

One in 20 U.S. ag students is a Texas Aggie

Across the United States one in 20 students embarking on an agricultural career will attend Texas A&M University.

This is the finding of a recent nationwide agricultural school study directed by Iowa State University researchers.

Texas A&M has had the largest single-campus enrollment in agriculture since 1974. More than 5,500 ag students attend the sprawling 27,000-student central Texas university that also has the free world's largest College of Engineering.

Currently 1,513 females are enrolled in Texas A&M's College of Agriculture, also reflecting a national trend in agricultural education.

Dr. Harry Kunkel, dean of the college, says a nationwide record was set last fall in ag school enrollments. Some 98,000 students were involved throughout the country on a university level, including 30,952 women.

"As the role of women increased in society, we have seen the trend reflected in women entering agriculture. When women first came

to the university, there was a tendency toward animal science and wildlife science careers. Now, there is a general move to all the departments," Kunkel says.

"One of the last fields women entered was agricultural engineering and range science. Today, that number increases with every semester," he adds.

In 1976-77, the college graduated 1,257 undergraduate and graduate students. A huge jump over the 1966-67 total of 478.

It has only been in the last four years that Texas A&M has been tops

in the country as far as enrollments. One point is that this is single-campus enrollment, and not satellite campuses around the state," Kunkel says.

"Since people have become aware that we are a large college, there has been a wide array of job openings for our graduates," he says. "Today the job market is mixed. Some markets are terribly good, and some jobs you are going to have to hunt for."

On a nationwide basis, wildlife sciences are difficult markets to enter. Forestry is another tough

career to enter, but Texas A&M students don't seem to have much of a problem being placed, Kunkel says.

Kunkel says one advantage a large school has is the broad range of courses available.

The larger the faculty, the greater

the opportunity to find the courses wanted. Also, there is a greater opportunity to meet fellow students who have a much broader outlook and experience.

Looking ahead, Kunkel predicts there will continue to be a need for agricultural graduates, and that the

current problems in agriculture are only temporary.

"Only with professional people in agriculture can we continue to provide the foods desired by the American people and meet the demands of international trade," he says.

No 84-day dust wind

Take heart all you adventurous West Texans.

Those stinging, choking, gritty dust storms that were supposed to inundate the plains for nearly three months won't be as prevalent as first thought.

A prediction was made recently that West Texas would have 84 days of blowing dust during the year. However, indications from what is called the "Palmer Drought Index" do not put the figure nearly as high.

"The records we have do not indicate a drought cycle," said Dr. Jim McFarland, meteorologist in charge of the Environmental Studies Service Center at Texas A&M University. "This does not mean the dust is not going to blow. It just won't blow for three months."

"The West Texas region averages 27 days of blowing dust annually. The highest record average was in 1953, when 59 days had dusty skies. This year will have dust, but it won't be as dusty as 1953."

Using the Palmer Drought Index, indications show conditions are no worse than normal for the High Plains area of Texas, he said. The index does show the plains are dry.

In the Lubbock area, the soils are very dry in spite of good rains last fall. A long growing season allowed cotton and other crops to draw a lot of the moisture out of the ground.

"We are coming into the primary season for dust storms," he said. "The storms are usually on the increase when we shift from winter to spring meteorological conditions."

Texas' worst years for droughts and dust storms were in the 1950s, said McFarland. The droughts of

the 1930s were bad, but they were located in the more extreme areas of West Texas.

The longest drought period in Texas, according to the Palmer index, was in South Texas from October 1950 to February 1957.

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