

# Career Choice Factors of Agriculture College Students

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## Introduction

The University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) is one of the seven constituent units of the University of the Philippines System. Like all other constituent universities of the UP System, it is a publicly funded academic, research and extension higher education institution. It started out as the UP College of Agriculture in 1909 and became a full-fledged, autonomous university in 1972. UPLB is mandated to train the country's needed manpower and to undertake relevant researches and extension services in agriculture, forestry, veterinary medicine, and allied sciences. To date, it has nine colleges (Agriculture, Arts and Sciences, Development Communication, Economics and Management, Engineering and Agro-industrial Technology, Forestry and Natural Resources, Human Ecology, Public Affairs and Veterinary Medicine) and two schools (School of Environmental Science and Management and the Graduate School).

UPLB's College of Agriculture (CA) is one of the first three units organized in the University of the Philippines. Its mission is to raise farming and agriculture from being a poor man's means of

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obtaining food to a thriving enterprise that meets the demands of a growing market. As a college, it aims to:

1. train and develop the manpower requirements for agriculture and rural development;
2. undertake research on immediate and long-term problems of Philippine agriculture for the advancement of agricultural science and technology; and
3. disseminate research findings and technology suitable for adoption by extension workers; provide the technical backstop to extension technicians; and conduct pilot action/research projects on agriculture and rural development.

UPLB CA offers the following major areas of discipline: Agronomy, Horticulture, Soil Science, Animal Science, Food Technology, Entomology and Plant Pathology. It also offers Agricultural Chemistry, a joint program with the College of Arts and Sciences. Its graduate degree programs are offered through the Graduate School.

However, like many other programs in the country today, enrolment for BS Agriculture at UPLB has dropped through the years. Despite the fact that up to now it is still considered the country's premier agricultural university, UPLB has experienced decreased enrolment on its BSA program from 51 percent in 1980 to 43 percent in 1995 (Mission 2008). In fact, BS Agriculture currently has the fewest number of enrollees among the academic programs offered by higher academic institutions in the country (Castañeda 2007).

But the issue is not just about declining interest in agriculture education. Another trend that has been observed recently, according to Lasco (2007), is that half of BS Agriculture graduates of UPLB for the year 2000 to 2005 are employed in non-agricultural related jobs. If this alarming trend will continue, it will undoubtedly pose a serious threat to the country's agricultural labor force.

One of the most popular theories in the economics of education is what is referred to as the Human Capital Theory. Explaining the relationship between education and economic growth, it suggests that education increases an individual's productivity and, ultimately, his earning potential. Most parents in developed countries agree with this line of thinking. Parents make tremendous sacrifices in order to provide secondary and higher education for their children, believing that education is the way out of poverty. Children in their young age are left to the care of other relatives because parents, who find their salaries inadequate, work abroad to prepare for their children's college education. Filipinos, indeed, have a deep regard for education. Despite the high rate of unemployment and

underemployment, education in the country is still believed to be the primary avenue for upward social and economic mobility.

Gary S. Becker (2002), a professor of Economics and Sociology at the University of Chicago, argues that no country can grow without a strong human capital base. Getting education however is not enough. More important than getting tertiary education is choosing the sort of education that can open to graduates the opportunity to land into jobs that fit their interests and training, and addresses the manpower needs of the country.

In other words, aside from becoming better earners—as what Human Capital Theory postulates—agriculture graduates should also be able to use their acquired knowledge to build new tools for agricultural production and ensure food security for the country.

### **Purpose of the study**

Following the Human Capital Theory, the recent issues in agricultural education indeed highlight the need to identify and understand motivational factors luring people to either agriculture-related or non-agriculture-related careers. This is particularly important because the Philippines as an agricultural economy needs a strong agricultural labor force. As Zamora (2002) puts it, “we have relied too long on relatively few breeders, few breeding strategies and on few formally trained scientists (who are not even farmers) for food security. With such a grim prognosis for the future, there is a glaring need to reorient economic policies and scientific support programs.”

Mission (2008) in an article entitled “Diploma in Agricultural Entrepreneurship: Reinventing Agricultural Education” quoted a UP Diliman Professor who commented that agriculture is a profession that has lost its appeal. This may be true considering that since 1980 enrolment statistics for agriculture vis-à-vis total enrolment has been declining. It may even be concluded that agriculture at present is among the least attractive career choice.

But what makes it so unattractive at present? Aside from Vroom’s (1964) Expectancy Theory which focuses on the strong link between the efforts that people put in and the achievement of goals and desirable outcomes, Frederick Herzberg’s (1959) Hygiene-Motivation Theory may offer some clues. The first component of Herzberg’s theory looks into “hygiene factors” which includes, among others, the organization, policies and administration, working conditions, salary, status and job security. The theory’s emphasis on the aforementioned hygiene factors does hold water when one considers that employment opportunities in the country for agriculture