

Board Member Profile: Melissa Fries

Meet FCFB Board member Melissa Fries. Melissa works in flock accounting at Pitman Farms, a third generation family owned business that raises free-range birds. Fries joined the FCFB Board of Directors as the poultry chair in the fall of 2014.

Central Valley agriculture is nothing new to Fries. Her parents own and operate Jim Stollar Trucking Inc., a local trucking business that hauls for Beef Packers and Harris Ranch. Additionally, both her paternal and maternal grandparents were born and raised in the Central Valley and are grape farmers.

She admits to not being interested in agriculture until her high school orientation. "My dad begged me to go look at the FFA booth with him," said Fries. "They told me I could take an animal science class in place of a regular science class, and it was all over from there."

While attending Washington Union High School in Easton, she was actively involved in FFA. Fries showed sheep and turkeys, competed in the FFA Creed speaking and prepared public speaking contests, as well as agriculture literacy contests.

Fries attended California State University, Fresno where she majored in agriculture education with an option in animal science. During her sophomore year at Fresno State, Fries took a poultry production class taught by former FCFB Board member Michelle Ganci, which lead to her internship at Foster Farms.

During her internship, Fries had the opportunity to write "How to Run a Hatchery," a book for the hatchery. When her internship concluded, Fries continued working at Foster Farms for six years. She held various positions starting with most of the clerical work, including transportation clerk, where she managed all of the chick deliveries to proper grow-out farms. The other half of that time was also spent as a quality control representative taking care of egg break outs, environmental testing of the hatchery, as well as analyzing data to find solutions within the hatchery. "I wouldn't know a thing about hatching a bird if it wasn't for that job," Fries said.

From 2010-2018, Fries managed the duck breeding and hatchery operations for Pitman Farms. She oversaw the breeders from the time they began to lay, through the remainder of their life cycle. "It's important to make sure the ducks got into production the correct way and started laying eggs," said Fries.

Additionally, she supervised the 28-day incubation of eggs that were laid by the breeders. Once the ducks hatched, they were sent to a farm to continue their growth.

Fries stepped away from her role at Pitman for a brief time and returned to Foster Farms for one year in 2018-2019 where she started her internship. It was an opportunity to work for the third largest hatchery in the U.S. where people saw she had made such a large impact. Ultimately, Fries followed her heart back to Pitman Farms in 2019.

Today, Fries manages the flock accounting for Pitman Farms watching the dollars and cents. She manages the performance of all of the different types of birds at Pitman coast-to-coast. Melissa's day-to-day consists of building all the reports that go directly to ownership so they can make decisions on how to run the business.

Fries enjoys being a FCFB Board member. "I like learning about all the new issues that I wouldn't have known about otherwise, and I really look forward to the more political side of agriculture. I've already learned so much," said Fries, adding that she wants to be a voice for the poultry industry. "It's such a great way to get to know people I wouldn't have met otherwise."

Melissa lives in Caruthers with her husband, Ryan, and their nine year old son, Ryan Jr.. They enjoy camping and off-roading at the Mojave desert near Dove Springs. They are also involved in Ryan Jr.'s activities of karate and drums.