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Exploring career preferences among agriculture graduates and postgraduates in Maharashtra

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Abstract

This study investigates career preferences among graduate and postgraduate agriculture students, viewing career choice as a pivotal outcome of higher education and a key factor in agricultural human resource development. Employing an ex post facto research design, data were gathered from students at Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri. Preferences were assessed across major domains: government services, research, higher education, agribusiness, private sector employment and entrepreneurship. Results indicate that graduates primarily favoured government and administrative services, whereas postgraduates leaned toward research, academia and specialized professional roles. These differences stem from variations in academic exposure, achievement motivation and perceived job security. The findings highlight the importance of tailored career guidance and institutional support to align student aspirations with evolving opportunities in agriculture.

Keywords: Career preferences, agriculture students, graduate students, postgraduate students, higher education, employment aspirations

Introduction

Career preferences denote an individual's predisposition toward specific occupations or professional paths, influenced by personal interests, abilities, values and perceived opportunities. In higher education, these preferences are moulded by academic experiences, socio-economic factors, institutional settings and employment prospects (Rojewski, 1996) ^[6]. For agriculture students, such preferences hold particular relevance, as agriculture drives employment, rural development and national food security.

Agricultural higher education seeks to deliver technical expertise while cultivating human resources for roles as scientists, educators, administrators, extension specialists and entrepreneurs. Graduate and postgraduate students form a vital part of this workforce. Yet, research reveals a persistent bias toward select careers, driven by job security, income reliability and social status (Surve, 2005; Agbo *et al*, 2015) ^[7, 1].

Government jobs remain the top choice for agriculture graduates, offering stable income, security and advancement in departments, allied services, banking and administration—roles often seen as prestigious (Ansari & Ansari, 2019) ^[2]. This focus leads many to prioritize competitive exams over alternatives like agribusiness or entrepreneurship.

Postgraduate training, with its emphasis on advanced

courses, research methods and specialization, shifts orientations. Elevated academic achievement fosters research skills and motivation, steering postgraduates toward research, teaching and academic positions (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996) ^[5]. It also expands awareness of non-traditional paths, such as consultancy, policy formulation and tech-driven agricultural services.

Despite pushes for agripreneurship and private-sector involvement, entrepreneurial preferences lag due to risk, capital constraints and insufficient support (Modak *et al*, 2018) ^[4]. Analyzing these preferences is crucial for refining curricula, guidance programs and policies to foster balanced agricultural growth.

This study compares career preferences between graduate and postgraduate agriculture students, pinpointing dominant choices and educational drivers. Its insights aim to bolster career planning in agricultural universities, boosting employability and satisfaction among future professionals.

Objective

To study the career preferences of graduate and post graduate agriculture students

Methodology

This research employed an ex-post-facto design. The study site was Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri, Maharashtra. The sample comprised graduate and

postgraduate agriculture students, drawn via proportionate random sampling.

Career preferences were gauged by ranking options: government services, research and education, private-sector jobs, agribusiness, entrepreneurship, and self-employment. Analysis utilized the Garrett ranking technique alongside descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages

Garrett Ranking

Garrett ranking was calculated for purpose of ranking by using following formula.

$$\text{Per cent position} = \frac{100 * (R_{ij} - 0.50)}{N_j}$$

Where,

R_{ij} = Rank given for the i^{th} variable by j^{th} respondents

N_j = Number of variables ranked by j^{th} respondents

Results and Discussion

Career Preferences among of Graduate Agriculture students (n=342)

Table 1: Distribution of graduate agriculture students according to their career preferences

Sr. No.	Career options	Graduate (n=342)	
		Percentage rank	Rank
1	Indian Forest services (IFS)	60.82	I
2	Research	59.44	II
3	Indian Administrative service (IAS)/ Indian Foreign services (IFS)/ Indian Police services (IPS)	59.43	III
4	Maharashtra Forest Services	58.07	IV
5	State department of Agriculture/Maharashtra	57.85	V
6	Banking sector	56.65	VI
7	Maharashtra General State services	55.72	VII
8	Government undertakings	54.82	VIII
9	Indian Revenue services (IRS)	54.63	IX
10	Other Maharashtra civil services	52.84	X
11	Academics	52.75	XI
12	Farming/ Agriculture	52.22	XII
13	Other union civil services	50.83	XIII
14	Agri-entrepreneurship/ Agribusiness	49.01	XIV
15	Business	49.01	XV
16	Entrepreneurship	47.37	XVI
17	Agri Input dealership	41.34	XVII
18	Corporate sector	41.04	XVIII
19	Job in non- government organizations	38.52	XIX
20	Co-operative sector	36.51	XX
21	Farm journalism	27.61	XXI

The career preferences of graduate agriculture students are presented in Table 1. The data indicated that the majority of students expressed the highest level of interest in joining the Indian Forest Service (IFS), with 60.82 per cent prioritizing this career path. A considerable proportion (59.44 per cent) aspired to research-oriented roles, particularly as Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientists. Similarly, 59.43 per cent of the graduates showed strong inclination toward pursuing central civil services such as the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Indian Police Service (IPS), highlighting the appeal of prestigious government positions.

Government and public-sector careers emerged as particularly attractive options. A significant percentage of students preferred the Maharashtra Forest Services (58.07 per cent), the State Department of Agriculture, Maharashtra (57.85 per cent) and the banking sector (56.65 per cent). Additionally, 55.72 per cent aimed to secure roles in the Maharashtra General State Services, while 54.82 per cent considered employment in government undertakings such as the Food Corporation of India. The Indian Revenue Service

(54.63 per cent) and other Maharashtra civil services (52.84 per cent) also drew interest. Academic careers attracted a fair proportion of students, with 52.75 per cent aspiring to become assistant professors, while self-employment through farming and agriculture appealed to 52.22 per cent of the graduates.

On the contrary, relatively fewer students preferred alternative career options. Only 50.83 per cent indicated interest in Union Civil Services, while 49.01 per cent expressed inclination toward agri-entrepreneurship/agribusiness and general business. Entrepreneurship outside agriculture attracted 47.37 per cent of students, whereas agri-input dealership roles, such as employment in Krishi Seva Kendras, were chosen by only 41.34 per cent. Corporate sector jobs were preferred by 41.04 per cent, while positions in non-governmental organizations 38.52 per cent and the co-operative sector 36.51 per cent gained even lower interest. The least preferred option was farm journalism (such as reporting, radio jockeying, or agricultural journalism), where only 27.61 per cent of students expressed interest.

Career Preferences among of Post Graduate Agriculture students (n=31)**Table 2:** Distribution of postgraduate agriculture students according to their career preferences

Sr. No.	Career options	Postgraduate (n=31)	
		Percentage rank	Rank
1	Indian Forest services (IFS)	58.74	I
2	Indian Administrative service (IAS)/ Indian Foreign services (IFS)/ Indian Police services (IPS)	57.39	II
3	Indian Revenue services (IRS)	57.06	III
4	Maharashtra Forest Services	55.48	IV
5	Other union civil services	53.03	V
6	State department of Agriculture/Maharashtra	52.52	VI
7	Banking sector	52.23	VII
8	Other Maharashtra civil services	51.87	VIII
9	Maharashtra General State services	51.81	IX
10	Research	50.58	X
11	Academics	50.19	XI
12	Agri Input dealership	49.77	XII
13	Farm journalism	49.00	XIII
14	Corporate sector	48.52	XIV
15	Co-operative sector	47.10	XV
16	Farming/ Agriculture	46.97	XVI
17	Agri-entrepreneurship/ Agribusiness	46.77	XVII
18	Business	46.42	XVIII
19	Entrepreneurship	45.10	XIX
20	Job in non- government organizations	43.52	XX
21	Government undertakings	36.94	XXI

The career preferences of postgraduate agriculture students are presented in Table 2. The data indicated that the majority of students expressed a strong preference for careers in the Indian Forest Service (IFS), with 58.74 per cent prioritizing it as their top career choice. A similarly high proportion (57.39 per cent) aspired to pursue central civil services such as the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Indian Police Service (IPS). Government services remained attractive, with 57.06 per cent opting for the Indian Revenue Service (IRS) and 55.48 per cent showing interest in the Maharashtra Forest Services.

Additional preferences included the Union Civil Services (53.03 per cent), the State Department of Agriculture, Maharashtra (52.52 per cent) and employment in the banking sector (52.23 per cent). Similarly, 51.87 per cent of students considered careers in other Maharashtra civil services, while 51.81 per cent expressed interest in the Maharashtra General State Services. Careers in research (50.58 per cent) and academics, particularly as assistant professors (50.19 per cent), were also moderately preferred by postgraduate students. Some respondents also viewed agri-input dealership roles (49.77 per cent) and farm journalism (49.00 per cent) as viable options.

By contrast, comparatively less interest was expressed in corporate sector jobs (48.52 per cent) and roles in the co-operative sector (47.10 per cent). Traditional farming or agriculture as a career path attracted 46.97 per cent of students, while agri-entrepreneurship/agri-business (46.77 per cent) and general business careers (46.42 per cent) were similarly less preferred. Entrepreneurship outside the agricultural sector was chosen by 45.10 per cent of the students. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as BAIF, CARE, or WFP attracted 43.52 per cent. The least preferred career option was government undertakings, such as the Food Corporation of India or the Warehousing

Corporation, with only 36.94 per cent of the postgraduate students indicating interest in this career path.

Conclusion

This study reveals distinct career preferences among agriculture students by educational level: graduates prioritize secure government positions, whereas postgraduates preference is towards research, academia, and specialized professional roles. These patterns arise from differences in academic exposure, achievement motivation, and perceptions of career viability.

To promote balanced agricultural sector development, universities should enhance career guidance frameworks because many students without awareness or knowledge of opportunities, follow the rat race blindly, raise awareness of diverse pathways, and foster entrepreneurship via hands-on training and robust institutional support. Such alignment between education and aspirations will elevate professional satisfaction and drive sectoral advancement and most importantly, benefit students by raising awareness about diverse opportunities, guiding them throughout the journey and ensuring their settlement in their fields of interest.

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