

PERCEPTIONS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS ON AGRICULTURE AS A CAREER CHOICE IN AKOKO SOUTH-WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract. This study assessed the perceptions of secondary school students of agriculture as a career choice in Akoko LGA, Ondo State, Nigeria. A two-stage sampling technique was used to select 120 respondents. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data from a structured questionnaire. Respondents were mostly female (60.8%), Christian (72.5%), members of small households and sponsored by parents (90.8%). The perceptions results showed that “peer groups believe agriculture is for low-achieving students” had the highest mean score (\bar{x} =3.96; σ =1.32). The most favourable attitude statement was "I would recommend studying agricultural science to others" (\bar{x} =4.06; σ =4.77). The most serious constraints was insufficient time allotted for agricultural practical sessions (\bar{x} = 2.26; σ =1.08). The most cited way of making agriculture attractive and accepted by students was through curriculum enhancement (\bar{x} = 4.76; σ =0.95). The study recommended that schools should incorporate practical agriculture to spark interest and hands-on learning of the subject.

Keywords: socioeconomic characteristics, attitudes, technology, innovation, equipment, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The overarching challenge facing the agricultural sector is to satisfy society's rights to food and ensure that the resource base remains productive for the future (FAO, 2017). Consequently, it is imperative to devise mechanisms for intergenerational transition of agri-food systems to a young, dynamic, innovative, and energetic group of practitioners for sustainable agricultural production and enhanced food security.

The massive number of jobless youths leaving in rural communities in Nigeria coupled with their dismal economic conditions made them potential drivers of agricultural development. Indeed, young people can gainfully invest their energies, skills and creative knowledge toward sustainable agriculture and rural development. As compelling agents of change and creators of wealth and services, young people could be nurtured to take interest in agriculture. Although secondary school students have little or no economic assets such as land, property and capital, they have the time, energy and intelligence required to learn and improve their knowledge and capability for positive change and development. These students could be encouraged, trained or groomed to embrace agriculture as a discipline at the university and as a career for the future (Pervez *et al.*, 2024).

Evidently, exposing young people to the merit of agriculture would alter preconceived negative notions about the subject and possibly engender a positive perception towards the learning and practice of agriculture (Pervez, 2024). Scholarship

have established that poor educational environments including the lack of infrastructure, teaching/learning resources and qualified teachers in Africa affect the effective agriculture instruction in schools (Darko *et al.* 2015).

The viability of agriculture as a profession is increasingly in question, hence the need for agriculture pedagogy to be re-visited in schools, colleges and universities of agriculture (Sahin *et al.*, 2016). Understanding the perceptions of secondary school students towards agriculture as a career choice is crucial for aligning future workforce interests with national development goals. Moreover, youth involvement in agriculture is essential to counteract the aging farmer population and promote innovative agricultural practices (IFAD, 2014; Girdziute *et al.* 2022). Crucially, identifying students' perceptions and barriers towards agriculture as a course or career would aid educators and career counsellors in framing programs that make agriculture appealing to students and nurture future agripreneurs (Mulei *et al.*, 2020).

This study examines the perceptions of secondary school students of agriculture as a career choice in Akoko South-West Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria. It describes the personal characteristics of the secondary school students, examines the students' attitude towards agriculture as a career choice, identifies the constraints faced by the students in studying agriculture, and suggests ways by which agriculture can be made more attractive and embraced by the students as a future career choice.

The following hypotheses are stated in null form

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the personal characteristics of secondary school students and their perceptions of agriculture as a career choice

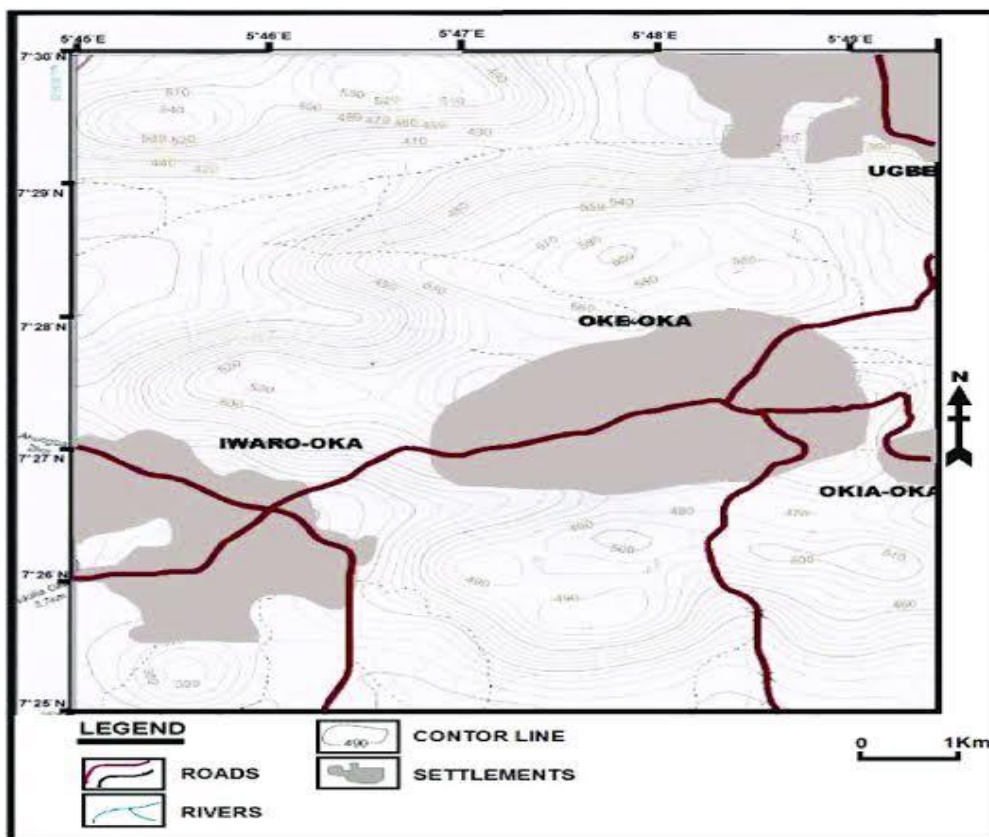
Hi: There is no significant relationship between the attitude of secondary school students and their perceptions of agriculture as a career choice.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study area is Oka-Akoko, Akoko LGA, Ondo State, Nigeria. The people are mainly subsistence migrant farmers, producing foodstuffs like yams, maize and cassava, which some farmers combined with cash crops like cocoa, coffee and rubber. Oka-Akoko has a vibrant educational scene, comprising several secondary schools offering agriculture from Senior Secondary School (SSS) 1 to 3.

The population of the study comprises all secondary school students in Akoko Local Government area of Ondo State. Respondents were selected using a two-stage sampling procedure. Akoko South West Local Government Area, comprises of five communities. In the first stage, simple random sampling was used to select five Government secondary schools in each of the selected communities in Akoko namely, Ac Grammer school, Ola Oluwa Grammar School, Ogosu Grammar School, Ac2 Grammar School, Ojomirin Grammar School. .Second, eight (8) students in (SSS 1-3) were randomly selected from each of the selected government secondary schools, making a total of 120 respondents.

Data collection involved a well-structured questionnaire survey and interview schedule which were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Socioeconomic characteristics such as age, household size, etc., were measured at interval and nominal levels.



Map of Oka-Akoko

Student's attitude towards agriculture as a career choice was measured by asking respondents to tick from a list of attitudinal dispositions towards agriculture which were measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale of Strongly disagree (SD) (5), Agree (A) (4), Undecided (U) (3) Disagree (D) (2), Strongly agree (SA) (1). The responses were aggregated, and the mean calculated (mean ≥ 3.0 = favourable attitude).

Ways by which agricultural science could be made more attractive and accepted to students as a future career was measured by asking students to tick from a list of suggestions which were measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale of Strongly disagree (SD) (5), Agree (A) (4), Undecided (U) (3) Disagree (D) (2), Strongly agree (SA) (1). The responses were aggregated, and the mean calculated (Mean ≥ 3.0 = agreed). To identify constraints faced by the students in studying agriculture, respondents were asked to tick from a catalogue of constraints. The responses were aggregated, and the means and standard deviations generated which were measured using a 3-point Likert-type scale of (Very serious, Serious, not Serious). The responses were aggregated, and the mean calculated (mean ≥ 2.5 = serious constraint).

Perceptions of secondary school students on agriculture as a career choice was measured by asking students to tick from a suggested perception list which were measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale of Strongly disagree (SD) (5), Agree (A)

(4), Undecided (U) (3) Disagree (D) (2), Strongly agree (SA) (1). The responses were aggregated, and the mean calculated (mean \geq 3.0 = favourable perception).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 shows that 38.3% of the respondents were male, while 60.8% were female, indicating a dominance of female students in the sample. The population of male and female enrolments in secondary schools in Nigeria broadly shows parity between both genders as parents prioritise the formal education of their children. Olowofela *et al.* (2021), found that female students are increasingly recognizing the value of agriculture in promoting food security and sustainable livelihoods.

The age distribution shows that 45.8% of respondents were aged 11-15years, 49.2% were aged 16 and above years. This approximates the age range for children at the senior secondary level of education in Nigeria. Arimi and Fatufe (2021) found that 52.1% of students in their sample were aged 11 and 15years, 50.3% were females, while 56.3% had parents who were traders.

Christianity is the dominant religion among the respondents (72.5%), with Islam accounting for 22.5%. Although southern Nigeria tends to have almost equal populations of adherents to the Christian and Islamic faith, the prevalence of Christians in this sample indicates the stronger penetration of Christian evangelism in the area, particular of the Pentecostal variety. Adebo and Sekumade (2013) found that 61.25% of their sampled students were Christians.

Approximately half (51%) of the respondents had household size of less than 5 persons, followed by families with 5-8 members (33.3%). Household sizes have progressively shrunk especially in southern Nigeria since the 1980s, reflecting decline in fertility rates due to existential realities and cost of living crisis. Egboduku *et al.* (2021) confirmed an average household size of three for a study of youth interest in agriculture in Abuja, Nigeria.

The distribution of respondents' parents' occupation was relatively even among civil service (36.7), farming (32.5) and trading (30.8). This indicates a diversity in the occupational profile of the students' parents, reinforcing the prioritization of children's education by parents of different occupational affiliations. Ikuemonisan (2022) found that 41% of college students in Nigeria have civil/public servants' parents.

An overwhelming 90% of the students were sponsored by their parents, 2.5% were sponsored by self and 5% mixed sponsorship. This high proportion of parent-sponsored students is not surprising as sponsorship from government and private sector scholarships have dwindled since the 1980s. The small proportions of self and mixed sponsorship are instructive as they demonstrate students' personal investments in their education. Ogunode *et al.* (2023) emphasized the need for greater investment in education. Afolabi *et al.* (2020) prescribed improvement in agricultural education through higher budgets and recruitment of qualified personnel.

Table 1. Socioeconomic characteristics of respondents

Name of School	Freq	%
Age in years		
<10	6	5

11-15	55	45.8
16 and above	59	49.2
Sex		
Male	46	38.3
Female	73	60.8
Religion		
Islam	27	22.5
Christianity	87	72.5
Traditional	6	5
Educational level		
Senior Secondary School 1	26	21.7
Senior Secondary School 2	53	44.2
Senior Secondary School 3	41	34.2
Actual household size		
Less than 5	62	51.7
5-8persons	40	33.3
9-11persons	11	9.2
12-14persons	2	1.7
15 and above	5	4.2
Occupation of the parent		
Farming	39	32.5
Trading	37	30.8
Civil service	44	36.7
Mode of Sponsorship		
Parent	109	90.8
Self	3	2.5
Parent & Self (Mixed)	6	5
Scholarship	2	1.7

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Perceptions of respondents regarding agriculture as a career choice

Table 2 shows that the perception that “peer groups believe agriculture is for low-achieving students” had the highest mean score ($\bar{x}=3.96; \sigma=1.32$), indicating a strong opinion that agriculture is undervalued by peers. The perception that “agricultural graduates have opportunities to work in different establishments ($\bar{x}=3.35; \sigma=1.39$) had the second highest mean score, while “parents do not support their children in choosing agriculture at the university level” ($\bar{x}=3.24; \sigma=1.40$) had the third highest mean score. The wide job prospects perception is a valid one which is often not borne out by reality as generalized unemployment in the economy squeezes

job opportunities for all graduates including those of agriculture. Parental influence or pressure in the career choice of students is pervasive as parents often pivot their children towards so-called ‘prestigious’ courses such as medicine, law and architecture.

Obayelu and Fadele (2019) found that about 50% of the students in their sample desired to become doctors and 24% aspired to become engineers, while only 5% wanted to become farmers. Prasetyaningrum *et al.* (2022) discovered that 75% and 84% of male and female students in their Indonesian sample respectively, indicated that their parents gave them freedom towards career choices in agriculture.

The perceptions that “many people look down on those who choose agriculture in the university” ($\bar{x}=3.16$; $\sigma=1.52$) and “studying agriculture in the university takes longer years” ($\bar{x}=3.05$; $\sigma=1.48$) made up the final list of perceptions that meets the “agreement” threshold of 3.0. Evidently, some segments of the society hold the belief that agriculture is somewhat lowly and mundane and does not warrant a five-year course of study at the university. Relatedly, bachelor’s degree agriculture courses in Nigerian universities run for a minimum of five years, exceeding the duration for most courses in the sciences and humanities by one year, which is a disincentive for potential choosers of the discipline as a career. Overall, the perceptions reflect a mix of positive and neutral views about the challenges and societal predilections toward agriculture as a career choice. Prasetyaningrum *et al.* (2022) affirmed that the lack of enthusiasm among young people in pursuing agricultural careers is due to the perception that it holds less promise for the future, lacks prestige and attracts relatively low salaries. Meanwhile, Ogunyemi and Oyebola (2022) reported a growing awareness among Nigerian youth on the importance of agriculture for national development and career choice influenced by increased exposure to agricultural education in schools.

Table 2. Perceptions of respondents regarding agriculture as a career choice

Perception	\bar{x}	σ
Parents do not support their child to choose agriculture in university.	3.24	1.40
Peer groups believe agriculture is for low-achieving students.	3.96	1.32
Agricultural graduates have opportunities to work in different establishments.	3.35	1.39
Studying agriculture in the university takes longer years.	3.05	1.48
Studying agriculture in the university makes you look inferior.	2.40	1.31
Engaging in agriculture makes someone dirty.	2.43	1.62
Agriculture teachers are not available in schools.	1.97	1.18
There are no available tools and implements for agriculture field practical.	2.43	1.40
Agricultural graduates find it difficult to secure jobs.	2.18	1.14
Many people look down on those who choose agriculture in university.	3.16	1.52

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Mean \geq 3.0 = Agreed

Respondents' attitudes toward agriculture as a field of study and career choice

Table 3 shows that the most favourable attitude was recorded for the statement, "I would recommend studying agricultural science to others" ($\bar{x}=4.06$; $\sigma=4.77$), indicating a strong endorsement of agricultural science as a field of study and career choice by the students. Similarly, respondents agreed that "agriculture is pivotal to achieving food security and sustainability globally." ($\bar{x}=3.89$; $\sigma=1.19$), showing positive sentiment on the global roles of agriculture. There were also favourable attitudes towards "agricultural science provides practical skills applicable to real-world situations" ($\bar{x}=3.69$; $\sigma=1.30$), "agricultural science education is adequately valued in society" ($\bar{x}=3.67$; $\sigma=3.93$), and it is considered "easy to establish oneself as a graduate of agriculture" ($\bar{x}=3.64$; $\sigma=1.37$), "agricultural education fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills" ($\bar{x}=3.66$; $\sigma=1.25$), and "agriculture offers fulfilling career prospects" ($\bar{x}=3.6$; $\sigma=1.24$). Finally, other statements with favourable attitudes were that "there are ample opportunities for growth and innovation in the field" ($\bar{x}=3.48$; $\sigma=1.34$) and "agriculture graduates are perceived to become wealthy" ($\bar{x}=3.34$; $\sigma=1.28$). Arimi & Fatufe (2021) discovered that 72.5% of the respondents in their study had unfavourable attitude towards studying agricultural science.

On the less favourable side are the stigma associated with agricultural science ($\bar{x}=2.95$; $\sigma=1.50$) which suggest that despite considerable positive attitudes toward the field, societal bias or prejudices may discourage students from pursuing a career on it, agriculture being viewed as a "dirty job" ($\bar{x}=2.74$; $\sigma=5.0$) and the idea that agricultural students are treated poorly by the public ($\bar{x}=2.70$ $\sigma=1.33$). Overall, the attitudes of respondents show predominantly positive or favorable attitudes toward agriculture as a career. Afolabi *et al.* (2021) asserted that society often prioritizes white-collar jobs over agricultural careers creating a stigma that deters students from pursuing agriculture careers.

Table 3. Respondents' attitudes toward agriculture as a field of study and career choice

Attitude	\bar{X}	σ
Agriculture is believed to be a dirty job.	2.74	5.00
The public treats agricultural students as trash.	2.70	1.33
Agriculture graduates are always rich.	3.34	1.28
It is easy to establish as a graduate of agriculture.	3.64	1.37
Studying agricultural science offers fulfilling career prospects.	3.61	1.24
Agricultural science education is adequately valued in society.	3.67	3.93
Agriculture is pivotal to achieving food security and sustainability globally.	3.89	1.19
There are ample opportunities for growth and innovation in the field of agricultural science.	3.48	1.34
Studying agricultural science provides practical skills applicable to real-world situations.	3.69	1.30
I would recommend studying agricultural science to others.	4.06	4.77

Studying agricultural science fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills.	3.66	1.25
The stigma associated with agricultural science discourages students from pursuing it as a career.	2.95	1.50

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Mean \geq 3.0 = Favourable

Constraints faced by students in agricultural education

Table 4 shows that all the constraints mentioned by the respondents fell below the threshold mean of ≥ 2.5 required to be considered "serious." However, the most widely faced constraints were "insufficient time allotted for agricultural practical sessions" ($\bar{x}=2.26$; $\sigma=1.08$), "limited opportunities for hands-on learning in agricultural studies" ($\bar{x}= 2.21$; $\sigma=1.11$) and "difficulties in accessing the school library" ($\bar{x}= 2.20$; $\sigma=0.98$). The lack of practical sessions and hands-on learning in agricultural studies is a disturbing feature of agriculture programs in schools where the pedagogy is disproportionately skewed toward classroom sessions and less toward field operations. Other constraints include the non-availability of agricultural materials in schools ($\bar{x}= 2.11$; $\sigma=1.20$), the strenuous activities during practical sessions ($\bar{x}= 2.12$; $\sigma=1.08$), and lack of adequate equipment and tools for practical sessions ($\bar{x}= 2.02$; $\sigma=1.12$). These responses show an interplay of concerns around the practical sessions such as the need to deepen, broaden, provide appropriate materials, and manage the process effectively. Olaniyan *et al.* (2022) advocated a more hands-on and practical approach to agricultural education to enhance students' interest and understanding of agriculture-based careers.

Table 4. Constraints faced by students in agricultural education

Constraints	\bar{X}	σ
Inadequate number of teachers	1.83	0.94
Difficulties in accessing school library	2.20	0.98
Unavailability of agricultural material in school	2.11	1.20
Strenuous activities engaged during agricultural practical	2.12	1.08
Lack of adequate equipment and tools for practical sessions	2.02	1.12
Limited opportunities for hands-on learning in agricultural studies	2.21	1.11
Insufficient time allotted for agricultural practical Sessions	2.26	1.08
Inadequate funding for agricultural education programs	1.78	1.10

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Mean ≥ 2.5 = Serious

Ways to make agriculture attractive and accepted by students

Table 4 reveals that the ratings for making agriculture attractive and accepted by students as through curriculum enhancement ($\bar{x}= 4.76$; $\sigma=0.95$); "the use of innovative educational approaches" ($\bar{x}= 4.38$; $\sigma=1.01$) and "the integration of technology and

digital platforms” ($\bar{x}= 4.36$; $\sigma=0.99$). These findings sign post the need to revisit and revise the agricultural curriculum as currently constructed to incorporate modern, innovative and best practices in the field of agricultural education and development to make it more exciting to students.

Other ways mentioned by the respondents includes revamping agricultural policy and institutional support ($\bar{x}= 4.37$; $\sigma=1.01$), promoting awareness and perception change ($\bar{x}= 4.28$; $\sigma=0.99$), exposure to sustainable practices ($\bar{x}= 4.25$; $\sigma=1.01$) and community and parental engagement ($\bar{x}=4.12$; $\sigma=1.16$). There are evident gaps in agricultural policy and institutional support that needs to be bridged. Moreover, many agricultural institutions are in dire need of financial and material support to fulfil their mandates and exposure to sustainable practices is important to demonstrate the relevance of agriculture in providing solutions to contemporary food and nutrition challenges. Community and parental engagements are also critical, illustrating the role of families and communities in shaping positive perceptions of agriculture as a viable career path. Olanrewaju and Raji (2022) underscored the need for families to instill a sense of pride in farming practices on their children to engender a more favourable perception of agriculture. Omojuwa and Adebayo (2023) emphasized the importance of role modelling by showcasing successful agricultural practitioners, to foster interest and enthusiasm for agriculture careers as an innovative approach for inspiring young people to consider agriculture as a profession. Asare-Nuamah *et al.* (2024) suggested mounting of workshops and trainings to ignite interest in agriculture.

Table 5. Ways of making agriculture attractive and accepted by students

Options	\bar{X}	σ
Curriculum enhancement	4.76	0.95
Awareness and perception change	4.28	0.99
Community and parental engagement	4.12	1.16
Use of technology and digital platforms	4.36	0.99
Exposure to sustainable practices	4.25	1.01
Agricultural policy and institutional support	4.37	1.01
Innovative educational approaches	4.38	1.01

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Mean ≥ 3.0 = Important

Test of Hypothesis

Table 6 shows a significant relationship between the socioeconomic characteristics of the farmers such as name of school ($\chi^2=160.195$; $p< 0.05$) sex ($\chi^2=79.078$; $p= 0.05$), household size ($\chi^2=112.656$; $p< 0.05$) and students' perceptions of agriculture as a career choice. This implies that the school attended plays a crucial role in shaping students' views on studying agriculture. Similarly, gender and household size influence students' perceptions of agriculture as a career choice. Other factors such as age, education, parents' occupation, and mode of sponsorship, do not significantly influence students' perceptions of agriculture as a career choice. Egbojodu *et al.* (2021) found that factors significantly motivating youths toward agricultural career included family context, access to land and inputs cost.

Table 6. Results of Chi-square showing association between socio-economic characteristics and perceptions of agriculture as a career choice

	Chi-square	df	Sig (<i>p</i>)
Name of school	160.195**	124	0.016
Age	70.078	62	0.225
Sex	79.078*	62	0.051
Education	60.84	62	0.518
Household size	112.656*	124	0.045
Parents' Occupation	64.048	62	0.405
Mode of sponsorship	71.92	93	0.249

Source: Field survey, 2024.

**Significant association at 0.01 and *Significant association at 0.05 level of significance

Table 7 reveals a significant relationship between attitude of secondary school students towards agriculture and their perceptions of agriculture as a career ($r=0.246, p < 0.05$). This implies that positive attitudes of students toward agriculture reinforced their perception of agriculture as a career. The strength of the relationship is moderate, suggesting that while attitude plays an important role in shaping students' perceptions, other factors influence their views on agriculture as a career path. Obayelu and Fadele (2019) found that the likelihood of high school students' choosing a career in agriculture was significantly related to having a parent that practised the vocation and desire to operate a farm after graduating from high school.

Table 7. Relationship between the attitude of secondary school students and their perceptions of agriculture as a career choice

	Correlation Coeff (<i>r</i>)	Signif. (<i>p</i>)
Attitude	0.246**	0.007

Source: Field survey, 2024.

**Significant association at 0.01 and *Significant association at 0.05 level of significance

CONCLUSION

The study assessed the perceptions of secondary school students of agriculture as a career choice in Akoko Southwest Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria. The perceptions reflect a mix of positive and neutral views about personal, peer and societal predilections toward agriculture as a career choice. It is recommended that schools should incorporate practical agricultural activities such as gardening or farm visits to spark interest and hands-on learning, organise career talks by agricultural professionals to showcase modern opportunities in agribusiness, technology, and sustainability, update the education curriculum to reflect modern agricultural practices, such as smart farming, biotechnology, and sustainable practices, leverage media and technology to highlight innovations in agriculture and engage local communities, including parents and opinion leaders, to change the societal narrative on agriculture.

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