I still remember exactly where I was the moment I knew I was going to do whatever it took to be in RULE. Seated at a dinner table at the Gettysburg Hotel, I watched my former Dean, (and future boss) Secretary Russell Redding give his, “Gettysburg Address.” That night, I was surrounded by leaders and advocates from all walks of life, completely engaged and committed to improving the future of agriculture. I was hooked! I would spend the next year doing everything I could to make sure when the next class of RULE nominations came up – I was on the list!

Once my RULE journey had begun, I never looked back. The two years I spent as a proud member of Class “Shining Sixteen” were honestly the most transformative years in my life since I left the farm. See, the thing is, RULE isn’t a leadership program or a critical thinking program, it is a nuclear reactor of professional development. It’s exponential and transformative growth of one’s state of being. And for that, I am eternally grateful.

Some of my favorite life lessons I learned from my RULE Classmates:

- Pulling yourself up by your bootstraps is an incredibly impressive thing, so much so that we should all make sure everyone has bootstraps to start.
- Never underestimate the power of spontaneity and creativity combined. (Our class party in Clarion was epic.)
- Be brave enough to write your goals down – and invite people to keep you accountable.
- Often people who think they will get the least out of an experience, end up getting the most.
- These lessons work themselves into my personal and professional life often. I feel a strong sense of commitment to pay all of the good karma that I have had in my life forward. Be brave – and be fearless in the pursuit of your dreams – RULE taught me that. ❤️

Zach Gihorski, Associate Director of Public Policy for NASDA—National Association of State Department of Agriculture
RULE was where I set my goal of obtaining a world class legal education from the Penn State Dickinson School of Law. It was clear early on in Law School, I was not going to become a traditional, "lawyer." With that in mind, in true RULE spirit - I set the goal of having a job to start upon completion of my law degree. While this may not seem very lofty, when the Covid-19 Pandemic hit two months prior to my graduation and hiring freeze became the status quo, the goal seemed so out of reach. However, through perseverance, networking, and the unbelievable generosity of others - I was able to graduate Law School on a Friday, and accept my dream job as an Associate Director of Public Policy at a National Agricultural Policy Organization on the following Monday.

All of this has led me to a rewarding career in agricultural policy in Washington, D.C.

**I have been honored over the last two years to be able to work with Capitol Hill on some of the most pressing issues of our time including climate change, hemp, and COVID-19 emergency assistance. It has been a journey far greater than any small-town farm kid could have ever dreamed.**