



Getting to Know Megan Eckhardt, Ph.D.

Ron Gustafson Scholarship Recipient Spotlight



Coast Packing Company is proud to spotlight **Megan Eckhardt, Ph.D.**, a recipient of the [Meat Foundation's Ron Gustafson Scholarship](#)—an award recognizing emerging leaders shaping the future of meat science.

Named for Ron Gustafson, former CEO and Chairman of Coast Packing Company and founding president of the Scholarship Foundation, the scholarship reflects his enduring commitment to the Meat Institute and to advancing education and workforce development within the meat industry.

Each year, the Meat Foundation awards scholarships to students pursuing degrees in animal, meat, or food science, as well as culinary arts, at accredited colleges and universities across the country.

“Investing in students today means strengthening the workforce and leadership of tomorrow,” said Susan Backus, former President of the Meat Foundation. “We are proud to continue fostering education, encouraging innovation, and upholding the highest standards of excellence through this scholarship program.”

After graduating in December, Dr. Eckhardt joined Oklahoma State University as an Assistant Professor of Meat Science, where she is already contributing to the next generation of industry innovation.

We caught up with Dr. Eckhardt to learn more about her journey, her work, and how the Ron Gustafson Scholarship is helping shape what comes next.

Can you tell us a little about yourself and what inspired your path into meat science?

Megan: I am originally from New Braunfels, Texas, where my background in animal agriculture and youth organizations such as 4-H and FFA sparked my interest in meat science through meat judging.

That passion grew during my education and coaching endeavors at Texas Tech and Angelo State, ultimately leading me to pursue a Ph.D. at West Texas A&M University. I will cherish my time at WTAMU, it truly shaped me into both a researcher and educator, especially through hands-on research and coaching students.

What was your graduate research focused on, and why did that topic matter to you?

Megan: My graduate research focused on methods to measure and improve beef quality and production, particularly by evaluating factors that influence carcass characteristics and palatability.

This work matters to me because it directly connects producers to consumers, helping ensure a more consistent, high-quality beef product while improving efficiency across the industry in light of ever-changing industry and market demands or characteristics.

What did receiving the Ron Gustafson Scholarship mean to you?

Megan: Receiving the Ron Gustafson Scholarship was incredibly meaningful to me, as it represents recognition from leaders within the meat science community.

It validated the hard work I've put into my education, research, and student mentorship, while also motivating me to continue contributing to the industry.

How has financial support like this made a difference in your ability to focus on your studies and research?

Megan: Financial support like the Meat Institute's Ron Gustafson Scholarship has allowed me to focus more fully on my studies and research without financial stress impacting my day-to-day routine.

It's given me the flexibility to invest more time into meaningful projects, student mentorship, and professional development opportunities.

You recently joined Oklahoma State University as a meat science professor. What excites you most about that role, and what do you hope to bring to your students?

Megan: I'm excited to have recently joined Oklahoma State University because it provides an opportunity to work with motivated students while contributing to teaching and applied research. Likewise, in my role, I serve the state as the extension specialist in meat science, which allows me to work with people across all facets of the industry and the broader community. I hope to bring a hands-on, practical learning approach that connects classroom concepts to real-world applications, while helping students develop critical thinking skills, confidence, and strong professional connections.



Any final reflections?

Megan: I am very grateful for the opportunities and support I've received throughout my academic and professional journey, including the generosity of the Ron Gustafson Scholarship.

Experiences like this have allowed me to grow as both a researcher and an educator, while reinforcing the importance of giving back to the next generation of students.

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At Coast Packing, we recognize that the future of the industry depends on leaders like Dr. Eckhardt—those advancing research, mentoring students, and strengthening connections across the supply chain.

In honoring Ron Gustafson's legacy, we remain committed to advancing education and fostering innovation across the meat industry.