

**Parent and Guardian Perceptions on Post-High School AFNR Experiences**

**Amy Smith**

University of Minnesota—Twin Cities  
218 Ruttan Hall  
St. Paul, MN 55108  
612-624-6590  
arsmith@umn.edu

**Joe Ramstad**

Iowa State University  
227 Curtiss Hall  
Ames, IA 50011  
651-280-0214  
ramstad@iastate.edu

## **Parent and Guardian Perceptions on Post-High School AFNR Experiences**

### **Introduction and Need for Research**

The USDA Economic Research Service (2024) indicates 10.4% of the national workforce is involved within agriculture, boasting over 25 million jobs. Of these, 70.1% connect specifically to product preparation, manufacturing, or processing. Further, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reveals an increase of 6% in demand for jobs related to agriscience fields (2024-a), and a shortage of nearly 1,800 employees in the forest and conservation industry (2024-b). There is a demand for agricultural careers, and developing a well-qualified, well-trained workforce to satisfy these demands is critical. Parents and guardians have influence over the careers and training experiences their children pursue (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018), so there is a need to understand their perceptions on AFNR-focused careers and training. The purpose of this study was to examine parent and guardian perceptions related to AFNR experiences for their children after high school. Research questions included: 1) What factors influence parents and guardians' degree of AFNR career promotion for their children? and 2) What factors influence parents and guardians' degree of support for their children pursuing AFNR post-secondary training?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory of planned behavior is “designed to predict and explain human behavior in a specific context” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181). Our research examined parents' perception of AFNR careers and post-secondary training and how those perceptions may influence their ability to promote or avoid promoting them to their children. Ajzen's (1991) theory examines attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavior control. Parents indicated attitudes and perceptions about AFNR careers and training on the questionnaire. These attitudes transpire into their subjective norms, considering their assumptions about AFNR careers or training opportunities (Ajzen, 1991). The perceived behavior control considers how easily or frequently the parent will inevitably promote the AFNR career or training opportunities to their children. The three areas of the theory of planned behavior guided the creation and analysis of the study as a whole.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative descriptive study utilized a pragmatist epistemology. Kaushik & Walsh (2019) share that “pragmatism is based on the proposition that researchers should use the philosophical and/or methodological approach that works best for the particular research problem that is being investigated” (p. 2). An IRB-approved questionnaire with short answer items, such as “Why have you encouraged your child to pursue a career in AFNR?” and “To what extent do you think you have influenced your child's thinking on whether or not to pursue a career in AFNR?” The questionnaire was administered to parents and guardians of high school students in 4 central and southern Minnesota Perkins consortia. There were 95 school districts with 35,000 students in the consortia, with an unknown number of parents and guardians; representing a non-probabilistic, purposive, accessible population, resulting in 270 participants (Fraenkel et al., 2022). Member checking (Ahmed, 2024; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) occurred as participants validated and reflected on responses typed on the Qualtrics form, and peer debriefing ensured researchers' consistency interpreting and reporting findings (Spall, 1998). Inductive data analysis (Azungah, 2018; Thomas, 2006) allowed codes to emerge exclusively from participant responses.

### **Findings**

Research question 1 identified factors that influence parents and guardians' degree of AFNR career promotion for their children. Of the 75 participants who provided a response to the short answer items, 84.0% ( $n = 63$ ) indicated they encourage their children to pursue AFNR careers.

### **Theme 1: Farming and Personal Interest Serve as a Foundation**

Nearly all respondents who indicated encouraging their child to pursue an AFNR career expressed their own interest in AFNR and/or their child's interest in AFNR, leading them to encourage their children to pursue such opportunities. Of the short answer question respondents, 24.0% ( $n = 18$ ) indicated family participation in farming crops or livestock, or operating a family-owned agribusiness. A desire to continue family tradition was apparent. One participant shared: "My parents have lived on their farm for 35 years and my brother intends on taking it over when they retire. It's important for the younger generations to continue with family farms otherwise they'll be non-existent."

### **Theme 2: AFNR Careers are Job-Secure**

Respondents who encouraged their children to pursue agricultural careers commonly referenced the idea that AFNR careers will always be necessary since there is persistent local and global need for food, fiber, and fuel. One participant concisely summarized three reasons which influenced their encouragement of their child to pursue AFNR careers as: "Always in demand, versatility, career growth." Although some individuals chose to not encourage their children to pursue AFNR careers, largely due to their child's lack of interest or unstable markets, many acknowledged these careers are still valuable and needed.

Research question 2 identified factors influencing parents and guardians' degree of support for their children pursuing AFNR opportunities. Of the 75 short answer question respondents, only 4.0% ( $n = 3$ ) said they would not promote AFNR post-secondary opportunities to their children.

### **Theme 3: Experiences Propel Career Aptitude**

Participants recognized college is not the only post-secondary training option. One participant shared "College education in any field will provide life experiences and tools that can be brought into a job setting." While some indicated they are requiring their child to attend college, many shared the value of certifications and technical training.

### **Theme 4: Financial Impact in Short- and Long-Term**

College cost and the potential payout received from being credentialed was a sentiment among participants. While 2 of the 3 individuals who do not encourage their children to pursue AFNR training suggested it was due to expenses associated with these opportunities, one shared: "Jobs are going unfilled, there is money to be made doing what you enjoy."

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Personal experiences and interests of both parents and children and job security were found as two of the top factors that drove parents to promote pursuit of AFNR careers, while the desire to have additional, practical experiences and financial impact were two factors that influenced the desire to promote post-secondary training opportunities. Overall, there was generally a positive perception of both career and training opportunities. As referenced by the theory of planned behavior, these parents may take these beliefs and attitudes to ultimately encourage their children to pursue these opportunities (Ajzen, 1991) and satisfy the emerging career demands within AFNR (USDA Economic Research Service, 2024).

Additional research is needed to advance this study. Replication conducted regionally or nationally could identify potential geographic differences in the AFNR job market. The use of a normed instrument to collect quantitative data on the lived experiences or values of these parents can indicate additional trends to update college or career recruitment materials, since parents play a large role in their children's training and career choices (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018).

## References

- Ahmed, S. K. (2024). The pillars of trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, 2, 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2024.100051>
- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211.
- Akosah-Twumasi, P., Emeto, T.I., Lindsay, D., Tsey, K., & Malau-Aduli, B.S. (2018). A systematic review of factors that influence youths career choices—The role of culture. *Frontiers in Education*, 3, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2018.00058>
- Azungah, T. (2018). Qualitative research: Deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 18(4), 383–400. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-D-18-00035>
- Kaushik, V., & Walsh, C. A. (2019). Pragmatism as a research paradigm and its implications for social work research. *Social Sciences*, 8(9), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8090255>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Wiley.
- Spall, S. (1998). Peer debriefing in qualitative research: Emerging operational models. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4(2), 280–292. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049800400208>
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 237–246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748>
- United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024-a). *Agricultural and food scientists: Occupational outlook handbook*. United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/life-physical-and-social-science/agricultural-and-food-scientists.htm>
- United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024-b). *Forest and conservation workers: Occupational outlook handbook*. United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/farming-fishing-and-forestry/forest-and-conservation-workers.htm>
- USDA Economic Research Service. (2024, February 14). *Chart detail*. USDA ERS. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=58282>