

“The old skills of timeliness, hard work and honesty will never be replaced.” see page 21 >>

# advantage



## Our look at the new boom in ag education:

- Interviews with current and former students
- The increase in enrollment
- Job prospects and real-world lessons



A FarmLIFE/inside agriculture Special Report

# MAJOR Changes

STORY BY CLAIRE VATH /// PHOTOS BY ART MERIPOL

## IT IS EARLY, AND THE YOKE-COLORED LIGHT

is breaking over the spartan brick buildings in Murray, Ky. Things look decidedly hopeful as students stride across the dew-laced grass of campus. Murray State University’s Hutson School of Agriculture teems with activity.

In the equestrian center, horses are saddled for class. At the school’s Pullen Farm, students huddle around a greenhouse table, studying plant propagation. In a vet tech class, cats in varying stages of anesthesia offer up stray meows as class members monitor blood pressure.

MSU’s Hutson School of Agriculture, like so many North American ag schools, appears about to burst at the seams. In a reversal from just a decade ago, agriculture is “in” and its future bright. Enrollment in colleges of agriculture in both the U.S. and Canada has experienced healthy upswings. Individual institutions, including MSU, are reporting record numbers.

Most of it boils down to “jobs, jobs, jobs,” says MSU Hutson School of Agriculture dean Dr. Tony Brannon of increased interest in agriculture among a new crop of students. “There are lots of expanded job opportunities in fields relatively new to agriculture, such as biotechnology, veterinary technology and precision agriculture.” Coupled with a retiring workforce and an expanding market that includes positions for non-rural youth, Brannon believes this created “the perfect storm leading to increased enrollment in many sectors of agriculture. I also think modern students realize there is as much respect for agriculture now as there is in being a doctor, lawyer, etc.,” he adds.

Because they offer a glimpse at agriculture’s future, we sat down with a group of Murray State’s agriculture students to better understand what motivates, concerns and appeals to them about their chosen academic discipline and the profession for which they’re preparing. We did the same with a group of MSU graduates, who offered additional perspective, colored by a few years of hands-on work experience.

The following is a snapshot of the conversations with those current and former students, offering a wealth of knowledge, budding experience and plenty of opinions. >>