

Kara Snyder 0:00

Hello and welcome to the podcast, a podcast produced by the College of Applied Science and Technology at Illinois State University. I'm your host Kara Snyder and I serve as the assistant dean of marketing communications and constituent relations for the College. Each episode, we're sitting down with an alum of the College and today we have a chance to talk to Kristin fogden. Christian is an alum of the Department of Agriculture and currently works as the member Business Administration manager for GrowMark. Welcome, and thank you for being here.

Kristen Faucon 0:28

Thanks for having me here. I'm excited to join you.

Kara Snyder 0:30

This will be fine. So let's start at the beginning. Why did you choose Illinois State?

Kristen Faucon 0:36

So I was actually pretty dead set on attending the University of Illinois like if you would talk to me as a junior even starting my senior year of high school, but I had two FFA advisors. So for those who maybe don't have an ag background, there are ag education classes in high school and FFA is kind of like the the club, the extracurricular, but they had said me, Christina would want me to move towards some other places. And I toured campus at ISU, and I was like, oh, man, there's just something about it. And then after that, I was like, Alright, this is happening. In my state. I'm all in.

Kara Snyder 1:09

I love it. I love hearing how people became a red bird. So it sounds like you found your major really early on then before you even left high school.

Kristen Faucon 1:18

Yes. So going back to this FFA experience. I mean, it's really designed to help kids explore careers in ag and think about what you might want to do. And so through that, I learned that I was a pretty good writer. I like to tell him the story of agriculture and of our industry. But as someone who really liked politics, by the time I was enrolling to get ISU I knew Okay, I want to see ag communications, I think I want to do some political science classes as well, which that was another pro for ISU, it was easy to do that. And so I was able to go right in. That's awesome.

Kara Snyder 1:48

And I know, while you were here, you made the most of your time on campus. Tell us about how you were involved while you were here.

Kristen Faucon 1:55

I like to say I tried to record a little bit of everything. It's kind of trying to figure out like, what was my right fit on campus. And then even within the department specifically, there are so many artists to get involved with, it was hard to narrow it down. But I think where I really

engaged the most was Sigma Alpha, which was a professional agriculture sorority, I was one of our ag ambassadors, you have to go out and recruit for the college. And that was also part of our group called NAMA, the National agri Marketing Association and competed in that marketing competition as well. I think those were the big ones as well as helping to get collegiate Farm Bureau started at ISU,

Kara Snyder 2:28

that's a big deal starting something new tell us about that.

Kristen Faucon 2:32

It's always good to get something off the ground running. I mean, at that time, the department was probably at an enrollment high though. So we had quite a few students who are looking for something more to get involved. And what I liked about that organization was that can continue on into life outside college. And I think there's a lot of value there as you're trying to think about what do I want to do, what's my network going to be post finishing an ISU who are maybe some of those folks that can engage with and so it seemed worth it. And really, students responded pretty well, something that was major agnostic, it wasn't focused on animal science, it wasn't focused on marketing, or agronomy. So it really seemed to be a good fit, they really helped us to make it pretty easy to get that up and going. That's so exciting,

Kara Snyder 3:10

and what great experience for you to have in hand before you enter the job market. So tell us then you've got this experience, both in and out of the classroom. Now you have your degree, what was that initial job search like for you? And where did you land.

Kristen Faucon 3:26

So I was super benefited by the fact that the department has really great engagement with different employers in the industry, and they do a career fair every year. And so through that career fair and some other opportunities on campus, as well as the advice of a good friend at school, I found GrowMark. And so I like to joke like I was stalking them for like a year or two at career fairs and different events because that was really where I wanted to have an internship and hoping that that internship, it turned into a full time job. That's really kind of why I had lasered in my focus. So I had entered with them and finishing that internship, they said hey, we'd like you to come on full time after you graduate. And so that really made the job search pretty easy. Or I should say I then had to wrestle with, Hey, I'm gonna go into this rotational program at GrowMark. I really liked GrowMark and I'm hoping that that will lead to the job I actually want there that was going to be the hard part was hey, I might not get that job I wanted right away. Once I kind of wrestled with that was that hey, you know I'm sure about GrowMark I'm sure this far I want to be in all sorts itself out.

Kara Snyder 4:27

Well, and I'm sure our listeners heard that you're currently still at grill marks. So tell us about that career progression for you. You must have found a home that you really liked there. Give us some details.

Kristen Faucon 4:37

I started part time before I finished my last semester ISU and so within six months of graduation, the job I wanted came open. You may have heard me say earlier I did some political science classes so I wouldn't be a lobbyist. I don't know what 18 year old kid shows up at college and says I want to be a lobbyist but I was one of them. And so one of those government relations Jobs came open at GrowMark Because of minor drip and other experiences, I won that interview process. And I spent the next five years at GrowMark, doing state issues in Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, I was a bit of a road warrior. I loved it built a great network learn more about our system and the coops we serve the farmers we serve. While I was doing that, I kind of had this realization. Alright, I'm gonna go one of two ways, I'm either going to double down on GrowMark, if I'm going to do that, I'm leaving my background of communications, government relations. So I'm going to need to pivot into the business, or I'm going to double down on this Government Relations thing. And if I'm doing that, I probably want to run a trade association, there gonna be some other experience, I need to effectively run a business, I was a communications major, we're very proud about not doing math, both of those opportunities, were going to involve doing that. Through this like wrestling time, I decided I was gonna go do my master's degree, I found a great opportunity through Purdue for food and agribusiness management program. Through that experience, I got my masters in Ag Econ, and my MBA, did a capstone project. And that kind of is what led into the job I have now. That's very

Kara Snyder 6:08

cool. And I did want to ask you to I know earlier, you mentioned your involvement, when you were on campus, and all of the things you were involved in outside of the classroom, tell me how those activities provided you with some transferable skills that are helping you in your career. Now,

Kristen Faucon 6:23

I always would joke that everything I know about managing people and managing difficult conversations I learned from being president of a sorority. I'm sure anyone involved would agree. But I think that what students can lack coming into a job is you don't have a lot of the soft skills necessarily, you're used to going to class, you get an assignment, you want to do it, that kind of thing, right? You're smart, you've figured it out, right? You finish with this degree, you know, something, but when it comes to a lot of getting things done at work, it's how can you navigate those different relationships? How can you lead people, whether it's by influence, or maybe you are their direct supervisor, whatever those things are? That's a lot of what I got out of my extracurriculars. And so when I jumped into my first role at GrowMark, I mean, lobbying is all about influence and leading and that was definitely skills I got to practice I got to work on and build while I was involved in all those extracurricular activities at ISU.

Kara Snyder 7:17

That's awesome. I love when that all comes full circle like that. We have listeners from all across the college and the university. How would you describe your job to somebody outside of the agriculture industry?

Kristen Faucon 7:28

Let's talk about GrowMark. First, as a company, if you're not familiar with them, even folks in agriculture, haven't always heard of GrowMark. They maybe have heard of Fs work Co Op, and we're a co op of coops. We have member cooperatives who operate under that Fs brand, they fly that Fs flag across North America. So if you're on campus, you may be seen an evergreen Fs we use them as an example. We've got these local member coops that are a part of us. Those member coops are then owned by farmers. So the farmers own the member, the member owns GrowMark. So that's a little bit about us, which will really help to then explain what am I doing now. And I haven't figured out that quick 32nd elevator speech. But if I said it in short, I would say that my job is kind of like being a business consultant. I work directly with a couple of member coops and a certain geography. And so it's all working directly with that CEO, their management team, their board of directors, helping with things like what do we pay our people, we're thinking about building something or acquiring something, what has to be true for that to work out? Should we do that? Maybe we need some training, there's all kinds of different things like that, that kind of roll up under this umbrella. That's exactly why I liked this role was to do a lot of different kinds of projects with our members and our members, were really why I wanted to stay with my career at GrowMark and not go down that government relations path.

Kara Snyder 8:48

Sure. And I'm sure you get to see the impact of those conversations and those decisions and those projects. And that's probably very rewarding.

Kristen Faucon 8:56

Oh, for sure. It's very satisfying to see like, hey, that worked out, hey, something's different, or we got to do something because of what I had a hand in.

Kara Snyder 9:04

So what is your favorite part of your job?

Kristen Faucon 9:07

I think it's exactly this that we're talking about. And being that getting to help my member solve problems, getting to work with them to help them better serve their farmers, that feels really crude at the end of the day. And it just honestly, agriculture is really good people. That's how I got into it to begin with. And a lot of that is just what's what's really satisfying about it.

Kara Snyder 9:26

On the flip side, what would you say the most challenging thing about your job is?

Kristen Faucon 9:30

One thing is challenging, it's just there's a lot to balance, whether it's the schedule running all over the place, that kind of thing. I shared a little bit about my geography. There's some companies I work with here in Illinois, but I got to Ohio, I got to Virginia, the state, there's quite a lot there. And so managing that travel time with time at home, other things I want to be

engaged in as well those then just a lot of its relationships, right and Relationships are hard. And so finding that right mounting X at the end of the I consulted but I can't force anyone to do anything. And so sometimes all you can do is say, Hey, this is what I think we should do. And this is why I think that but you ultimately get to make the decision, not me. And so those are some of the things that can be difficult or frustrating or challenging at times.

Kara Snyder 10:16

And your job clearly keeps you very busy. But I also know that somehow you find time to give back to ASU and the Department of Agriculture. So tell us what you're currently doing and working on and how do you fit that in with your busy schedule?

Kristen Faucon 10:31

Just what I'd say about maybe six months ago, a group that we restructured our ag alumni group, and I'm now serving as president of that AG alumni board. That was really one where as I think about my time at ISU, there's a lot of opportunities I got to have in my life today, people I've met that I owe to that department. And so I've always been passionate about giving back, especially because alums who did that really helped me whether it was scholarships coming into class. So when there was this opportunity to help get this group back going and bring some life into it after COVID. I'm like, Hey, I think this is the right place for my passion. And my skill set to align. I think one of the things that we all are struggling with, especially in this role, post COVID is where do I want to be spending my time we realize how valuable that time is. And so I'm going to pick that one extra thing, I want to plug myself into outside work, this is going to be it. And this is where I think I can do the most good.

Kara Snyder 11:23

That's a great point. It's protecting your time while still using it wisely and investing it where you see value. And you know, on behalf of the university, we really appreciate alumni like you that take the time to invest in the mission. So thank you,

Kristen Faucon 11:37

Oh, I appreciate that. And that's what I would share. You know, I'm a young alumni, I'm 30 years old, I'm not at that place in my life, yet we're giving is easy to do or can't give big amounts. But that's one where there's so many opportunities to give your time or other skills that you have. And so I would encourage other alums listening. You know, while we want financial donations, there's a lot of ways that you can still give back to the university and help students move along in their career.

Kara Snyder 12:03

That's a great point, it can look a little bit different for everybody. You know, we have those alumni boards. I know, for example, I teach a class, I'm always looking for alums to come and speak and share their story. There's lots of ways to make an impact. So that's a great point. All right, Kristen, we are going to finish with a speed round. So just go with your first instinct on these questions so our listeners can get to know you just a little bit better. First question. Salty or sweet?

Kristen Faucon 12:30
Salty.

Kara Snyder 12:31
What is your favorite day of the week?

Kristen Faucon 12:35
Oh, that's that's a tough one. Thursday? I don't know.

Kara Snyder 12:41
I like that question. Because some people react like you do. And some people are very opinionated on it. So it's a fun one to ask. All right, and it's fall officially. So are you Team Pumpkin or team apple flavor? Team Pumpkin. All right, and what are you reading or listening to right now? Anything you could recommend to us?

Kristen Faucon 13:04
Well, I'm a big True Crime fan. So I'm always listening the podcast crime junkie. So I'd recommend that one for sure. And then, oh, gosh, I read about like two or three books at a time. I'm a nerd. So all spirit guys telling me about all of them.

Kara Snyder 13:20
I love it. How do you relax?

Kristen Faucon 13:24
So back to being a reader? I mean, that's my big goal. And I love just sit down with a good book, a glass of wine. And that's like good relaxation time.

Kara Snyder 13:32
What's the best trip you've ever taken?

Kristen Faucon 13:34
I think I'll have to say, Ireland. I've had the privilege to go to a few different countries, but that's the one that's most beautiful. You could convince me to go back there anytime.

Kara Snyder 13:43
Oh, that sounds beautiful. All right. I ask everybody that comes on the podcast. Avanti is gondola or pub to cheese balls Avantis gondola. And one last question for you. If you could give one piece of advice to a college student, what would you say?

Kristen Faucon 13:58
So a piece of advice that was given to me as I was wrapping up my time at ISU that I don't think I understood the time, but I do understand now is to make sure you have fun. And I know yeah, like I went to college all the time. Right. But I think part of that is that perspective, because it's

homecoming week, I have quite a few colleagues who went to ICU as well. And we were kind of reflecting on do we miss our time at college and we all agreed, it's you know, I missed that time when all my friends live either down the hall or within a short walk of each other. And while there's a lot of responsibility to pay for school to do well in classes, it's one of that that last kind of time of less responsibility. And so just making the most of that time and being sure to carve out that time with your friends and the other folks that is your community beyond class.

Kara Snyder 14:44

Well, thank you so much for being here Kristen. It was great to chat with you. That was Kristen Falcon, the member Business Administration manager for GrowMark. Join us next time on the PodCAST for more stories from our cast alumni.