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Research Article

# Exploring Senior Secondary Students' Perceptions and Interest in Agricultural Science Education: A Case Study in Benue State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study examined the perceptions and interests of Senior Secondary Students regarding agricultural science education in Benue State, Nigeria. Four research questions guided the study, and four hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a survey design. The population was 400 respondents. The sample of 200 respondents, which comprised senior secondary students it was drawn purposively from the population. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled: Students' Perceptions and Interest in Agricultural Science Education Questionnaire (SPIASEQ), which was structured by the researchers from the literature review and used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts. The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach's alpha (α). The reliability coefficient of 0.71 was obtained. The data collected were analyzed using percentages to answer research questions, while the Chi-square was used to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings from the study were, students should be encouraged to improve conditions within the agricultural science education profession through the provision of incentives for those who choose this field as a career. Scholarships should be offered to students who have selected agricultural science as a career path, particularly those engaging in mechanized agriculture practices, by the government, organizations, and individuals. There should be an emphasis on integrating practical and theoretical methods within the course curriculum to enhance the learning experience. Hence, schools and educators should provide vocational guidance and clear explanations regarding the relevance of agricultural science education as a professional choice to students. This is vital for encouraging students to have positive attitudes toward agriculture science education and training-retraining of teachers for adequate competencies for the implementation of agricultural science education activities at senior secondary schools. Besides, these will enable production for efficient graduates for self-reliance and job empowerment in Benue State and the nation at large.

## Introduction

The agricultural sector plays a critical role in Nigeria's economic development, serving as a major source of employment and contributing significantly to both food security and economic growth. Although the oil sector continues to dominate the national economy, agriculture remains an indispensable component. However, the future of the agricultural workforce faces notable challenges, including low enrollment in Agricultural Science Education courses and a prevailing negative perception of agriculture as a viable career path [1]. These challenges highlight the need for targeted interventions to reshape young people's attitudes toward agriculture. In particular, promoting Agricultural Science Education as a compulsory subject, especially in government-owned senior secondary schools in Benue State, Nigeria, will be essential to sustaining and revitalizing the agricultural workforce [2].

In the report of Mbokazis and Lebeloane [3], these institutions serve as formal educational settings where Agricultural Science Education is offered as a subject. It is considered an optional subject in upper secondary schools and is designed to equip students with essential knowledge and skills in agricultural science education. The objectives of the subject include training students in basic agricultural practices, promoting creative thinking, and preparing them for global competitiveness [4]. In the context of this study,



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interest refers to a feeling of wanting to know more about or be involved in something. To achieve the goals of Agricultural Science education, students must develop a positive interest in the subject. Nonetheless, student interest in Agricultural Science remains a concern, with research indicating that many students exhibit negative attitudes toward the subject [5]. Shishi [6] defines interest as an internal state that influences or moderates an individual's actions. It suggests that interests dictate an individual's choices and assert a directive influence based on personal experiences. This means that interest can arise from discrepancies in beliefs and ideas or emotional states, leading to positive or negative reactions to certain stimuli. Asogwa [1] further opines that the effectiveness of teaching practical agriculture can be judged by the level of positive change observed in students. To gauge a student's interest in a topic, one could simply ask how they feel about it. For Agricultural Science Education to thrive and for students to achieve expected outcomes, their interest must be fostered, encouraging a more favorable perception of Agricultural Science Education.

Perception plays a critical role in shaping students' choices, influenced by factors such as parental advice, peer influence, and career aspirations. Agricultural Science Education encompasses various dimensions beyond farming, contributing significantly to a nation's economy [7]. Agbidi, Uwoghiren, and Uduigwome [8] asserted that for Agricultural Science Education to be effectively promoted in senior secondary schools, students must cultivate both perception and positive interest, facilitated by effective teaching strategies. Furthermore, providing adequate learning facilities can address the widening gap created by declining interest in vocational agricultural Science Education beyond classroom instruction.

According to Mokoro [9], transforming students' perceptions and motivating interest in senior secondary school Agricultural Science Education programs necessitates the development and implementation of robust agricultural science education curricula and government policies designed to enhance agricultural production. Lawankar, Shelar, and Pote [10] emphasized the necessity of overcoming existing negative perceptions rooted in students' primary and secondary education experiences, often stemming from principals and teachers who may misuse students as labourers for their personal gain. Agbidi [11] highlights that some educators view practical agricultural science work primarily as a way to extract labour from students for personal benefit, which contributes to students' negative attitudes toward agricultural science education as a career. Furthermore, the author stated that to address such misconceptions, there is an urgent need for methods that effectively alter perceptions toward Agricultural Science Education, recognizing its significance as a professional field in society. Mashingia [12] posits that the provision of practical equipment and necessary materials is essential for improving the teaching and learning efficiency of both teachers and students in Agricultural Science education. Eze and Onyemeh [7] stress the importance of professional counseling in helping students understand the relevance of agricultural science education to the economy. Furthermore, previous research has documented the factors shaping students' negative perceptions towards Agricultural Science Education such as farming activity, which is often viewed as one of the least creative professions in society, especially when compared to other sectors like oil or white-collar jobs as medicine, computer engineers among others, which underscores the need for positive reinforcement of agriculture science education [13].

According to Kaboniire [14], despite these challenges, agricultural science education remains a sustainable career option for many unemployed youths and graduates. Therefore, it is crucial to foster a proper understanding and interest in agricultural science education students, beginning at the grassroots level, as it is a backbone of the populace and vital for economic stability [15]. Thus, the aim is to assess how students view agricultural science education as a field of study, enhance their level of interest, and identify factors influencing their perceptions. By examining these aspects, we can better understand how to enhance the educational experience in this vital subject and encourage more students to engage with agricultural science education studies, ultimately benefiting both the individuals and the larger community.

Research and observations over the past few years within the Nigerian educational system indicate that the percentage of secondary school students enrolling in Agricultural Education Science courses, who subsequently registered for the school certificate examination, is relatively low when compared to overall student enrollment. This decline can be attributed to various misconceptions surrounding the subject, which contribute to a diminished interest in Agricultural Science Education among students. Many view the discipline as a series of punitive measures rather than an engaging field of study. Additionally, students are often incentivized inadequately, facing issues such as insufficient wages and recognition of their efforts. Furthermore, the perception that no prior training is necessary to pursue Agricultural Science Education may undermine its value in the eyes of students. Consequently, this study aims to investigate the misconceptions affecting Senior Secondary Students' perceptions and interests in Agricultural Science Education across three senatorial zones in Benue State.

## Research questions

The following are research questions to guide the study:

i. To what extent does agricultural education rank as a profession compared to other professions?

ii. How important are the motivational factors that influence students to choose agricultural science as a career?

iii. To what extent do students perceive the standard of living of agricultural science educators?

iv. To what extent do students perceive agricultural education as a legitimate profession?



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### Research hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated and will be tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

i. There is no significant difference in the ranking of agriculture as a profession compared to other professions.

ii. There is no significant difference in the motivational factors that influence students to pursue agricultural education as a career.

iii. There is no significant difference in students' perceptions of the standard of living of agricultural science educators.

iv. There is no significant difference in the extent to which students perceive agricultural education as a profession.

## Methodology

The research design employed for this study was a survey. This design was chosen to gather students' opinions on agricultural science education as a course and to address the issues surrounding the ranking of agricultural education and career choices among senior secondary school students in Benue State. A random selection was made from the populations of two government schools in each of the three senatorial zones (A, B, and C), totaling a population of 4000 senior secondary school students. The selected schools included Government College Katsina-Ala and Divine Girls Secondary School Katsina-Ala from Zone A; Government College Makurdi and School for the Gifted and Talented Makurdi from Zone B; and Government College Otukpo and Federal Government Secondary School Otobi from Zone C. Simple random sampling was utilized to determine the sample size, which was calculated to be 5% of the total population of Agricultural Science Senior Secondary School students, resulting in a sample size of 200 students out of 4000.

The main data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire designed to assess students' perceptions and interests in agricultural science education. The questionnaire was organized into several sections:

Section I: Information ranking with response options as follows:

Prestigious = 3; Somewhat Prestigious = 2; Less Prestigious = 1.

Sections II, III, and IV: Included response options of Importance = 1;

Average Importance = 2, and Utmost Importance = 3.

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, it was reviewed by three experts: one in the Department of Agricultural Education, one in the Department of Mathematics Education, and one in the Department of Measurement and Evaluation, all affiliated with Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi. Reliability was assessed by calculating the reliability coefficient using data from students at Mount Saint Gabriel Secondary School, Makurdi. The reliability coefficient, determined using Cronbach's alpha, was found to be 0.71, indicating a high level of reliability and validity of the instrument. The questionnaires were administered to the 200 selected students, and all 200 completed questionnaires were retrieved instantly with the aid of research assistants. Chi-square was utilized as an instrument for calculating hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

### Research question one

To what extent does agricultural education rank as a profession compared to other professions?

### Research hypothesis one

There is no significant difference in the ranking of agriculture as a profession compared to other professions.

The results of the research question and hypothesis are summarized in Table 1.

The data presented in Table 1 highlights the significant perceptions of occupational rankings among Senior Secondary Students in Benue State. A total of fourteen items were found to be highly significant in terms of their perceived prestige, while the fifteenth item was not significant. Notably, farmer occupation was regarded as prestigious with 37%. Occupations that were considered somewhat prestigious are the Engineering profession, Agricultural College Teacher/Educator, and Business Executives/Entrepreneurs, with the percentages of 31%, 42.5%, and 42.5% respectively.

Additionally, occupations deemed least prestigious, including items 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14, with percentages varying from 43% to 66.5%. This indicates a clear distinction in how students perceive the value and status of different occupations.

### Research question two

How important are the motivational factors that influence students to choose agricultural science as a career?

### Research hypothesis two

There is no significant difference in the motivational factors that influence students to pursue agricultural education as a career.

The results of the research question and hypothesis are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 indicates that motivational factors for students are of relatively high importance in pursuing agricultural education. The responses range between average and utmost importance. The items rated as of average importance include: 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 17, with corresponding percentages of 37%, 38.5%, 44.5%, 42%, 41.5%, 45%, 43%, 44%, and 37%, respectively.

In contrast, the items identified as of utmost importance in motivating students to pursue agricultural education are: 1, 2,



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**Table 1:** Occupational Ranking in Nigeria, as Perceived by Senior Secondary Students.

| S/N | Types of occupation | P | SP | LP | $X^2$ | $H_o$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Medical Professionals (Doctors, Surgeons) | 26(13%) | 41(20.5%) | 133(66.5%) | 10.69(5.99) | <.95S |
| 2 | Engineering Fields(Civil, Mechanical, Electrical): | 47(23.5%) | 62(31%) | 57(28.5%) | 58.25(9.49) | <.05S |
| 3 | Lawyers | 37(18.5%) | 59(29.3%) | 106(53%) | 39.13(5.99) | <.05S |
| 4 | Information Technology Specialists | 27(13.5%) | 76(38%) | 97(48.5%) | 38.71(5.99) | <.05S |
| 5 | Business Executives/Entrepreneurs | 40(20%) | 87(43.5%) | 73(36.5%) | 17.47(599) | <.05S |
| 6 | Agric. College Teachers/Educators | 47(23.5%) | 85(42.5%) | 68(34%) | 10.87(5.99) | <.05S |
| 7 | Government Officials/Public Servants | 47(23.5%) | 73(36.5%) | 81(40.5%) | 9.31(5.99) | <.05S |
| 8 | Artists and Performers | 34(17%) | 73(36.5%) | 93(46.5%) | 27.01(5.99) | <.05S |
| 9 | Agricultural Professionals | 38(19%) | 64(32%) | 98(49%) | 27.16(5.99) | <.05S |
| 10 | Social Workers and Counselors | 32(16%) | 81(40.5%) | 87(43.5%) | 27.3(5.99) | <.05S |
| 11 | Military Officers | 50(25%) | 74(37%) | 78(39%) | 6.52(5.99) | <.05S |
| 12 | Veterinary doctors | 32(18%) | 58(29%) | 100(50%) | 34.72(5.99) | <.05S |
| 13 | University lecturers | 33(16.5%) | 48(24%) | 116(58%) | 137.2(7.82) | <.05S |
| 14 | Nurses | 37(18.5%) | 77(38.5%) | 86(43%) | 20.41(5.99) | <.05S |
| 15 | Famers | 74(37%) | 65(32.5%) | 61(30.5%) | 1.33(5.99) | >.05NS |

Key for Responses: P = Prestigious; SP = Somewhat Prestigious; LP = Least Prestigious; $X^2$ = Chi-square; S = Significant; NS = Not Significant

**Table 2:** Students' Influences to Choose Agricultural Science Education as a Career by a Variety of Motivational Factors.

| S/N | Item statements | NIMP | AIMP | UIMP | $X^2$ | $H_o$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Passion for Agriculture | 42(21%) | 77(38.5) | 79(395%) | 78.76(7.82) | <.05S |
| 2 | Secondary School Teachers' Influence | 31(15.5%) | 80(40%) | 88(44%) | 102.12(7.82) | <.05S |
| 3 | Desire for National Agricultural Development | 37(18>5%) | 75(37.5%) | 87(43.5%) | 91.28(7.82) | <.05S |
| 4 | Influence by peer groups/Classmates | 57(28.5%) | 74(37%) | 69(34.5%) | 2.290(5.99) | >.05NS |
| 5 | Parents' influence | 48((24%) | 71(35.5%) | 81(40.5%) | 8.590(5.99) | >.05NS |
| 6 | Family Influence | 54((27%) | 77(38.5%) | 69(34.5%) | 4.090(5.99) | >.05NS |
| 7 | Agricultural exploration for income/profit-making | 51(25.5%) | 71(35.5%) | 78(39%) | 5.890(5.99) | >.05NS |
| 8 | Educational Programs | 47(23.5%) | 89(44.5%) | 64(32%) | 13.390(5.99) | <0.5NS |
| 9 | The practical nature of Agricultural science is a nuisance | 53((26.5%) | 61(30.5%) | 86(43%) | 8.890(5.99) | <.05S |
| 10 | High wages/salaries in Agricultural professions | 35(17.5%) | 84(42%) | 81(40.5%) | 22.630(5.99) | <.05S |
| 11 | Impact on Society | 58(29%) | 83(41.5%) | 59(29%) | 6.010(5.99) | <.05S |
| 12 | Job Opportunities | 52(26%) | 90(45%) | 65(32.5%) | 7.270(5.99) | <.05S |
| 13 | Possibilities of self-employment in Agriculture | 47(23.5%) | 86(43%) | 67(33.5%) | 11.410(5.99) | <.05S |
| 14 | Perception that Agricultural science is easily comprehensible | 67(33.5%) | 88(44%) | 45(22.5%) | 13.870(5.99) | <.05S |
| 15 | Innovation and Technology in Agricultural Science | 41(20.5%) | 79(39.5%) | 80(40%) | 14.830(5.99) | <.05S |
| 16 | Career Flexibility | 45(22.5%) | 75(37.5%) | 78(39%) | 8.750(5.99) | <.05S |
| 17 | Global Challenges | 54(27%) | 74(37%) | 72(30%) | 3.640(5.99) | >.05NS |

Key for Responses: NMP = Not Important; UIMP = Utmost Important; AIMP = Average Important; X2 = Chi-square; S = Significant; NS = Not Significant.

3, 5, 7, 9, 15, and 16, with percentages of 39.5%, 44%, 43.5%, 40.5%, 39%, 43%, 40% and 39% respectively. Additionally, the Chi-square results indicate significance for the motivational factors listed as items 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16, while the remaining six motivational factors were found to be not significant. Summarily, Students consider most motivational factors as either of average or utmost importance in pursuing agricultural education.

Items 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, and 9 are especially motivating for students. The statistical significance of many items suggests that students' motivations are clear and consistent for those factors, while a few factors are less consistently viewed as important.

## Research question 3

To what extent do students perceive the standard of living of agricultural science educators?

## Research hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference in students' perceptions of the standard of living of agricultural science educators.



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The results of the research question and hypothesis are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 indicates that the motivational factor is Students' Perception of the Standard of Living of Agricultural Science Educators and Workers. The item that has been shown as highly important is item 9, with a percentage of 34.5% perceived by the students. According to the results has shown the items that are of average importance perceived by the students are 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8, with their percentages as 41%, 42%, 36.5%, 40.5%, 41.5%, and 36.5%, which indicates the perception of agricultural science education by the respondents. In the response of utmost importance, those items, 2, 5, and 10, were indicated with their percentages 38%, 48%, and 36% respectively. Additionally, the Chi-square results indicate significance for items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 10, while four items, such as 4, 7, 8, and 9, are not significant.

Summarily, students have mixed perceptions about the standard of living of agricultural science educators and workers. Certain items 2, 5, and 10 are seen as highly important; six items are viewed as only moderately important, while item 9 is not considered important. Hence, the statistical significance for some items suggests that students' perceptions are strong and consistent for those aspects, while for others, opinions are more varied.

## Research question 4

To what extent do students perceive agricultural education as a legitimate profession?

## Research hypothesis 4

There is no significant difference in the extent to which students perceive agricultural education as a profession.

The results of the research question and hypothesis are summarized in Table 4.

The results from the above table indicate that there are no responses categorized as "not important." In the "average importance" category, items 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, and 11 received the following percentages: 32.5%, 42%, 38.5%, 40.5%, 42.5%, 43%, 41.5% and 39.5%. On the other hand, items 2, 7, and 8

**Table 3**: Students' Perceptions of the Standard of Living of Agricultural Science Educators and Workers.

| S/N | Item Statements | NIM | AIM | UIM | $X^2$ | $H_o$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Agricultural educators have adequate resources for professional development. | 41(20.5%) | 82(41%) | 77(38.5%) | 15.010(5.99) | <.05S |
| 2 | High salaries of agricultural educators compared to other professions. | 50(25%) | 74(37%) | 76(38%) | 6.280(5.99) | <.05S |
| 3 | Agricultural educators are recognized within the community. | 52(26%) | 84(42%) | 64(32%) | 7.840((5.99) | >.05S |
| 4 | Working conditions for agricultural educators are conducive to teaching and learning. | 62(31%) | 73(36.5) | 65(32.5%) | 1.970(5.970) | >.05NS |
| 5 | Agricultural scientists receive sufficient support for their research activities. | 52(26%) | 52(26%) | 96(48%) | 19.360(5.99) | <.05S |
| 6 | Opportunities for career advancement for agricultural workers. | 51(25.5%) | 81(40,5) | 68(34%) | 6.790(5.99) | <.05S |
| 7 | The benefits provided to agricultural educators meet the standard of living and families. | 41(20.5%) | 83(41.5%) | 81(40.5%) | 21.910(5.99) | >.05NS |
| 8 | Agricultural educators balance their professional to their personal lives. | 62(31%) | 73(36.5%) | 65(32.5%) | 1.970(5.99) | >.05NS |
| 9 | The standard of living for agricultural workers is superb. | 69(34.5%) | 63(31.5%) | 68(34%) | 0.310(5.99) | >.05NS |
| 10 | Agricultural educators are involved in community development initiatives. | 53(26.5%) | 65(32.5%) | 72(36%) | 4.270(5.99) | <.05S |

**Key for Responses:** Nip = Not Important; Aimp = Average Importance; Uimp = Utmost Importance.

**Table 4:** Extent of Students' Perceptions of Agricultural Education as a Legitimate Profession.

| S/N | Item Statements | NIM | AIM | UIM | $X^2$ | $H_o$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | It is mostly a low-status job | 62(31%) | 65(32.5%) | 43(21.5%) | 0.970(5.99) | >.05NS |
| 2 | It is necessary for national development | 43(21.5%) | 74(37%) | 83(41.5%) | 1.960(5.99) | <.05S |
| 3 | It is suitable only for illiterates | 58(29%) | 84(42%) | 68(34%) | 7.840(5.99) | >.05NS |
| 4 | Provide no monetary satisfaction | 56(28%) | 77(38.5%) | 67(33.5%) | 3.310(5.99) | >.05NS |
| 5 | It is a prestigious occupation | 51(25.5%) | 81(40.5%) | 68(39%) | 6.790(5.99) | <.05S |
| 6 | It is more than farming | 50(25%) | 85(42.5%) | 65(32.5%) | 9.25(5.99) | <.05S |
| 7 | Enable one to be close to nature | 47(23.5%) | 69(34.5%) | 84(42%) | 10.39(5.99)) | >.05S |
| 8 | Tends to isolate one from the rest of society | 58(29%) | 61(30.5%) | 81(40.5%) | 4.69(99) | >.05NS |
| 9 | It's worth enjoying doing it for the rest of your life | 46(23%) | 86(43%) | 68(34%) | 12.04(5.99) | <.05S |
| 10 | It is a great war of life | 53(26.5%) | 83(41.6%) | 64(32%) | 6.91(5.99) | <0.5S |
| 11 | Is hard work | 46(23%) | 79(39.5%) | 75(30.5%) | 9.73(5.99) | <.05S |

Key for Responses: Nim = Not Important; Aim = Average Importance; Uim = Utmost Importance.



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received responses classified as "utmost importance," with corresponding percentages of 41.5%, 42%, and 40.5%.

Chi-square results identified items 1, 3, 4, and 8 are not significant, while items 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11 showed significance. These statistical findings indicate that students have strong and consistent perceptions regarding certain aspects, while opinions on others tend to be more varied.

## Discussion of findings

The findings in Table one primarily showed that the purpose of agricultural science education at the senior secondary school level is to foster positive attitudes towards agricultural careers and cultivate sustained interest in agricultural science education as a profession. This study aimed to explore various factors influencing senior secondary school students' perceptions and interest in agricultural education, particularly concerning the occupational ranking of the field and students' vocational aspirations, where senior secondary students' perceptions of the farming profession were somewhat inappropriate [16,17].

The data analysis revealed that students displayed a significant perception regarding the occupational ranking of agricultural professions; however, it is concerning that farming was among the least favored professions. This was in agreement with Creswell and Creswell [18] that many students viewed the life of a farmer as uninteresting and insignificant, reflecting a wider disillusionment with the farming profession. Furthermore, this perception is troubling, particularly in light of the insufficient provision of modern farming tools and equipment at subsidized rates by the government and other organizations, which could alleviate some of the burdens of farming and enhance productivity.

Similarly, Montale [19] notes that the low interest in the farming profession highlights a disconnect between students' aspirations and the realities of agricultural work, which is often viewed as tedious and outdated. Emphasizing modern agricultural practices and integrating advanced techniques could significantly improve students' perceptions. Both government and private entities need to provide accessible, modern farming inputs and tools to stimulate interest in agricultural education as a viable career path.

Furthermore, addressing the practical aspects of agricultural education is critical. Many students find the subject matter unengaging and fail to see its relevance to their lives and future careers. As indicated by Adeboye and Oloyede [20], enhancing students' interest in agricultural education is vital for combating unemployment and ensuring that agriculture remains a prominent and respected career choice. Overall, to change students' perceptions and boost interest in agricultural education, a multifaceted approach is necessary. This approach should focus on modernizing agricultural practices, providing adequate resources, and highlighting the importance of agriculture in sustainable development and economic growth.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Foster partnerships between the government and professional organizations to enhance public awareness initiatives that highlight the achievements and societal contributions of agricultural educators.

2. Establish mentorship programs, provide scholarships, and organize exposure visits to encourage student interest in agricultural education.

3. Share transparent data and real-life success stories, while offering improved remuneration and benefits, to illustrate the diverse career pathways and earning potentials available in agricultural education.

4. Integrate agricultural education into mainstream career guidance and counseling services, emphasizing its essential role in national development.

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