



PREMIER *leadership*

CHARTING *Her* PATH

A detour from agriculture gave CEO Megan Nunes the insight she needed to help improve it.

Megan Nunes has an interesting piece of advice for those looking to make waves in agriculture: “Don’t be afraid to explore other industries.”

Leaving agriculture, though more accidental than intentional, led her to find the solutions she offers the industry today. The former California regional FFA officer currently sits at the top of San Francisco-based Vinsight, a forecasting software company for grape and almond crops. She started the company in 2015 after eight years in satellite imaging.

Having grown up in a farming family in California’s Central Valley, Nunes majored in dairy science at Cal Poly with plans to become a lawyer to help improve air and water quality in the dairy industry. Around the same time that she discovered law was not for her, she started working part time at an aerospace company. “That completely changed my path,” Nunes says.

“I became enamored with this new world. I thought I’d always be very involved in agriculture. Then I took this part-time job and thought I’d stay in aerospace.”

It turns out she could incorporate both. While analyzing data sets created by satellite imagery, Nunes began to question how this technology could improve agriculture. “My curiosity catapulted me,” she says. “I wanted to be a part of that shift in the future of agriculture. I wanted to give back.”

She quit her job as a chief operating officer and spent six months brainstorming a business idea. In that time, she discovered a need for more actionable data for high-value specialty crops, and Vinsight was born. Launched exclusively with

grapes (thanks to a partnership with a local orchard), Vinsight analyzes satellite imagery, weather trends and historical yield data to predict yields. The company now also services almonds and will have eight crops, including walnuts, strawberries and hops, next growing season.

Starting her own business has had “a lot of peaks and valleys,” Nunes says. One of the biggest challenges: overcoming farmers’ skepticism. “Getting customers to share yield data was a big ask. But from the beginning, we have built our company on the core values of trust, transparency, not overpromising or underdelivering. Building that

kind of relationship with our customers has allowed us to get to this point. Our customers are incredibly happy.”

What’s not much of a challenge is being a woman. “Don’t let gender bias influence your

capabilities,” she says. “I grew up one of four girls, and my parents told us we could do anything we wanted to. Gender doesn’t play a role in my importance.” Instead, Nunes attributes her success to grit, determination, confidence, a strong support system, insatiable curiosity and “being scrappy and a problem solver” — all leadership traits she developed through her years in FFA.

“I was very active in FFA in my early high school years, and that is the time we develop our character and formulate our own ideas,” Nunes says. “Because I had so many teachers and mentors pour into me, that foundation gave me a jump-start and propelled me forward. FFA really is a rare resource that sets you apart in the working world.”

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— By Lauren Denton