

CAREERS



Let's consider two basic approaches to one's life and professional career. One says, "To be successful, to make the greatest contribution, confine your program to a narrow field. Become an expert in one area and be highly specialized." A conflicting approach believes, "As you go through life, change your outlook – try something new and different. If you don't change jobs, change what you are doing on the same job." It is not a matter of one approach being right and the other wrong. Everyone must shape his or her own destiny. Let's look at different paths taken by three great agronomists.

One became a geneticist and plant breeder. His professional life has been devoted to research in grasses. He has lived in the same small town for over 60 years, turning down offers of administrative positions. His grasses are grown throughout the world, contributing millions of dollars to the economy and untold enjoyment of lawns and golf courses.

Another went from teaching and research to department head, Extension Director, USDA leadership, and Dean...involving moves throughout the country. He became president of a great university and then Chancellor of an entire university system. When he retired from that position he devoted his energies to meeting world food needs.

A third agronomist confined his professional life to one area. He taught the introductory course in Soil Science for over 50 years at the same institution. He did no research, no Extension, just teaching, though he did write the leading textbook in Soil Science. Just teaching? But he was magnificent. No one ever did a better job. And thousands of students carried the impact of his teaching throughout their lives.

Three agronomists – three different careers. Who can say that one contributed more than the other? Early in one's career, every person has the opportunity to choose a route to follow and a way to pursue it.

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