When Janine (Stewart) Whipps was a student at Iowa State, her family’s farm faced a crisis when pseudorabies struck the purebred Duroc herd.

The family worked with Iowa State to successfully transfer embryos from their best Duroc sows and implant them in disease-free sows. The result: Elite genetic lines were saved and the herd rebuilt.

Whipps (’83 agricultural journalism) wrote a story about it. She pitched it to Successful Farming magazine, which bought the article and ran it.

“That was the first article I ever sold. It was a big deal. As a student, you have to do things like that to be different and stand out from the crowd,” she says. “That’s what I tell young people who have a passion for agriculture and for communications.”

Whipps has lived her advice. She’s one of the principals of Morgan&Myers, a company she’s been with 27 years, that provides integrated communications and strategic planning services for agricultural clients in animal health, seed, banking, commodity organizations and more. The company offices in Waterloo, where Whipps is based, and Waukesha, Wis.

As a student, Whipps was active in both journalism and agricultural groups, including working for swine industry legend Al Christian at the ISU Swine Teaching Farm. Her goal was to work for a national agricultural magazine. But she graduated as the Farm Crisis deepened and found slimmer opportunities.

So her first job was working for a Harvestore dealership in communications, advertising and client relations. “It was a great first job. You leave college thinking you know it all, then you realize you don’t. That’s good for everyone to learn,” she says.

Whipps went on to work for the Hampshire Swine Registry in Peoria and then an agency in Cedar Falls that worked on animal health and seed industry accounts. Morgan&Myers eventually bought the agency and Whipps stayed on.

“We’ve grown while staying very true to our agricultural and pasture-to-plate roots,” she says. “I’m pleased to have worked so long with so many who are making a difference in food and agriculture.”

One accomplishment she’ll never forget was leading the team that worked with Asgrow to introduce Roundup Ready soybeans.

“I’d take farmers to a field and watch them as the plants were sprayed. You’d just see them cringe,” she recalls. “Then we’d return two weeks later and see this beautiful field of soybeans. Seeing that new technology take off was a great experience.”

Whipps has seen major changes in communications tools (gleefully, she believes every student should experience a manual typewriter). But some things don’t change.

“The fundamentals remain the same. You need to know your audience, have insight into what’s important to them, know what information is relevant and understand who influences their decisions,” Whipps says. “These are the foundation for building consistent messages that are on track and resonate. Then you need to build relationships and gain trust by being as transparent as possible. At the end of the day, relationships matter and are what sets companies, products and people apart.”

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BUILT ON TRUST

STRONG RELATIONSHIPS SUPPORT AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS SUCCESS

By Brian Meyer

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