



# A Profile of Southern Agricultural Students

John E. Dunkelberger, Joseph J. Molnar and John L. Adrian

Land-grant universities were created by the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 to emphasize the practical aspects of education. To meet this public charge schools of agriculture have been providing this type of learning experience with their wide variety of basic and applied curricula. In the 1970's there occurred an increased demand for useful and vocationally relevant college programs as undergraduate students placed renewed emphasis on education for occupations. The result was a period marked by sharp increases in agriculture enrollments.<sup>2</sup>

Increased student interest in curricula offered in schools of agriculture is a nationwide phenomenon. From 1961 to 1976 undergraduate enrollments increased 199 percent. However, this rate of increase had slowed by the end of the decade as the pool of college age youth leveled off.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, changes in the student body that spurred this growth of enrollments have not disappeared, but remain as a continuing challenge to agricultural educators. Today's agriculture students are more likely to be urban residents and women.<sup>4</sup> Fewer students have been reared on a farm. These rather obvious changes portend still other changes that agricultural teachers, administrators, and industry representatives need to consider as these students matriculate and assume their places in agricultural occupations.

The purpose of this report is to provide a profile of students enrolled in the varied curricula offered by those schools or colleges of agriculture in the South responsible for educating the majority of students studying agriculture. The intention is to offer a detailed profile of the "new generation" of agriculture students reflecting the characteristics of the expanded agricultural enrollment that occurred in the 1970's. Designers of agricultural curricula, advisors of youth making educational and occupational plans, and employers of agriculture graduates should find this broad-ranging and systematic profile useful. Certainly the insights gained into the aspirations and expectations of agriculture students should reveal emerging themes and trends pertinent to agricultural education.

Dunkelberger is associate professor, Joseph J. Molnar is assistant professor, both in Rural Sociology; while Adrian is associate professor of Agricultural Economics. All three are members of the School of Agriculture at Auburn University, AL 36849. This research was conducted as Hatch 440 Project in conjunction with the Southern Regional Project S-114.

## Procedure

The scope of this research report is limited to a focus on students attending land-grant universities in the South. The U.S. Census definition of the South used here consists of 13 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Within these states a dual system of agricultural education reflects the unique cultural and historical circumstances leading to passage of the two Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890. Because of the fundamental nature of differences between these two types of universities, particularly regarding the nature and size of their student bodies, each type of institution, (1862 and 1890) was considered an independent population in the design of the study.<sup>b</sup>

Undergraduate enrollment lists for the 1976-77 academic year were obtained for the school of agriculture at each land-grant university in the region.<sup>a</sup> Enrollments at the 1862, predominantly white institutions ranged from 601 students at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville to 4,151 students at Texas A&M University. Median enrollment was 1,500 students. Because of the large enrollments involved, a 15 percent random sample was selected. A return rate of 74 percent was achieved for the mailed survey consisting of 2,381 questionnaires.

The predominantly black 1890 institutions were much smaller. The median size was 110 agriculture students, with Langston University in Oklahoma having the fewest agriculture students and Alcorn State in Mississippi having the most. Questionnaires were returned by 703 students for a rate of 60 percent. There was considerable variation in return rates among these schools.

<sup>a</sup> The land-grant system was created following passage of the Morrill Act of 1862, which authorized establishment of a state land-grant college in each state. Instruction was to emphasize agriculture and the mechanical arts as the foundation undergirding a strong agricultural production and marketing system. The second Morrill act, passed by the U.S. Congress in 1890, expanded the land-grant philosophy to include opportunities for black youth to train for agricultural occupations.<sup>1</sup> Seventeen southern and border states designated a second state land-grant college.

<sup>b</sup> For a discussion of the separate student profiles for 1862 and 1890 institutions see Joseph J. Molnar, John E. Dunkelberger and Dennis A. Salter, "Agricultural Education in the South: A Comparison of Student Characteristics at Land Grant Institutions."<sup>2</sup>

The questionnaire focused on a number of different attributes of agriculture students with particular attention given to the subjective aspects of why they enrolled in a major administered by a school of agriculture. Because of space limitations these data will be presented in abbreviated form in an effort to profile the characteristics of all agriculture students, adjusted for variable sampling and return rates. The resulting weighted sample is 3,182 agriculture students comprised proportionately of 179 students representing 1890 universities. The slight expansion of the weighted sample size is an artifact of the weighting procedure used.

## Results

The profile presented here considers such student characteristics as family background, personal attributes, school accomplishments, work experiences, college characteristics, and subjective dimensions of curriculum choice and goal aspiration.

### Personal Characteristics

The decade of the 1970's has been marked by an increased enrollment of women students in agricultural curricula at land-grant universities.<sup>4</sup> Slightly more than one-fourth of the students in this study were women. A second trend has involved the declining presence of black Americans in U.S. agriculture.<sup>7</sup> The minimal presence of black students training for agricultural occupations at land-grant universities is indicative of this societal condition. Only about five percent of all agriculture students in the South are black, and some of these are foreign nationals studying in the U.S. In general, however, Southern land-grant universities have not attracted large numbers of foreign students to their undergraduate agriculture programs.

Table 1. Selected Personal Characteristics of Agriculture Students Attending Southern Land-Grant Universities

Weighted sample size	3,182
Personal characteristics	Agriculture students —percent—
Females	27.2
Blacks	5.3
Other nonwhites	4.8
Foreign citizens	2.9
Juniors & seniors	58.0
Married	13.7
Oldest, youngest or only child	44.1
Rural and town resident (place smaller than 10,000)	42.7
Farm resident	20.1
Large metro resident (500,000 or larger)	14.1

Across the South the majority of agriculture students are in the junior and senior classes. This is partially a result of the broadly available system of 2-year junior and community colleges. Because of their upperclass status, the median age was older and more were married; however, the proportion of married students was only 14 percent.

Birth order within the family is at times a determinant of occupational choice because of the intergenerational need to transfer land and capital investment. Our attention here focuses on the extent to which agriculture students tend to be either the oldest, youngest, or only child in their families. Nearly one-half (44 percent) were in one of these birth order positions. However, when expectation to inherit a farm someday was considered, middle children expected to obtain a farm with the same frequency as did oldest, youngest, and only children.

Agriculture students are a very diverse grouping in terms of their childhood residence. Less than half (only 43 percent) grew up in rural places of fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. Those raised on farms accounted for about half of these students. On the other hand, about 14 percent were raised in large cities of 500,000 or more people. When considered against the fact that there are few large metropolitan places of 500,000 or more people in the South, this number has added significance.

### Family Characteristics

Parents of almost two-thirds of these agriculture students had grown up in rural areas including towns totaling as many as 10,000 inhabitants. About 60 percent of both fathers and mothers were from rural backgrounds. Being reared on a farm accounted for about half of the rural-reared parents, with fathers somewhat more likely to be farm reared than mothers.

Table 2. Selected Family Characteristics of Southern Agricultural Students

Weighted sample size	3,182
Personal characteristics	Agriculture students —percent—
Fathers:	
Raised rural or town	63.3
Raised on farm	33.2
Completed college	42.5
Farm occupation	14.9
Professional occupation	25.5
Mothers:	
Raised rural or town	60.8
Raised on farm	26.7
Completed college	28.0
Parents:	
Living on farm (present)	25.3
Own, lease or rent farm	38.6
Primary income from farm	31.4
Annual income below \$15,000	29.8

Educational levels attained by the parents differed considerably between fathers and mothers. Fathers were much more likely to be college graduates (42 percent compared to 28 percent), although only similarly small proportions (14 percent and 10 percent) had not completed high school. The wide educational gap of a generation ago between parents and their college oriented children has narrowed considerably, particularly for white students.<sup>8</sup>

Only one-fourth of the parents currently lived on a farm, with parents of 1890 students most likely to do so. Other families also have some tie to farming. About 39 percent of the parents either owned, leased, or rented a farm, although fewer families (31 percent) received their income primarily from the farm. At the same time, the proportion of fathers for whom farming was reported as their principal occupation was small (15 percent). This profile definitely does not suggest a strong farming tradition among contemporary agriculture students.

The largest single occupational category for the fathers of agriculture students was that of professional. One-fourth were in this category with another quarter in managerial and administrative occupations. Annual incomes below \$15,000 in 1977 were reported for 30 percent of the families, while 35 percent had incomes above \$25,000.

### School Accomplishments

The high schools attended by agriculture students varied widely in size. More than one-third of the students had attended schools with fewer than 150 students per class. At the same time, only a few students (13 percent) were products of schools with classes of fewer than 50 students.

Table 3. Selected High School Experiences of Southern Agriculture Students

Weighted sample size	3,182
School accomplishments	Agriculture students —percent—
High school attended:	
Small (fewer than 150 in graduating class)	37.3
Large (400 or more in graduating class)	29.6
Offered agriculture courses	46.7
High school grade point of A	26.5
Completed agriculture course(s)	23.8
Agriculture clubs:	30.3
Participated in 4-H	24.5
Participated in FFA	24.1

High school academic achievements of agriculture students were high. Most (82 percent) reported above average grades (B or A) in high school. One-fourth described themselves as A students.

Almost half of the students attended schools offering courses in agriculture. Nevertheless, fewer than one-fourth had taken at least one agriculture course in high school; and only one quarter had participated in Future Farmers of America (FFA) or 4-H Clubs, both of which are generally associated in part, at least, with school extracurricular activities. The portion of students involved in either 4-H or FFA revealed the overlapping membership in these groups, as only a six percent increase (24 percent to 30 percent) was noted when the two activities were combined.

### College Characteristics

A striking dimension of these agriculture students is the extent to which they had begun their post high school education at a college or university different from the one in which they were currently enrolled. Almost 40 percent had transferred to their current land-grant university. Transfer students were equally drawn from both 2- and 4-year schools. Quite clearly, there is a sizeable number of agriculture students who opt to complete their basic nonagriculture courses at an educational institution close to home or at another university before initiating their more specialized agricultural studies.

Table 4. Selected College Related Experiences of Southern Agriculture Students

Weighted sample size	3,182
College characteristics	Agriculture students —percent—
Transferred from another school:	
2-year junior or community college	18.1
4-year college	17.1
Changed college major since enrolling	51.5
College GPA 3.0 and above	36.6
College activities:	
Curriculum club	48.9
Member of college judging team	12.9
Member of college 4-H or FFA groups	10.1
Member of agriculture council	5.9

Slightly more than half of all agriculture students reported having changed majors at least one time. Since these students include both underclass and upper class students, it is very likely that an even higher percentage of any particular college class would change majors before they graduate. While some curriculum changes involved shifts from one area of agriculture to another, especially to more specialized areas from a general curriculum, others involved shifts into agriculture majors from nonagriculture curricula. Many of these latter changes represented drastic redirections in educational and occupational goals.

Grade attainment, as indicated by student grade point average (GPA), revealed a slightly skewed distribution toward high grades. More than one-third indicated their GPA was a B (3.0) or better, while only 8 percent reported GPA's below a C (2.0). Because the university system is designed to discourage marginal students from continuing their educational pursuits, this grade distribution for agriculture students is typical of that characterizing students in all areas of the university.

Relatively few agriculture students were actively involved in the voluntary organizations available on campus that related to their agricultural goals. The college activity most often participated in was the department or curriculum club. Almost half indicated participation in this type of activity. No other agriculture related organization involved more than 13 percent of the students. The most often mentioned was a judging team which may include a number of curriculum-related interests such as livestock, soils, and weeds. Another set of

activities involving about 10 percent of the students included the college level adjuncts of the 4-H and FFA programs associated with the high school years.

### Work Experiences

How much direct contact with farming do agriculture students have today? Already this profile has documented the fact that the majority of students are not farm reared. For this reason less than half reported ever working on the family farm, although a similar proportion (47 percent) reported having done hired farm work. Combining these two types of farm work experiences revealed that a majority (59 percent) have been exposed to work on a farm. It also showed that many students have worked both on the family farm and as a hired farm worker on other farms. Almost all agriculture students (88 percent) reported that they had been employed at some part-time or full-time nonfarm job which was agricultural in nature. The majority of agricultural work experiences involved both farm and nonfarm agricultural employment.

Table 5. Selected Work Experiences of Southern Agriculture Students

Weighted	sample	size	3,182
Work experiences			Agriculture students
			—percent—
Either home farm or hired farm work			58.8
Worked on home farm			47.7
Hired farm worker			46.6
Nonfarm agricultural worker			88.1

### Choosing an Agriculture Major

Two types of concerns were addressed with regard to how a student comes to choose a college major, and particularly, a major in agriculture. The first involved the human dimension associated with interpersonal contacts that people experience which mold and guide their choice of goals and means of attainment. The second focused on the kinds of things perceived as important factors in the ultimate choices made.

**Influential Significant Others.** "Significant other" is a term used to indicate persons holding status positions in a group and serving as points of identification to others. Because of the visibility of the position and its accompanying prestige, the holders often serve as role models or sources of information and encouragement. In this study each agriculture student was presented a list of 16 significant other statuses and asked to indicate whether persons in such positions had been very influential, of some influence, or of no influence in the choice of their present college major. Ratings of very influential and of some influence are combined.

Several clusters of significant other statuses are considered. First are family members who generally manifest the greatest influence. Parents are the key figures here with the influence of the father (65 percent) indicated slightly more often than that of the mother (61 percent).

Table 6. Significant Others Influence on Choosing a College Major by Southern Agriculture Students

Weighted sample size	3,182
Significant other statuses	Agriculture students —percent—
Family:	
Father	65.1
Mother	60.8
Brother	23.2
Sister	17.9
Other relatives	29.7
High school contacts:	
Friend	26.2
Teacher or principal	23.2
Counselor	17.9
Agriculture teacher	16.1
Occupational contacts:	
Veterinarian	22.3
County extension agent	10.9
Clergyman	6.0
College contacts:	
College teacher or advisor	37.3
College friend	35.6
College dean of agriculture	12.5

Other family members such as brother, sister, or other relatives were perceived as influencing this choice less than half as often as the parents.

Significant others associated with the high school years represent a second cluster of contacts. Each significant other status identified persons within the high school context who might be viewed by a student as having influenced his or her choice of an agriculture major. High school friends were mentioned most frequently (26 percent) followed by high school teachers or principals. Least often mentioned (only 16 percent and 18 percent respectively) were the agriculture teacher and school counselor.

Another cluster of potential significant others is represented by occupational role models that have traditionally provided professional linkage between the rural community and the larger society. The county extension agent, veterinarian, and clergyman have served this function. These data indicated that of the three statuses, the veterinarian played the most prominent role (22 percent). The county extension agent was considered influential only half as often and members of the clergy even less often.

The final cluster of significant others is identified with the college environment and is particularly important because of the common practice of curriculum shifting that the majority of college students experience. More than one-third of the students indicated that college friends and college teachers or advisors had influenced them in the choice of their current major. Mentioned much less (only 13 percent) was the dean of agriculture, but this is understandable because this person rarely has direct and frequent contact with students until after the curriculum decision is made.

**Reasons for Choosing Agriculture Major.** Many events and experiences can enter into a person's decision to choose certain goals and means to these goals. Attention is directed to the kinds of reasons students perceive as having entered into the decision to choose the current college agricultural major. Each student was asked to indicate the extent to which 13 potential reasons were either very important, of some importance, or of no importance in their choice. Ratings of very important or of some importance were combined as both indicate motivational forces.

Table 7. Reasons Important in Choice of an Agriculture Major by Southern Agriculture Students

Reasons for choosing	Agriculture students —percent—
Weighted sample size	3,182
Career preparation	96.7
Prefer country life	76.6
Able to help others	74.4
Field insures a good income	57.5
Prior successful agriculture experience	48.5
Completed related college course	31.5
Suggested by college teacher or advisor	21.1
Family encouragement	20.4
Completed related high school course	20.0
Available financial assistance	19.4
Friends in agriculture majors	17.1
Offered chance for better grades	16.9
Suggested by school teacher or advisor	12.9

The virtually universal reason given for choosing an agriculture major was to prepare for a career. Two other reasons mentioned by a large proportion of students (three-fourths) were the preference of country life associated with many agricultural occupations and the humanitarian value for helping others. Only two other reasons were mentioned by as many as half or more of the students. A majority perceived the income prospects for jobs related to their agriculture major to be attractive and about half had been exposed to agriculture and encouraged by successful agricultural experiences.

It should be noted that none of the most common reasons for choosing an agriculture major was people or school related. Only a related college course was viewed as important by as many as 30 percent of the students. Other reasons of this type were mentioned by fewer than 20 percent. The important motivators tended to stem from a positive perception of agriculture as an occupational field offering opportunities for a satisfying and prosperous life style.

#### Desired and Expected Goals

Clearly observable is a strong career orientation among Southern agriculture students. But what is the nature of this futuristic goal orientation? To shed additional light on this question, information was obtained from each student about his or her desires and expectations in a number of adult goal areas. Major areas considered were education, occupation, and residence.

Table 8. Frequency with which Selected Adult Goals are Desired and Expected by Southern Agriculture Students.

Adult goals	Agriculture students —percent—
Weighted sample size	3,182
* Percentage applies only to students expecting to own a farm someday.	
Education (professional or doctoral degree)	
Desired	39.6
Expected	19.0
Desired residence:	
Rural nonfarm	29.6
Farm	37.7
Expectation to farm:	
Ownership	26.7
Inherit farm *	47.5
Desired occupation:	
Profession	52.5
Farmer or manager	17.4
Agriculture related	66.6
Expected occupation:	
Profession	40.0
Farmer or manager	13.1
Agriculture related	56.0
Expected first job income \$12,500 or more	27.7

A large proportion of these agriculture students (40 percent) wanted to continue their formal education in pursuit of a professional or doctoral degree. This proportion does not include the additional 27 percent who desired to complete a master's degree. There was a widely held view among agriculture students that advanced academic training is a desirable goal.

Many students also recognized that circumstances might intervene which would limit their opportunity for achieving their desired education. When asked what they thought they would really do about their formal education, a large number indicated that they expected less education than they would like. For example, only half of those desiring a professional or doctoral degree actually expected to attain this goal. Almost three-fifths of all students anticipated that their formal education would end with college graduation. Of those who expected to continue their education, the most (84 percent) indicated they planned to remain in an agriculture related area for any further degrees.

Residence goals were considered from the perspective of the size community in which one would like to live. Among six size alternatives, 67 percent desired living in a rural area or town with fewer than 10,000 people. The residence category most often desired was to live on a farm (38 percent). Few agriculture students wanted to live in a large metropolitan city of more than 500,000 population.

Another area of goal expectation is that related to perceived prospects for obtaining a farm. When asked whether they might eventually own a farm or ranch, almost half held such an expectation.<sup>9</sup> A follow-up question tabulated only for those expecting to own a farm inquired whether they expected to inherit a farm or

ranch. Almost half of the expectant farm owners indicated this was a possibility. However, only 16 percent believed they would definitely obtain a farm through inheritance.

Occupational goals are of extreme importance to all young people. To profile the occupational goals of agriculture students, both the general type of occupation and its agricultural relevance were considered. A majority of students desired professional occupations. Most important, however, was the fact that many of these professions were in agricultural service areas such as veterinary medicine or in the sale of agricultural products. Two-thirds of all agriculture students associated their occupational goals with agriculture. Yet only a small proportion actually wanted to farm (17 percent). Clearly, students enrolled in agriculture at land-grant universities are not oriented toward the traditional occupational role of farmer. Even when given the opportunity, free from any restraints which in actuality might hinder their becoming a farmer, few expressed a desire for this occupation.

The more realistic assessment of occupational goals in terms of expectations revealed a consistent pattern of deflection to less prestigious and nonagricultural occupations. The rate of deflection was not large and suggests a considerable stability among desired and expected occupational goals for many agriculture students. Those who desired to enter a profession were most likely to deflect to other occupational goals as signaled by a 13.5 percent decrease between aspiration and expectation. A majority of agriculture students (56 percent) expected to enter agriculture related occupations, even though this percentage is down 10 percent from the proportion desiring such occupations. The already small proportion of students desiring to farm declined by 4 percent to 13 percent, documenting the fact that relatively few agriculture students today are interested in receiving training for occupations in production agriculture.

Income expectations were not excessively high for the first job after college. Using \$12,500 to indicate a good starting income for 1977, only about one-quarter had expectations for salaries or incomes this high.

**Table 9. Frequency with which Selected Sources of Funds are Used to Cover Costs of Attending College by Southern Agriculture Students**

Weighted sample size		3,182
Sources of college funds	Agriculture students	—percent—
Parents	83.9	
Summer jobs	77.5	
Personal savings	74.7	
Part-time job while attending college	53.8	
Scholarships	27.5	
Students loans or grants	27.5	
Employed spouse	10.4	
Other relatives or friends	10.3	
Veteran's benefits	8.0	

### Sources of College Funds

Going to college is expensive for most students and their families. Where a local college is available and daily commuting possible, costs can be greatly reduced or at least spread more evenly over the year. Students interested in agriculture often find that only one or two schools in their state provide this type of education. Thus, education in agriculture usually means going off to college and encountering higher costs. For this reason, one dimension of this student profile focuses on the various sources of funds used to support college attendance.

A listing of nine possible sources of funds was presented each student along with the instruction to indicate the source he or she uses to cover college costs, including living expenses. No attempt was made to determine the proportion of the costs met through each source. The most widely used source (84 percent) was the most traditional — parents. Two additional sources relied upon by three-fourths of the students were summer jobs and personal savings. One-half the students covered at least some of their college costs through part-time jobs both on and off campus during the academic year. Scholarships and student loans or grants represented two additional forms of support available to help defray college costs. More than one-fourth of the students utilized these sources. The data clearly show that while parents were the most consistently used source of college funds, the majority of agriculture students contributed to their own education through different kinds of employment.

### Student Self-Perceptions

How do agriculture students perceive themselves relative to other students on their campus? A series of nine descriptive phrases were presented as endings for the lead phrase "agriculture students are." Responses offered were: more, the same, or less than nonagriculture students.

**Table 10. Southern Agriculture Students' Ratings of Themselves Compared to Nonagriculture Students**

Weighted sample size		3,182
Comparative characteristics	Agriculture Students	—percent—
Agriculture students are more:		
friendly and helpful to other people	54.9	
sure of what they want to do in life	42.2	
seriously concerned about the state of the nation and of the world	30.4	
tolerant of people who come from a different background	21.8	
willing to accept new and unusual ideas	17.6	
interested in having a good time at college	10.3	
interested in competing for high grades	8.2	
interested in making a lot of money	6.6	
interested in classical music and good literature	3.3	

In all but one instance half or more of the students perceived agriculture students as the same as nonagriculture students. The single exception involved the image characteristic that agriculture students were more friendly and helpful. The majority (55 percent) viewed agriculture students in this positive fashion. Another generally positive characteristic (42 percent) was related to their perception of agriculture students as being sure of what they want to do in life. Because of the technical and applied nature of many agriculture curricula, it is understandable that such an image might prevail. On the other hand, one quarter of these students perceived their peers to be less interested in making a lot of money and almost 20 percent as less tolerant of people who are from different backgrounds and less interested in competing for good grades. These perceptions are consistent with the traditional image of the slower pace of the countryside and the realities of economic conditions confronted by many rural families.

#### Attitudes

Agriculture in the United States is confronted by a number of special issues upon which citizens hold a variety of opinions. Six statements pertaining to selected issues were used to assess the attitudes held by agriculture students. The five alternative responses for each statement ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree with a neutral mid-point. Since both favorably and unfavorably worded statements relative to agriculture were used, the positive response is presented.

**Table 11. Selected Attitudes Toward Agriculture Among Southern Agriculture Students**

Attitude statements	Weighted sample size	Agriculture Students
	3,182	—percent—
There are good career opportunities in agriculture. (percent agree)		87.2
Agriculture is a declining industry. (percent disagree)		85.0
Most work in agriculture can be done by people with little education. (percent disagree)		73.5
Greater regulation is needed on the use of chemicals in agriculture. (percent agree)		59.4
Most agricultural occupations are unsuited for women (percent disagree)		57.5
The government should be able to force farmers to adopt soil conservation practices if they have erosion problems. (percent agree)		48.4

Two attitudes exhibited a high degree of consensus among agriculture students. Most students (87 percent) believed that career opportunities were good in agriculture and denied (85 percent) that agriculture was a declining industry. Also, most students (74 percent) denied a third contention that a person in agriculture doesn't need much education.

Of the remaining statements, the one concerning the suitability of agricultural occupations for women is of special relevance given the marked increase of women in agriculture education. A majority of students held a positive attitude (58 percent) on this issue. However, when the sex of the respondent was controlled, the picture was not as encouraging. Among women students 79 percent held a positive attitude with 35 percent feeling very strongly about the suitability of women for agriculture. However, only 48 percent of the men had a positive attitude, and 18 percent considered women "unsuited" for agricultural occupations.

The remaining issues both involved the need to regulate agricultural practices. In both statements the positive or favorable direction concerning agriculture is a matter of one's value premise. Nevertheless, a majority of agriculture students believed that there needed to be more regulation in the use of agricultural chemicals, and almost half believed the government should be able to force farmers to use soil conservation practices. It may come as a surprise to some people to see the extent to which students training in agriculture today accept the role of government as an enforcer of prescribed agricultural practices.

Another subjective attitude is that of political philosophy. Each student was asked to self-classify his or her political preference on a five-point scale of "very conservative" to "very liberal" with a middle position of "moderate." This rating avoids political party identifications, although these labels are associated in many instances with party images.

**Table 12. Political Philosophy of Southern Agriculture Students**

Political philosophy	Weighted sample size	Agriculture students
	3,182	—percent—
Students:		
Conservative		30.8
Moderate		34.3
Liberal		28.9
None		6.1
Student/father comparison:		
More conservative than father		13.6
Same as father		39.6
More liberal than father		46.8

Only a small proportion (6 percent) of agriculture students failed to identify with one of these political labels. More than one-third identified themselves as moderate. The liberal label attracted the smallest proportion of students (29 percent), but overall, the picture gained is one of considerable philosophic diversity.

How do students see their political philosophies compared to those they have been exposed to in their family environments? Utilizing the perception students hold of their fathers' political philosophy as a point of comparison, the labels assigned for students and fathers were cross-tabulated. Consistent with what one would expect, the largest proportion (47 percent) perceived themselves either less conservative or more liberal than their fathers. However, another large proportion (40 percent) considered themselves philosophically compatible with their fathers at whatever that philosophy happened to be.

### Discussion

The expanding enrollment trends in higher education that marked much of the past 30 years are being dashed against the hard realities of the 1980's. Key among these realities is that the pool of youth eighteen years of age in population is declining each year.<sup>3</sup> Prospects are for this decline to reach the 20 percent level during the 1980's. Obviously, such a decline portends serious ramifications for colleges of agriculture at land-grant universities. Already some institutions are seeing a slowing of enrollment increases. However, the smaller number of potential students may be somewhat offset by increased preferences for the more practical and job-oriented education characteristic of land-grant institutions.

The detailed profile of agriculture students in the South presented here is both unique and timely. It reflects agricultural enrollments as they were approaching their crest. The changed composition of this enrollment is portrayed by the sizeable proportions of women and urban students. Enrollment growth during the past decade was due largely to the expanded interests of these students in curricula offered in agriculture. Maintaining this new student clientele will require that these nonfarm college graduates are assimilated into the various agricultural industries and businesses. Certainly, these students hold positive subjective orientations to agriculture that should lead to their becoming productive workers.

Many questions about the agriculture student of today are addressed and answered here. Detailed information about agriculture students is presented describing their personal and family background, work experience, high school and college experiences, as well as their subjective perceptions, future goals, and attitudes.

When the attitudes, preferences and motives of these students are considered in conjunction with other facts such as the population turn-around (urban to rural migration), the revival of agriculturally based communes, and the reappearance of the log house, there is reason to conclude that societal values are changing. The profile presented here can be viewed as further evidence of an emerging neo-agrarianism among some American youth. Their preference for country life and their sense of altruism are important motivations behind the choice of

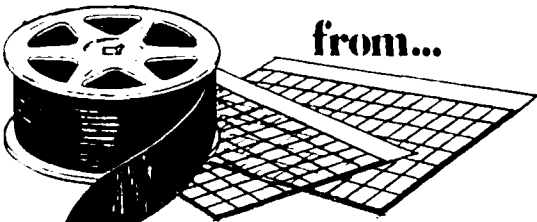
a major in agriculture. With this in mind it seems appropriate to suggest that colleges of agriculture at land-grant universities might enhance their appeal to potential students by emphasizing the "close-to-nature" aspect of many agriculturally related occupations and careers.

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