

Feature Story



The next generation of agriculture: What to expect from millennial growers

Have you ever heard someone speak disparagingly about the millennial generation? Defined as those born from the early 1980s to the early 2000s, millennials have been characterized as lazy, entitled and self-obsessed.

However, based on recent surveys, millennials in farming are likely to make their predecessors proud. According to a study by Millennium Research, Inc., the next generation of growers, who are now aged 18 to 34, will be innovative, educated and motivated. These young growers are ready to champion new methods and bring fresh perspectives to their operations.

Millennial growers are much more likely to incorporate new ideas and technology into their practice, which probably comes as no surprise. In fact, their adoption of technology is what they say is the biggest difference between themselves and their predecessors when it comes to activities on the farm.

According to the study, 64 percent of growers under 40 use most or all of the precision farming technology they can find. This high use rate in technology allows the growers to concentrate on financial return and high yields, both of which, according to the study, are top motivators for the young growers.

The majority of millennial growers have made a strong investment in their education. In fact, 57 percent of them have completed college and possess a bachelor's degree. An additional 9 percent of young growers have earned a graduate degree, while 2 percent have a PhD.

These higher-level degrees allow the new growers to apply fresh knowledge directly to their farm operations. All growers, young and old, know that agriculture is vastly complex, but new management strategies are being discovered every day.

In addition to increased education, young growers have invested their time working off the farm. Reportedly, 61 percent of growers who farm more than 1,000 acres and 77 percent working on fewer than 1,000 acres took time to work elsewhere before joining the operation full time. Experience off the farm can give young growers a well-rounded approach when it comes to their farming jobs.

The study concludes that time spent working off the farm led these growers to develop structured decision-making skills. Of those that worked off the farm, 26 percent say the biggest lesson they learned in a different job was how to manage employees and cooperate as a team.

For more information contact:

Barbara Aguiar
BASF Corporation
Tel: (919) 547-2305
E-mail: barbara.aguiar@basf.com

Young growers are fully motivated when it comes to their farming operations. Of those surveyed, 71 percent say that they plan to pay off the land they have purchased and increase the current size of their farms.

Female growers are not to be forgotten and their ambition is undoubtedly noteworthy. According to the USDA's 2012 Census of Agriculture, 14 percent of American farms have a female principal operator and millennial women make up 4 percent of this statistic. While this may seem like a small number, the operations of female growers are getting larger every year. Since the last census of agriculture in 2007, women growers have increased their acreage by 3 percent.

These statistics give some insight into what is to come from the next generation of growers. Older generations may already be seeing the direct effects from the millennial mentality. After all, 66 percent of millennial growers are already the primary decision maker at their farming operation. Predecessors may be hesitant to hand over the reins of their farming operation, but by giving young growers a chance, they may be pleasantly surprised by the perspective that millennials bring to the table.