

A View Beyond the Classroom



Matt Wolters told agricultural economics students that he understood what it was like to be sitting in a Waters Hall classroom anticipating what the future would hold, because he had been there just 12 years ago.

As a 2014 Distinguished Young Alumnus, Wolters was in Manhattan Feb. 24 to 26 meeting with various groups and presenting a university-wide lecture in the K-State Student Union.

The K-State Alumni Association's Student Alumni Board and the Board of Directors sponsor the award.

Wolters, a 2003 graduate, said he chose agricultural economics as a major because he found the classes interesting and the major offered many job opportunities.

After graduation Wolters traveled the United States promoting his fraternity, Beta Sigma Psi, before taking a job as territory sales person for JD Skiles, a fertilizer equipment supply company in his home town of Atwood.

In 2007, he founded SureFire Ag Systems Inc. with his brother Josh

and friend Blaine Ginther to develop packages to apply liquid using existing equipment, such as corn planters and drills. The business has grown to 31 full-time employees, with seasonal employees during peak seasons. They ship products to 47 states, 6 Canadian provinces, and 6 other countries.

When students asked Wolters what he took away from K-State, Wolters listed three things.

- Ag econ classes taught me how to think strategically and solve problems. I use those skills all the time.
- An agricultural communications class (AG COMM 420) stressed the value of communications and how to write clearly. Those skills are invaluable for marketing materials and creating websites.
- The network of people and relationships I established. Rarely a day or week goes by that I don't interact with or bounce ideas off someone I met at K-State.

Shelby Droddy, senior in agribusiness from Princeton, Kan., appreciated listening to Wolters.

"I think it's awesome we bring back young, successful alumni to speak to us," Droddy said. "Especially being a senior, it's more realistic to hear his story now and more inspirational. I love that he was an agriculture student as well."

"He shared experience from his first job, not knowing what he wanted to do, to starting his own business. It shows that you don't have to have it all figured out immediately and can still be successful as a young professional."

In addition to personal success, the young alumni award also emphasizes giving back to the community.

As a K-State student, Wolters was a College of Agriculture ambassador, as well as a member of Blue Key Honor Society and Student Governing Association. He continues that spirit of involvement today.

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He and his partners founded the Dream Big Foundation, which promotes and provides resources to enhance science, technology, engineering, agriculture, and math education in the Rawlins County USD 105 school district. He helped reorganize the Kansas FFA Foundation and serves as a member of the Rawlins County Hospital Board.

Wolters completed the Kansas Agricultural Rural Leadership Program in 2011.

This was the second year that K-State honored two young alumni. Both years, a College of Agriculture alumnus was selected.