The USDA projects 53,500 qualified graduates will be available for about 54,400 jobs annually in agricultural and food systems, renewable energy, and the environment. The shortage of agronomy graduates and lack of opportunity in other sectors of industry will draw students with varying backgrounds to this in-demand career path. The appeal of gaining a degree that lends itself to an industry with limitless potential and an entrepreneurial attitude is hard to ignore.

The students who traditionally seek out a degree in agronomy or a related major have had a background in agriculture or have lived in the vicinity of rural farming operations in some capacity. The potential for a shift in those backgrounds is very evident. We may start to see more students with a focus in majors such as business, horticulture, and biology alter their intended track of study to incorporate varying degrees of agronomy or environmental science. This is a great realization for agriculture. However, it will raise some questions: Can you consider these “young professionals” qualified and do they have enough real-word, practical experience in agriculture to meet the demands of their potential employers?

To help answer the questions posed above, the CCA program has renewed its focus on the next generation of