Agricultural/Food Science Technician

Snapshot

Career Cluster(s): Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources; Science,

Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

Interests: Agriculture; animals; food Earnings (Yearly Average): \$41,230

Employment & Outlook: As Fast As Average Growth Expected

OVERVIEW

Sphere of Work

Agricultural and food science technicians assist agricultural and food scientists, including animal scientists, by performing duties such as measuring and analyzing the quality of food and agricultural products. Tasks include agricultural labor, recordkeeping duties, laboratory testing, and office work, depending on the field in which the technician works.

Work Environment

Agricultural and food science technicians primarily work in offices and laboratories, but may also work in greenhouses, processing plants, and on farms or ranches. In non-office settings, they may be required to be physically active for long periods.



Food science technican (D-Keine via iStock)

Occupation Interest

Agricultural and food science technicians usually have a passion for both science and nature. They want to ensure that crops and livestock remain vibrant and healthy, for the benefit of the environment and for human quality of life.

A Day in the Life—Duties and Responsibilities

Agricultural and food science technicians often specialize by subject area, which includes animal health, farm machinery, fertilizers, agricultural chemicals, or processing technology. Duties can vary considerably by specialization.

Agricultural science technicians typically study ways to increase the productivity of crops and animals. These workers may keep detailed records, collect samples for analyses, ensure that samples meet proper safety and quality standards, and test crops and animals for disease or to confirm the results of scientific experiments.

Food science technicians who work in manufacturing investigate new production or processing techniques. They also ensure that products will be fit for distribution or are produced as efficiently as expected. Many food science technicians spend time inspecting foodstuffs, chemicals, and additives to determine whether they are safe and have the proper combination of ingredients.

Profile

Interests: Things, Animals, Data

Working Conditions: Both Inside and Outside

Physical Strength: Moderate Work

Education Needs: Associate Degree, Bachelor's

Degree

Licensure/Certification: Not Required
Opportunities for Experience: Internship

Interest Score: RIC

Duties and Responsibilities

Agricultural Science Technician

- Following protocols to collect, prepare, analyze, and safely store crop or animal samples
- Operating farm equipment and maintaining agricultural production areas to conform to scientific testing parameters
- Examining animal and crop specimens to determine the presence of diseases or other problems
- Measuring ingredients used in animal feed and other inputs
- Preparing and operating laboratory testing equipment
- Compiling and analyzing test results
- Preparing charts, presentations, and reports describing test results

Food Science Technician

- Collecting and preparing samples in accordance with established procedures
- Testing food, food additives, and food containers to ensure that they comply with established safety standards
- Helping food scientists with food research, development, and quality control
- Analyzing chemical properties of food to determine ingredients and formulas
- Compiling and analyzing test results
- Preparing charts, presentations, and reports describing test results
- Preparing and maintaining quantities of chemicals needed to perform laboratory tests
- Maintaining a safe, sterile laboratory environment

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Immediate Physical Environment

Technicians work in a variety of settings, including laboratories, processing plants, farms and ranches, greenhouses, and offices. Technicians who work in processing plants and agricultural settings may face noise from processing and farming machinery, extreme temperatures, and odors from chemicals or animals. They may need to lift and carry objects and be physically active for long periods.

Agricultural and food science technicians typically work full time and have standard work schedules. Technicians may need to travel, including internationally.

Human Environment

Technicians must be able to work both independently and with colleagues, in lab and field settings. They must also be prepared to present research findings to superiors and other scientists.

Technological Environment

Agricultural and food science technicians use a range of laboratory equipment to conduct their research, as well as computer software to input and track data. They must be comfortable transporting and setting up equipment in the field, as well as creating presentations with results, including graphs and charts.

EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND ADVANCEMENT

High School/Secondary

Students interested in a career as an agricultural or food science technician should take as many high school science and math classes as possible. A solid background in applied chemistry, biology, physics, math, and statistics is important. Knowledge of how to use spreadsheets and databases also may be necessary.

Some agricultural and food science technicians successfully enter the occupation with a high school diploma or equivalent, but they typically need related work experience and on-the-job training that may last a year or more.

Workers who enter the occupation with only a high school diploma or equivalent often must have experience in a related occupation during which they develop their knowledge of agriculture or manufacturing processes. These related occupations include food and tobacco processing workers and agricultural workers.

Suggested High School Subjects

- Algebra
- Biology
- Botany
- Chemistry
- Civics
- Computer Science
- Earth or Environmental Science
- English
- History
- Physics
- Statistics
- Trigonometry

Related Career Pathways/Majors

Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources Career Cluster

- Animal Systems Pathway
- Environmental Service Systems Pathway
- Food Products & Processing Systems Pathway
- Natural Resources Systems Pathway
- Plant Systems Pathway

Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics Career Cluster

• Science & Mathematics Pathway

Postsecondary

Agricultural and food science technicians typically need an associate degree in biology, chemistry, crop or animal science, or a related field from an accredited college or university. Some agricultural and food science technician positions require a bachelor's degree.

Students may take courses in biology, chemistry, plant or animal science, and agricultural engineering as part of their programs. Programs include technical instruction and hands-on experience. Many schools offer internships,

Skills and Abilities

Analytical Skills

- Conducting a variety of observations and on-site measurements, all of which require precision, accuracy, and math skills
- Using computer modeling to prepare analyses

Communication Skills

 Understanding and giving clear instructions, keep detailed records, and, occasionally, write reports

Critical-thinking Skills

- Reaching conclusions through sound reasoning and judgment
- Determining how to improve food quality and testing products for a variety of safety standards

Interpersonal Skills

- Working well with others
- Supervising agricultural and food processing workers and receiving instruction from scientists or specialists

Physical Stamina

 Standing for long periods, lifting objects, and generally performing physical labor in manufacturing or agricultural settings cooperative-education, and other programs designed to provide practical experience and enhance employment prospects.

Related College Majors

- Agricultural Engineering
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Plant/Animal Science

Additional Requirements

Agricultural and food science technicians typically undergo on-the-job training. Various federal government regulations outline the types of training needed for technicians, which varies by work environment and specific job requirements. Training may cover topics such as production techniques, personal hygiene, and sanitation procedures.

EARNINGS AND ADVANCEMENT

Earnings of agricultural and food science technicians depend on the type of employer, the type of job, and the education and experience of the employee. The median annual wage for technicians was \$41,230 in 2019. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$28,030, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$64,180.

Agricultural and food science technicians may receive paid vacations, holidays, and sick days; life and health insurance; and retirement benefits. These are usually paid by the employer.

EMPLOYMENT AND OUTLOOK

Agricultural and food science technicians held about 24,200 jobs nationally in 2019. Thirty-two percent were employed in food manufacturing. The remainder were employed in professional, scientific, and technical services; post-secondary institutions; agriculture and forestry; and crop production.

Employment is expected to grow as fast as average for all occupations through the year 2029, with a projected increase of 4 percent. Demand will continue for agricultural research into areas such as the effects of population growth, increased demand for water resources, harm from pests and pathogens, changes in

Farmer/Rancher/ Agricultural Manager

Snapshot

Career Cluster(s): Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources; Business, Management & Administration

Interests: Agriculture; business practices; being outside; working independently

Earnings (Yearly Average): \$71,160

Employment & Outlook: Decline Expected

OVERVIEW

Sphere of Work

Farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural managers grow food for personal consumption and for wholesale and retail consumers. Farmers and farm managers oversee agricultural production and financial operations at farms, nurseries,

ranches, and greenhouses. Farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural managers grow crops, livestock, poultry, and aquatic animals. Although specific tasks vary by type of agricultural work, all farmers and farm managers are responsible for ensuring the care of crops and animals from conception to market. Farmers often perform the hands-on labor of planting, cultivating, operating farm machinery, harvesting, and mar-



A farmer collects eggs (sasapanchenko via iStock)

keting and selling crops and animals. Farm managers hire, train, and supervise farm staff to complete these tasks.

Work Environment

Farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural managers work in farms, nurseries, ranches, and greenhouses that they own or lease. Farmers and farm managers do not have set work hours and instead must work until tasks are complete. Crop farm work is seasonal. During non-growing seasons, crop farmers and farm managers focus on repairing farm machinery, planning

Profile

Interests: Data, People, Things, Animals
Working Conditions: Both Inside and Outside
Physical Strength: Medium Work, Heavy Work
Education Needs: On-The-Job Training, High School
Diploma with Technical Education,
Junior/Technical/Community College, Apprenticeship,

Bachelor's Degree

Licensure/Certification: Usually Not Required

Opportunities for Experience: Internship,

Apprenticeship, Volunteer Work, Part Time Work

Interest Score: ERC

next year's crops, and marketing and selling efforts. Animal farmers and farm managers work steadily throughout the year to care for their livestock, poultry, and aquatic animals.

Occupation Interest

Individuals attracted to the farming profession tend to be physically strong and detail-oriented people. Successful farmers and farm managers exhibit stamina, resilience, organizational abilities, integrity and ethics, independence, and effec-

Duties and Responsibilities

- Supervise all steps of crop production or ranging, including planting, fertilizing, harvesting, and herding
- Make decisions about crops or livestock by evaluating factors such as market conditions, disease, soil conditions, and the availability of federal programs
- Choose and buy supplies, such as seed, fertilizer, and farm machinery
- Maintain farming equipment
- Maintain farm facilities, such as water pipes, fences, and animal shelters
- Serve as the sales agent for crops, livestock, and dairy products
- Record financial, tax, production, and employee information

tive time management. Business acumen and familiarity with computer technology is advantageous. Farmers and farm managers should enjoy physical labor and have a strong background in agriculture and business.

A Day in the Life—Duties and Responsibilities

Farmers and farm managers perform different daily occupational duties and responsibilities depending on their specialization and work environment. They may specialize in the production of crops, beef, poultry, pork, dairy, or aquaculture.

On crop farms, farmers and farm managers oversee activities related to the planting, tending, and harvesting of crops. These tasks may include preparing soil and managing its nutrient levels, using natural or chemical methods to eliminate pests, irrigating and draining fields, weather forecasting, and storing fuels and chemicals. Crop farmers and farm managers promote and sell crops to distributors and food-processing companies, retail customers in farmers markets or farm stands, or shareholders in a community-supported agriculture (CSA) program.

Animal farmers and farm managers oversee meat production operations. They raise beef cattle, chickens, turkeys, ducks, game birds, goats, or pigs. Animal farmers and farm managers must ensure proper breeding and birthing and feeding, housing,

Skills and Abilities

Analytical Skills

Monitoring and assessing the quality of land or livestock

Critical-thinking Skills

 Determining how to improve harvest and livestock while reacting to conditions that may affect short- or long-term plans

Initiative

Being self-motivated in order to maximize crop or livestock production

Interpersonal Skills

Supervising laborers and other workers

Mechanical Skills

 Operating complex machinery and occasionally performing routine maintenance

Physical Stamina

 Physically strenuous, repetitive tasks, such as bending, stooping, and lifting

transportation, and slaughtering. Those who work with beef cattle and pigs medicate and vaccinate the animals as needed. On poultry farms, they also manage the hatchery, establish egg or meat-bird production effort, adjust the lighting in poultry buildings to promote molting or egg laying, and match stock size to seasonal demand. All animal farmers and farm managers are responsible for promoting and selling meat products.

Dairy farmers and farm managers direct tasks related to the production, collection, and sale of milk. They must ensure the proper care for milk cows. These farmers and farm managers oversee the establishment of a feed storage system for corn silage, alfalfa, hay, cottonseed, and soybeans. They also supervise the construction and maintenance of a milking parlor, a milking and milk storage system, and a manure management system. Dairy farmers and farm managers promote, transport, and sell dairy products.

Aquaculture farmers and farm managers oversee aquaculture production tasks. They or their staff stock ponds or floating nets with eggs, shellfish, or juvenile fish, feed fish stock, and protect fish stock from predators and contamination. Like their meat and dairy counterparts, these farmers and farm managers are responsible for the promotion and sale of their products.

In addition, all farmers and farm managers are responsible for purchasing supplies, maintaining farm machinery, ensuring the cleanliness of farm facilities, and educating themselves about government regulations and business trends affecting their industry.

OCCUPATION SPECIALTIES

Farm General Manager

Farm General Managers operate farms for corporations, cooperatives, or other owners.

Fish Farmer

Fish Farmers spawn and raise fish for commercial purposes.

Fur Farmer

Fur Farmers feed and raise mink, fox, chinchilla, rabbits, and other fur-bearing animals for sale on the fur market.

Horse Trainer

Horse Trainers train horses for riding or harness.

Livestock Rancher

Livestock Ranchers breed and raise livestock such as beef cattle, dairy cattle, goats, horses, sheep, and swine to sell meat, dairy products, wool and hair.

Nursery Manager

Nursery Managers supervise plant nurseries that produce plants for sale to wholesale or retail customers.

Organic Farmer/Farm Manager

Organic Farmers/Farm Managers grow crops, control pests, and maintain soil health without the use, or the limited use, of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

Poultry Farmer

Poultry Farmers raise chickens, turkeys, or other fowl for meat or egg production.

Shellfish Grower

Shellfish Growers cultivate and harvest beds of shellfish, such as clams and oysters.

Tree-Fruit-and-Nut Crop Farmer

Tree-Fruit-and-Nut Crop Farmers plant and cultivate fruit producing trees.

Vegetable Farmer

Vegetable Farmers plan and plant vegetables according to weather, type of soil, and size and location of the farm.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Immediate Physical Environment

Farmers and farm managers work in farms, nurseries, ranches, and greenhouses. Farming tends to be very physical and requires extensive hard labor, walking, lifting, and bending. Farmers and farm managers are at high risk for back strain, pesticide exposure, and machine accidents.

Human Environment

Farms, nurseries, ranches, and greenhouses tend to be remotely located and isolated. However, farmers and farm managers interact with farm workers, families, customers, landholders, bankers, veterinarians, and government inspectors. The amount of human interaction often depends on the scale and business model of the farm operation. Farm managers typically report to a farmer or corporation.

Technological Environment

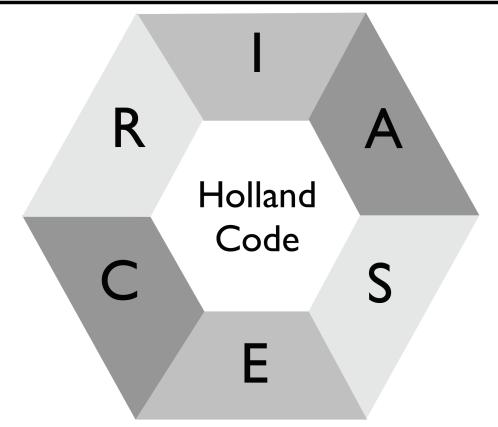
In the course of their work, farmers and farm managers use farm machinery and equipment such as animal feeders, hay balers, mowers, trucks, irrigation systems, tractors, chain saws, and milking machines. In addition, farmers and farm managers use computers, Internet communication tools, accounting and farm management software, and spreadsheets to assist them with the business tasks of farming.

EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND ADVANCEMENT

High School/Secondary

High school-level study of mathematics, agricultural science, biology, chemistry, and business can provide a strong foundation for work as a farmer or college-level study in the field. High school students interested in this career path may benefit from internships, apprenticeships, or part-time work with local farms

What Are Your Career Interests?



This is based on Dr. John Holland's theory that people and work environments can be loosely classified into six different groups. Each of the letters above corresponds to one of the six groups described in the following pages.

Different people's personalities may find different environments more to their liking. While you may have some interests in and similarities to several of the six groups, you may be attracted primarily to two or three of the areas. These two or three letters are your "Holland Code." For example, with a code of "RES" you would most resemble the Realistic type, somewhat less resemble the Enterprising type, and resemble the Social type even less. The types that are not in your code are the types

you resemble least of all.

Most people, and most jobs, are best represented by some combination of two or three of the Holland interest areas. In addition, most people are most satisfied if there is some degree of fit between their personality and their work environment.

The rest of the pages in this booklet further explain each type and provide some examples of career possibilities, areas of study at MU, and cocurricular activities for each code. To take a more in-depth look at your Holland Code, take a self-assessment such as the SDS, Discover, or a card sort at the MU Career Center with a Career Specialist.

This hexagonal model of RIASEC occupations is the copyrighted work of Dr. John Holland, and is used with his permission. The Holland Game is adapted from Richard Bolles' "Quick Job Hunting Map." Copyright 1995, 1998 by the MU Career Center, University of Missouri-Columbia.

Like to?

work outdoors

use your hands

build things

be physically active

tend/train animals

Realistic (Doers)

People who have athletic ability, prefer to work with objects, machines, tools, plants or animals, or to be outdoors.

Are you? practical straightforward/frank mechanically inclined stable

concrete reserved self-controlled independent ambitious systematic

Can you? fix electrical things solve electrical problems pitch a tent play a sport read a blueprint

plant a garden operate tools and machine

Career Possibilities (Holland Code):

Air Traffic Controller (SER) Archaeologist (IRE) Athletic Trainer (SRE) Cartographer (IRE) Commercial Airline Pilot (RIE) Commercial Drafter (IRE) Corrections Officer (SER)

Dental Technician (REI) Farm Manager (ESR) Fish and Game Warden (RES) Floral Designer (RAE) Forester (RIS) Geodetic Surveyor (IRE) Industrial Arts Teacher (IER)

Laboratory Technician (RIE) Landscape Architect (AIR) Mechanical Engineer (RIS) Optician (REI) Petroleum Geologist (RIE) Police Officer (SER) Practical Nurse (SER)

Property Manager (ESR) Recreation Manager (SER) Service Manager (ERS) Software Technician (RCI) Ultrasound Technologist (RSI) Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant (ESR)

tinker with machines/vehicles

work on electronic equipment

Investigative (Thinkers)

People who like to observe, learn, investigate, analyze, evaluate, or solve problems.

Are you? inquisitive analytical scientific observant/precise scholarly cautious

intellectually self-confident Independent logical complex Curious

Can you? think abstractly solve math problems understand scientific theories do complex calculations use a microscope or computer interpret formulas

Like to? explore a variety of ideas work independently perform lab experiments deal with abstractions do research be challenged

Career Possibilities (Holland Code):

Actuary (ISE) Agronomist (IRS) Anesthesiologist (IRS) Anthropologist (IRE) Archaeologist (IRE) Biochemist (IRS) Biologist (ISR)

Chemical Engineer (IRE) Chemist (IRE) Computer Systems Analyst (IER) Dentist (ISR) Ecologist (IRE) Economist (IAS) Electrical Engineer (IRE)

Geologist (IRE) Horticulturist (IRS) Mathematician (IER) Medical Technologist (ISA) Meteorologist (IRS) Nurse Practitioner (ISA) Pharmacist (IES)

Physician, General Practice (ISE) Psychologist (IES) Research Analyst (IRC) Statistician (IRE) Surgeon (IRA) Technical Writer (IRS) Veterinarian (IRS)

LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES

Academy of Prosocial Learning (APL)

860.262.1807

info@prosocialacademy.org www.prosocialacademy.org

AgExplorer

800.323.9084

education_info@discoveryed.com agexplorer.com

AgNIC Swine Resources

Iowa State University Library 701 Morrill Road Ames, IA 50011-2102 515.294.3642

instr.iastate.libguides.com/agnic

Agricultural Network Information Collaborative (AgNIC)

Necia Parker-Gibson (AgNIC chair) 365 N. McIlroy Avenue Fayetville, AR 72701-1201 neciap@uark.edu agnic.org

Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC)

National Agricultural Library 10301 Baltimore Avenue, Room 132 Beltsville, MD 20705 301.504.6559 www.nal.usda.gov/afsic

American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA)

12575 W. Bayaud Avenue Lakewood, CO 80228 800.252.2242 aaha@aaha.org www.aaha.org

American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS)

9190 Crestwyn Hills Drive Memphis, TN 38125 901.754.8620 info@aalas.org www.aalas.org

Offers testing and certification for animal technicians: www.aalas.org/certification/technician-certification

American Association of Veterinary State Boards

(AAVSB)

380 W. 22nd Street, Suite 101 Kansas City, MO 64108 877.698.8482 www.aavsb.org

American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK)

8476 E. Speedway Boulevard, Suite 204 Tucson, Arizona 85710-1728 520.298.9688 visitor@aazk.org aazk.org

American Chemical Society (ACS)

1155 Sixteenth Street NW Washington, DC 20036 614.447.3776 service@acs.org www.acs.org Division of Biological Chemistry: www.divbiolchem.org

American Dairy Science Association (ADSA)

1800 S. Oak Street, Suite 100 Champaign, IL 61820-6974 217.356.5146 adsa@adsa.org www.adsa.org

American Farm Bureau Federation

600 Maryland Avenue, SW, Suite 1000 Washington, DC 20024 202.406.3600 webmaster@fb.org

American Fisheries Society (ASF)

425 Barlow Place, Suite 110 Bethesda, MD 20814-2144 301.897.8616 main@fisheries.org www.fisheries.org

American Geosciences Institute (AGI)

4220 King Street Alexandria, VA 22302-1502 703.379.2480 agi@americangeosciences.org www.americangeosciences.org

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American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association