Factors Influencing Job Choice Among Agricultural Economics Professionals

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Introduction

Each year, many agricultural economics graduates enter the job market. Upon graduation, these new professionals choose positions based on their goals, abilities, position availability, and preferences (e.g., opportunities for advancement, location, time for family, salary). Over a career, the set of factors influencing job choice may change, and in many cases, result in a job change among sectors. Information regarding individuals’ preferences, current positions, and changes in preferences leading to employment changes, may illuminate relationships between factors influencing the job choices. Existing job choice studies on agricultural economists are limited. Furthermore, most studies are 10 to 25 years old (Cheney 2000; Schneider 1985). Although a few studies have examined working agricultural economics professionals (Marchant and Zepeda 1995; Thilmany 2000), the analyses have been primarily descriptive as opposed to modeling choice behavior.

Objective

The objective of this study is to identify factors influencing the choice between a position in either academia or government. The study includes sample data for both new and seasoned professionals.

Methods

An on-line survey sample consisted of 2,201 agricultural economics professionals employed in academic institutions (1,668) and USDA agencies (543). Summary statistics were computed, and chi-squared tests were used to test for homogeneity of the distributions of responses between men and women and between academic and government professionals. Based on a review of the literature and preliminary analyses of the survey data, a binary probit model was hypothesized as a function of 17 variables: $y = f(x)$ = positive work environment, supportive colleagues, advancement opportunities, good salary, desirable location, job responsibilities, lack of social isolation, lack of professional isolation, employer’s perception of your potential, positive work environment, employer nondiscrimination, health benefits, pension, previously holding a non-gov/acad position, current sector preference.

Results

Of surveys sent, 392 (17.8%) were usable: 306 were from academics and 86 were from USDA employees. There were 88 female respondents, and 297 male (7 did not respond). While 351 (89.5%) held PhDs, 41 (10.5%) respondents held MA or MS degrees. Of 351 academics and 86 were from USDA employees. There were 88 professionals employed in academic institutions (1,668) and 543 professionals employed in government; highly valuing advancement opportunities and academic preference were highly significant (α=0.01) and indicated that placing high value on advancement opportunities significantly increased the probability of being employed in an academic setting.

### Table 1. Probit Parameter Estimates and Marginal Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modeling Prob[academic]</th>
<th>Coef. Estimates</th>
<th>Marginal Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Coef.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.8372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector Preference</td>
<td>academic</td>
<td>1.2448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector Preference</td>
<td>government</td>
<td>-2.4392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Non-Gov/Acad Position</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>-0.6926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advancement Opportunities</td>
<td>very important</td>
<td>0.7238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Salary</td>
<td>very important</td>
<td>-0.4766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>very important</td>
<td>0.3165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Work Environment</td>
<td>perfect match</td>
<td>-0.6527</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at α = 0.01; **Significant at α = 0.02; ***Significant at α = 0.05

N = 374

**Figure 1.** "Somewhat" or "Very" Important Job Attributes by Gender

**Figure 2.** "Somewhat" or "Very" Important Job Attributes by Sector

### Literature Cited


