

Brooke:

Welcome back to season three of I Am WT Podcast. I'm Brooke.

Hunter Sparling:

And I'm Hunter Sparling. And today we are joined by Kyli and McKenna who are two ag students who are helping with the Fall Gather event.

Brooke:

Would you two like to introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about yourselves?

McKenna Murphy:

So my name's McKenna Murphy. I'm originally from Calhoun, Colorado, which is a really small town just 45 miles east of Colorado Springs if you know where that is. Grew up on a cow-calf operation doing all things ag, being involved with that. I showed steers, pigs, livestock judge, just really became involved with that industry from a young age. And then I ended up coming to WT. It wasn't too hard of a decision. I came here once, toured and met all the good people, all the good things and just fell in love with everything here. And so yeah, now I'm here in Canyon, Texas and loving every minute of it.

Kyli Kraft:

My name's Kyli Kraft. I'm also from Colorado, similar to McKenna, up towards the top of the state. I'm the fifth generation involved in production agriculture, particularly the cow-calf industry, but involved in every sector, whether that's the background, the feed yard, and that's where my passion lies today. It's a large reason for why I came to WT was the agriculture industry and the community in this area. It's special, it's unique, it's like something that is nowhere else in the world and so I've loved it here. I am a senior getting ready to graduate in December, so excited for this last chapter.

Brooke:

Right. I'm also getting ready to graduate in December and I'm very ready. What events are y'all involved in at WT?

McKenna Murphy:

So I'm involved in a couple things here and there. Obviously Fall Gather. I was asked to come on last year by Jayci Mekelburg, who was the marketing committee chair last year. And so she brought me on for this year to take on all those tasks and it's just been awesome to get to experience all that and just new opportunities with that. Outside of Fall Gather, I'm involved with Rise, which is a student org here, but it's also through our church, Harvest Connexion, in Amarillo. I'm a youth leader there. We do a lot of things on campus, a lot of things off campus, just all good things, spreading the Gospel, spreading God's word. And then I'm also involved with Agriculture Communicators of Tomorrow, which is a club we have over in the ag department just for ag comm majors, which I am and I'm loving it. And just having those connections of people that are wanting to do the same things is pretty awesome. So yeah, those are a few things I'm involved in.

Kyli Kraft:

Yeah. Similar to McKenna, I've loved getting involved on campus at WT. There's so many options to be taken advantage of. One of which I did previously was Collegiate Farm Bureau. We were the first and largest chapter leading the way in Texas, so that was an awesome opportunity. I went to Washington DC with them and a variety of other awesome trips. Off campus though, I'm on the National Junior Angus

Board of Directors as the secretary. That's a two-year position where we lead an organization of 5,000 members and network, serve, and provide leadership. So that's been awesome, taking quite a bit of time during college and then just a few other organizations here and there. But yeah, it's an awesome place to get involved and there's numerous opportunities for students.

Hunter Sparling:

So you both mentioned that you're from Colorado, and so my question for you now is a question that I have for a lot of people that are from out of state, why WT? What made you come here?

McKenna Murphy:

I think Kyli touched on this earlier, a lot about the community. When I came to West Texas just for a tour, nobody was even here, but a lot of the teachers were here, professors, all of them. And instantly I was just welcomed and I felt very at home, very a part of the community. And small towns always get that bad rep of you have to be from this town or grown up here for so many years or else you're not a somebody. And with Canyon, Texas that's not true at all. You come here and you already feel like you're a part of the family. Everybody's so welcoming. And so really I think it was the community and the people that are here and just wanting to be a part of that.

Kyli Kraft:

I don't even think I need to add much on that, but that everyone is so welcoming. It's hard to really even put it into words until you visit, but the professors truly care. You want to be friends with everyone, get to know everyone. The local surrounding community supports WT, and I think that's part of what makes WT what it is more of the Canyon community. It quickly becomes a small town. You get to know people and they're invested in the college here. And so that is awesome to see and helps make WT what it is, it's helped make Fall Gather what it is. And so I just like to say a thank you to all those people that believed in it and continue to believe in it. But yes, the people here are like none other.

Brooke:

Yes, of course. So to continue on that, tell us more about the history of Fall Gather. How did it come about?

Kyli Kraft:

Yeah, it's actually all student-led. There is a group of us students last year that came together and said, "Hey, we have this idea, we want to make it happen." Really the motive behind it was the fact to bring together WT students, consumers, the local community and producers. And that's just what we've done. We took this idea to Dr. Pond, the dean of the Ag and Natural Science Department, and he was instantly on board. Since then, the planning process began. It started back in, I think it was about February and the event did actually take place until September 30th last year. So it was a lot of planning, some Zoom calls as we were all over the country and we were able to pull it off and be successful last year. Now we have a new group of students that are passionate about it as well, and we're going to make it happen again here in a few weeks.

Hunter Sparling:

So with the Fall Gather, the attendees that you have attend, I imagine it's incoming freshmen, freshmen, sophomores, all those. What are you wanting them to take away from the Fall Gather?

Kyli Kraft:

I think it's so easy for us to go to the grocery store and get our food and not realize that someone worked hard for not just a matter of days, but years to produce that. I know it's something that even being raised on a farm I take advantage of and sometimes forget. And I think the more that we can spread awareness to the attendees that hey, these are some of the people that are responsible for raising the livestock, the crops that you eat, the better off they are.

And it's back to what we've mentioned so far is that community is so important and there is something special about the ag community. I don't know if we've probably over hit on that point since we've been here, but that's something that we look to share with people who might not got to experience it and maybe light that passion for them, to not necessarily join Fall Gather, but to invest in agriculture, learn more about where their food comes from, talk to a farmer, that type of thing. So the conversation goes both ways and then just bring people together over food, football, and fellowship is really the goal. It's more of a serving others rather than trying to recruit. Anything else you want to add McKenna?

McKenna Murphy:

No, I think that covered a lot of it.

Kyli Kraft:

Okay.

McKenna Murphy:

Yeah, that was pretty good.

Kyli Kraft:

Yeah.

Brooke:

So how did last year's event go? You said that was the first one y'all have hosted?

Kyli Kraft:

Yes, ma'am. It was the first one. We served 640-ish plates of attendees, multiple athletic teams on campus participated as well, which was awesome to see our fellow peers that we all love. What other key stats? We raised \$40,000. And what's really neat about that is it doesn't just go into a fund. That goes back to those student orgs and clubs that participate and helped put on the event. We had about 100 volunteers of students and industry partners that made it happen. And so those clubs and orgs that donated their time to help set up or serve food or tear down, they actually received benefits and those benefits help them to attend conferences, compete in contests, variety of neat opportunities that they otherwise wouldn't have. So it all goes back to serving and helping Ag orgs and clubs and students here at WT.

McKenna Murphy:

Right. And I mean wasn't actually a part of the committee last year and like I said, I got brought on this year. And so last year I had the privilege of being a guest and just coming and showing up and experiencing all of that. And I had no idea what Fall Gather was obviously because it was the first year and so you hear all these things, get your ticket, make sure you're there. So I got my ticket and I showed up and it was the most incredible thing I've ever been to. You have good food, good people, just good things all around and you got to learn a lot about the ag community, ag industry, all of those things. And the meal was just phenomenal and everybody was just having a great time while I was there. It was awesome.

Brooke:

How do you get faculty, staff, and the community to be involved?

McKenna Murphy:

Really a lot of it is making those personal connections with students, professors, even the community. And we've done a lot of marketing this entire year, really more so the past couple of months really hitting home on that and just spreading the word, going to class and be like, "Hey, do you know what Fall Gather is? September 21st is coming soon. We'd love to see you there." And just making sure people are aware of that and like I said, building those connections and asking what they're interested in, what they want to bring to Fall Gather, all those things.

Kyli Kraft:

To touch on that more, there's two options for students, particularly within the Ag department, but all students, any student can attend. For \$10, you get a plate of food, which highlights Panhandle products, you get a free t-shirt, activities. There's drinks for those that are over 21 and entry into the WT football game. So really it's hard to get much for anything like that for \$10 today. The adult tickets or the regular ticket price are \$35, you get the same thing, you get a T-shirt, you get a hearty Panhandle meal, you get activities. We made coasters last year that everyone could take home and then attend the WT football game. There's live music, it's an opportunity to experience culture, see friends. Highly recommend it. And so that's an option or for students within the Ag department that are in an org or just want to come volunteer, that's a way to give back to serve, to maybe meet someone new in the ag department that you don't know and be a part of something bigger. And so that's how we're promoting it to specifically the students like you mentioned.

Brooke:

Can you share your favorite memory from the last year's Fall Gather?

Kyli Kraft:

I can go first, then McKenna can hit on it with a participation perspective. I really think that it's cool that WT and Dr. Pond provided a group of students that had this crazy idea to host an event, the support and encouragement to do so. As someone who approached him with the crazy idea, it was also awesome to see it come to fruition even better than we could have imagined or planned. And so having friends and families there enjoying it, eating good food, I think that was probably awesome just to see the smile on their faces.

McKenna Murphy:

Yeah, I guess from an outsider perspective, participation perspective, I really like the food, which might not be the answer that you'd think, but the food was just so good. We had a couple different grill teams last year and multiple different cuts of meat and you got to go through the line and try all of them, vote for your favorite. And so a good plate full of good meat was like, "Yeah, this is awesome," and you got to try a bunch of different things. So that was one of my favorite parts.

Brooke:

That's awesome.

Hunter Sparling:

Well that's awesome. So folks, we're going to go on a break real quick. Stick around and we will be right back.

Speaker 5:

Donors to West Texas A&M University give more than their material support. They devote time, expertise, and commitment. WT would not be what it is today without individuals dedicated to our forward progress.

Brooke:

We are back with Kyli and McKenna from the ag department talking about the Fall Gather that is coming up in September. So can y'all tell us what the goals are for this year's event compared to last year?

McKenna Murphy:

Yeah, so like Kyli said before, we served about 640 plates last year and we're hoping to serve at least 1,000. We're shooting pretty high for this year just because it was such a success last year. And so really just gaining those numbers of participation and people that show up and really making the event something that they look forward to coming to every single year. We want it to be memorable. We want it to be something that people love going to and they tell their friends about it. And so we've added a bunch of different booths here and there to help incorporate the ag industry and just different sectors in that. We've added a lot of kids activities that we want people to bring their kids. It's not just for adults. They should bring their kids. They don't have to get a babysitter. So it'll be fun to see the kids, the parents, the students, and everybody else just come together and we really just want to see it all come together and make it happen. Anything else Kyli?

Kyli Kraft:

I think you pretty much covered it. We're excited for this year and just getting to experience it again.

Hunter Sparling:

So now I have probably the biggest question that anybody ever has. Where do you find the tickets at?

Kyli Kraft:

There's a few different places you can buy them. Online, we did that both last year and this year and then of course you can buy them at the gate day of as well. So online... I'll let you cover more of the details on that.

McKenna Murphy:

Yeah, so we actually have a website, which is fallgather.com. There you can see a lot of our mission, what we're about, what exactly a ticket gets you and you can go ahead and purchase it directly through the website. And it's \$10 for a student, 35 for adults. And yeah, we hope you buy a ticket.

Kyli Kraft:

Kids 12 and under eat free. So bring the whole family.

McKenna Murphy:

Yeah.

Brooke:

It sounds like a pretty great deal, honestly. How do you see this event growing in the years to come, even if y'all aren't here in those years?

Kyli Kraft:

I think you cover a good point that the student turnover and being student-led, that's probably one of the biggest challenges we face. Similar to what McKenna already hit on is of course we want to see more people have the opportunity to experience Fall Gather, but I think also promoting it within the ag department for those students to take over next year, that's one of our focuses as well. And then encouraging more and more students to come help and participate. It really would not be possible without those a hundred volunteers that gave up their Saturday and was willing to serve the community and the guests. So that's just another area that we want to see grow. And of course more friends, family experience that as well.

McKenna Murphy:

The turnover definitely from student-ran to the next students that are running it needs to be something that grows and we can get more people involved with that. And so I mean really without us or without the volunteers, like she said, it wouldn't happen at all. We've spent almost a year now going and planning this and going through all the details and it is a lot of work, but it is so worth it. And to be a part of something like this and say you've been a part of something like this is just really special and it resonates with exactly what WT ag is. And so I think it'd just be awesome to see a lot more students want to be involved in this and want to put this event on.

Kyli Kraft:

The other thing I'll plug in there and something that I've come to realize is that there is so many talented students at WT. It's not just the ag department, it's the marketing, it's the business, it's the communications. And I feel like there's a little bit of a segregation between the two just because whenever we have our outclasses on the other side of the road, that's where we stay.

And I know my heart and part of the reason why Fall Gather was founded was to help bridge that gap. And so any student, whether you're ag or not, if you're interested in hosting an event like this or learning more about agriculture or working together in a team, I'd encourage you to reach out. We would love to have you a part of the executive team. I know that there's numerous life skills and experiences that came from the few years working together. You can learn a lot in classroom, don't get me wrong, but actually having to do it and see it happen in the real world, that's just so much better. I've learned so much through it. So anyone that wants to take that challenge, I'd encourage you to do so.

Brooke:

Yeah, I like how you said that. It's kind of gapped because I know I'm in the same building all day every day. I see the same people every day. So I think that's a great idea to bridge the gap.

Kyli Kraft:

Bring your friends to the Fall Gather and all of our communities converge together.

Brooke:

Exactly.

Hunter Sparling:

So how has organizing this event taken time away from you in your personal lives and what real world experiences are you taking away from this?

McKenna Murphy:

Yeah, I mean, like we said, we've been planning it for a year. And so a year of your time, a year of hard work, it does take up a lot of everything else, your personal life and really... I don't even know.

Kyli Kraft:

It's something we believe in though, to be able to sacrifice some time and not going to lie, there is probably some stress right now with it right around the corner. We have a lot left to do, but we're going to pull it off and make it happen. I'd say from my experience, one of the great experiences from Fall Gather benefits was my summer internship, which has led into a part-time job and hopefully a future career. And so that's another perk with getting to know industry producers and partners and work with them throughout this experience and the life skills that come from it. But it's all been great.

Brooke:

It's always great to be able to get your foot in the door because that leads you to lots more opportunities. So McKenna, what has your experience been as a first-year committee member?

McKenna Murphy:

First year, let's just say I didn't know what I was getting into it first, but I was really looking forward to it. The first time I met with Jayci, she was like, "This is just going to be so great for you. You're going to love it." And I do. I love it, but I was just a little hesitant. I was not expecting everything that they do do and all the hard work that goes into it.

And so being an insider now, getting to see all the things and all the details, the small nitty-gritty details that go into putting on an event like this, oh my gosh, it is crazy. There's so many things that people don't realize that need to be done before this event. And so now I have a deeper appreciation for anybody that puts on something big like this. But I've gotten to grow a lot and my own skills with the ag media and comm and just marketing and all those things and learning how to promote an event like this, deadlines, making sure everything is ready by this time and that time, and just being fully prepared to take on any task that needs done.

Hunter Sparling:

All right. So Kyli, from a committee member standpoint, what are some of the differences from last year's planning and what are some of the challenges that you've already faced this year?

Kyli Kraft:

I'd say the biggest one is that there's an expectation. And so in our minds we have a goal to reach and we want it to live up to last year and continue. There's a lot of roadblocks that we had to overcome, things we had to learn last year, thankfully we know those lessons now and we can move past that and continue to see growth. You'll have to remind me what the rest of your question was.

Hunter Sparling:

Oh. What are the challenges that you're facing this year?

Kyli Kraft:

Yeah, it probably goes back to everyone in college is busy. We're involved in 50 different things, find the time in prioritizing Fall Gather. Well, we were all working in different places this summer, so Zoom meetings, deadlines, like McKenna said, she hit on a lot of those great points, but so many life skills that I've taken away from this. And I know talking to other committee members as well, they have grown personally and it's really cool to listen to them and this is what I learned and it's different for everyone, but it all goes back to the adulting skills that you'll appreciate later on in life.

McKenna Murphy:

Yeah, there's a sense of maturity that comes with putting on an event like this. Yeah.

Hunter Sparling:

Do you mind telling us when and where the event will be?

McKenna Murphy:

Fall Gather will actually take place September 21st. It'll start at 3:00. We'll start serving plates. You come, enjoy talking to people, eat your food, go visit all the booths, all the activities. We'll have live music as well. And then after that, the football game will start at 7:00 and so you can head over there after you've gotten your meal. Your ticket will get you in free to the football game. So that's an added bonus. And it will also take place over by the Buffalo Courts, which is east of the Countdown to Kickoff Tailgate.

Kyli Kraft:

So it's right involved, close to the tailgate, but slightly separated. Conveniently placed right?

McKenna Murphy:

Yes.

Hunter Sparling:

What are you two planning on doing after you graduate?

Kyli Kraft:

Since my graduation is closer, I'll go ahead and hit this one off. I entered with AgTexas, which is part of the farm credit system this summer. Absolutely loved it and have since decided to pursue that as a career in the agribusiness department. So working with some of the local feed yards. This is the cattle feeding capital of the world, so no better place to be than the Panhandle of Texas. And learning more about underwriting loans and what it takes to run an operation like that. So the technical term is a credit analyst, but we'll do that. And I know there's going to be lots of learning to come, so I'm excited about it.

McKenna Murphy:

Yeah. Now that Kyli's hit home with the professional aspect of her job, I'm hoping to actually be freelancer and have my own business. I've actually started it... it'll be a year and just a couple of years that I've started my own business and wasn't expecting it to take off so quickly, but it did. And now I'm just trying to balance school and that and hopefully continue to work with a bunch of different clients once I get out of college, whether that's graphic design, logos, videography, photography, and all things mass communication. I just love that aspect and I'd really like to work for myself and just meet a whole bunch of different people along the way in the ag industry.

Hunter Sparling:

All right, so Kyli and McKenna, do either of you have anything you would like to throw out there about the fall gathering? Any other information about your organization?

McKenna Murphy:

Really, I think the big thing is just go get tickets. Fall Gather is right around the corner, September 21st, like we said. And so now's the time to buying tickets. Like we said, those are on the website at fallgather.com. Also, make sure you follow us on social media. We have an Instagram at [wtamu.fallgather](https://www.instagram.com/wtamu.fallgather) and we also have a Facebook, if you just look up Fall Gather. We'll have a lot of updates, a lot of posts. Maybe you'll see your friends on there when we take pictures. So make sure to follow us on social media, get your tickets, and you're going to have a great time.

Brooke:

So both of y'all, what does WT mean to y'all?

Kyli Kraft:

I'd say the theme of this whole conversation has been community. I've highlighting the fact that community isn't just on campus. In fact, I'd say it's probably one of my favorite things about Canyon is the Canyon community. I tell everyone who hasn't visited that Canyon has a hometown feel, the longer you're here, the smaller it gets, the more familiar faces you see. And it's evident in the way that local businesses and individuals support the university and students such as those individuals that believe in Fall Gather. And it really wouldn't be possible without their support. So community and I like to thank everyone who's made WT what it is.

McKenna Murphy:

Yeah, I mean, Kyli really nailed that one on the head. Mine would definitely be community as well. And I mean, Fall Gather just bridges the gap like we said earlier, and brings so many different people to one place to celebrate one thing that makes the world go round, really, which is cheesy to say, but it does. And so Fall Gather to me is just taking one day out of the year to truly celebrate that and celebrate the people that are bringing all of those wonderful things to the table. And yeah, just thanking everybody that has made that happen.

Hunter Sparling:

I would just like to say how happy we are that you two got to do this podcast with us, and I hope everybody learned something about the Fall Gather and your organization. And I hope you have a lot of people in attendance. But we're going to go ahead and we're going to close off here. Thank you all for tuning in. My name is Hunter.

Brooke:

My name is Brooke. And thank y'all so much for being here with us today.

Hunter Sparling:

And we'll see you next time. Go Buffs.