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Tech Savvy: Coke helping farmers use data to improve yields

By Don Wilkins Messenger-Inquirer
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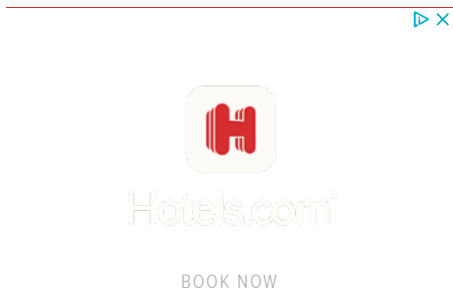
By Don Wilkins/Messenger-Inquirer

Kahlan Coke has gone from helping raise chickens to guiding farmers about how to use the latest agricultural technology.

Coke, 24, is an integrated solutions consultant for Wright Implement who grew up on her family's farm in West Louisville.

"At a young age, I was helping with the chicken houses and setting tobacco by walking behind the tobacco setter," she said. "That's really where I got started until I got older and could actually ride the setter myself."

Coke said those responsibilities gave her a greater appreciation for what it takes to raise crops and livestock.



"Having that background in ag, I didn't know what it was like to grow up in town," she said. "So it was just natural to come home on the weekends and work on the farm; it was just so enjoyable to be outside with nature, and I feel like it established that work ethic in me from a young age."

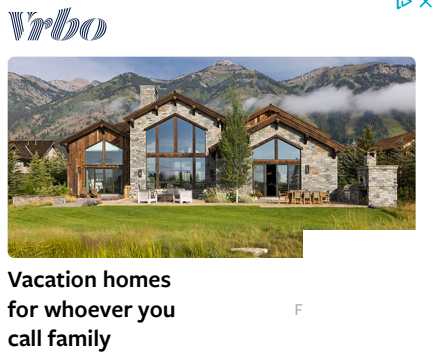
Coke further immersed herself into agriculture by joining the FFA program at Apollo High School, where she graduated from in 2017.

"I really feel like I owe FFA a lot for who I am today, along with the ag community," Coke said. "Mainly because doing things like speech competitions really got me out of my comfort zone."

And by the time she was a senior at AHS, Coke knew she wanted to major in agriculture in college. She earned her bachelor's degree in ag business from Western Kentucky University.

Coke said she didn't have a job after graduating from WKU and initially applied for an open receptionist position at Wright Implement.

She credited Bruce Westerfield, a Wright Implement colleague, with bringing the integrated solutions consultant position to her attention.



"Being a smaller family farm, we did not have the newest technologies growing up, but we did have some," said Coke, who began working as a Wright Implement consultant in July 2021.

Coke now helps farmers manage crop data such as how to compare their seeding data to their harvest yields.

"It's showing them the value of how different varieties are performing and what they can do with their practices to do better," she said. "It's more than selling them a machine; it's working with them on this technology and showing them how technology can improve their overall business."

To retrieve the data, newer John Deere tractors come equipped with an onboard modem called the JDLink system, which is the connection via cell towers that enables automatic data flow between connected machines and the owner's John Deere Operations Center account.

Coke said older tractors can be retrofitted with the system.

And it's not uncommon, she said, for her to bring her laptop into the fields and ride with the farmers while they're planting or harvesting.

"They're still go-go-go, but at the same time I'm helping them run that data," she said.

And although she's just starting out, Coke said she couldn't imagine doing anything else.

“One of the big things that led to an ag career is that I wanted to give back to a community that has made me who I am today,” Coke said.

Don Wilkins, dwilkins@messenger-inquirer.com, 270-691-7299

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