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Alumni Profile

Wilkinson milkin' some value for farmers

Ann Wilkinson began her career doing business planning and analysis for some of the biggest names in agriculture.

After taking time off to start a family, Wilkinson, MA '85, PhD '89, founded [Origin Farms](#) of Kansas City, Mo., in 2001. She helps smaller producers hold onto as much value as possible when they market their products. "In the U.S. only about 19 cents of every food dollar goes back to the farmer," Wilkinson says. "The rest goes to pay for services in getting those products ultimately to the consumer."

With value-added products, farmers can either capture or create value. Capturing value occurs when pork producers process and sell their own sausage. That allows them to capture a portion of the dollar typically lost down the value chain. Creating value is what corn producers have done with ethanol. The proliferation of the biofuel gives them another place to sell their grain. One of Wilkinson's first clients was Heritage Acres Foods, a group of Missouri pork producers. She helped them create a niche by branding and marketing natural pork.



Ann Wilkinson, MA '85, PhD '89, of Kansas City, Mo., helps small agricultural businesses increase profits through value-added products.

"When smaller farms can produce a unique product and bring it to market, they have a strong

chance of growing and capturing a greater percentage of the food dollar,” she says. Value-added products are typically marketed locally, and an increasingly food-conscious public only aids the producers’ cause. “People want to know where their food comes from,” Wilkinson says. “They want to understand it. They realize there are differences in the quality of products.”

She also works with CheezSorce, a consulting firm specializing in specialty cheeses. “I do the financial, business-planning side, and founder Neville McNaughton works on the production-planning side,” Wilkinson says. “We did a number of projects together and decided it was a good fit.” She has been with CheezSorce for six months. Wilkinson thinks there is great potential for dairy farms to capture value through processing.

Joe Parcell, director of the Missouri Value Added Center, agrees. “Dairy is very versatile, and the technical processes are not rocket science,” Parcell says. “Many small dairies have had great success adding value through bottling their own milk or making products such as cheese, yogurt and ice cream.”

Wilkinson says, “In today’s competitive environment, it is important for farmers to capture as much value as they can.” Her hard work through Origin Farms and CheezSorce will ensure farmers are holding onto all the value they can. — Josh Chittum

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