Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources

Highlights at a Glance

- The agribusiness industry in Illinois employs over 163,000 and contributes $13.5 billion to the state’s economy. Given the domestic and export markets for its products, the industry is expected to remain a significant contributor in both jobs and product.

- Over 75 percent of the state’s total land area is dedicated to farming in Illinois.

- Illinois is a leading national producer of soybeans, corn and swine. The state’s climate and soil types also enable farmers to grow and raise many other agriculture commodities including cattle, wheat, oats, sorghum, hay, sheep and poultry.

- While employment in the traditional “on farm” agricultural production industry is expected to continue to decline, overall employment in agribusiness, food and natural resources is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all industries in Illinois.

- Specific segments within the agribusiness industry will experience average growth and many additional job openings will arise from the need to replace those workers who leave the labor force. For example, the landscape and horticultural services segment should have among the most rapid industry job growth in Illinois.

- Those seeking careers in agribusiness need to have a well-rounded educational background in their specific interests (for example, agronomy, agricultural economics and business, natural resources conservation, horticulture, crop science, and animal science). Those interested in these areas who acquire the necessary education and skills should find ample opportunities for employment in Illinois and the Midwest.

Nature of the Industry

The agribusiness industry plays a vital role in both the state and national economies and our daily lives. It supplies us and many other countries with a wide variety of food products and non-food products such as fibers, lumber, and recreation. It contributes positively to our foreign trade balance and it remains one of the Nation's and state’s larger industries in terms of total employment. However, technology continues to enable us to produce more of these products with fewer workers. The largest segment of the traditional agricultural production industry in Illinois includes two large subsectors, crop production and animal production. Of course, many farms in Illinois have both crops and livestock, such as those that grow their own animal feed, or have diverse enterprises. The vast majority of farms, ranches, and other agribusiness companies are small enterprises, owned and operated by families as their primary or secondary source of income. Although large family farms (those generating more than $250,000 per year in gross annual sales) and corporate farms comprise less than 10 percent of the establishments in the industry, they produce three-fourths of all agricultural output. Increasingly, these large farms are being operated for the benefit of large agribusiness firms, which buy most of the product. The agribusiness industry sector is being transformed by the implementation of science and technology in almost every phase of the agricultural process (for example, bioengineered crops, the use of global positioning equipment, animal genetics, further mechanization, and marketing). These changes are increasing the employment opportunities in all agribusiness fields including: agricultural support services; farm management services; aerial dusting and spraying; farm labor contractors; and, animal breeding and insemination.
Agribusiness Systems

11-9012 Farmers & Ranchers 57,067 -4,175 -7.32% 0 349 349 $43,611 Long-term on-the-job training
11-9011 Farm, Ranch & Other Agricultural Managers 3,146 10 0.32% 1 64 65 $30,771 Bachelor's degree plus work exp.
41-4011 Sales Reps, Whls/Mfg, Tech/Scientific Products* 707 46 6.52% 5 16 21 $65,900 Moderate-term on-the-job training
11-2022 Sales Managers 567 78 13.65% 8 12 20 $96,217 Bachelor's degree plus work exp.
51-1011 1st-Line Supervisors/Mgrs, Production Workers* 1,349 -70 -5.22% 0 18 18 $54,614 Work experience in a related occ.
13-1021 Purchasing Agents & Buyers, Farm Products 745 -18 -2.42% 0 17 17 $50,878 Work experience in a related occ.
11-3071 Transportation, Storage & Dist. Managers* 415 -19 -4.66% 0 11 11 $84,179 Work experience in a related occ.

Animal Systems

11-9012 Farmers & Ranchers 57,067 -4,175 -7.32% 0 349 349 $43,611 Long-term on-the-job training
29-2056 Veterinary Technologists & Technicians 1,941 565 29.11% 57 49 106 $36,727 Associate degree
29-1131 Veterinarians 2,013 595 29.56% 60 35 95 $73,599 First professional degree
31-9096 Vet Assistants & Lab Animal Caretakers 2,983 541 18.14% 54 33 87 $22,525 Short-term on-the-job training
11-9011 Farm, Ranch & Other Agricultural Managers 3,146 10 0.32% 1 64 65 $30,771 Bachelor's degree plus work exp.
45-2093 Farmworkers, Farm & Ranch Animals 1,083 -75 -6.93% 0 29 29 $23,551 Short-term on-the-job training
19-1011 Animal Scientists 14 0 0.00% 0 1 1 $50,360 Bachelor's degree
25-1041 Agricultural Sciences Faculty 139 9 6.47% 1 2 3 $52,810 Doctoral degree

Environmental Service Systems

19-4091 Environmental Science & Protection Technicians 584 81 13.74% 8 25 33 $41,787 Associate degree
19-2041 Environmental Scientists & Specialists* 536 55 10.12% 6 15 21 $67,350 Master's Degree
17-2081 Environmental Engineers* 525 98 18.63% 10 11 21 $82,040 Bachelor's degree
19-1013 Soil & Plant Scientists 316 22 6.96% 2 11 13 $63,632 Bachelor's degree
25-1053 Environmental Science Faculty 26 3 11.54% 0 1 1 $50,322 Doctoral degree

Food Products & Processing Systems

51-3021 Butchers & Meat Cutters 7,739 250 3.23% 25 248 273 $25,967 Long-term on-the-job training
51-3022 Meat, Poultry & Fish Cutters & Trimmers 5,607 359 6.40% 36 180 216 $23,968 Short-term on-the-job training
51-3023 Slaughtermen & Meat Packers 5,082 81 1.59% 8 163 171 $22,940 Moderate-term on-the-job training
45-2041 Graders & Sorters, Agricultural Products 1,253 -30 -2.39% 0 26 26 $20,189 Work experience in a related occ.
45-2011 Agricultural & Food Science Technicians 544 25 4.60% 3 11 14 $46,641 Work experience in a related occ.
17-2021 Agricultural Engineers 78 1 1.28% 0 2 2 $72,813 Bachelor's degree
19-1012 Food Scientists & Technologists* 248 18 7.54% 2 9 11 $56,728 Bachelor's degree
19-1022 Microbiologists* 208 10 5.06% 1 3 4 $63,338 Doctoral degree
49-1011 Agricultural & Food Science Technicians 524 28 5.34% 3 18 21 $34,321 Associate degree
29-1031 Dietitians & Nutritionists* 552 38 6.84% 4 19 23 $51,297 Bachelor's degree
13-1021 Purchasing Agents & Buyers, Farm Products 745 -18 -2.42% 0 17 17 $50,878 Work experience in a related occ.
41-4011 Sales Reps, Whls/Mfg, Tech/Scientific Products* 707 46 6.52% 5 16 21 $65,900 Moderate-term on-the-job training

Note: Food preparation workers including chefs and cooks are not included in this initial analysis. They play key roles within the Food Products and Processing Systems Pathway in developing and improving prepared food products for processing and distribution throughout the food supply chain, but work predominantly within the hospitality and culinary sector. These occupations may be added in future analysis after consultation with agriculture and hospitality stakeholders.

Natural Resources Systems

11-9011 Natural Sciences Managers 1,209 45 3.72% 5 36 41 $129,345 Bachelor's degree plus work exp.
19-4021 Biological Technicians* 404 34 8.43% 3 6 9 $40,044 Associate degree
19-1031 Conservation Scientists 296 5 1.69% 1 3 4 $64,814 Bachelor's degree
45-4011 Forest & Conservation Workers 264 20 7.58% 2 7 9 $48,319 Moderate-term on-the-job training
19-4093 Forest & Conservation Technicians 250 12 4.80% 1 11 12 $36,469 Associate degree

Plant Systems

19-1013 Soil & Plant Scientists 316 22 6.96% 2 11 13 $63,632 Bachelor's degree
17-1012 Landscape Architects 845 181 21.42% 18 14 32 $62,901 Bachelor's degree
37-1012 1st-Line Supervisors/Mgrs, Landscaping & Lawn Serv. 7,013 1211 17.27% 121 76 197 $41,855 Work experience in a related occ.
37-3011 Landscaping & Groundskeeping Workers 43,617 9703 22.25% 970 525 1,495 $24,338 Short-term on-the-job training
37-3013 Tree Trimmers & Pruners 971 226 23.27% 23 12 35 $33,160 Short-term on-the-job training
37-3012 Pesticide Handlers, Sprayers & Applicators 1,468 253 17.23% 25 18 43 $29,291 Moderate-term on-the-job training
37-3019 Grounds Maintenance Workers, All Other 1,445 184 12.73% 18 17 35 $23,172 Short-term on-the-job training
11-9012 Farmers & Ranchers 57,067 -4,175 -7.32% 0 349 349 $43,611 Long-term on-the-job training
45-2092 Farmworkers & Laborers, Nursery/Greenhouse 8,874 -491 -5.53% 0 239 239 $22,727 Short-term on-the-job training

Power Structural & Technical Systems

49-3041 Farm Equipment Mechanics 1,275 135 10.59% 14 24 38 $33,734 Postsecondary vocational award
49-2091 Agricultural Equipment Operators 1,268 -79 -6.23% 0 34 34 $28,904 Moderate-term on-the-job training
49-3031 Truck Mechanics & Diesel Engine Specialists* 276 -24 -8.60% 2 6 8 $44,148 Postsecondary vocational award
49-3042 Mobile Heavy Equipment Mechanics* 157 16 10.38% 2 3 5 $52,823 Postsecondary vocational award
17-3023 Electrical & Electronic Engineering Technicians* 1,082 -28 -2.61% 0 21 21 $56,099 Associate degree
15-1041 Computer Support Specialists* 19 -1 -5.26% 0 0 1 $47,828 Associate degree

Note: * Share in the Agribusiness Industry.