

ELIZABETH BEILKE SHARES ABOUT THE MANY 'HATS' SHE WEARS WITHIN THE INDUSTRY

Elizabeth Beilke was a student at Kansas State University (KSU) when she learned about the COE program. She took COE classes in 2010 and 2011. She went on to get her Master's of Public Health from KSU and her Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine from Iowa State University (ISU). After completing her degrees, Dr. Beilke immediately started using her skills to improve poultry health, first joining the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Response Team at ISU during the 2015 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza outbreak and then as a company veterinarian with a commercial swine, egg, and turkey operation in Ohio.

Today Dr. Beilke works as the Corporate Veterinarian for West Liberty Foods, LLC. "Veterinary medicine is the science of helping animals, but for me it's all about the people," Dr. Beilke says. Dr. Beilke feels veterinary medicine is a serving profession and her work is done in service to those taking care of the birds. She enjoys getting to work one-on-one with individual farmers and their families. "With my farmers, we get to know each other on a more personal level. I get to know their strengths, weaknesses, quirks, and that really helps me best serve them and, in turn, the turkeys. Even in times where a farmer and veterinarian might disagree, we can always agree on one thing – we both care about that turkey in front of us and that helps lay the foundation of trust."



Dr Elizabeth Beilke

Speaking of her role as a veterinarian, Dr. Beilke says, "I am a veterinarian by trade which means I wear a lot of hats, but two I never expected to wear as much as I do are psychiatrist and salesman." While she does not work in psychiatry and sales in the typical sense, she feels those themes are very relevant to her career in veterinary medicine. "Personal skills and communicative abilities are needed in my field. Like many careers, those working in agriculture face a lot of stress. I may roll-up to a farm for a standard health visit, but the farmer or production manager might need me to be a listening ear. That is an important part of the job and I might not get to everything I had planned on during that visit, but I always acquire something valuable and it makes the next visit even more successful when I have taken the extra time to listen and understand the challenges they are facing." She says that while she will have set appointments and meetings, in the role of a production veterinarian, she needs to be flexible and adapt to changing needs.

"As for sales, I am very much a salesman, but I am selling different things," Dr. Beilke says. "I am selling biosecurity practices, water sanitation, proper ventilation, and various other best management practices." She says her day-to-day work goes far beyond diagnosing and treating – her main goal is preventative medicine and keeping the turkeys healthy from the start. "I don't want to be a firefighter who has to run in with the firehose on. For me, preventative medicine will always be the main focus and I work every day on developing and maintaining our health programs on-farm."

Dr. Beilke feels COE was an important springboard for her career. "While it's been a decade since I participated in the COE courses, I still reference the material. Not too long ago, I had a textbook case of Avian Encephalomyelitis and it brought me back as I had presented on this disease during the Avian Health class at COE. You never know when or how your COE education will be useful, but it will be." She also continues to find value in the COE network and even works with classmates to address poultry health challenges. "I work with Dr. Maria Dashek (COE 2010/2011) as she is a poultry diagnostician, and I am a turkey production veterinarian. We got to know each other at COE and now she helps me troubleshoot issues happening in the field." Dr. Beilke also appreciates the COE faculty who continued to help her grow within the industry, "Dr. Rob Porter taught Avian Health and helped me get active in the American Association of Avian Pathologists (AAAP) and Dr. Mike Lilburn, who taught in Poultry Nutrition, introduced me to several colleagues who have been instrumental over the years – the connections you make during COE don't end with the classes."

She also sees a lot of value in the COE internships. "My first internship with Michael Foods really shaped my next steps. I will forever be grateful to have worked with Dr. Jeff Erickson and Dr. Rich Dutton. They did a wonderful job of giving me a well-rounded view of the production system. I still remember when I had completed a set of necropsies with Dr. Rich Dutton and he pulled me aside to chat. I clearly remember that conversation to this day – he was kind and encouraged me to pursue veterinary school and become a poultry veterinarian. It set the stage for my continued education focus."

Dr. Beilke also wears a teaching hat. She helped create an internship program at West Liberty Foods and has served as a mentor for COE and non-COE students. She has hosted field trips for COE students and seeks out other opportunities to speak with undergraduate and veterinary students about the turkey industry. She enjoys her involvement with the Iowa Turkey Federation (ITF) and is an avid turkey consumer who enjoys trying recipes from the ITF Everyday Turkey Cookbook. "One of my favorite recipes is the Turkey and Jalapeno Poppers. If you have not tried them, you are missing out! I make them for church events and they are always the first appetizer to go!" You can view the recipe [here](#). She is living in Iowa and enjoys being in nature – especially exploring the hiking trails with her border collie Kabel.