

County AGvocate overcomes obstacles to pursue her passion

Standing in a classroom, surrounded by children eagerly waiting to get their first glimpse into the world of agriculture is where Britney Lardner said she loved to be.

The New Mexico Agriculture in the Classroom County AGvocates are individuals who dedicate their spare time to educate youth about the importance of agriculture. They travel across the state presenting to students of all ages about the many facets of New Mexico agriculture. Britney is currently volunteering as the Bernalillo County AGvocate and has presented to over 900 students in the Albuquerque area in the past year.

Britney said she has had a passion for teaching her whole life and always planned on pursuing a career in education, but agriculture has not always been forefront in her mind. In fact, she wasn't in FFA or even an agricultural education class until she was a senior in high school.

"Since I wasn't born into a life focused on agriculture," Britney said, "nor did I have anyone in my extended family that farmed or ranched, I took that as a notion that it was something I could admire and enjoy from afar."

Britney said right before senior year her younger sister, Nikki Lardner, convinced her to take an ag class and she was hooked.

Britney said. "If I could go back and tell myself a few things that I know now, one would be to explore more options and start things at a younger age. I'd tell myself that my upbringing shouldn't dictate what I want to be when I grow up."

Britney did not let this late start in agriculture slow her down. After high school, she went on to get a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Education and Extension from New Mexico State University in 2013 and a Master of Science in International Agriculture with a focus on

agricultural education from Oklahoma State University in 2015. Britney said college allowed her to venture on her own path and really discover her passion for agriculture.

However, a family accident changed Britney's teaching plans. In 2013, her sister, Nikki, was in a serious car accident and suffered a traumatic brain injury and was in a coma. Nikki was given a 10 percent chance of ever waking up, and even if she did wake up, she only had a 10 percent chance of ever being independent again. Britney said because of this, she moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, to live with her mom and Nikki.

"I trust in God and his plan for my family," Britney said. "There will always be teaching positions available and there will always be time to do my own thing, but I won't ever get this time back with my mom and my Nikki."

Because of the care Nikki needs, Britney said a teaching career was not a feasible option. She needed a job with a flexible schedule so she took a position at the New Mexico Heart Institute.

Although Britney said her family is her priority, she refused to give up her passion of teaching agriculture to others. She contacted New Mexico Agriculture in the Classroom in the fall of 2015. By the spring of 2016, she had a full schedule of classroom presentations. Britney said this was the perfect opportunity for her situation.

"The part that drew me to 'advocating' in Bernalillo County was the fact that I wanted to teach, but I was unable to – due to my current family situation," Britney said. "So, to still get experience in teaching, all the while working with Nikki. I knew that Agriculture in the Classroom was the route for me."

Britney said she enjoys investing her time in people and agriculture. She said she recognizes the hard work farmers and ranchers put into providing food and believes this should be recognized.

“Providing a service for the community in the capacity of spreading the knowledge of agriculture, and experiencing some students’ first interactions with seeds and ag products is exciting,” Britney said. “I want to help tell [farmers’ and ranchers’] stories to young minds so they can learn to appreciate where everything in this world comes from.”

Britney also said she encourages anyone who is considering volunteering for New Mexico Agriculture in the Classroom to do it, especially college students studying any form of agriculture.

“I love volunteering and I think it takes a special kind of person to put monetary value associated with hard work aside, and simply focus on the inward value they’re adding to their lives and those they’re meeting with,” Britney said. “You are not only giving your time to educate others, but I personally feel that I gain more than they do because it’s a personal decision to go the extra mile.”