

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture Highlight: Courtney Talbot
By Betty Thompson

STILWELL, OKLA. – Courtney Talbot had aspirations of living and working in the fashion world when she graduated from the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) with a fashion marketing degree at the age of 21, but her family’s business, Mountain View Meats, was always in the back of her mind.

“This is all I’ve known for 30 years,” Talbot said. “I could go on and on about it.”

Talbot grew up in Stilwell, Okla., a small rural town east of Muskogee. Like many other kids in her community, she joined the local 4-H club.

At age 10, she competed for the first time in the 4-H speech and demonstration contest.

“My goal that day was to simply not pass out in fear, or at the very least, knock over my display,” Talbot laughed. “It helped me conquer my fear of public speaking.”

She said that competition taught her valuable lessons like speaking with authority, confidence, and maintaining composure even through stress. Years later, those lessons are still paying off.

“The entire board of agriculture, including Secretary Jim Reese, came to tour our facility at Mountain View,” Talbot recalled. “I accidentally knocked over a large display photo during my presentation. Of course it couldn’t have simply fallen quietly; instead it crashed to the floor shattering into a million pieces. I just kept talking like nothing happened, blushing the entire time but speaking through adversity nonetheless.”

From a small child to a senior in high school, Talbot spent a significant amount of time at the family business, including her summer breaks.

“I had been there [Mountain View] for so long I wanted to do something different,” Talbot said. “So, I went to UCO and got my degree in fashion marketing.”

After spending a short period of time in the apparel industry, Talbot began to feel like a “tiny fish in a big pond,” and decided corporate America was not for her.

“I’m a sentimental person, so Mountain View was always in the back of my mind,” Talbot said.

To entice her to return, her father used her love of fashion and offered to let her design a shirt for the business.

In 2009, Talbot returned to Stilwell and the family business; she has not looked back since, saying it is a far more rewarding career.

“It has been an invaluable experience to watch firsthand my family work hard and see their dreams come to light,” Talbot said. “My grandpa had no idea when he started this company that 40 years later it would be supporting his grandkids and great-grandkids.”

In 1973, Cliff and Betty Phelps realized there was an opportunity for a niche market of specialty meat in their community of Stilwell, Okla. They started a wholesale packing plant and Cliff and his sons, Clifton and Mike, traveled store-to-store selling products out of the back of the truck. Talbot’s father, Mike, now operates the family business.

“Fast forward 40 years and we are still offering those specially cut meats,” Talbot said. “We actually have a specialty meat store on the property called Cliff Superette that pays tribute to my grandpa because that is what gave Mountain View our start.”

They also had family recipes for hot links and sausages from Betty Phelps’ side of the family that they made for “fun.” As the company grew, the hotlinks grew in popularity. Eventually, they started selling them in restaurants and grocery stores throughout Oklahoma. Today, Mountain View Meats hotlinks and sausages can be found in 18 states across the United States and has become the main focus of the business.

“It’s a niche product and a growing market,” Talbot said. “Mountain View Meats Hotlinks have their own flavor profile. We have a very unique way of making them—old world style in a growing world of machines.”

Talbot’s official title is the Director of Sales and Marketing, but in a family-owned business, she said you have to be flexible and fill in wherever you are needed. Her primary roles are to work on new contracts, seek out new business, and oversee the production and labeling to ensure the links they sell are what the customer is looking for. Talbot said keeping the business current while staying consistent to their brand name is critical, and her fashion marketing degree comes in handy for that challenge.

“Initially when you hear the word ‘fashion’ you automatically think of apparel or clothes,” Talbot explained. “But fashion is about what is trending. All markets have a trend with a life cycle, and in the world of marketing timing is everything. Being able to recognize a trend is key to keeping a brand current and relevant to consumers.”

Talbot said she's especially passionate about marketing locally sourced products and Oklahomans supporting other Oklahomans and is proud to say the products from their facility truly are "Made in Oklahoma."

"You really get the full farm-to-table food experience," Talbot said. "Our pork comes from Oklahoma farms and we turn it into a product that is on your table. That pork quadrupled its value."

Talbot serves on the Board of Directors for the Made in Oklahoma Coalition, a food manufacturers group of over 60 companies promoting Oklahoma food and agriculture products.

"We joined in 2014, and it has been a big game changer," Talbot said. "I had no idea how many manufacturing companies were based here in Oklahoma, and I've lived here my whole life."

Talbot said her personal goal is to improve consumer awareness of what goes on behind the scenes of having a steady food supply.

"You just expect your favorite product to be there when you go to the store," Talbot said. "You don't necessarily think about the story or the family behind the product. We are a local brand, we push brand awareness of local products, local families, and that trickles down in the economy because the money stays here in Oklahoma."

According to Talbot, on any given day you can find one of the nine fourth-generation family members at the business, including her and her husband Daniel's children, Boone, Winnie, and Sullivan.

"I know the work I do supports my parents, my siblings, and my kids," Talbot said. "I wouldn't change it. Hopefully one of the next generation will want to carry on the family business here in Oklahoma."

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Editor's note: This is part of a continuing series of stories on Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture. The project is a collaborative program between the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry and Oklahoma State University to recognize and honor the impact of countless women across all 77 counties of the state, from all aspects and areas of the agricultural industry. The honorees were nominated by their peers and selected by a committee of industry professionals.

Photo Caption: Courtney Talbot of Stilwell, Okla., is the director of sales and marketing at her family's business, Mountain View Meats, and a board member for the Made in Oklahoma Coalition. *Photo courtesy of Made in Oklahoma Coalition.*

