

CHAPTER 2



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Careers and Employability Skills

Essential Question

What are some examples of jobs in agricultural mechanics? How can you secure and keep a job in this sector?

Before You Read

The summary at the end of the chapter highlights the key concepts. Read the chapter and write a summary of it in your own words. Then, compare your summary to the summary in the text.

Chapter Outcomes

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

- Explain ways of gaining the skills and knowledge needed to obtain a job.
- Identify competitions and educational opportunities that will help you gain skills for success in the workplace.
- Produce well-organized documents to secure a job.
- Describe interview strategies.
- List sources of leads for jobs in agricultural mechanics.
- Maintain a job in agricultural mechanics.

Words to Know

4-H
apprenticeship
Career Development Event (CDE)
certificate
continuing education
cover letter

job application
Leadership Development Event (LDE)
National FFA Organization
networking
Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)

portfolio
reference
résumé
skilled trade
SkillsUSA
soft skills
template

In this chapter, you will learn about some of the many careers available in the different sectors of the agriculture industry. We will also learn about the traits employers are looking for in employees, and what you can do to stand out from the competition when applying for a job. Securing a job is a process that requires knowledge and practice. Maintaining a job requires skills that can be learned and practiced on the job every day.

Careers in Agricultural Mechanics

Throughout the world, more people are employed in agriculture than in any other industry. In the United States alone, more than 19.7 million people are employed in agriculture-related jobs. These jobs vary greatly and include employment in everything from production agriculture to retail sales.



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Figure 2-1. The introduction and development of farm machinery has enabled farmers to increase planting and harvesting efficiency greatly.

As the amount of mechanization used in the agriculture industry has steadily increased over the years, the need for knowledgeable, skilled mechanics and technicians has also increased. Farm equipment has evolved dramatically from the team of horses used in the early 1900s. Today's four-wheel-drive tractors have the power of 40 to 620 horses, **Figure 2-1**. As the amount of mechanization and horsepower in farm machinery has increased, the time needed to complete tasks has decreased. Combines, huge machines used to harvest grains such as corn, soybeans, and wheat, have dramatically changed agriculture. In the 1930s, before the machines were available, a farmer could manually harvest an average of 100 bushels of corn in a nine-hour day. Today's combines can harvest 7200 bushels of corn per hour, or 120 bushels of corn in a minute!

Skilled Trades and Apprenticeships

Most careers available to agricultural mechanics involve specialty skills and training. These are high-skill, high-paying jobs open to people willing to perfect their abilities in one or more skilled trades. **Skilled trades** are jobs that require a specific set of skills, such as electrical wiring, welding, construction, or masonry proficiency. Many jobs also require skill certification, which can be obtained even while students are in high school through specialty training programs or classes. Skilled trades often involve perfecting a skill over years of on-the-job practice, which produces higher skill levels that command higher pay.

Apprenticeships

Many jobs in the skilled trades begin with an apprenticeship. **Apprenticeships** are formal training programs that include two basic components: on-the-job learning from a master or mentor, and a formal classroom education-training program provided by industry experts or skilled trade unions, **Figure 2-2**.

Agricultural Mechanics-Related Career Opportunities

Agriculture Career Sector	Careers
Agribusiness	Equipment repair shop manager, equipment dealer, manager of local chemical supply cooperative
Agricultural Communication	Technical writer, editor, advertising account manager
Agricultural Processing	Design or systems engineer, repair mechanic, maintenance technician, machine operator
Agricultural Production	Farmer, rancher, mechanic, veterinarian, manager
Agricultural Systems	Design engineer, repair technician, inventor
Agriculture Education	Teacher, specialty skill instructor, professor
Agriculture Services	GPS field technician, software application designer, food safety inspector
Agri-science	Inventor, researcher, laboratory technician
Natural Resources Management	Engineer, technician, program managers (often specialized in soil, water, forestry, air, energy production or pollution control)

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Figure 2-2. The agricultural industry is extensive, and many careers overlap into the different areas. The above chart lists only a few of the many areas to which training in agricultural mechanics and technology will apply.

An apprenticeship allows a new worker to learn the skills needed by an industry while earning a good wage. This benefits both the apprentice, who needs training, and the industry, which needs trained workers. Apprenticeships are a great way for an agricultural mechanic to secure the job training and skills necessary to enter many related professions. An agricultural mechanic's skills can be applied to other industries, such as the home-building or manufacturing sector. This opens many more career possibilities for an agricultural mechanics student, **Figure 2-3**. The US Department of Labor or your state's employment department has information on many available apprenticeship programs.



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Figure 2-3. The compensation you receive from an apprenticeship may be wages and/or the knowledge and experience you gain from the work.

Matching Your Skills and Interests

Once you have decided that you have an interest in an agricultural mechanics job, you need to investigate available jobs to determine which jobs are a good fit for you. How do your existing skills and other skills you can learn match up with the available jobs? There are several ways to find this information. One excellent resource is the **Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)**, which provides detailed information and predicts demand for most careers in the United States. This resource is available online. The *OOH* is published by the US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. This resource is a one-stop location for information about a wide selection of careers available in the United States. Information includes job categories determined by the federal government for statistical purposes of employment monitoring. Categories include:

- **What They Do**—the basic job description
- **Work Environment**—working conditions and general location (indoor, outdoor, clean, dirty, dangerous surroundings, etc.)
- **How to Become One**—education and/or training needed, including special licenses or certifications required and special personal or physical qualities needed
- **Pay**—average salary, as well as the low and high ends of the wage scale. May include information on benefits available as an industry standard and often includes information on length of workweek, overtime, or unusual working hours.
- **Job Outlook**—the jobs that are currently experiencing growth and are expected to grow or decline in the future. This helps you gauge job prospects when you have completed your education, not only what is available today.
- **Similar Occupations**—jobs that share characteristics with the titled occupation. This helps guide students into job areas they were unaware of that may suit their skills.
- **More Information**—additional bits of information that might be interesting to students determining if this is a career for them to pursue. Generally, this also includes professional, trade, or union contact information that is related to that career.

Student Organizations

The **National FFA Organization**, an organization for students interested in agriculture and leadership, provides **Career Development Events (CDEs)** and **Leadership Development Events (LDEs)** that help students learn, practice, and demonstrate skill attainment in several competitive activities, **Figure 2-4**. You can improve your performance in many of these events by developing your agricultural mechanics skills.

Other organizations also provide skills competitions and learning experiences. **SkillsUSA**, a partnership of students, teachers, and industry working together to ensure that the United States has a skilled workforce, has dozens of skills assessments and competitive activities that test and certify students, **Figure 2-5**. The US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) program referred to as **4-H** is a youth development program of the USDA land-grant university cooperative extension service that is available in every county and parish in the country. The program offers many agricultural mechanics learning opportunities for trade skills, including welding, electricity, and woodworking, but also offers projects on soils, GPS training, and a variety of problem-solving activities. Students can compete in many state and local fairs and stock shows with their mechanics projects through these organizations.

Education and Certification

Students enrolled in workforce training programs are often granted **certificates**. These certificates are evidence that a student has specialized agricultural mechanics skills such as welding, electricity, or plumbing that are industry approved. To obtain a certificate, students are often required to complete a course of study and then pass a certification test. If students meet the minimum score, they are certified and are given a certificate that says they have met industry standards.

Occasionally, certification tests require a practical demonstration of the actual skill, such as in the case of welding. Students who complete the suggested course of study and pass the test enter the job market with a marketable skill that is recognized by everyone in the chosen industry.

Required Education

Because of the wide variety of careers available to skilled agricultural mechanics, the educational requirements for specific jobs vary as well. Students can prepare for many agricultural mechanics jobs in a high school training program, certification program, or apprenticeship. However, more opportunities are available if the student has received an associate degree from a trade or technical school, or from a community college.



photo provided by the National FFA Organization

Figure 2-4. Students who qualify compete at the National FFA Convention that has over 50,000 students in attendance. The National FFA Organization also presents opportunities for students to attend government meetings and contribute to local and national projects.



SkillsUSA

Figure 2-5. Students studying agricultural mechanics and technology may enter competitions such as those offered by SkillsUSA.

As the job responsibilities increase, students may determine that the next logical step in their education is a bachelor's degree, which opens many doors at the engineering and technically skilled levels. Engineers need a master's degree and may hold a PhD. A master's degree requires two or more years of additional study beyond a bachelor's degree, and a doctorate requires another one to three years beyond a master's degree. Many scientists and educators find that a doctorate is required to reach the top of these professions.

Continuing Education and Training

Many students can enter the job market with a basic set of skills, and then improve their skills with **continuing education**. Generally, this training is available from local technical and trade schools, industry associations, colleges and universities, and online schools. Some employers offer tuition reimbursement to their employees for continuing education. It is wise to take advantage of the opportunity to improve your skills through continuing education, especially if the employer will pay for the training.

Securing Employment

Getting a job is not always as easy as visiting the employment office of the company at which you want to work. Most companies require proof that you have the skills and training needed to perform the job. To improve your chance of being hired for the job you want, first gather the documentation you will need, and be prepared to interview for the job.

Skill Documentation

In many cases, getting a job in a skilled trade involves proving that you have the skills needed. As mentioned earlier, this is sometimes accomplished with a certification from a training program. However, some training does not lead to certification, but merely helps you develop skills that will transfer to a job. One way to prove that you have these skills is to document your progress with a portfolio. A **portfolio** is a record of skills, activities, training, and education. A great way to document your skills is to include photographs of your projects before, during, and after completion.

A portfolio can be stored online using a record-keeping system, such as the Agriculture Experience Tracker (AET), through your local FFA program. If you are not a member of FFA, you can use other online portfolio storage systems. Your portfolio, whether it is online or kept in a physical location, should include:

- Photos of you performing the skill (welding, finishing concrete, building, etc.). Make sure all photos show you wearing proper safety gear and working in a safe manner, **Figure 2-6**.
- Testimonials from teachers, employers, and other supervisors. Generally, these are written in letter format.
- Community service hour records, especially if they are earned using agricultural mechanic skills such as building fences for the local dog shelter or setting irrigation equipment at the local park.
- Detailed records of hours worked and skills performed each day.
- Samples of work products. For example, you might include a report on the safety review you did for the local equipment dealer or a copy of the presentation you gave to the school board on repairing the athletic fields at your school.



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Figure 2-6. A portfolio is a great way to supplement your résumé by showing examples of your work, including illustrations and photographs. Ask your teacher or fellow students to help take photos of you working and of your completed projects for your portfolio.

It is also helpful to have teachers or employers write letters explaining what you learned in specific situations. These are somewhat different from letters of recommendation in that they address only the specific skill(s) you learned during a particular project or span of time. These, too, should become part of your portfolio.

Documents

Other, more traditional documents that are needed for securing a job include a résumé, cover letter, and list of references. You will often need these when filling out a job application, or sometimes an employer will ask for them after you have submitted an application.

A **résumé** is a summary of your experience, education, and skills. A **cover letter** is a letter (usually no more than one page) that introduces a job candidate and refers the reader to the accompanying résumé. Employers may also want to hear information from people who know the job applicant, either personally or professionally. These people are known as **references**. The applicant must provide their names and contact information. A reference can be a friend or family member, but employers usually prefer former teachers, coworkers, or supervisors.

These documents should be prepared as if they were your only chance of making a good impression, because they often are. Spelling and grammar errors cause many applicants to be rejected before their documents even make it to the hiring personnel. Many students say, “I won’t be writing on my job; they really don’t care if I have a résumé.” These students are wrong. Businesses *do* want employees who can read and write in a capable manner. The care applicants take with their initial contact information for a company indicates immediately how much they care about the job.

Ag Ed Connection

Employment Skills LDE

We spend much of our lives preparing for and working in our careers. There are many career opportunities in agriculture, and one of the best ways to prepare for your job search is to participate in an FFA Employment Skills LDE.

An FFA Employment Skills Leadership Development Event will help you develop, practice, and demonstrate the skills needed when seeking employment in the agricultural industry. In this event, you may be required to create a cover letter and résumé, complete an electronic job application, practice telephone skills, and participate in a personal interview. Students submit cover letters, résumés, complete an application and telephone interview, and participate in a face-to-face interview. They may also practice a variety of networking activities. Awards may be presented, and everyone who participates will gain valuable experience that will help prepare them for real job applications. Ask your advisor and agriculture teacher about participating in an FFA Employment Skills LDE today.



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Résumé

When writing a résumé, remember that spelling errors can prevent you from securing a job. Generally, résumés have a grammar style that is different from other written works. The résumé needs to convey a great deal of data about an applicant in a short amount of space. For inexperienced workers, a one-page résumé is acceptable and encouraged, but it may be two pages to include references.

The résumé is sometimes read by an electronic data scanner instead of a human. Therefore, it should follow a basic pattern so the information is displayed in an easy-to-access manner. The best way to write a résumé is to use a template from a standard word-processing program. A **template** is a preformatted document for a specific form, such as a résumé. A template is set up in an acceptable, professional style and can be customized to your needs. **Figure 2-7** is an example of a résumé template.

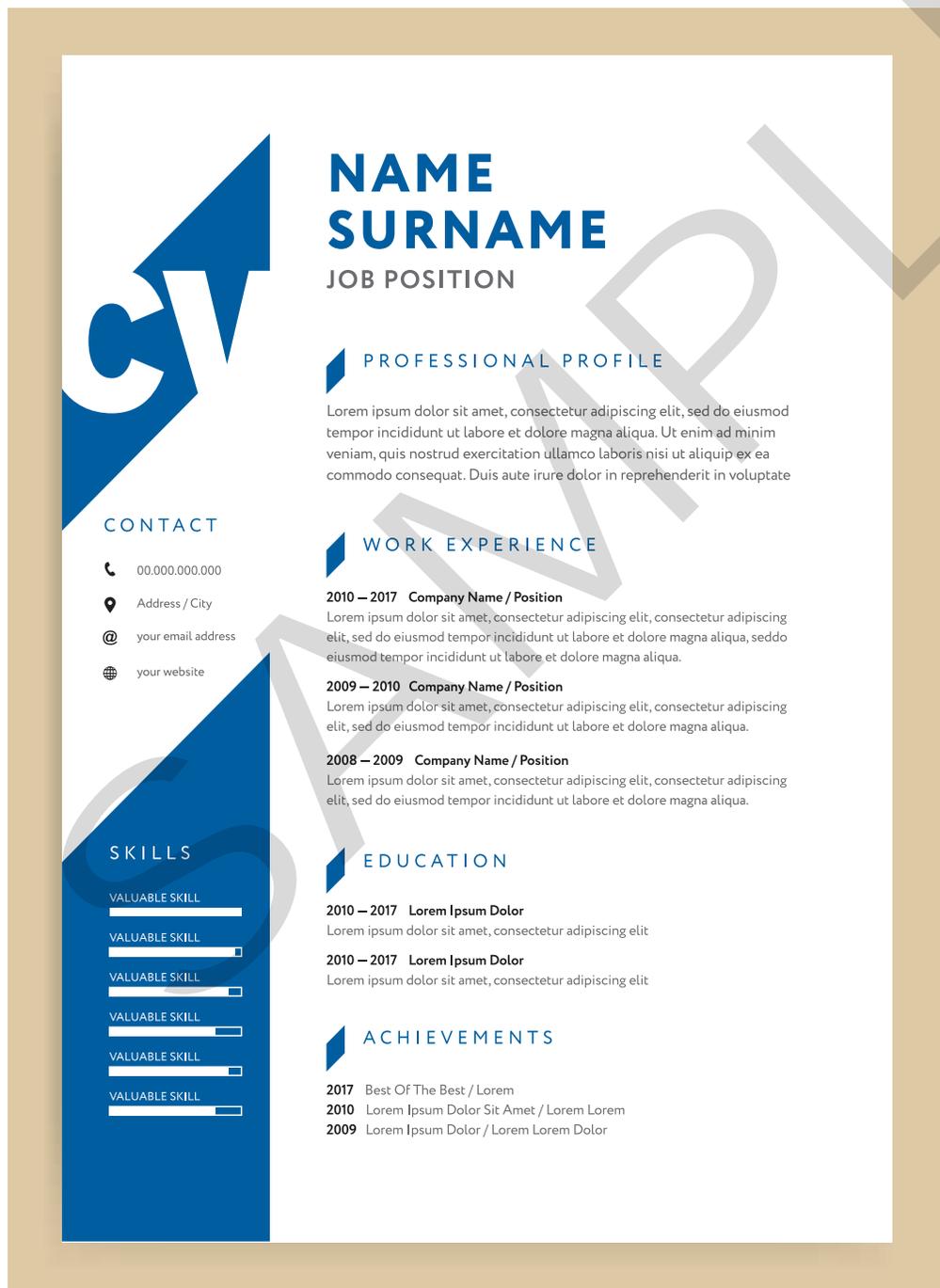


Figure 2-7. An effective résumé is concise, highlights your skills, and is presented in an easy-to-read format. Using a template is a good way to organize your information in a logical format.

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Cover Letter

The cover letter is another form of communication that must be completely error-free and grammatically correct. Many word-processing programs have templates for this type of writing, as well. The purpose of a cover letter is to make the reader want to read the attached résumé. Remember to highlight one or two facts that will make the reader turn the page to continue on to the résumé. One good way to pique someone's interest is to refer to a person the reader knows well who recommended the applicant. Additionally, mention the job opening and highlight a specialized skill you know the company needs. **Figure 2-8** is a cover letter template.

Figure 2-8. A cover letter enables you to introduce yourself to the prospective employer, explain the job you are seeking, and explain why you are a good candidate for the position. Cover letters are usually read before the résumé, so a poor cover letter can often mean that the résumé will never be seen.

CONTACT

- 00.000.000.000
- Address / City
- your email address
- your website

NAME SURNAME
JOB POSITION

DEAR SIR, MADAM

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References

Who makes a good reference? The answer to this question is often vital for getting the job. The following are basic qualities of people who make good references:

- The person is not a relative. Even if you have worked for a relative in an ongoing family business, a relative should not be offered as a work reference.
- The person knows your work habits and is willing to sing your praises about your ability and work ethic.
- The person is well respected and has a good reputation in the industry in which you are seeking employment. Generally, but not always, other students or young people do not make the best references.
- The person has known you long enough to answer questions about your work, character, and other important qualities. Be certain this person will give you a *good* reference. Some people will report that they know you but may not give a good recommendation. This may hurt your chances for employment.
- The person is willing to offer a reference in whatever format is required. Ask your references if they are willing to write a letter, send an email, or speak directly on the telephone.

Job Application

Generally, getting a job will require filling out an application. A **job application** is a form supplied by an employer to collect information about a prospective employee, **Figure 2-9**. If the application is the first point of contact between you and the business, make sure it is free of errors and omissions. Treat it as if it is your résumé and you want it to make a great first impression. Here are some things to consider before submitting an application:

- Is it available online? If so, should you file it online or print it out and bring it with you to an interview?
- Should it be done in your own handwriting? Do you need to sign it in person?
- Do you understand exactly what each question is asking?
- Are there any special instructions?

In some cases, the application is completed as a formality *after* the hiring process. In these cases, the application serves as a legal document. It requires that the applicant be honest and accurate, with the understanding that misrepresentations here can lead to future dismissal. By signing the form, you are agreeing that you have not lied about any felony convictions and that all statements are true.

Job Interview

If the potential employer is impressed by the information in the documents you have submitted, you may be asked to participate in a job interview, **Figure 2-10**. Generally, a job interview has two goals: for the employer to learn more about the job candidate and for the candidate to learn about the job.



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Figure 2-9. Many job applications are now available online, and often you can attach and send a cover letter and your résumé electronically as well.



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Figure 2-10. Maintain eye contact with the interviewer during the job interview. This shows that you are attentive and interested in the available job.

Before the Interview

Before the interview, make sure you have the *correct* date, time, and location. If the location is a virtual platform, test your internet connection, camera, microphone, and speakers prior to the event. Arrive early; this will make a good impression by showing that you are punctual. Arriving late to an interview is usually the end of potential employment.

Additionally, ensure you know what you are expected to bring to the interview. For example, does the employer require a completed application form? Even if it is not required, it is often a good idea to bring a copy of your résumé along so that you have all the information (including references, contact information, and dates of training or employment) readily available.

Wear the Appropriate Clothing

Prepare yourself physically and mentally before any interview. Have well-groomed hair as well as clean clothing that is representative of your work style, **Figure 2-11**. A standard for interview attire is to wear clothing that is one step up from the job for which you are interviewing. Therefore, if the job's dress code is jeans and a T-shirt, you should wear dress slacks and a collared shirt. You should dress as if the hiring manager were seeing you in person instead of online.

If the usual dress code requires wearing a shirt and tie, then adding a suit jacket to a shirt and tie is in order. This more formal attire, however, is often not necessary for a casual job in agricultural mechanics.

Wash and Comb Your Hair

Wearing your hair, including any facial hair, in a neat and conservative manner is a good idea. If you wear a scent, make sure it is understated and not overpowering. Remember, employees are representatives of the company. Any employee who looks, acts, dresses, or even smells inappropriately may potentially offend customers or perhaps coworkers, which is bad for business and employers will not tolerate it.

Figure 2-11. A sloppy or neglected appearance can negatively affect your employment chances. Particularly for agricultural interviews, which may take place partly outdoors, a neat, job-appropriate appearance shows that you understand the work and the clothing requirements.



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Research the Employer

After you have prepared yourself physically for the interview, you must prepare mentally as well. You should do some basic research on the employer, including:

- How many employees does the company have?
- What business products or services does the company supply?
- What is the main part of the business?
- What role would you play in the business?
- Is the business growing?
- Are there local competitors, and how stable is the industry as a whole?

Practice Interview Questions

You should also prepare and practice your answers to basic questions that may be asked at the interview. Keep in mind the interviewer may have little experience in interviewing job applicants, and each situation is different, **Figure 2-12**. Typical interview topics include:

- *Tell us about yourself.* Generally, this is not an invitation to tell them where you were born or went to grade school, but rather an opportunity to tell them how you can fit into their business and what skills you have. (Good thing you did your research!)
- *Why should we hire you?* Again, this is a great place to explain how you can fit in with the employer's current and future business and to explain your important qualities.
- *Where do you see yourself in the future?* The employer wants to know if the company can count on you long term. If so, be sure to tell the interviewer that, but if you intend to work there for less than five years, be honest about that, too.

There are many ways to answer questions. Practiced answers are generally better to help you make your point. Sometimes a question will be unique and catch the interviewee off guard. Ensure you take time to think through your answer and reply honestly. Generally, your sincerity and thoughtfulness are important qualities the interviewer is attempting to determine.

Make a Good Impression

When you arrive at the interview, dressed appropriately and prepared to answer questions, make the best impression possible. Making a good impression is generally a combination of common courtesy and preparedness. The following suggestions will help you make a good first impression:

- **Be early**—As mentioned earlier, arriving late to an interview almost never ends well. If you have a problem and cannot avoid being late, call ahead and explain your situation. Ask to reschedule, if possible.
- **Be professional**—Greet everyone you meet in a friendly but professional manner. Administrative assistants are often asked their opinion of the interviewees, and a sour note here can cost you the opportunity to work for this company.



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Figure 2-12. Be prepared to answer questions about yourself and your experience. Practicing answers to potential interview questions will make it easier for you to respond when they are asked during the interview. This will reduce the possibility that you will hesitate during your response and will show the interviewer that you are prepared and confident.

- In business, a handshake begins and concludes most dealings. However, with today's health-conscious society this convention is often avoided. You can wait and follow the lead of the interviewer. If a handshake is offered and you feel comfortable, give a firm but not crushing grip in return. If you feel uncomfortable shaking hands, say, "I do not feel comfortable shaking hands but I am very glad to meet you."
- **Be prepared**—If you have a copy of your résumé or other documents with you, make sure you have them organized and available at a moment's notice. Searching through a disorganized briefcase or folder leaves a bad impression.

Answering Interview Questions

Once you are in the interview, take a deep breath and focus on answering the questions. Carefully listen to each question, and give it a moment of thoughtful consideration before answering. Answer honestly and in such a way the interviewer will see you as someone with insight.

Often, the final interview question is, "Do you have any questions about the position or our company?" This is the time to ask questions that were not answered by your background research. These might include questions such as, "What is the possibility of advancement from this position?" or "Do you promote from within when there is an opening?" The interviewer will see that you took the initiative and showed interest in the position by doing some research before your interview. This is not the time, however, to ask about what your specific pay would be, how long your lunch break would last, or when you qualify for sick leave or vacation days. That will occur during a follow-up interview or if an offer is extended.

Follow-Up Letter

If you have made it through the job interview, there is one more document that is essential for getting a job, and that is the follow-up letter. As soon as you return from the interview, sit down and compose a letter. Thank the interviewer for taking the time to speak with you, highlight the main point of your interview (restate why you are the best candidate for this job), and convey any other information that was not mentioned in the interview. For example, perhaps you were not asked about your specialized safety training; now would be a good time to mention that you are OSHA-certified for personal safety. Many templates for follow-up and thank-you letters are available within most word processing programs.

Send your follow-up letter by email, and if you wish, by regular mail too. If possible, send it to the interviewer's company email address. The extra step of sending a follow-up letter shows the interviewer how serious you are about acquiring this position and could be the deciding factor in getting the job.

Finding a Job in Agricultural Mechanics

Finding a job is often the result of education and training. Finding a job in agricultural mechanics is no different from finding one in any other industry. Knowing where to look is the best starting point. For agricultural mechanics positions, it is usually not necessary to pay someone to assist you in your job search when there are so many free resources available.

There are several common free or low-cost places to begin a job search, including:

- Your personal network (friends and family)
- Trade unions and professional organizations
- Government agencies
- School employment offices
- Areas with job opportunities

Networking is the act of getting to know people in various professions through self-introduction or through introductions made by friends or associates, **Figure 2-13**. Networking is also a means of informing others you are looking for employment. When you are using your network, be sure to use all your resources effectively. Start by telling family and friends exactly the type of work you are looking for and exactly what your skills are. However, do not limit yourself to jobs you think are well matched to your skills. Many times the not-quite-right job leads to something better.

Searching for a job is a skill that takes practice, so applying for and even interviewing for jobs that seem imperfect may lead to better searches for the perfect job. Often a job is known by your network long before it is published. So be sure to tell everyone you know, and ask them to share with everyone they know. Before long, the word will be out to scores of people that you are in the job market, and your network is now in action.

Trade Unions and Professional Organizations

Many business associations, unions, trade organizations, and other business groups have employment posting services either online or at their physical locations. Becoming a member of these associations is a great way to network with people in your chosen field and know about jobs when they are first announced. Often, these groups have student memberships available for a reduced cost.

Government Agencies

Every state has a government agency that assists job seekers. Generally, these agencies do not require state residency or much more than registering on their website to search large databases of job openings in the state. No government agency requires a fee to search for a job or assist you in applying for work. It is helpful to know keywords related to your area of interest. For example, if you are interested in a job as an electrician, searching for *electrical*, *journeyman electrician*, and *construction trades* might also deliver job openings in your area.



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Figure 2-13. Your network may include friends, family, coworkers, or others in your profession. Networking with these people will help you in your search for employment.

Be aware that the internet is also available to unscrupulous individuals who prey on job seekers. If a job sounds too good to be true, it probably is. To ensure your safety, be wary of offers to meet in remote locations or at odd hours. Research potential employers thoroughly before responding to offers. The Better Business Bureau can help vet a company if you have reservations about the legitimacy of an offer.

School Employment Offices

Whether you have been in a specialized training program or a general education program, your teachers, mentors, or others who have assisted you may know of jobs in areas in which you are interested. It is to your advantage to tell these professionals that you are seeking a job and to ask for leads. This is another example of networking, although it is a bit more complex than simply telling everyone you know.

Areas with Job Opportunities

When job searching, do not discount researching where the jobs are. Look for locations that have job openings, keeping in mind they may not be local. This seems reasonable and simplistic, but often people miss opportunities because they search in areas with high unemployment and few jobs, when ample jobs are available just a short distance away. Looking outside your immediate area can improve your chances. The internet can be a valuable source of information on employment trends and recruitment. Again, beware of online job offers that seem too good to be true. Research any job offerings carefully to determine if they are legitimate jobs and not a swindle.

Maintaining Employment

What is interesting about the skills needed for agricultural mechanics is that many on-the-job skills are not trade skills, but soft skills. **Soft skills** are skills defined by working ability, communication ability, and the ability to get along with others. These skills include, but are not limited to, the following:

Getting along with other employees and customers—No one wants to work with a difficult coworker, and customers certainly do not want to do business with them either. Putting your best foot forward and going the extra mile to be nice is often all that is needed, **Figure 2-14**.



ESB Professional/Shutterstock.com

Figure 2-14. As an employee, you should get along with your coworkers and be pleasant to customers.

Reading information and following directions—Sometimes, this is as simple as being able to read the directions for new equipment or training yourself to execute a new skill.

Making good decisions—This means making decisions that advance your employer's interest, increase profit, help customers, or improve some aspect of the operation. Try to imagine how different decisions would affect the outcome.

Continuing to upgrade and improve your job-specific skills—Ask employers about specific training, seek out greater-skilled coworkers, and practice these new skills when you have a chance after your work is complete. Learning about new advancements or techniques in your business not only helps your employer, but it helps you stay motivated. It may also lead to a pay increase or promotion.

Being punctual—Most employers will tell you that on-time attendance is one of the top employee problems, **Figure 2-15**. Arriving to work on time every day ensures that the employer can rely on you, you will not miss information or directions, and others will not have to do your job for you. If tardiness is a problem for you, set a goal of being at work 10 minutes early every day and offer yourself a reward when you have made your goal for a set period. Your real reward will be in retaining your job and not being docked pay.

Being a self-starter—Employers want employees who see the work that needs to be done, and then complete the task without being asked. This soft skill frees managers to manage bigger projects and leads to employees who can be trusted (and often rewarded) to work unsupervised. Most employees like to control their work life in some aspect, and this is one way to earn that right.

Having a strong work ethic—This means being positive, enthusiastic, and willing to work at your day-to-day duties. Most employers believe that if their employees have a good work ethic, they will accomplish most of the other soft skills on this list. This skill can be practiced and refined by generally checking your attitude each day: Are you arriving to work on time and with a positive attitude? While you are a student, practice being positive about school and what you are required to learn. Attitude is something each person controls. If you truly do not like your situation, only *you* have the power to change it. Remember, sometimes changing how you see the situation is the only change you need.



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Figure 2-15. Being on time for work is a critical soft skill. Chronic tardiness, or absence, may be grounds for termination.

Career Connection

Agricultural Mechanics Teacher

Agricultural mechanics teachers teach introductory and advanced courses in agricultural mechanics and technology. Course topics include welding, power equipment, construction, and computer technology. Agricultural mechanics teachers may also advise the FFA chapter and actively participate in curriculum development.

Teaching positions in agricultural education minimally require a bachelor's degree and teaching certification, and employers often expect teachers to acquire a graduate degree, such as a master's degree in teaching or a related field.

This job may be a fit for you if you enjoy helping people and working with technology. Individuals who are problem solvers and have natural curiosity about how things work will enjoy this career. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, this position pays a median



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annual salary of \$59,140, depending on your education, experience, and the geographical area in which you are teaching. The outlook for agricultural teachers is about 5% new employment per year for the next decade.

Chapter 2 Review and Assessment

Chapter Summary

- Most careers available in agricultural mechanics involve specialty skills and training. An apprenticeship allows you to learn the skills needed by an industry while earning a good wage.
- The online *Occupational Outlook Handbook* is an excellent source of job information in the United States. It is published by the US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- In addition to formal schooling, education and training opportunities include the competitions and events held by student organizations, certificate courses, and apprenticeships.
- Securing a job in agricultural mechanics requires gathering documents, such as a résumé and portfolio, that prove your skills to employers and hiring managers.
- Prospective employees must be well prepared physically and mentally before a job interview. This includes your physical hygiene and your clothing.
- Methods of searching for a job include networking, talking with school employment offices, and checking government agencies, trade unions, and professional organizations.
- Maintaining a job in agricultural mechanics involves continuing education, training, and the use of soft skills.



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Vocabulary Review

Match the vocabulary terms listed in the *Words to Know* to the correct definition.

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| A. apprenticeship | J. <i>Occupational Outlook Handbook</i> |
| B. Career Development Event | K. portfolio |
| C. certificate | L. reference |
| D. continuing education | M. résumé |
| E. cover letter | N. skilled trade |
| F. 4-H | O. SkillsUSA |
| G. job application | P. soft skills |
| H. National FFA Organization | Q. template |
| I. networking | |
1. A record of skills, activities, training and education.
 2. The act of getting to know people in various professions through self-introduction, or introductions through friends and associates; informing others you are looking for employment.
 3. Evidence that a student has specialized agricultural mechanics skills; evaluated through testing of some type.
 4. A form supplied by an employer to collect information about a prospective employee.
 5. A job that requires a specific set of skills, such as electrical wiring, welding, construction, and masonry.
 6. A competitive event that is sponsored by the National FFA Organization in which students learn, practice, and demonstrate skill attainment.
 7. Training in which employees continue to study and gain new skills in their chosen profession.
 8. A partnership of students, teachers, and industry working together to ensure that the United States has a skilled workforce.
 9. A summary of your experience, education, and skills.

10. A letter that introduces a job candidate and refers the reader to the accompanying résumé.
11. A person who is willing to speak or write well of a job applicant because of their past work or other association with the candidate.
12. A youth development program of the US Department of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension Service that is available in every county in the country.
13. A preformatted document for a specific form, such as a résumé.
14. An organization for students interested in agriculture and leadership.
15. A book detailing information and predicted demand for most careers in the United States.
16. A person's ability to function with other people; includes areas such as communication, language, personal habits, people management, and friendliness.
17. Formal training program that includes on-the-job learning from a master or mentor, and a formal classroom education-training program provided by industry experts or skilled trade unions.

Know and Understand

Answer the following questions using the information provided in the chapter.

1. *True or False?* A skilled trade is a job that requires a specific set of learned skills.
2. *True or False?* An apprentice is someone learning a skilled trade in a formal classroom and with a mentor on the job.
3. *True or False?* An apprenticeship is always sponsored by the local trade union.
4. *True or False?* The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* is a Department of Labor publication that details information about jobs and the outlook for employment in many career areas.
5. *True or False?* FFA Career Development Events allow students to earn while they learn.
6. *True or False?* A portfolio is a letter about your qualifications in the skilled trades.
7. A résumé _____.
 - A. lists skills
 - B. lists education and training
 - C. must be error-free in spelling and grammar
 - D. All of the above.
8. *True or False?* A job application is *not* required for most jobs unless the applicant has a felony conviction.
9. When virtual interviewing, _____.
 - A. always check your internet connection before starting
 - B. dress as if you are in person with the interviewer
 - C. be early to the virtual call
 - D. All of the above.
10. *True or False?* A job seeker should practice answers to possible interview questions before the interview.
11. *True or False?* A follow-up letter is written after an application is submitted to determine when the interview will be held.
12. Job searching is best begun with _____.

A. your personal network	C. your parents
B. a list of your honors and awards	D. All of the above.
13. *True or False?* Networking means to tell everyone you know that you are looking for a job and is often the most effective way to hear about a job opening.

14. You can improve your chances of finding a job in your skill area by searching _____.
- A. only online job boards sponsored by the skilled trades
 - B. through local want ads
 - C. where the jobs are, not just locally
 - D. only in federal government databases
15. Soft skills are _____.
- A. communication skills
 - B. work ethic skills
 - C. being punctual and a self-starter
 - D. All of the above.
16. Maintaining a job in agricultural mechanics involves _____.
- A. continuing education
 - B. training
 - C. the use of soft skills
 - D. All of the above.

Analyze and Apply

1. Using online job interview applications, practice job interviewing. Record yourself and have someone review your presentation or review it yourself and determine how to improve.
2. Research a possible employer and write three questions you could ask in an interview to determine if this would be a good employer for you.
3. Collect at least five job applications either in person or online. Practice filling them out using your personal information. Have a mentor review your applications.

Thinking Critically

1. Write a one- or two-paragraph explanation of what you would do if you were the boss and an employee was tardy at least one day a week for a month.
2. Complete a one-page résumé and a one-page cover letter. If the résumé or cover letter is longer than one page, practice editing to make the document shorter but still informational. Have a classmate check both documents for spelling or grammatical errors.
3. Choose two agricultural careers that merit licensing, certification, or credentialing to become a professional within the industry. Within your state or county, examine the required licensing procedure. Investigate what types of certification or credentialing programs are also necessary/available. Write a short report based on your findings.

STEM and Academic Activities

1. **Science**—Create a flowchart of a career related to agricultural mechanics.
2. **Technology**—Using the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, as well as other resources, research a career related to agricultural mechanics. Make a presentation to the class about the career.
3. **Engineering**—Build a board game (or a video game if you have the capability and your teacher allows you access) that demonstrates the different paths to becoming an agricultural, or any other, engineer.
4. **Math**—Look up the average salaries for welders, welding inspectors, and welding engineers. Explain why there are differences in the expected pay.
5. **Language Arts**—In 140 characters or fewer, write an answer to the question “What is an example of a soft skill?”

6. **Social Science**—Attend a local meeting of an industry organization or trade group and notice how the people at the meeting interact. Write a summary of your experience, concentrating on the networking possibilities you did or did not see at the meeting.

Communicating about Ag Mechanics

1. **Reading and Speaking**—Create an informational pamphlet on how to apply for a job in the agricultural industry. Research résumé strategies and portfolio organization and download a sample job application. Present your pamphlet to the class. After your project has been graded and returned to you, review the instructor's comments. List the type of changes you could make to improve your project.
2. **Reading and Speaking**—Working with two partners, research the type of interview questions you may be asked when applying for a job in agricultural mechanics. Look for examples of the best way to reply to interview questions. Create a script with one partner applying for the position and the other two partners performing the interview. Perform the skit for your class.

SAE for **ALL** Opportunities

1. **Foundational: Career Exploration**—Arrange an interview online or in person with a professional in an agricultural area that interests you. Prepare a list of questions before the interview. Ask the person to describe a typical day at work. Here are some questions you might ask: What is the work environment like? What are the job duties? What other types of professionals do you work with? Report your findings to the class, giving reasons why you would or would not want to pursue a career similar to that of the person you interviewed.
2. **Foundational: Agricultural Literacy**—What role does agriculture play in society, the environment, and the economy? Research and write a two- to three-page report explaining your view of the role(s) agriculture plays in these areas. Consider expanding your report into a speech that could be used in a speech competition.
3. **Foundational: Career Exploration**—Job shadow an agricultural mechanic and write a news release about your experience. Highlight the job description, the daily tasks, education required, and the industry-average wages and benefits.
4. **Work Management**—Set up a wall calendar and track your priorities at home, school, and work. You can use a monthly calendar or one that displays the entire year on one sheet. Place the calendar where you will see it each morning. Mark the dates you have set for your personal and SAE goals, and the dates that assignments and projects are due.

SAE for **ALL** Check-In

- How much time have you spent on your SAE this week?
- Have you logged your SAE hours?
- What challenges are you having with your SAE?
- How can your instructor help you?
- Do you have the equipment you need?