

Assessing emerging adults' career interests and intentions toward commercial urban agriculture in Florida

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Introduction

Concerns regarding global food security and agricultural sustainability are intensifying, driven by an aging farmer population, declining youth engagement, rapid urbanization, and a surging global population (Borda et al., 2023; Vasilieva & Harvey, 2021). Additionally, the loss of rural farmlands to urban and industrial expansion has led to reduced production and employment, placing further pressure on the local food systems (Hunter et al., 2022; Wittman et al., 2017). Given the need to address these challenges and the increasing prospects for commercial urban agriculture (CUA) in Florida, the current study considers CUA as an opportunity to engage emerging adults (18–25 years) living in urban areas and to strengthen support for the agricultural sector within these environments [Pasula, 2025].

Theoretical framework

The current research was guided by the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) interest model (Lent et al., 1994). The model explains that an individual's interest in a career choice is the result of their self-efficacy beliefs and the outcomes they anticipate from performing that behavior (Lent et al., 1994). Individuals develop enduring interests if they believe they can excel and anticipate positive rewards from choosing that career choice and vice versa (Lent et al., 2010; Lent et al., 1994). Interests combined with self-efficacy and outcome expectations shape individual goals or intentions for future engagement, such as choosing a career that is aligned with their interests (Lent et al., 2010). Additionally, these core variables interact with environmental variables like supports and barriers, which influence learning experiences that aid in the formation of self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 2010).

The primary objectives of the study were to a) assess emerging adults' self-efficacy, outcome expectations, supports, and barriers to pursue careers in CUA; b) assess emerging adults' interests and intentions to pursue careers in CUA; c) evaluate the relationship between emerging adults' self-efficacy, outcome expectations, supports and barriers, and interest to pursue careers in CUA; and d) Evaluate the relationship between emerging adults' self-efficacy, outcome expectations, supports and barriers, interest, and intentions to pursue careers in CUA.

Methodology

Non-probability purposive sampling coupled with quota sampling was used, targeting emerging adults living in study-defined urban counties in Florida ($N = 214$). All the survey items were adapted from the existing survey instruments and modified according to the study context (Blanco et al., 2010; Doran et al., 2022; Kumar Chaudhary et al., 2017; Lent & Brown, 2006; Lent et al., 2001). All variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale, with responses labels aligned to each construct: Self-efficacy, and outcome expectations ranging from *strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)*; Interest ranging from *very low interest (1) to very high interest (5)*; intention ranging from *very unlikely (1) to very likely (5)*; supports and barriers ranging from *not at all (1) to very strongly (5)*. The survey questionnaire was shared with expert panelists to establish instrument validity, and pilot testing was carried out to ensure reliability. Before data collection, institutional review board approval was secured. Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to assess SCCT variables, interest, and intentions to pursue careers in CUA. The data

was tested for assumptions of multiple linear regression, and all the assumptions were met. Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to assess the relationship among self-efficacy, outcome expectations, supports and barriers, interest, and intention to pursue careers in CUA.

Results

The descriptive statistics revealed that only positive outcome expectations ($M = 3.67$, $SD = .77$) were positive and all other variables were interpreted as neutral (Lindner & Lindner, 2024): interest ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.20$), intention ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.18$) self-efficacy ($M = 3.38$, $SD = .96$), negative outcome expectations ($M = 2.78$, $SD = .93$) supports ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.11$), barriers ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.08$). Multiple linear regression revealed that SCCT variables accounted for a variance of 67.1% in interest to pursue careers in CUA ($F(5, 208) = 84.786$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = .671$). Out of five variables only supports ($B = .523$, $t(213) = 8.351$, $p = <.001$), self-efficacy ($B = .501$, $t(213) = 6.397$, $p = <.001$), and negative outcome expectations ($B = .010$, $t(213) = .148$, $p = .014$) were noted as significant positive predictors. The SCCT variables accounted for a variance of 81.2% in intention to pursue careers in CUA ($F(6, 207) = 149.282$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = .812$), with the addition of interest as an independent variable. Among six variables, only interest ($B = .755$, $t(213) = 14.590$, $p = <.001$) and self-efficacy ($B = .185$, $t(213) = 2.89$, $p = .004$) were significant positive predictors.

Conclusions

Based on these findings, we conclude that emerging adults perceive positive outcomes from pursuing careers in CUA but, given their overall neutrality, might need additional information to make decisions for choosing careers in CUA. From these findings, we conclude that emerging adults' interest to pursue careers in CUA is significantly influenced by accessibility to supports and their abilities. However, it is worth highlighting that negative outcome expectations as significant predictors of interest to choose careers in CUA. This might be due to the general awareness of the negative rewards that are possible because of working in the agricultural sector. These results suggest that interest alone could translate into behavioral intention despite the lack of supports.

Implications/recommendations/ impact on profession

Considering the aging farmer population and urbanization, these exploratory study findings are helpful for Extension professionals, agricultural educators, and advocates of urban agriculture who are working towards preparing the next generation of agriculturists. Emerging adults' anticipation of positive rewards from choosing careers in CUA, along with neutral interest and intentions in doing so, may be due to the lack of supports in the form of learning experiences that are essential for developing self-efficacy beliefs. Therefore, future Extension interventions should focus on providing supports (e.g., access to training and education) to increase confidence of emerging adults and to turn neutral perceptions towards positive engagement in CUA. Furthermore, educational programs and school-based agricultural education curricula should include hands-on learning experiences (e.g., visits to urban farms, internships) that capture emerging adults' interest to pursue careers in CUA and to strengthen the future agricultural workforce.

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