

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture Highlight: Dr. Mindi Clark

It has been said that people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Perhaps that is why long before Dr. Mindi Clark of Byron, OK had the agricultural success and knowledge she does today, she was spending her time pouring into others and serving the agriculture community. Now a wife and new mother, she continues to impact lives through agriculture every day.

Brought up in Braman, OK on a small farm that raised swine and cattle, Dr. Clark was always drawn to the agricultural lifestyle.

“My first involvement in agriculture was showing livestock through 4-H and helping with livestock on the farm,” said Dr. Clark. “That led to me getting involved in FFA in the 8th grade. FFA provided me opportunities to compete in public speaking, livestock judging and to hold leadership roles in high school. I also worked at the local grain elevator during the summers. I think both of those experiences propelled my love for agriculture and stoked a desire for me to be a part of the agriculture community.”

During her senior year of high school, Dr. Clark realized she didn't want her involvement in agriculture to end. She made the decision to run as a State FFA Officer to help others get involved and find the leadership opportunities that she had.

“My first year at Oklahoma State University was spent as a State FFA Officer,” said Dr. Clark. “This allowed me to see the impact the agriculture programs were having on students across the state. It was this experience that prompted me to pursue agricultural education as a career.”

While attending Oklahoma State University, Dr. Clark met her husband, Steve. In 2005, Dr. Clark graduated with a B.S. in Agricultural Education and returned to Byron with her husband to take over the farm.

“My husband is the 5th generation to operate Clark Farms,” said Dr. Clark. “My summers and time after work are spent on the farm. We have a no-till operation where we produce wheat,

corn, grain sorghum, soybeans and sesame. We also operate an alfalfa seed cleaning business and run a cow-calf operation as well. There's always something to do on the farm. I try to help wherever it is needed, such as driving the silage truck, feeding cattle and operating the grain cart."

In addition to helping Steve farm, she accepted a teaching position at Fairview Public Schools in 2006.

"After college we got married and started living the farm life," said Dr. Clark. "I get to live two lives: I get to teach people about agriculture, and I also live agriculture by producing crops and cattle."

It was her first teaching position at Fairview Public Schools that made her realize the impact an educator can have on a student.

"The reward lies in your students," said Dr. Clark. "You see your students on a daily basis and develop relationships with them through various contests and projects. You really can make a positive difference in their lives."

Dr. Clark shares one of her most cherished memories about getting to play a part in one particular student's life.

"I'll never forget I had a young man who was a sophomore in my horticulture class," said Dr. Clark. "He really took advantage of the hands-on activities we had in our program's greenhouse and excelled in horticulture. I got to watch other teachers ask him about their plants and gardens and I was so thrilled to see him finding his place and a sense of belonging in school."

Tragically, it wasn't until his funeral five years later that Dr. Clark realized the impact her class had on the young man.

"He passed away in a car accident when he was 21-years-old," said Dr. Clark. "At the funeral, they spoke about his love for horticulture and how if he were there, he'd know the names of all the flowers at the service. The fact that our agriculture program was brought up during this time of reflecting on his life was touching. It showed me that the things you teach don't just stop at the classroom- they become a part of your life. I'll never forget that."

In 2010, Dr. Clark accepted a job as Assistant Professor of Agriculture at Northwestern Oklahoma State University in Alva. It was this position that prompted her to go on to obtain her Ph.D. in Agricultural Education from Oklahoma State University in 2013.

"Now in teaching postsecondary education, I get to help students prepare for the rest of their lives," said Dr. Clark. "I get to see them go on and influence the state through educating the next generation. It's very rewarding to help prepare them."

It is clear that Dr. Clark has influenced hundreds of lives across the state. However, her most important teaching position has just begun as the new mother to her son, Thomas Clark.

“We’re a Centennial Farm,” said Dr. Clark. “The Tom Clark Farm was claimed in the Land Run, so Thomas is named after his great, great-grandpa.”

Dr. Clark already has big plans for baby Thomas to help with harvest this year.

“I’m still trying to figure out where he’s going to ride in the tractor when I’m operating the grain cart,” laughs Dr. Clark. “We’re not real sure yet. But I hope as we raise our son that he realizes how fortunate he is to get to grow up on a farm and the responsibility he has to educate others about agriculture.”

Many students have been educated in the classroom by Dr. Clark over the years. However, perhaps the most valuable lesson they can learn is how to build a lasting legacy through agriculture.

“I see how important it is to create agriculture awareness,” said Dr. Clark. “I’m a part of production agriculture, but I’m so blessed to have the opportunity to share that message through my job as a teacher. If I can effectively educate my students on the postsecondary level, then they have the opportunity to educate theirs for generations to come. I feel so, so fortunate to be involved in production agriculture and agriculture education.”

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IMG_0702: Dr. Clark teaching a group of students in the horticulture greenhouse at Northwestern State University in Alva, OK.

