



Agriculture is my whole life. It is all I have ever known. When you think of “Kesley Holdgrafer” you think of agriculture. For the past twenty years, I have been raised on a large diversified family farm. Agriculture has always been the center of my world. My backyard consists of 5 large cattle yards. The view from my front yard is acres and acres of corn, soybeans, and hay all raised by my family. The grain bins, dryer, and legs in our yard sing a loud lullaby all fall that is the best music to sleep to. The farm shop is where we spend most of our days diligently working to complete the task at hand, but also share a lot of laughs. Living on a farm has taught me countless life lessons from how to work hard and love unconditionally. My dad has been my biggest role model in teaching me these life lessons.

I was always told from a young age if you wanted to know just how hard a farmer works just look at their hands. When I look at my dad’s hand, I see a lot. For starters, they are usually covered in something whether it's dirt from the fields, grease from equipment, corn dust from checking the bins, or possibly even covered in manure from working cattle. However, when I look at his hands, I do not see rough cracked, and calloused covered hands I see a story. His hands tell the story. They are the first hands to feel the hearts of a newborn baby calf. His hands have been freezing multiple times year after year from cruel winters as he breaks ice from frozen waters, so his livestock could drink. They have gripped tractor steering wheels for hours as he makes countless trips across fields. His hands are not only just working hard on the farm. Those same exact hands have held and raised his 4 kids. Those hands are the ones that are first in line to give me a high five and hug after each one of my accomplishments. Those hands give and give and give. They work tirelessly to not only feed our family, but they also help feed the world! Those hands may not be manicured or pretty by any means, but they tell a story. An extraordinary tale of hard work and determination. My aspiration in life is to communicate that story with the world which is why I am at Iowa State studying Agricultural Communications.

Before beginning my extraordinary adventure at Iowa State, I attended Northeast Goose Lake High School where I was a high-achieving scholar and very active in extracurriculars including an Ag Media Team I assisted in founding my freshman year. We had our own weekly ag radio show for three years that turned into a TV show called Agri-Vision. On our shows, we highlighted all aspects of agriculture. Along with that, we traveled all across the United States being media personnel at various events and conferences. I have traveled to Tennessee, Oklahoma, Texas, Indiana, Chicago, Las Vegas, and all across Iowa. I have gotten to work with Angus Media, the National Finals Rodeo and Professional Bull Riding media teams, the National FFA Organization, and more.

Along with being a part of a top-level youth media team, I have my own weekly column, Kesley's Corral, in the Iowa Farm Bureau Spokesman Clinton County news section. This began in 2017 and for the past six years, I have reached thousands of devoted weekly readers and have written over 300 articles. I continue to weekly write fun ag articles in my column highlighting my own experiences on the farm and sharing the story of agriculture.

This past summer I had the unique opportunity to be the Public Relations intern at Bader Rutter the largest agricultural agency in the world. This small-town farm girl embraced the city life of Milwaukee, and every moment was an adventure! It was a summer filled with tremendous growth and learning. I got to experience for the first time the fast-paced environment of the agency world by working with a diverse range of elite agricultural clients. I had the privilege of diving into the dynamic world of public relations by crafting compelling press releases, producing numerous blog pieces, developing engaging social media strategies, and more. It was a comprehensive experience that allowed me to touch every aspect of public relations. This internship not only sharpened my skills but also deepened my appreciation for the industry. Collaborating with an incredible team and fellow interns with extraordinary talent, I've learned more than I ever imagined.

I am driven to continue to learn and improve my skills and to also develop more. My passion has always been agriculture. No matter where the future takes me, my goal is to always continue to be an avid advocate for the industry and to share the incredible story of agriculture.