Hello everyone. My name is Hunter Nickell and I am the new Livestock Production Extension Agent for the Southwind District. I am a Humboldt, KS native, born and raised. It was in Humboldt where I grew my passion for livestock through Logan Pals 4-H club, Humboldt FFA and the farming and ranching community as a whole. I grew up with a small herd of cattle owned by my parents and for a short time we were out of the business, but a 4-H bucket calf started the first of my herd that I own today with my wife. We have about 10 cow-calf pairs with a mix of Angus and Simmental and through the next few years we hope to expand that number and acreage. I have a strong love for the area and for livestock and I am super excited to be back!

Upon graduation from Humboldt High School in 2018, I embarked on my journey to Manhattan and Kansas State University where I spent the next four years studying Animal Sciences and Industry, Pre-Vet option and working towards my BS in Agriculture. Manhattan was the foundation to my professional career and will always hold a place in my heart. As a student who benefitted from dual credit in high school, I started Kansas State as a sophomore in the Fall of 2018. The first class in 2018 as a new student I took was one of the introductory Animal Science classes that all first year students take, and I instantly fell in love with the Animal Science Department.

Fast forward three years to the Spring of 2021 and I was taking the last of my finals in the lecture halls that built me as a person, surrounded by the friends I had made over the last three years. Countless hours spent in Weber, Waters, and Call Hall all paid off as stood on the field and walked across the stage at Bill Snyder Family Stadium. I will always consider Manhattan my second home.

Of course I couldn’t have done it without the help of my family, friends, and the boss of my college job. As an undergraduate student, I was able to get connected with Marty Vanier, the
owner of Horizon Ranch and learn an abundance of information about horses and how to run a ranch. The ranch quickly became one of my favorite parts about Manhattan; it was my getaway during stressful finals, and my full time job in the summer. At the ranch, pasture management was the number one priority. We burned, sprayed, and rotational grazed with appropriate stocking rates. We took care of the fence, worked cattle for neighbors, and built great relationships with the other “cowboys”. Without the ranch, I wouldn’t have gained as much cattle, horse, and land management experience as I did. Horizon Ranch is notably one of the best things that could have happened to me, and is the reason I am where I am today.

Most recently, before my current position, I worked for the Biosecurity Research Institute in Manhattan, KS within the Animal Care department. In my role at the BRI I worked to promote success with about 15-20 animal based research projects. Most of the projects I assisted were with African Swine Fever Virus (ASF). This research was to study the disease itself and work on vaccines to prevent outbreaks. We also worked with SARS-CoV-2 projects. As we all know the COVID-19 pandemic affected our daily lives, so this was an important study, my job was very rewarding to see great research published by the teams and knowing I contributed some to that success.

As I reflect back on the last four years being away from Southeast Kansas, I have a sense of pride that I left Manhattan a better person and more well rounded on the issues facing animal agriculture. I feel that I bring back a wealth of knowledge needed in the area and I am excited to share that knowledge with you all. If you have any questions feel free to email me at nickell99@ksu.edu or give any of the Southwind Extension Offices a call and I will be glad to help!