

ABSTRACT

This study focused on tertiary level students from the University of the West Indies (UWI) campus in St. Augustine Trinidad and their beliefs and perceptions of agriculture and agricultural based careers. Forty (40) students, twenty-two females and eighteen males provided the sample from four of the largest faculties: The faculty of Social Sciences; The faculty of Humanities and Education; The faculty of Engineering and The faculty of Medical Sciences. It must be noted that students from the faculty of Science and Agriculture were excluded to retain a non-biased sample. Questionnaires were developed, pretested and administered to participants. A convenience sample was employed because of its feasibility and ease of data collection.

Key findings were as follows: (1) participants expressed strong views on the usefulness of agriculture. When asked if they believed agriculture was important to the economy, 88% of the respondents fully agreed that it was important. The second key finding was that tertiary level students (88%) believed agriculture to be a viable career option and 68% believed a career in agriculture was an excellent opportunity for self-employment. Surprisingly, 63 % of respondents did not perceive agriculture as a dead-end job. The third key finding revealed, like Holz-Clause and Jost (1992-1993) identified stereotypical views of agriculture amongst undergraduate and graduate students. The study also noted that students equated agriculture with farming, plants, crops and soil, with little association to the technical or research intensive nature of agriculture. Furthermore, the fourth significant finding was that a relatively high percentage of participants (50%) also indicated that most of their beliefs and perceptions on agriculture stemmed from the families, and relatives in the home environment and from schools. Additionally, student perception on agriculture was also found to be influenced by media sources such as television and newspapers. Finally, across faculties, the Faculty of Humanities and Education had the least positive scores on the perception of agriculture and agricultural-based career while Medical Sciences, Social Sciences and Engineering students saw agriculture as a viable career option.

The study argues that more incentives, more education about agriculture and its career paths should be part of school curricula at both public and private secondary and primary schools throughout the country. Similarly, new curricula reform should highlight the possibilities of agricultural-based careers and the usefulness of agriculture in the lives of citizenry.