

By: Marcus Summ, UF- Department of Ag Education and Communication

Alumna Profile: Erin Freel Best, The Market Place (11/09)

Graduating from the University of Florida's Department of Agricultural Education and Communication in 1996, Erin Best immediately threw herself into the career world of agriculture.

"I graduated on a Saturday, and on Monday morning, thanks again to some help by Dr. Ricky Telg, I started as the director of marketing for the Florida Strawberry Growers Association," she said.

Best said she felt a bit overwhelmed at first as a new college graduate with such a big responsibility, but she soon found her new job to be fun and quite rewarding. Best found herself in charge of everything from public relations to newsletters and creating the association's first Web site.

Best continued to serve in that capacity until June 2000 when she decided she was ready to start a company of her own.

"From a very young age I wanted to start my own business, but I knew that I needed some experience first," Best said.

After gaining that experience at FSGA she began fulfilling that dream, as FSGA became her first client at her new company, The Market Place.

The Market Place's two primary project areas are Web design and video production.

"We have over 70 Web site clients, and we offer services in the area of design, development and hosting," Best said. "In the area of video production we create

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promotional, education and historical pieces.”

Recently, the company has created a Web site for Purina and a new logo for the American Farm Bureau Foundation.

The Market Place has had some great fans and supporters along the way, Best said.

“Clients like the Florida FFA Association, Marshall Tree Farm, Florida Farm Bureau and Pioneer Growers have been with us since the beginning,” she said.

Best has also been fortunate to work with her employee Joel Bockoras. Bockoras has been the Web designer and “everything else technical” guru at The Market Place for the past five years, Best said.

“He’s more than just a good employee, he’s a strategic part of our business model success,” she said.

On top of all her other projects at The Market Place, Best has also been hired by Superior Productions to conduct interviews and shoot video footage around the Southeast for RFD-TV. The footage is sent to Fort Worth where it is edited for 30-minute episodes of the television show “The American Rancher.”

“It is very rewarding to be able to sit down in front of the television and watch something you were involved with,” she said.

Best was also a part of the Wedgworth Leadership Institute’s – Class V and was chosen as a McCloy Fellow last year by American Farm Bureau. In September 2008 the fellowship sent Best and three other American agriculturalists to Germany for a three-

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week travel study, where she learned about the German cattle, dairy and sugar beet industries.

Growing up on a farm, Best said she has always been passionate about agriculture.

“If I couldn’t farm myself, then promoting and marketing their products was the next best thing,” Best said.

Best said she always felt like she was promoting or defending the industry of agriculture.

“That passion comes from believing in something whole-heartedly,” Best said, “We do live in the greatest country and I think one of the noblest jobs on earth is to produce food. I love helping our clients, brand, market, sell and promote what they produce.”

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