

Feature Story



Starting a career in agriculture at BASF

Can anyone be guaranteed a job after college graduation? Those who study agriculture or food sciences are part of the few who need not worry. According to a U.S. Department of Agriculture forecast, there will be 57,900 high-skilled job openings annually between 2015 and 2020 in the agriculture and food industries. On average, only 35,400 new U.S. graduates will come out of agricultural programs across the country. That is a shortage of 22,500!

According to Jeffrey Dorfman, professor of economics at The University of Georgia and contributing editor to Forbes magazine, employers would prefer graduates with a background in agriculture to fill the 85 percent of non-production agriculture jobs in the industry. That said, companies like BASF are looking for passionate, driven students from diverse backgrounds that want a unique learning experience to jump-start their career in agriculture.

The BASF Professional and Leadership Development Programs are great ways to begin a career in agriculture. Whether someone is a recent college graduate, an undergraduate looking for internship options or completing an advanced degree in a niche area, there are opportunities to learn and grow at BASF. The programs offer learning experiences in business, management, marketing, finance, engineering, research and development, sales and human resources.

“As a participant in the Professional Development Program (PDP), you are able to work in different business units in different offices, which essentially allows you to do many different jobs under one title,” said Mark Kaplan, former Commercial PDP at BASF who served a marketing communications rotation within the U.S. Crop business and gained rich experience in ag. “The skills you learn in one area can be brought over to another, which is unbelievably useful.”

The classic PDP is open to graduates with a Bachelor of Science in a variety of fields. This rotational program allows participants to spend several months learning to address different business needs, including needs within agriculture, at various BASF offices across the country. There are also programs for students completing their Ph.D. in Chemistry, Biochemistry or Chemical Engineering, to name a few. The Leadership Development Program (LDP) is for recent MBA graduates who want to build on previous work experience. Summer internship opportunities are also available for college students who want an introduction to BASF and the agriculture industry.

All of these programs offer many benefits above and beyond the valuable knowledge and experience gained through time at the largest chemical company in the world. Participants move through several units of the company, learning areas in which they can excel and where they have an opportunity to grow their skills. They are encouraged to be hands-on immediately, working to find solutions to business needs while they develop crucial problem-solving and critical-thinking skills in a real-world environment. When the program is complete, participants have a large network of colleagues that stay with them their whole career.

“If I had started [at another company] as an entry-level employee, I never would have had the opportunity to connect to the values and work like I do at BASF,” Kaplan said. “I have seen many aspects of the business and understand how we all fit together to provide solutions to the world’s problems.”

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Many participants are placed in permanent positions at BASF to continue building their careers. In fact, about 90 percent of ag PDPs were hired into BASF U.S. Crop positions upon completion of the program.

Still, Kaplan says, the most valuable aspect of the PDP experience is not a paycheck, but friendships.

“In the program, you build this amazing network of peers and mentors,” Kaplan said. “There are so many amazing people from different backgrounds and places, brought together by this program, you otherwise would not have met. You become friends as well as colleagues.”