

Shawn Kuchta

Agricultural Research Technician

Career Description

An agricultural research technician conducts experimental research to improve plant and animal production techniques and protect the environment.

Interview

Shawn Kuchta approaches each day on the job with the same question in mind: how can we produce more food of the highest quality in an efficient and environmentally sustainable way?

Shawn is a research technician at a large agricultural research centre in Summerland where he's worked for seven years. He specializes in the soil, water and nutritional aspects of growing major fruit crops such as apples, cherries and wine grapes.

“Originally, I was interested in environmental issues, which led to my degree in environmental chemistry,” says Shawn. “Now I’m starting to see that it all fits together.”

“I really enjoy understanding the science behind our research and how agriculture and the environment are connected,” he continues. “Every project tends to involve at least two or three other research teams and that opens you up to whole new areas of knowledge. I find it fascinating.”

Shawn’s typical day depends a lot on the season. During spring and summer, you’ll probably find him outside, possibly working a shovel to plant trees, taking leaf and soil samples or collecting experimental data. Flip to the fall and winter and most of his work moves indoors: analyzing samples in the lab, helping to prepare reports or conducting trials in the greenhouse.

“There’s a tremendous amount of variety in what I do and that’s been a huge source of job satisfaction for me,” says Shawn. “It’s a physical job at times but I also spend a lot of time problem solving, calculating and working with instruments and other technologies. No two days are the same.”

Best of all, Shawn knows his efforts make a difference. “The kind of fruit we produce under very specific practices ultimately leads to that apple you just ate for lunch,” says Shawn. “It doesn’t get much more practical than that.”

Key Quote

“I started out interested in environmental issues. Then I developed a passion for agriculture. Now I’m starting to see how it all fits together.”

Ask Shawn: What can I do now to prepare for a career in agricultural research?

“Keep taking your sciences up all the way through grades 11 and 12. That way when you start making course decisions, you’ll have kept all your options open.”

Primary Location

- Lower Mainland, Thompson/Okanagan

Interests/Skills

- Teamwork
- Observation and analysis
- Applying technology
- Writing reports
- Training and supervision

Suggested Qualifications

- Degree in Agricultural or Environmental Science or a related subject

Education and Training Options

- Simon Fraser University, Burnaby
- Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops
- University of British Columbia, Vancouver
- University of British Columbia, Kelowna
- University of Northern British Columbia

Related High School Subjects

- Biology
- Chemistry
- Mathematics

Related Careers

- Resource Management Agrologist
- Crop Advisor
- Agricultural Biotechnologist
- Viticulturalist

Did you know?

- British Columbia produces 84% of Canada's total production of sweet cherries, ranking it #1 in the country. (Source: Statistics Canada, 2004)