From Croissants to Career

4-H food project leads Kansas girl to bakery science

By Annika Wiebers, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – When a 7-year-old takes their first 4-H project to the county fair, they probably aren’t thinking that it could be the first step toward their future career.

But for some 4-H’ers, it is.

Rachel Featherstone is a sophomore at Kansas State University majoring in bakery science with the specialty option of cereal chemistry. She is also a longtime 4-H member who was heavily involved in the foods and nutrition project.

“I started the foods project my first year in 4-H when I was seven,” Featherstone said. “I have been doing it every year until my final year, which was my 13th year. I love the challenge of developing new skills and there was always more to learn and achieve in the project.”

While many may perceive baking as an inflexible science, Featherstone loves the freedom she has to make her foods projects into art.

“There is no end to creativity, even in baking,” she said. “Anytime I decorate cakes or cupcakes, shape rolls or make braids, I am always using my creativity to produce the product. The art of presentation of any food product demands creativity.”

She adds: “My favorite foods project I took to the fair are croissants, which are a French laminated pastry used for rolls or sandwiches; and croquembouche, which is also French. It is a choux pastry similar to cream puffs stacked in a cone tower, covered with spun sugar and eaten as a dessert. I enjoyed making both as they challenged me beyond regular rolls and desserts.”

Featherstone’s experience in the 4-H foods project helped her when it came time to choose a college major.

“The foods project requires an abundance of flour; flour comes from grain, and the utilization of grain is the focal point of cereal chemistry,” she said. “Principles of Milling has been my favorite course so far (because) it taught me all about the different classes of wheat and what they are used for, as well as each part of the grain and the components and values of it. And it taught me about the milling process, which I had not considered prior to this course.”
Longer term, Featherstone hopes to draw on her experiences and what she learns through her courses at K-State to improve the quality of wheat and other grain products on the market and in baked goods.

“I am not completely sure what I want to do for a career, but the areas of analysis with relation to grain and flour and product development are of interest,” she said. “While doing this I would like to find the balance between the consumer and the producer, encouraging the producer to produce a higher value grain and the consumer to obtain a healthier product.”

More information on opportunities available through Kansas 4-H is available at local extension offices in Kansas. More information on the Bakery Science and Management program is available online.

-30-

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
K-State Research and Extension local offices, www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/stateandareamaps.html

Bakery Science and Management homepage, https://www.grains.k-state.edu/academics/bakesci/

K-State Research and Extension is a short name for the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, a program designed to generate and distribute useful knowledge for the well-being of Kansans. Supported by county, state, federal and private funds, the program has county extension offices, experiment fields, area extension offices and regional research centers statewide. Its headquarters is on the K-State campus in Manhattan. For more information, visit www.ksre.ksu.edu. K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Story by:
Annika Wiebers
annikaw@ksu.edu

More information:
Rachel Featherstone
rfstone@ksu.edu