

Each spring, when the snow has melted and the robins have begun to sing, I find myself eager to begin the annual wheat harvest journey. Loading the combine, packing my belongings into the trailer house and heading south is what I look forward to throughout the rest of the year. The experiences, life lessons and memories I have gained from my past 18 summers on harvest have molded me into who I am today and also molded my future.

Because my family runs a small harvesting operation, my parents work in the field while I am in charge of the daily household duties, cooking, and delivering meals to the field. Ask any combine, grain cart or truck driver who has been working in the field for ten hours and they'll tell you how important the cook is to the crew.

Anyone involved in the harvesting business understands that you have to be able to fly by the seat of your pants, but there is one thing that remains constant: food. As the cook, it's my responsibility to plan and create the biggest meal of the day, which is delivered to the field.

Once the meal is cooked and loaded into the pickup along with a big jug of iced tea, I call Dad over the two-way radio to get directions to where I need to go. The evening meal is the one time of the day everyone can take a break and enjoy each other's company and the meal I've prepared. In the same way the crew finds satisfaction in finishing a field, I take satisfaction when I see them finish their plate of food.

Last summer, I found myself looking forward to cooking more than I had in the past years. I especially enjoyed experimenting with baking different breads, intrigued by how simple ingredients can make a beautiful loaf. With my newfound love of baking, I plan to attend Metropolitan Institute of Culinary Arts in Omaha, Nebraska. With a degree in culinary arts and management, I will graduate as a pastry chef and ideally open a small town bakery where I can share my stories of the road and my appreciation of how our food gets to the table.

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