

Latest Millennial Dream Job? Farming

On Thanksgiving Day, while America ate its biggest, most famous meal of the year, *The Washington Post* [wrote about](#) something for which everyone ought to be thankful: more millennials are taking up farming.

That's right: For the first time in a long time, a growing number of young Americans are ditching cities and desk jobs to sow seeds and pull weeds. In fact, it's only the second time in the last century that the number of farmers ages thirty-five and under has increased.

That's good—and surprising—news.

Good, not just because America's aging farmers desperately need younger reinforcements, but also because the country's agricultural landscape has been steadily shifting away from small, local, family farms to huge, commercial operations, something millennial farmers are set on changing.

Surprising, not just because millennials are supposedly notoriously lazy and averse to the kind of hard, manual labor that agriculture requires, but also because those huge, commercial operations have arguably made small-scale farming more cost-prohibitive and unnecessary than ever before.

Surprising most of all because most of these millennial farmers have college degrees and no agricultural background or experience. Usually, one farms because one's family farms, and in eras past, going to college was a ticket *off* the family farm.

So why the sudden uptick in college-educated, twenty-something, farming newbies entering the field?

No doubt part of it is the desire to see and be surrounded by life and living things, and to feel alive themselves. Few generations have spent as much time as millennials have done sitting still while staring into the dead light of smartphones, laptops, iPads, and other gadgets.

Millennials are the kings and queens of screens, of internet, information, and technology. The most educated generation ever, millennials are of the mind, not the body; they tend to work in jobs that require brainpower but not muscle, and are likely the first group of people ever to exist from whom so little physical effort is required to survive.

Surely part of the appeal of farming is the chance to escape the sedentary lives to which so many are condemned, the manual labor of a field being a way to balance the physical and mental lives, the means to experience the strength and vigor of youth that a life inside an office cubicle have a tendency to squash. It's not surprising some millennials might want to work with their hands, not just their thumbs; with their bodies, not just their brains.

And for many, farm life is probably understood as synonymous with simplicity and minimalism, a way of life that complements the tiny house movement millennials [are fueling](#). And for a generation that deeply desires [professional independence](#) and workplace autonomy, the keys to a tractor can be a vehicle to the coveted state of self-employment.

And what could be more natural for a most [environmentally conscious](#) and active generation than returning to nature and working the land? For millennials, farming isn't just a way of physically reconnecting with the Earth, it's about participating in a broader, values-based agricultural mission, the likes of which the world hasn't really seen before.

Once upon a time, growing food was either about surviving and keeping one's family fed or about business and making money.

But for many young Americans now, growing food is more about making a difference, a statement, or an impact.

They are attaching new layers of meaning and significance to farming, and are approaching the entire field of agriculture because of health concerns and social or environmental values, not just physical or financial survival.

Given the relationship between millennials and what they eat, that's not so surprising.

Food is not just food for millennials; it is its own language, a means of communicating and connecting.

This is a generation known for prolifically posting pictures of their food on social media, and for buying expensive avocado toast despite being broke—a generation of gluten-free paleo vegans using the food they eat or don't eat to seek belonging or identity or morality. A generation that grew up watching *Supersize Me* and *Food, Inc.* and are now forcing grocery stores to offer organic, local, sustainable, non-GMO kale.

For many millennials, for good or ill, food is status, identity, ethics, activism, and a way to connect, not just with others, but with their own values.

America's young agriculturalists won't be the only ones who reap the benefit of what they sow; slowly but steadily, the impact of millennials on farming practices and the food supply will influence local communities, the entire country, and someday perhaps the whole world. Of course for millennial farmers, that's the whole point.

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