

# AGAINST THE GRAIN



One swine nutritionist found her way back to K-State's campus, but in a role she never expected

Story and photos by Kaitlin Morgan

Cassie Jones, assistant professor of feed science at Kansas State University, grew up in Beulah, North Dakota, also referred to as the “Energy Capitol of North Dakota.” The coal mined nearby didn’t fuel Jones’ passion — instead she sought the knowledge, comfort and opportunities she felt could only be found at K-State.

Growing up, Jones raised Rambouillet sheep and pigs, spurring her interest in swine nutrition. The pigs’ quick response to feed fascinated Jones and made her want to learn more about what went into the feed and how those ingredients affected the animal’s performance.

The majority of her family attended North Dakota State University, but when it came time to choose her future, she was impressed by the swine nutrition program at K-State and was eager to wear the royal purple.

“When I came to K-State as a prospective student, I knew it was right for me,” Jones says. “It was an atmosphere of excellence, but at

the same time, it was a place where I felt comfortable.”

## Breaking the Mold

Jones graduated from K-State with her bachelor’s degree in animal sciences and industry in December 2007. After graduation, she married her husband, Spencer, and began her master’s degree at K-State in swine nutrition the following January. She went on to receive a Ph.D. in nutritional sciences at Iowa State University before returning to K-State in 2012.

“I got lucky,” Jones says. “I never imagined I would be in grain science. I had always planned to be a swine nutritionist and work in the industry first to get some experience under my belt. But I have a passion for teaching and always knew I wanted to come back and work at a land-grant university in the Midwest. As I was finishing my Ph.D., this job came open and it has turned out to be a great fit.”

Being the only nutritionist in the grain science department sets Jones apart from the numerous

grain scientists, milling scientists and engineers.

Because of the swine industry’s heavy focus on production efficiency and high-quality carcasses, Jones was able to participate in various feed studies. Her knowledge and experience in nutrition has helped Jones teach above and beyond the basic grain science concepts. She is able to go further than just teaching students what an ingredient is by explaining how those ingredients interact in a ration and the role they play in the diet.

“I teach ingredient quality and effects of processing in the animal,” Jones says. “My applicable teaching method provides a specific balance within the classroom. I teach them why what they do matters based on how everything affects the animal.”

## Discovering Her Passion

As an undergraduate student, Jones worked at the K-State Swine Teaching and Research Unit weighing pigs and helping graduate students with their

projects. There, she learned she wanted to take the next step in her education, but it was in a little classroom on the side of Weber lounge where she discovered her talent for teaching.

“I would spend a lot of time down there and that’s where I learned that teaching just comes naturally to me,” Jones says. “Anatomy and physiology came really easy to me so I would go teach it to a bunch of my friends

can be,” Jones says. “Jackie is someone who can make whoever she is talking to feel important. She just has that ability.”

McClaskey wasn’t the only faculty member to make an impression on Jones. She says her undergraduate academic adviser, Bob Goodband, had a contagious passion for the swine industry and love for his job that spread through every class he taught.

“He starts out every semester

their interests to help them get to that next step, just as her mentors did for her.

### Returning to the Family

The energy and culture of the campus and faculty that brought Jones here as an undergraduate student are the same reasons she decided to move back to the Manhattan area to start a family of her own.

“I think that when the football players hold up their ‘Family’ block it really resonates with me, because that’s the way I’ve felt the whole time I was here as a student, and even now as a faculty member,” she says. “Even being so far away from home, I never felt alone because I felt like I belonged here. One of the reasons I wanted to come back to K-State is to give that experience to others — I feel that responsibility to help other students see that K-State is family.” **KS**

“Even being so far away from home, I always felt I belonged here. One of the reasons I wanted to come back to K-State is because I still feel like K-State is family.”

—Cassie Jones, assistant professor

that were either on the livestock judging team and missed class that day or others that maybe just weren’t getting it.”

Some of Jones’ favorite memories from her years as an undergraduate were made in Waters 119 while serving the college as an Ag Ambassador.

“I really committed myself to that organization because they helped me have such a good experience on my student visit,” Jones says. “I understood how powerful it can be to have a really well-spoken student sitting in on those meetings.”

Through the Ag Ambassador program, she met one of her mentors, former Ag Ambassador adviser and Kansas Secretary of Agriculture Jackie McClaskey.

“She helped me see the balance between being professional and having a real connection to people and how valuable that connection

with, ‘I have the greatest job in the world because I get to teach swine nutrition at K-State,’ and it’s hard to argue with somebody who is that passionate about their job,” Jones says. “He made me realize that I wanted a job I thought was the greatest job in the world.”

Although Jones believes she is lucky to be at K-State, her mentor and former adviser says K-State is lucky to have her.

“Great people are a good fit for a great university, and we are lucky to have Cassie on faculty,” Goodband says. “Cassie was always very goal-driven and, without a doubt, she is passionate. She’s also a real team player who is always contributing to the progress of things, but always does it without creating roadblocks.”

Whether she’s teaching or advising, Jones strives to make sure her students know that someone cares about them and



Cassie and her husband, Spencer, with their twin daughters Hadley (purple shirt) and Hayden (white shirt) and son, Ty.