, vegetables and dairy products. We need to share this proudly.”