

Growing up on a small family farm in north-central Kansas, I developed a relatively narrow view of the world of agriculture. Agriculture was all around me, but I held the traditional stereotype of what Kansas agriculture looked like—a small herd of cattle, a few pigs, chickens, and the accompanying wheat fields. As a child, when I looked at agricultural careers in my local community, I could see the area feed salesman, our local veterinarian and the farmers that would spend their mornings at the local coffee shop. This was my view of agriculture from the time I could walk, through my sophomore year of high school.

Then, in the fall of my junior year at Blue Valley High, our FFA chapter qualified to compete in the forestry career development event at the National FFA Convention held in Louisville, Kentucky. In the months prior to the contest we spent a little time in class preparing, but didn't exactly put our all into studying for the event. In our minds, the trees in Louisville Kentucky couldn't possibly be that different from those in Kansas. Soon, October rolled around; we made the 12-hour-drive to Louisville, checked in, and began the contest. They put us on a bus and sent us into the mountains. Within two hours of starting, my team had made our way to the navigation event. We were handed a compass, a map, and a list of points to find. Five minutes later, my team was alone in the forest, surrounded by trees taller than anything we had seen in Kansas and more lost than we had been in our lives. It was while I was standing there in that forest, looking into the dazed eyes of my teammates that I realized something—I realized that if all of this around me was agriculture, then clearly the agricultural industry was more than I had grown up thinking it was.

We eventually found our way out of the forest that day, each of us with a new found respect for the industry we were a part of. In the remaining two years of my high school career, I continued to explore the agricultural industry. I became more involved with the FFA, and during my early college years, was elected to serve as the State FFA President. All of a sudden, I found myself in front of groups on a regular basis explaining the breadth of agricultural industry and the range of careers it included. I spent time with members of a completely urban school board explaining to them the benefits of agricultural instruction, and the career focus it could give their students.

Now, I am a senior at Kansas State University, dual-majoring in Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Communications and Journalism, and I have a passion for helping others to see the agricultural industry in a new light, the same new light that I have come to see the industry in. I served as a founding member of Kansas State's Collegiate Farm Bureau Chapter; an organization that dedicates a large part of its time to dispelling myths about agriculture and encouraging young leaders to find a careers in the industry. I also serve on our College of Agriculture Ambassador's Cabinet; an organization whose primary duty is to recruit students to attend Kansas State's College of Agriculture. We spend time in high schools across Kansas talking to classrooms about the more than 300 careers the agricultural industry offers, and often leave those classrooms hearing a student remark, "I never thought about jobs like that being part of agriculture."

Throughout my past four years at Kansas State, I have also found my own place within the agricultural industry. I began my college career as an agriculture education student, then discovered I enjoyed economics, and finally one day during an agricultural policy course, I found the niche that I enjoy the most within agriculture—public policy and the legislative process. I enjoy working within the political process, seeing how laws and public policies can affect our industry. My current plans are to attend a law school and focus on agricultural and natural resource law, and when I think of entering the industry after law school, I get excited. Not because I'm ready to be done with school and have a real job, not because I can finally consider myself as an adult in the real world, but because choosing agriculture as a career means that I will be entering a field facing many challenges, but also one that has many opportunities. The face of agriculture is continuing to change and evolve, and I am excited to be there, playing my part in that process.