

He's dead. As I looked at the slimy, skinny newborn goat lying in the dirt next to me, I was certain that the baby I had spent months preparing for was dead. I wrapped him in an old towel, braced his neck with my forearm, and swung him upside down in a desperate attempt to dislodge the amniotic fluid blocking his lungs. He stayed pale and limp in my arms. Just as I lifted him to swing him again, he let out a disproportionately loud cry for such a tiny baby, and my heart flooded with joy: I had just kickstarted the life of this newborn goat. I watched as his body began to lose its deadly gray tone and take on a pinkish hue. His mother licked him furiously, stimulating his body after a traumatic birth in which he presented in an extremely abnormal fetal position. But that's just life on the farm. By farm, I mean 500 square feet of backyard farming paradise, smack in the middle of Del Mar, California.

I've always loved animals, but my desperation for a goat was piqued one fateful day at the San Diego County Fair, when I met a gaggle of green-clad 4-H'ers leading their goats around the barn on silver chains. After learning everything that I could about goats, I convinced my supportive, yet agriculturally clueless parents that I needed to get a goat via a PowerPoint presentation coupled with a pledge that I would be the sole caretaker of these new creatures. I joined a 4-H club that fall, got two precious baby goats, and took my first steps down the path that would dramatically impact the person I am now. Intervening in my baby goat's birth taught me to think on my feet and to be calm under pressure. It cemented my belief that I am capable of figuring out a solution to any situation. I understand what it feels like to put someone else's needs before my own because I do that every day with my goats. This responsibility feels burdensome sometimes, but it has taught me to honor my commitments and make decisions with the consequences in mind. Being responsible for my goats has given me the confidence, drive, and passion to pursue my goal of studying business administration and public policy at the University of Michigan. I can see myself using the skills I've learned in 4-H to examine the business world through an agriculturally-sensitive lens, while using my public policy knowledge to develop policies that promote and protect the agriculture industry. I can imagine myself, twenty years down the road, enrolling my own children in 4-H and imparting the same values—humility, responsibility, integrity, and hard work—to them that 4-H has taught me.