

Seeds of Satisfaction

Who Works in the Seed Industry?

People of all backgrounds, geographic locations and interests work in the seed industry. The following profiles will provide a series of snapshots of the many types of jobs the industry offers.

Career Profile 1

Lauren S.

Job/Career Position

Bulk Seed Production Supervisor

Location

New York City, NY

Starting Salaries

\$65,000-\$160,000

“There are many different facets of the seed industry, so there are jobs for many different disciplines.”



Bio

I was born and raised in North Carolina. My interests growing up were all based in the arts. I studied violin, piano and dance. I was always academically inclined, especially toward the sciences. During high school, I took advantage of a program that placed advanced students with labs at local colleges. From there, my academic interests took priority over a career in dance and I decided I wanted to be a microbiologist.

Why I Pursued a Career in Seeds

It didn't really occur to me to work with seed until I was actually a seed producer.

My Educational Path

In high school I took AP Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Environmental Science, History, English and Literature. I attended McGill University in Montreal, where I earned a diploma in farm management. During the school year, I worked at local farms, which was an education in itself. I have continued my education at Rutgers University, where I am currently a nonmatriculated student.

Mentors, Clubs and Organizations

In college I belonged to the Ecological Agriculture Club, which took trips to local farms and to conferences about sustainable farm techniques. The faculty at Macdonald College was very helpful when job searching or looking for internships.

Why I Love My Career

I enjoy seeing the crops grow and change during the season. I also like having to be creative – using new cover crops for weed management and fertilization, experimenting with different field techniques and building different contraptions to make seed cleaning easier and more efficient.

Why My Job Is Important

New York City has limited natural areas left, so it is of the utmost ecological importance to preserve these areas and the natural genetic diversity of native plant species.

A Typical Day at Work

I never really have a “typical” day. Sometimes I will be on my knees weeding all day or in the tractor mowing all day. More often than not, I will do several different things, ranging from gardening-type work to tractor maintenance to making spreadsheets on the seed inventory.

Skills and Talents

Skills and knowledge required for my position are: plant identification, heavy-equipment operation, basic carpentry and mechanics, greenhouse propagation, working knowledge of soils and nutrient management, plant physiology, insect and pest identification, as well as the ability to use Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

Why You Should Consider a Career in the Seed Industry

There are many different facets of the seed industry, so there are jobs for many different disciplines. My advice would be to do a lot of internships because it is a great way to explore and discover your interests.



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Career Profile 2

Dr. Alan W.

Job/Career Position

Soybean Product Development

Location

Huxley, Iowa

Starting Salaries

\$65,000-\$160,000

“The seed industry is very rewarding for anyone who puts their mind and heart into it.”



Bio

I was raised on a farm near Alden, Minnesota. We grew corn, soybeans, alfalfa, oats, wheat, cattle and hogs. I loved agriculture and took agricultural classes in high school. I also participated in the county fair. My farm background made it natural for me to stay in agriculture.

Why I Pursued a Career in Seeds

I wanted to study agronomy so that I could help feed a hungry world.

My Educational Path

I first became interested in a career in the seed industry between my sophomore and junior year in college. I had a mentor at the University of Minnesota who helped to encourage and guide me toward my career.

- B.S., Agronomy, *University of Minnesota*
- M.S., Plant Breeding, *University of Maryland*
- Ph.D., Plant Breeding and Cytogenetics, *Iowa State University*

Mentors, Clubs and Organizations

In high school, I took four years of vo-ag classes and was also a member of the FFA from freshman through senior year. In the FFA, my project was to raise hogs and show them at the annual county fair. Vo-ag classes were important to me and my career development, as was my mentor, John Nelson, who was good at determining a person's interest and helping them develop that interest.

Why I Love My Career

It gives me satisfaction to know I'm helping to feed the world.

Why My Job Is Important

In my job, we continuously innovate to make growing more efficient, which means better and more crop yields.

A Typical Day at Work

Every day is different. We start the day by reading the daily safety messages. As a product manager, I then answer questions that come in from sales reps and agronomists in the field on product characteristics. Planning for the next year's seed supply takes a lot of time during the winter and spring months. During the summer I train agronomists and sales reps on products. During the fall I am evaluating potential products and selecting the best to be commercialized.

Skills and Talents

As a plant breeder, one must have leadership skills, be a risk taker, plan to get results, be a good communicator, have creativity for problem solving, be a team player, and always be able to learn and apply new things.

Why You Should Consider a Career in the Seed Industry

It is a very rewarding industry for anyone that puts their mind and heart into it. It's a smaller industry, and therefore your contributions are more easily noticed. As an individual, you get to see the difference you can make. We need bright minds to fill the needs, so I'd suggest taking classes in biology, math and the sciences to get the basics before determining your major.



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Career Profile 3

Kater H.

Job/Career Position

Agricultural Research

Location

Cary, North Carolina

Starting Salaries

\$100,000-\$200,000

“My advice to anyone considering a career in the seed industry is: Go for it. Your timing couldn’t be better.”



Bio

Neither my grandparents nor parents were farmers, but we have a close association with farming since my family owned Iowa farm land. As a result, I became interested in plant breeding in college. But I took jobs in field agronomy from the San Joaquin Valley to the Mississippi Delta. It was only after several years in field agronomy that I “returned” to plant breeding and the seed industry.

My Educational Path

While still in high school, I took advanced placement courses. This allowed me to enter college with credits already in place. I rushed through two college degrees, then I worked for a few years before pursuing a Ph.D. I continued to work while in school. I was very lucky that my employer supported my work toward an advanced degree, even though it took a little longer to complete.

- B.S. Genetics, University of California at Davis
- M.S. Agronomy, University of California at Davis
- Ph.D. Plant Science, University of California at Riverside

Mentors, Clubs and Organizations

Mentors have been critical. Working and interacting with senior members of the industry lets you learn from their experiences and extends your knowledge base to challenges they faced and overcame.

Why I Love My Career

I enjoy using science to help people, and I like working with my fellow agriculturalists.

Why My Job Is Important

Agricultural research and innovation allows you to make a contribution that beneficially impacts millions of acres, farmers and consumers.

A Typical Day at Work

I supervise a team of eight scientists and their support staff. We coordinate research with 350 different cooperators. A typical day for me includes meetings, conference calls, writing reports and reading research papers.

Skills and Talents

As an agricultural researcher, one needs strong communication and collaboration skills, self-motivation, the ability to adapt to a rapidly changing industry and to multitask, patience and a long-term perspective.

Why You Should Consider a Career in the Seed Industry

If you love challenges, this is a great industry. It combines the traditional challenges of farming (crop production, logistics, long-term planning) with the challenges of a high-tech industry (research, marketing, cutting-edge science).



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Career Profile 4

John M.

Job/Career Position

Division Manager, Seed Quality Services

Location

Gilroy, CA

Starting Salaries

\$70,000 and \$120,000

“In my job I wear many hats, and thus my daily routine is not routine.”



Bio

I was born and raised in Denver, Colorado. I like fly fishing, backpacking, riding my motorcycle and generally being outdoors.

Why I Pursued a Career in Seeds

A friend of mine was working at a seed business and wanted to hire me to work for him. I knew I didn't want to stay in academia, and I felt a position in industry was more suited to my goals and interests.

My Educational Path

- Bachelor of Science in Botany – *Colorado State University*
- Master of Science in Plant Pathology – *Colorado State University*

Mentors, Clubs and Organizations

I had a great advisor for my MS degree who was very pro-industry and helped me a lot. My time at the University of Minnesota as a faculty member in the department of Plant Pathology was a great help since the five extension specialists I worked with were tremendous tutors.

Why I Love My Career

Dealing with our clients and helping them to know the quality of their product.

Why My Job Is Important

I coordinate the services we perform for our clients and that helps the company grow and be an important part of our client's QA programs.

A Typical Day at Work

Much time is spent on the computer and phone interacting with clients to help them with questions as well as dealing with internal company issues such as budgets, marketing, sales, test protocols, etc. I wear many hats and thus my daily routine is NOT routine. Since I also manage our facility in Gilroy, CA, I deal with all sorts of building and property issues as well.

Skills and Talents

In the positions I have been in and currently am in, the most basic skill needed has been the ability to deal with people from all walks of life – from peasant growers in rural China to senior managers of corporations. Of course a strong knowledge of the seed business, seed production and plant pathology has been of utmost importance as well.

Why You Should Consider a Career in the Seed Industry

Decide if you want to be in research, operations or sales and then try to get an internship with a company in that area. Keep your options open so that if you think you like research but find you don't you are able to move into other areas.



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Career Profile 5

Jerry F.

Job/Career Position

Director, Regulatory Affairs

Location

St. Louis, MO

Starting Salaries

\$60,000 - \$200,000

“I am constantly learning about new technology and new applications of technology.”



Bio

I was born and raised on a grain and livestock farm in the U.S. I enjoy many outdoor activities including golf, hiking, and waterfowl and upland bird hunting. I also enjoy traveling, reading and spending time with my family.

Why I Pursued a Career in Seeds

I became interested in the seed industry during my graduate program at the University of Kentucky. I took a Seed Technology course during my Ph.D. program and became interested in learning more about the industry.

My Educational Path

- B.S. in Agronomy/ Agricultural Economics – *Purdue University*
- M.S. in Plant Physiology – *University of Kentucky*
- Ph.D. in Soil Science – *University of Kentucky*

Mentors, Clubs and Organizations

I became involved in several clubs during high school and college, including 4-H, FFA, Agronomy Club and honors programs. These opportunities provided early leadership experiences and way for me to explore potential career opportunities. I am fortunate to have had many advisors and mentors during my career, encouraging me to pursue agronomic research. I also participated in an internship and work study program during my undergraduate program at Purdue.

Why I Love My Career

I am constantly learning about new technology and new applications of technology. It is fascinating for me to see a seed product go from discovery to being planted on a farm.

Why My Job Is Important

Food production and food security will always be a basic part of international policy. As the global population continues to grow, new technology will be required to sustain yield and productivity gains. My job is a critical part of that process.

A Typical Day at Work

A typical day starts with a conference call to one of our Asia operations (Asia is a 12- to 14-hour time difference). That is followed by internal meetings to discuss the status of various projects and plan next steps. The balance of the day is returning phone calls and e-mail. If I am lucky, I might get to meet with a group of farmers or visitors from outside the US. We have a lot of tours and I am a resource speaker for certain groups.

Skills and Talents

Understanding basic science and basic business principles are a foundation for my role. I also need to understand global regulatory, political and business trends. It is necessary for me to understand management, development and performance management. I manage a global team and interact with people from different cultures. Therefore, it is important for me to be cultural sensitive.

Why You Should Consider a Career in the Seed Industry

Take as many opportunities as you can to learn about all areas of the industry. Do not be afraid to try something for a while before making a long-term commitment.



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Career Profile 6

Rob R.

Job/Career Position

Owner, Integrated Farming Business

Location

Waterloo, Nebraska

Starting Salaries

\$60,000 - \$200,000

**“Everyone is looking for a career that makes a difference.
What greater difference could one make than this?”**



Bio

When I was growing up, my parents owned a seed business. I started working in the family business when I was 14 years old. We lived in a rural setting and I have always enjoyed the people you find here. There's less traffic and much nicer scenery. I live in Elkhorn, Nebraska, with my wife Cheryl and our four children.

Why I Pursued a Career in Seeds

Due to my experiences growing up in a small agricultural community and interacting with seed people and farmers most of my life, the seed business felt very comfortable to me. It is also very easy to identify with a business that is focused on improving yields, improving our customer's productivity and profitability and feeding a hungry world. Everyone is looking for a career that makes a difference. What greater difference could one make than this?

My Educational Path

- B.S. in Agronomy – University of Nebraska
Minor in Agricultural Business
- Attended the ASTA Management Academy
- Attended the Cornell University Agricultural Academy

Mentors, Clubs and Organizations

I attended many ASTA meetings with my father while growing up. I had two very strong mentors who were professionals in the industry, and I also learned a lot from my involvement in the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) and the International Seed Federation.

Why I Love My Career

I love interacting with people and working together to set a direction through determining strategy, establishing objectives and building the action plans to reach those objectives. Then the fun part comes in making it all happen!

Why My Job Is Important

If we don't do our job, there will not be enough food to feed a growing population. The majority of the yield improvements in Midwestern agricultural crops in the past 40 years have come from genetic improvement. Recently there have been remarkable yield improvements due to biotechnology. Without these improvements, many more people would be starving in the world today! But our job is not finished. With a growing world population and the ability to address other needs such as bio-fuels, there is still much more work to be done.

A Typical Day at Work

When I was managing a seed business, I arrived at my office by 8AM to check and send emails and make phone calls. There were typically one or two meetings a day with various teams and customers. Roughly a third of my time was spent traveling throughout the Midwest interacting with employees, customers and industry groups. The hours were long and the schedule rigorous, but it was extremely rewarding!

Skills and Talents

Certainly knowledge of the seed business is important, but most of the other skills required are similar to what you find in other segments of business. Leadership, problem solving, conflict resolution, financial analytics, team building and innovation are all important skill sets for the seed business.

Why You Should Consider a Career in the Seed Industry

Join the seed industry today! The seed industry is more dynamic than almost any other industry in existence today. Advances due to biotechnology create tremendous growth opportunities for the industry in general and the people involved. We are in the process of creating an entirely new bio economy that will change the face of agricultural business as we know it today!



Visit www.firsttheseedfoundation.org today for more information.