

Farmer

Grow crops or raise livestock and run the business around them. Land is the hard part, not the work.

TYPICAL PAY

\$89,900

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$54k to \$160k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Fields, barns, greenhouses, feedlots, a farm office and a truck

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grade 12
Biology, chemistry, math and shop. Join the school's agriculture club and run a project of your own, even if it is six pigs.
- 2 Learn the work on someone else's farm** 2 to 4 years, often alongside school
Summers and weekends driving, feeding, fixing and watching how decisions get made. This is the part you cannot skip.
- 3 Two or four years of agriculture school** 2 to 4 years
A community college associate degree in agriculture, or a bachelor's degree in agronomy, animal science or agricultural business at a land-grant university.
- 4 Manage before you own** 3 to 10 years
Run a herd, a crew or a few hundred acres for a wage. Lenders want to see that you have done it before they hand you money.
- 5 Rent ground, then buy** Ongoing
Almost nobody buys a farm outright at the start. You rent acres, build a yield record, and borrow against that.

Pros and cons

- + You are your own boss on your own ground
- + Real skills: mechanical, biological and financial
- + Work outside, with animals or machines
- Weather and prices decide your income, not effort
- Getting land without family land is very hard
- One of the most dangerous jobs in the country

Good to know

The average farmer is closer to 60 than 30

The farm census run every five years by the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) has shown the average age of American farm operators climbing for decades. A huge amount of land is going...

Land is the wall, not machinery

You can rent a combine or hire a custom crew. You cannot rent your way into owning enough ground to support a family without decades of payments. That is why almost every new farmer leases acres first.

Optional boosts

Pesticide applicator license. CDL (commercial driver's license). Remote pilot certificate. Certified Crop Adviser.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers (11-9013.00)
Farmers.gov: Beginning Farmers and Ranchers
Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
National FFA Organization

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/farmer>



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