



## Department of Extension Animal Sciences and Natural Resources

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### Tips for Exploring Careers in the Equine Industry

*by Jason L. Turner, Extension Horse Specialist*

Fall and Winter are the times of year when motivated college students are aggressively seeking out and applying for summer internships with employers in the agriculture industry. This is their opportunity to “get their foot in the door” for a career in their chosen field of interest.

In the Cooperative Extension Service, we work with youth of all ages, and it is a perfect opportunity to expose them to different career options that build upon what they learn from Extension education programs. While the focus of this article is on careers in the equine industry, you can certainly adapt this example for other careers in the agriculture field using the resources listed.

If you have any questions, please contact me at your convenience at [jlturner@nmsu.edu](mailto:jlturner@nmsu.edu). Please know that the full version of this material will be released this spring from the State 4-H Office as a “New Mexico 4-H Idea Starter: Horse Self-Determined Project” guide.

#### Introduction

Many youth are interested in working in the equine industry. However, youth often focus on the careers that they are most familiar with, such as an equine veterinarian or horse trainer, rather than exploring the many options that are available in the modern equine industry. This exploration is important and takes a focused effort to become aware of the vast opportunities that are available, and then develop a plan to prepare for a meaningful career in a specific segment of the equine industry.

#### Selecting Careers to Explore

Mark Twain said, “*Find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work a day in your life.*” This is good advice for youth considering equine careers because they have already identified the horse as something that they are passionate about and truly interested in pursuing excellence with. Some things to consider in selecting the “right” career include: your individual personality, your current skills, and activities that interest you.

Good customer service is the key to success and longevity in the equine business. A fundamental component to good customer service is being able to assess your personality traits and how you interact with others. Once you have identified your personality traits, you can then see how this relates to the type of work you enjoy doing (<http://www.truecolorsworkshops.com/category/career>).

Every occupation requires a specific mixture of knowledge, skills, and abilities. One tool that can help you find occupations that use your skills is the Occupational Information Network (O\*Net Online; <https://www.onetonline.org/skills>). This web-based questionnaire asks you to select specific skills that you possess or plan to acquire. It then matches those skills with potential occupations that identify the skill as important to the job. This tool can help you identify careers that use your skills and then determine which other skills you might need to acquire to be better prepared for that specific job.

Determining which activities interest you will help you pinpoint specific careers to explore. While there are many tools available to assess your interests, the career interest survey ([http://www.ucango2.org/publications/student/Career\\_Interest\\_Survey.pdf](http://www.ucango2.org/publications/student/Career_Interest_Survey.pdf)) provided by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education is simple and convenient to use.

With the information you gained from the activities mentioned above, you should now be more aware of the variety of careers that will allow you to be successful based upon your own personality traits, skills, and interests. Hopefully, you can narrow your career exploration choices to a few specific families in order to begin preparing a career plan.

## **Career Families**

Once you have identified a career family or an occupation you wish to pursue, you can gain more reference information on that career by consulting the Occupational Outlook Handbook (<https://www.bls.gov/ooh>) published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. This guide will help you determine the general job duties for that career, the work environment, what education and experience you will need, and an estimate of potential income as well as future job outlook.

At this stage of the process, it is important to ask yourself some questions. Do I want a career that will allow me to have daily interaction with horses, or will I be happy if I have an office job with limited interaction with horses? Also, is my quality of life (i.e., happiness, desire to live in rural New Mexico vs. New York City) more important than my annual income or salary? Will my career choice provide the income and time flexibility that will allow me to pursue my personal goals (e.g., family, personal horse activities, sports, etc.). Your answers to such questions are important in determining which potential careers will provide what you need to be happy with your career decision over the long-term.

## **Developing a Career Plan and Goal Setting**

With your top career choices in mind, the next step is to develop a plan and set goals that will put you on the path to achieving that career. It is a good idea to develop a “Plan A” which is for your primary career as well as a “Plan B” that will allow you to pursue a related secondary career should your interests or goals change. For example, your “Plan A” might be centered on becoming an equine veterinary practitioner, and your “Plan B” might be a career as a veterinary technician, an animal pharmacist, or as an animal health care sales specialist. These careers all have the common theme of being involved with equine health care. Another approach might be where your “Plan A” is to be a professional horse trainer, and your “Plan B” could be to become a riding instructor, professional judge, or equine barn manager. These careers all have the common theme of routine interaction with horses and their owners. The main idea is to find a “back-up career” that can take the place of your primary career choice building on the same interests and strengths that you possess.

Once you have decided on “Plan A” and “Plan B”, then you can further develop your plan by outlining the education and experience that you will need to achieve those careers. One way you can

investigate what education and experience will be required is to look for job descriptions advertised in the equine or agriculture industry with specific companies. There are many job posting websites on the internet that can provide this information to you. A few places to start might be [AGCareers.com](https://www.agcareers.com), [Glassdoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com), or [Indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com). These career sites may provide information on the type of salaries and benefits that are available with many employers as well as helpful advice on preparing your resume or preparing for an interview.

Another important part in the education and experience part of your plan is to develop a support network of people that can advise you and provide opportunities to reach your careers goals. Therefore, it is important to establish good working relationships with your teachers, horse club leaders, local horsemen, and employers that can serve as mentors and advisors. You can further develop this network and your “soft skills” through participation in equine competitions in 4-H, FFA, breed association youth programs, and college equine clubs or teams. Today, employers are not only looking for knowledgeable (i.e., good grade point average) job candidates, but they also want them to possess “soft skills” such as time management and communication skills, the ability to work in a team, and decision-making skills.

Goals are an integral part of putting your plan into action so that you set, and reach, the specific milestones that are necessary to achieve the career you desire. One approach to goal setting is the S.M.A.R.T. method. This means that each goal you set meets the following criteria:

- **Specific:** Define the goal as much as possible with no unclear language. This might include answering the questions: WHO is involved, WHAT do I want to accomplish, WHERE will it be done, and WHY do I need to do this?
- **Measurable:** Define how you will determine when you met the goal. Can you record your progress and measure the outcome?
- **Attainable:** Can I reasonably accomplish this goal? Make sure that you have, or can you readily acquire, the skills or tools necessary to accomplish the goal.
- **Relevant:** Will this goal help me gain the experience, education, and skills that will prepare me for the desired career?
- **Timely:** Your goal should include a time limit for completion. This will make sure that you are focused and committed to completing the goal before a certain date.

Although it takes a lot of time and thought to set S.M.A.R.T. goals, this effort is the key component to finalizing your career plan and putting it into action so that you reach your dream job. This is where you must be determined and devoted to doing what it takes to get the job done.

## Summary

It is never too early to start career exploration. Being aware of the opportunities that are available to you and how to develop a plan to get you in the career you desire are important considerations as you look to future higher education and vocational training. Your career aspirations may change as you further your education and experience new things. Still, the career exploration steps in this guide will help you adjust your plan, from A to B, as these changes occur.

## Suggestions for further reading

AGCareers.com. *Career Profiles*. Retrieved October 15, 2018 from <https://www.agcareers.com/career-profiles/>

AGCareers.com. *Ag & Food Career Guide*. 2017. Retrieved October 15, 2018 from <https://www.agcareers.com/career-guide/2017/US/>

American Youth Horse Council. *Careers in the Horse Industry: Choose Your Path*. Retrieved October 15, 2018 from <https://www.ayhc.com/free-brochures>

Crawford, P., S. Lang, W. Fink, R. Dalton, and L. Fielitz. 2011. *Comparative Analysis of Soft Skills: What is Important for New Graduates?* Washington, DC: Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities.

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Please register online: <http://texmexhorse18.ezregister.com>

Hosted by Roosevelt County Cooperative Extension Service.

For more information, contact:

Ms. Alyssa Oates, CC Horse Judging Team Coach at [alyssa.oates@clarendoncollege.edu](mailto:alyssa.oates@clarendoncollege.edu)

Dr. Jason Turner, NMSU Extension Horse Specialist at [jturner@nmsu.edu](mailto:jturner@nmsu.edu)

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