

# NEWLY FOUND PASSIONS



**F**arming is in one's blood. Many students involved in Texas Tech University's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources have been working on the family farm since they were small children. Perhaps agriculture is all they know. For some CASNR students, they are seeking an agriculture transfusion.

Michael Orsak, a senior plant and soil science major at Texas Tech, is a prime example of this new breed of individuals. When Orsak first arrived at Texas Tech in 2008, he was determined to excel in the mechanical engineering department. After two years of engineering classes, Orsak found himself questioning his decision.

"Growing up, engineering sounded like the perfect job for me. I've always enjoyed math, and building things with my own hands," Orsak said with a smile. "But after a couple years of my engineering classes, I realized I didn't want to do that for the rest of my life."

Increasing needs for agriculture employees throughout our country have caused a growing demand for agriculture-related college majors. This includes first-generation farmers looking to invest themselves in the agricultural industry.

During his first few semesters at Texas Tech, Orsak made a lot of friends that were from farming backgrounds and were pursuing agricultural degrees. He became intrigued by the way they spoke of their classes and he wanted to know more about the science behind the crops that his friends and their families based their livelihoods around.

"I always thought of farming as something you were born into," Orsak said. "Texas Tech's agricultural programs opened my eyes to the possibilities for someone who hadn't come from a farming past."

After a lot of thought and research, Orsak confidently decided to change his major to plant and soil science. That very next summer, he did an

internship at Texas A&M AgriLife Research Center in Lubbock.

Orsak interned under Mark Stelter, a research associate in the sorghum breeding program.

"Michael is one of the most enthusiastic guys I've ever worked with," Stelter said. "It's refreshing to see someone so new to agriculture and so excited and passionate to learn about it."

On August 30, 2012, Tim Vilsack, the agriculture secretary of the United States Department of

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Agriculture, issued a press release (number 0288.12) and said the agricultural industry's future looks very promising.

"U.S. agriculture is stronger today than at any time in our nation's history, supporting and creating good American jobs for millions," Vilsack said.

Vilsack is confident that agricultural jobs will continue to be extremely valuable due in part to an increase in food exports from the United States.

"Exports of U.S. food and agricultural products are expected to reach \$143.5 billion in fiscal 2013, well above the record set in 2011," Vilsack said. "Since 2009, agricultural exports have made gains of 50 percent."

First-generation farmers and crop research enthusiasts like Orsak have a bright future ahead of them with this increasing demand for agriculture.

Texas Tech's CASNR department is prepared to accommodate for more

students like Orsak who want to make the move and major within their college.

Cindy Akers, the CASNR associate dean for academic and student programs, says the CASNR department has great scholarship opportunities for its students.

"Typically, one of every three of the college's students receives a scholarship," Akers said.

Orsak has continued working in the sorghum breeding program at Texas AgriLife while attending school. He hopes to secure a job with a seed company or a crop research organization after his graduation from the CASNR department in May.

"Making the switch to plant and soil science has been one of the best decisions of my life," Orsak said. "I'm ecstatic to see what the future holds for me." 🍷



*Sorghum heads are removed by Orsak as part of a breeding test at Texas AgriLife*

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