

Find a job you love, and you'll never work a day in your life.

University of Arkansas assistant professor Kate Shoulders discovered her passions at an early age and allowed those interests to shape her career in way that has resulted in an exciting and impactful opportunity in the Ozarks.

Shoulders, raised in Philadelphia, has been intrigued by agriculture for as long as she can remember.

"I have been really interested in agriculture since I was a little itty bitty kid," Shoulders said, "which is weird, I guess, being from Philadelphia."

Her interest in agriculture led her to pursue a series of collegiate degrees – starting with undergraduate degree in agriculture and ending with a Ph.D. in agricultural education.

Before pursuing graduate education, Shoulders taught high school agricultural education. During her time as a high school agriculture teacher, she realized her impact could grow substantially if she taught aspiring teachers how to teach agriculture.

"If I could teach people how to teach ag, I could be much more impactful than if I taught ag myself," Shoulders said.

Her passion grew from teaching agriculture to teaching about agricultural issues.

"Consumers really started to put their money where their mouth is on some of that, so I really got interested in educating people about agricultural issues."

Shoulders remembers the day she browsed the news and realized a report on a new dairy product in Great Britain was using common agricultural terms, like "organic" and "free range," in a misleading manner.

"I had taken enough ag classes at this point to know that terminology is important," Shoulders said. "The more I learned, the more I realized the general public does not know what these terms mean.

"The tough part on our ag industry is that when people make those uninformed choices, the ag industry has no choice but to cater to them because they won't buy their products...The ag industry has to succeed in order for people to eat and enjoy their lifestyles."

Shoulders wants to be on the cusp of a change in history that portrays the agricultural industry as a partner with the earth, not an earth destroyer, she said.

"I've become really passionate about sustainability in all areas," Shoulders said. "The [agricultural] sustainability part is really big for me."

Through the Renewable Energy Analysis Project [REAP] that Shoulders has spearheaded, the assistant professor will be able to take her teaching and research to the masses. The REAP has numerous educational facets ranging from solar energy modules, wind energy modules, and even a hands-on mobile energy demonstration. All aspects of the project will provide Shoulders ways to demonstrate to

both agricultural producers and consumers ways they can become more energy efficient and sustainable in their practices and their homes.

The research and expertise Shoulders has brought to the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology (AECT) at the University of Arkansas is unique, much like her faculty she works with every day. The department is comprised of several educators who excel in their respective fields of study, which promotes a diverse educational environment for students to thrive in when involved with the AECT department.

The dynamic the department and its faculty offers gives almost every student personality type a home, Shoulders said.

“If there’s somebody who’s interested in agriculture as a science and really embraces the coolness of geekery and science and research, that’s what I hope to bring to the department,” Shoulders said.

“An avenue for those students to say ‘Hey, I can see me in ag ed. I don’t look like the typical ag teacher, but I look like that ag teacher so I think I could do it.’”

George Wardlow, professor and department head of the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology, said Shoulders brings unique experiences and perspectives to students in the department.

“As a former high school agricultural science teacher, she brings the perspective of teaching in a program which emphasized the science of agriculture in addition to production agriculture,” Wardlow said.

Shoulders’ outreach education efforts, like the agricultural science fair she coordinates for the Arkansas FFA Association and the REAP, align well with the mission of a land-grant university.

As a land-grant institution, the U of A is tasked with creating new knowledge through research and sharing the knowledge through service activities, Wardlow said.

“Helping citizens of Arkansas understand how to use alternative and sustainable energy concepts is Dr. Shoulders’ unique contribution to the land-grant mission.”

Whether she teaches the public or her agricultural education students at the U of A, Shoulders especially wants to work with anyone who is interested in educating others who will share their knowledge with larger groups. She hopes to educate teachers, city government officials, and influential agricultural producers, who will share their new knowledge with their students, employees, and peers.

“I am super excited to really put together a dynamic learning package that people go to,” Shoulders said. “That’s what I really hope that happens, that it becomes a common thing that people use for their own learning.”

Through educational services and in-class teaching, Shoulders is able to follow her interests in agricultural issues and teaching others about agricultural issues.

“That’s why I went the route of getting my Ph.D.,” Shoulders said. “I really got interested in educating people about agricultural issues.”

Shoulders has turned her passions for teaching and for agricultural issues into a career that’s led her all the way from Philadelphia to Fayetteville. And, theoretically, she’s never worked a day in her life.