A core foundation of my life and a common thread in my non-linear career trajectory has been the convergence of agriculture, science, and policy. These issues initially presented themselves in a very tangible manner as a fifth-generation family dairy farm in south-central Wisconsin where my parents adjusted to the substantial and sometimes challenging impacts of federal policy. These impacts were very real to them and to other independent operators across the state and nation. As a young adult, I chose to pursue an academic path, which I not only enjoyed, but which also afforded me a clearer understanding of agricultural production practices and management. My education in agronomy was instrumental in providing me with a level of knowledge and expertise that is highly applicable to the agricultural policy arena. The scientific focus of my baccalaureate provided an advantage over those who had chosen to enter the same field without similar training since issue area specialists are essential in the policy process.

I had established a general roadmap early on to navigate my career, and identifying professional goals allowed me to recognize potential next steps. After finishing my undergraduate education, I sought out a science-related policy internship. An internship with the Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology provided an introduction to the manner in which biotechnology is handled in the public policy forum and by the media. Later, I obtained a legislative fellowship in the United States Senate in Washington, DC and also worked at the World Bank as an Agricultural and Rural Development Consultant on the first Agriculture Investment Sourcebook. I followed these experiences with seven years as the agriculture, nutrition, and trade policy adviser to U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson. During this time, my interactions with constituents, stakeholders, and federal agencies consistently emphasized the importance of agronomic research as well as the far-reaching economic and social impacts of such research on farmers and consumers alike. It also emphasized the need for a greater understanding of food systems and the importance of sustainability practices. These experiences propelled me to seek out a year-long fellowship with the Robert Bosch Foundation in Germany, with placements in both the Committee on Food, Agriculture, and Consumer Protection in the German Parliament and the global headquarters of Bayer CropScience.

**Tipping Point for Embracing Risk**

In each of these experiences and throughout my professional development, the tipping point for embracing risk was the point at which the fear of missing out on an experience, or the potential regret from not embracing what I had a drive and passion for, far exceeded either the fear of failure or change that accompanied that opportunity. By taking the risk that accompanied each door to the next opportunity may never open. My biotechnology internship offered a better understanding of the congressional process for a legislative fellowship; my legislative fellowship provided preliminary training for the duties of a legislative aide. Judicious risk can present tremendous opportunities for growth. It involves substantial preparation and a focus on both a journey and a destination. Risk with ample consideration and preparation may not in actuality be all that risky, but it still requires change. Accepting change, and maybe even proactively seeking out change, can provide a wealth of opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Some of the most challenging experiences, which have cast me furthest outside my comfort zone, have been the most rewarding. New and challenging experiences are marked by discomfort. Some of the most challenging experiences, which have cast me furthest outside my comfort zone, have been the most rewarding. New and challenging experiences are marked by discomfort.