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Treasure Your Experiences

My name is Jesse Gilmore and I am the new Horticulture Agent for K-State Research and Extension Wildcat District, with my home office residing in Girard, KS.

I've known that I would be in this position since the middle of December, but saying that seven weeks later, it still feels surreal. If you looked objectively at my education before attending K-State, there's nothing that would suggest that I would end up in an agriculture-related career. Being from Johnson County, ag classes weren't offered at my high school, and the nearest 4-H club was 30 minutes away in Gardner. The only meaningful experiences I had with plants were helping my mom with her Master Gardener volunteer work until fifth grade. That lack of experience should have pushed me into engineering at KU, but there was something very alluring to me about growing food and learning everything that it took to go from seed to consumption. I enrolled in agronomy at KSU, encouraged by the backup options I had if I discovered agronomy wasn't for me.

Just one semester into college, I was conflicted. Every class I took in agronomy was a new and exciting experience, but I discovered I was more interested in learning how to grow fruits and vegetables than row crops. After a little bit of digging into the horticulture program, I decided to try my hand at both. Thanks to their different perspectives on growing plants, I realized that both would be valuable in whatever I decided to do as a career. I gained valuable experiences in agronomy for its focus on soils, plant pathology and entomology, and in horticulture for its focus on fruits & vegetables, ornamental plants, and protected environment agriculture.

As a result of learning the ins-and-outs of large-scale and small-scale food production, I place a huge value on embracing the perspectives of row crop producers who desire consistency and scale, as well as specialty crop producers who desire variety and experimentation. From this mixing of perspectives, I am constantly looking for new ways to merge the two and encourage sustainable diversification into fruit and vegetable production. This includes training for

specialty crop growing and marketing, identification of viable and niche alternative crops, and getting fruits and vegetables into the public eye in nontraditional spaces (e.g. parks and schools).

If there's one thing I would like people to take away from my past, it would be to treasure every experience. No matter how seemingly insignificant and brief an experience may be, every single one shapes you into the person you are and can be crucial to decisions you make in the future. When choosing my major, I never thought about how helping my mom with her Master Gardener volunteering would influence my choice. Today, I can very clearly trace my interest in plants back to my experiences helping her. When I took an unpaid, part-time internship at an urban farm in Kansas City, Kansas, I had no idea that it would end up being the most influential of my pre-professional career experiences, developing skills in fruit/vegetable production, integrated pest management, food processing, and marketing.

If you looked at the sum total of my past, I shouldn't be here. But I am, and I'm thrilled that I get to help you have meaningful experiences with plants and landscapes in whatever ways I can.

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