

GET OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

by Mark McKown, AgCareers.com Marketing Intern and University of Illinois Student

Editor's Note: Discover the path one young professional took to find a successful career in the industry.

Name:

Cedric Jones

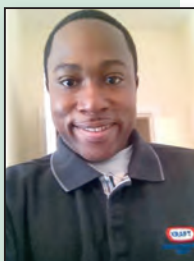
Education: B.S.

in agricultural education with a minor in plant and soil science

Position:

Operations

Supervisor, Kraft Foods Inc.



Describe your background and how it led to your current position.

Jones: I grew up surrounded by agriculture. It was apparent in my family, my school, and more literally, backyard. The small rural community of Louisburg, NC, was home to me and my family of multi-faceted agriculturalists. My grandfather was a tobacco farmer, and my father was the County Director of extension. I would visit local farms with him and learn about agriculture firsthand which really sparked my interest.

Deciding to attend **North Carolina Agriculture and Technology State University (A & T)** was something I knew I would do ever since I was a child. I am the third-generation of my family to attend A & T. While at school I had a number of great supporters, opportunities and experiences that led me to find my place in the agricultural industry.

What was a key motivating factor that helped you get to where you are today?

Jones: While attending school there were many influencing and motivational factors that led me to my current position. A few of the key people in my life would be **Kelly Woody**, an upperclassmen role model, and **Dr. Austin**, my collegiate mentor.

Kelly had an internship with Kraft in New York which really opened my eyes to opportunities off

campus. The internship with Kraft was something that truly impacted Kelly, and I followed in Kelly's footsteps. Dr. Austin was a mentor that guided me through my four years at A & T. I would highly advise that all students find a strong mentor, advisor, or counselor to reach out to and help make your time at college an enjoyable one!

What was the biggest set-back you had while job searching?

Jones: Understanding that I needed to get out of my comfort zone was arguably the biggest set-back. As I mentioned before, I am originally from North Carolina and I went to school in North Carolina, too. However, for my internship I had to leave family, friends, and that comfort zone. In leaving I discovered how much opportunity I could find outside of the East Coast. If I would have stayed in the North Carolina area I wouldn't have gotten the exposure to the tremendous opportunities in agriculture centered in the Midwest. With all of the jobs out there, you just have to step out of that comfort zone and adapt. Be willing to go out there and take in something you might not know.

What advice do you have for someone just starting college?

Jones: There are three things that can help you reach your dreams that I want to pass on to new students. First, have a positive attitude. It will help in your decision making and overall experience. Second, maintain good grades. The things you learn in college will be more applicable in the professional world than you expect. So pay attention and work hard to understand the concepts and ideas presented by your professors. Third, be a part of an organization. Through clubs and organizations you can meet new people, experience new opportunities, and be able to gain new perspectives.

What clubs and organizations were you a part of while attending North Carolina A & T?

Jones: I was a member of the **National FFA**, and **Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS)**. I sought out involvement in both organizations to be a part of the agricultural industry. The most powerful part of having been a member of these clubs was the conferences. At the conferences you are able to meet and connect with the major companies in agriculture. It always blew me away as to how many companies/agencies would be so interested in my contributions as a student seeking an agricultural degree.

What was your largest misconception about the agricultural industry? What allowed you to overcome this misunderstanding?

Jones: I had less of a misconception with the agricultural industry as I did with my part in the industry. I never imagined that I would work for a product business. My plans were to become a teacher or work for the government. Being able to reach out and step outside of my comfort zone, I have been able to find my place in agriculture even though it was not what I had initially intended. Agriculture is a great degree and there are tons of opportunities. I'm thankful to be a part of it.

What advice do you have for those graduating students preparing for the workforce?

Jones: Again, be ready to be step out of the norm. You must be positive, and have an open mind. When taking on a new job have fun and enjoy the experience. I looked for ways to be involved inside and outside of the workforce. I really tried to meet new people and grow as a person with my first job outside of college.