

KELSEY HELD'S CAREER PATH SET BY COE

Kelsey (Campbell) Held was a student at the University of Minnesota when she learned about the COE program. She took COE classes in 2006 and 2007 and completed COE internships with MacFarlane Pheasants and Jennie-O. While finishing her bachelor's degree she interned with the Midwest Poultry Consortium.

"The impact COE had on my career path was huge! I did so much networking through the classes and the internship experiences. I had a good feel for my interests and MPC staff assisted me in getting a full-time job that fit those interests," Kelsey said. She accepted a Leadership Trainee position with Gold'n Plump (now Pilgrim's) after graduation. From there she was promoted to a Broiler Service Technician and then moved into the manager trainee program. After finishing the management program she accepted the position of Hatchery Manager. She now manages Pilgrim's Sauk Rapids and St Cloud, MN, hatcheries. "I got into the poultry industry because of the COE program and now I can't see myself in any other career path," Kelsey said.

"My job can be summarized as 'fertile egg in, healthy chick out' – that is what I am responsible for," Kelsey said. Within her hatcheries, on average, 1.2 million chicks are hatched a week. To get a healthy chick, they work with the incubators to mimic what mother hens do out in the wild. Kelsey said the "recipe" for a healthy chick includes: humidity, temperature, turning, and ventilation. While Kelsey manages the process of 'fertile egg in, healthy chick out' there is also a lot of people management involved in her job. There is a team of 35 people in her hatcheries and everyone has their own roles that go into hatching healthy chicks.



*Kelsey Held (left) with Chelsea Russell
NDSU Poultry Panel*

Thinking back to the COE classes, she feels they gave her a solid foundation to grow within Pilgrim's. "When I was a broiler technician, I used skills from the Physiology and Avian Health class regularly. I was doing a lot of necropsies and helping farmers understand the health and welfare aspects of broiler production. Now my entire job is the material you learn in the Breeder Flock and Hatchery Management course," Kelsey said. She is glad to see leadership and communication aspects have been added to the Poultry Enterprise Management course too. While she didn't get to take that section, some of her COE interns have. "The leadership section MPC added is so important. People might not be thinking about how much people management goes into the jobs they will find after graduation, but that is a key area of my job and the jobs of so many of my classmates. Communication skills, self-management, and social awareness are often key for growth within a company," Kelsey said.

Kelsey is thankful she had the opportunity to be involved in the COE program and works to help the future COE students get the most out of the program too. She guest lectures in the Poultry Enterprise Management course and often works with faculty in the Breeder Flock and Hatchery Management course to put together labs. She has participated in COE recruitment events and was part of the Poultry Panel event at North Dakota State University this month. She enjoys working with the COE interns that come through her sites and tries to remain a resource for them even after the internships end.

Kelsey enjoys following the career paths of her COE classmates and finds their success motivating. "Through industry trade shows, conferences, and workshops, I have been able to catch up with other COE students. It has been a thrill to see their successes, such as Dan Wilson (COE 2006, 2007) using his amazing skill sets to run his own veterinary practice in the poultry sector," Kelsey said.

She connects with the wider COE network as well, such as Aaron Ripplinger (COE 2018, 2019), a fellow Pilgrim's Hatchery Manager who has often been a good resource in troubleshooting new issues that arise in the hatchery. Kelsey also remains in contact with Eliza Ripplinger (COE 2016, 2017). Kelsey served as Eliza's COE internship mentor and has enjoyed seeing Eliza's interest in poultry continue as she worked her way through veterinarian school.

Outside of work, Kelsey enjoys camping, gardening, and traveling. She is able to share those experiences with her husband and two sons Bennett (3 years) and Elliott (18 months).