

It's Not Just A Job, It's A Life Style

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You can't eat for eight hours a day nor drink for eight hours a day nor make love for eight hours a day-all you can do for eight hours is work. Which is the reason why man makes himself and everyone else so miserable and unhappy.

-William Faulkner

After reading the writing prompt for "Stage One" of the Core worker profile assignment, my immediate reaction was to profile my oldest brother Jay Schroeder, who just happens to be in the same field I am currently pursuing. I saw this as a good opportunity to expand my knowledge of engineering and learn more about my brother and my major. Many

people will tell you to always follow your first inclination or thought that comes to you because most often it is the correct or best response, but not in this situation. After several days of consideration I realized the average individual is not energized or enthusiastic about the work of a mechanical engineer. Most individuals are not into the technicality of the job. What people want is a profile on an exciting individual whose job title

portrays high risk, high stakes, and sitting-on-the-edge of your seat suspense driving you to want to know more about the individual. Well, if this kind of exciting job gives an extra beat to your heart, then hang on because you are in for an eye opening ride that will change your prospective of work. No, this individual is not a stock broker, a stunt man, a jet pilot, or an astronaut, but a business owner and entrepreneur. What is this thrilling and exhilarating profession? Adam Schroeder age twenty-four is a farmer struggling to take over the family owned farm. I felt an obligation or maybe it was a calling. At any rate I thought I owed it not just to my brother, but all the farmers to tell an accurate portrayal of the American farmer who happens to be the most efficient farmer in the world and who produces the least expensive food in the world. The average American consumer only spends 10.5 percent of their annual income on food compared to 20 percent in Japan, Germany, and Spain.

To put this astonishing fact into perspective it takes 37 days for the average consumer to earn enough money for a year's supply of food while on the other hand it takes 115 days for this individual to pocket enough money to pay for their year's taxes. It seems unfair and a

crime to me that the American farmer only takes home roughly 20 cents of every dollar the American consumers spends on food (Hallam).

I thought by performing a worker profile on Adam that I could do my fair part in promoting the American farmer's situation to the public, reduce the stereotype of "farmers must be rich since they own so much land," and trim down the growing separation between the producer and the uneducated consumer. Yes, Adam is a plain, ordinary, boring farmer who sits around all day in the local coffee shop, right? You may have this preconception about farmers, but it could not be farther from the truth. Adam's job title may just be "a farmer," but this title includes much more than planting and harvesting the crops. Adam is also a mechanic, an accountant, a veterinarian, and a business owner. You might ask, what does it take to become a farmer? It surely cannot be "that hard" to be a farmer right? It is not as easy as you think to get started in the farming profession; land is both expensive and scarce to find. It's nearly impossible for a young individual, like Adam, to get a loan because you first need to establish a line of credit and have equity. "A young person cannot start farming unless they have help from the

father or somebody. 'Cause you have to be almost able to retire a rich man to start out" (Terkel 3). This is exactly what Adam is in the process of doing. He is currently slowly taking over the family farm with the help of his father and older brother Jay Schroeder.

Our dad David Schroeder has helped Adam get started profession in several ways. First, he has provided his wisdom and taught by example what is needed to run a farm and how to do it successfully. The second aid he has provided Adam with is financial help. He rents his own ground that he farms and also cosigned on several loans for equipment one of the first steps in building equity for a larger loan for land. Without this help Adam would never have been able to establish a line of credit or have rented his own ground.

In December of 2003, Adam made the first step in taking over the family farm by buying a portion of the farm, eighty acres. Buying land is the biggest challenge a young farm can face because land is very expensive and requires a long term loan. Adam has not only received aid from my father, but also Jay Schroeder, our older brother.

Another fact that really tells us the magnitude of the challenge Adam is over coming to get started in this profession is that the average American

farmer is 55.3 years of age (Lamp) and the average age of retirement in America is 57.5 (Johnson). This fact clearly shows that there are not many young people involved in farming due to lack of financial reward and the difficulty young farmers like Adam face. Another astonishing fact that shows the degree of difficulty of the profession is that less than two percent of the population is farmers. If this being a farmer was "so easy" don't you think more individuals would be farmers? These two facts by themselves prove just how hard it is for a young person to get started in this profession and without the "help from the father or somebody" (Terkel) Adam would be living everyday knowing that he is not doing what he was called to do on this earth.

How much education is needed to be a farmer? Adam, after completing high school, received a two year associate degree in agricultural production at a local community college. He says, "It is not essential to receive a higher education if you take the right courses in high school like chemistry, accounting and agriculture education". Adam says, "In order to be a successful farmer in this technically advanced age continual learning is a must. It seems like every few months there are new and

better applications along with new machinery which is more technically advanced and more efficient." You might ask, how do farmers like Adam learn about these new and better applications and more efficient machinery? Farmers like Adam are able to keep up with these continual changes in agriculture by reading. Every month Adam receives a hand full of farming magazines like *Prairie Farmer*, *Successful Farming* and *Soybean Digest*. With these publications Adam is able to keep up with the changing practices. Due to the continual nature of farm work and since it depends so heavily on the weather and seasons, we must go season-by-season in order to get a glimpse of Adam's average day. Spring is the time when warm subtle breezes whisper a glimpse of the summer heat to come, but is also the time when farmers seem to flock to the fields preparing the ground and then planting. Adam's main goal during this season is to finish planting 500 acres of his own and another 1,000 acres of land he helps his father plant. Adam's average day during this roughly two month long season begins between 7:00 and 7:30 in the morning, a fast change of clothes and out the door by 7:35.

He proceeds to the daily chores of feeding his 200 head of cattle and helping his father with his own as

well. "This task roughly takes me about four hours if nothing breaks down or goes wrong, which is seldom the case with our old and out dated feeding machinery" (Schroeder). This task is physical like most farm work but, demands only short periods of strenuous labor. "About forty-five to an hour of my morning involves operating an electric feeding device to feed the dairy cattle, my father's cattle, but due to its age and dilapidated state it frequently breaks down or does not function properly" (Schroeder). Adam's own cattle that are located a half mile down the road from the home farm are fed round bales (weighing under a ton) and hay silage. To perform this task Adam uses a tractor to feed the round bales and also to pull the wagon that is used to haul the hay silage. Adam says that "this task requires minimal physical work because the tractor does most of the work" (Schroeder). The calves involve more physical labor because they are separated in several pens by age and or size and because they require closer care. These calves are fed smaller square bale of hay which weigh 50-60 pounds and corn which is carried in five gallon buckets to the pens. Adam uses the aid of his truck to haul feed to the various pens because some pens are kept as far away as 3 miles.

Along with just feeding the cattle, Adam has to be his own veterinarian and check to see that all the cattle are in good health, treating and looking after those that are sick. "In the midst of chores I come in at about 10:00 A.M. each day to check the markets on the computer because selling your crops is the one of the biggest risks and some time is the defining line between making money and losing money" (Schroeder). Adam comes in again at 12:00 to eat lunch, which his mother prepares, and to look over the paper or various farming periodicals that have come in the mail. After lunch the rest of the day is devoted to planting. This process is mostly mechanized so the physical labor is a minimal except for filling the planter with 50 pound bags of seed. "I figure that I carry about seven hundred bags of seed during planting which comes out to 17.5 tons that I personally carried" (Schroeder). The other challenge of planting season is transporting the machinery from field to field. "In order to make a living we must farm land that is mile from home, making it a real hassle to move equipment" (Schroeder). This is a long and difficult task since the equipment is large and tractors have a top speed of 20 mph. Many times Adam plants well into the night to beat an approaching storm.

Summer, with its long, hot days, brings the same daily chores of feeding cattle as the spring, but with planting done alfalfa (hay) is the next crop that needs to be harvested. This season occupies roughly 5 months of Adam's year and is the most physically demanding out of the four. The hay is used to feed the cattle and the extra is sold to neighboring farmers or horse barns. After having completed the cattle chores in the morning and having lunch, Adam begins the long process of harvesting hay. There is no such thing as an average day during the summer months. Adam might find himself mowing hay with the use of a tractor or baling the hay later after it has dried properly. Adam says that square baling is the worst, and I would have to agree with him because I have experienced this my whole life. Ask anyone who has had this unpleasant task and they will tell you that they never want to do it again. While baling Adam has to continually carry and throw 50-60 pound square bales in 90 and above temperatures, but the worst thing Adam's body has to face is the horrible dust created from the baler, which gets in your eyes and irritates the skin.

Adam's average day during this season last until about 9 or 10:00 and may last well into the

night in order to get the hay in the barn before an approaching rain storm. During the fall, the main job is harvesting the corn and soybeans before the snow falls. This task occupies about two months of Adam's year. The same daily cattle chores are done, but the grain markets are watched more heavily because Adam and my dad sell much of their crops at this time. After lunch Adam runs a combine, a machine used to harvest crops, and then hauls the grain to storage units on the farm. If Adam is harvesting his rented ground, which is far away, he pays for semi trucks to haul the grain to market. This task of harvesting is not so much physical labor because you are operating a combine, but operating machinery for twelve hours straight is exhausting, as any truck driver or machine operator can tell you.

During this period Adam's average day is mostly spent feeding and bedding the cattle with straw or corn stocks to keep the cattle warm. New tasks that have to be done during this season are checking the health of the cattle, making sure the cattle have a dry warm place to lay, and making sure the cattle have water. You might think these tasks are easily completed, but due to the cold weather tractors sometimes do not start and take ten to twenty

minutes to warm up. The task of watering the cattle should be easy, right? On the contrary, this is very difficult during the cold winter days because the water tanks and lines freeze and must be unfroze daily with hot water. After Adam completes the daily cattle chores, his next focus is on repairing/rebuilding machinery that he does not have time during the other months. By being his own mechanic, Adam can rebuild older machinery and then sell for a higher price making a little extra money, but sometimes he only breaks even. "The Casteels [family cattle ranchers] say it's hard to make a living just from farming, noting they've thought of some innovative ways themselves to get some extra income whenever possible, from remodeling homes to repairing machinery" (Casteels help revitalize beef association).

From these quotes, you can tell that this practice of using your extra time to try to make a little extra money is not unusual in this profession. As Adam says, "A farm is a work in progress; if you get caught up you are not setting your goals high enough." Farming is one of the hardest professions to get started in and is a large gamble. You might ask, why is it such a gamble? As far has I know humans are still not in control of the weather and

many time fail to predict it as well. Because of this uncertainty of the weather, farmers never know if the crops will receive the needed rains and heat units to make a crop. There could be a drought, there could be a flood (Adam rents ground near the Rock River), it could hail, it could freeze, it could be windy and destroy the crops, it could rain postponing planting or make it unable to harvest hay in the summer or even destroy the hay if rain falls on the bales for they get in the barn, the grain prices could plummet or go up, anyone of these disasters could happen causing thousands and thousands in unrecoverable loss.

It is a very complex profession that requires knowledge in accounting because records need to be kept and complicated tax forms filled out, you have to be knowledgeable in treatments of various animal illnesses, and have to be a knowledgeable mechanic to repair and maintain the equipment. The job of a farmer is never ending and seldom rewarded with either riches or recognition. So, please do your part and recognize the many things that American farmers do for you each day knowing that they selflessly give their lives in devotion to the land so that you can purchase food and products containing a trace of agriculture.

Thank You, Lord, For Our Dear Farmer

Thank you, Lord, for the man who toils,
The man who works your earth.
He plants the seed that makes our bread,
And is seldom noted for his worth.

He drives his tractor day and night,
Plowing, planting round the clock.
And does the same at harvest time,
All to help you feed your flock.

Dedicated to his task,
He always gives a willing hand.
Thank you, Lord, for this special man,
The farmer who tills your land.

-Edward C. Schaefer

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