Doctor Rolo Kake. Thank you for being on Living the Farm Life podcast. I'm so excited to get to know you and hear about your professional journey and your passion of helping others through pharmacy. I'm Kennedy Hallam. I am filling in as a guest host for Isabella Tobin.

Thank you for having me. Nice to meet you.

Yeah, so you are a very accomplished individual. And so before we talk about your professional path, can you just tell us a little bit about how you found your way to Purdue and the Purdue college of Pharmacy?

Of course. So I actually grew up in West Lafayette, so I was a townie when I went to Purdue. My dad was a faculty member here at Purdue. And then I come from a house, basically, of all Purdue grads. Actually, it was non-traditional route in terms of how I started at Purdue.

So I started very young. So I started at Purdue at the age of ten and then kind of worked my way through and always knew that healthcare was kind of a passion of mine. And so I followed in my sister's footsteps through going to the College of Pharmacy and kind of using that as a kind of entrance way into the world of healthcare and ending up really loving pharmacy and everything that it has to offer from that.

I loved Purdue and the fact that it's in a small college town, you know, some people say there's not much to do in West Lafayette, but at the same time, the campus is just like a whole world in itself. And so you're consumed as a student with everything that's going on.

And I kind of noticed that when I was really little, just kind of following my dad and going around just to kind of see to all the way as a student and participating in all of the events and stuff. What an amazing story you have. So did you find it challenging to navigate the ins and outs of college life at such a young age?

So it was kind of interesting. So for me now, when I think about it, it's kind of like that wow. That was like something very unique at the time. I was very confident in the sense of for my age and very mature. So I felt like academically I was there, I was like everything that was a challenge, that was good, and I was overcoming.

I was going to classes and I really enjoyed that. I really thought it's my work that kind of speaks for itself, right? And so as long as I show up, I do the work, and I'm really committed to all my classes. That, that was great. And so I think the, the challenge of like, being a university student, to me kind of was like, quickly overcome because there was like, excitement and it was like an opportunity and things like that.

So I really enjoyed that. And so you would see me, although I was, I was ten, I was very mature and, like, was very serious and, you know, took the exams when I needed to do and things like that. And so I never felt that I missed out on much with regards to that.

I think socially too, I was very, very interested in having conversations with people and learning from people. And so that also opens you up to the world around you in terms of, like, from faculty to, like, staff to other students. Although they were a lot older, they still had so much perspective to offer.
So I think that was very exciting in that realm. I think your traditional challenges of, like, insecurities or those types of things. I think as someone that's younger, you don't really think too much about competition because you're just like, I'm here to go to class and do the work and things like that.

And so you're very focused, and then otherwise you realize like, okay, I still wanna enjoy life and have a social element. It just looks a little bit different when you're younger versus maybe when you're older and stuff. But I think it was such a great experience and I think so much focusing on making sure that I do well or learn a lot and then having the opportunity where also, like so many of the faculty and staff and, like, they took you really seriously in the sense, like you have a lot to offer and stuff.

So I think that was a great environment.

>> Wow, that is so amazing. So going off of that, how did you choose pharmacy?

>> So there's multiple decision points. I think, when you choose any sort of major wanting to do healthcare and wanting to stay at Purdue, right?

Purdue has such a great pharmacy program in general. So kind of just from a ranking, if you want to go to a top institution within a field, pharmacy was kind of like a no brainer, right? Because at the time, too, pharmacy was like number two in the nation for that, and so it was such a great program.

And so then realizing, for one, that's the decision of, like, you're saying, okay, well, it's highly ranked, great faculty, the environment is great, great university. Then there's the element of the profession itself, right? The fact that you're involved in a very universal topic that hits every touchpoint within healthcare, which is medicines, right?

And I've always been interested in how do we improve access to medicine. And so if you have that as an interest, the first touch point, right. That is your pharmacist. You know, where do you get your medications? And so understanding, I really wanted to understand, okay, build the clinical knowledge of understand how are medications made, what do they do inside your body, all those types of clinical assessment type of things, but as well as kind of embark on that, to change policies and think about how do we improve access within communities.

And so I think that opportunity in itself was really nice with pharmacy also. There's so much you can do with pharmacy, the fact that you can, like, continuously build your skills within areas like you're not set to one thing. At the time I went through pharmacy school, they were talking about how there's like 400 things, different things you can do with a pharmacy degree.

Now there's significantly more, which means what the skills that you learn as a pharmacist can be applied in so many different areas. And I thought that was really valuable, right? So as you're building, and you're building a career, you're building your education to have a platform or to have a foundation of something that's technical in the sciences, within healthcare, and then has so much opportunity to kind of grow, I think was very exciting about the field.

And the more you learn about the field, the more exciting it gets, right? Because you see that there's so much opportunity. But I wanna ask you, Kennedy, why did you come to Purdue, or how did you make your way to Purdue, or why did you even
choose pharmacy, too?

>> Yeah. So I knew back in 7th grade that I wanted to be a pharmacist solely because my grandma got diagnosed with non Hodgkin's lymphoma. And just seeing those life-changing medications and the cure of chemo treatment, that really touched my heart that I wanna be able to work with those life changing medications and be kind of that point of contact for somebody going through those life experiences, such as cancer.

And so I knew ever since then that pharmacy was something that was in the back of my mind. And so my junior year of high school, I did something called the Health Science Institute, where you explore every single field, every single career in the medical field, such as a surgeon, a doctor, a nurse, anesthesiologist, pharmacist.

And after that, I just knew that pharmacy was still pulling out my heart, and I just knew that it's what I wanted to do, and I had a passion for it, and I felt that I had some of the skill sets, but I could also learn other skill sets needed to be a good pharmacist.

And so then just researching pharmacy schools, Purdue is ranked very highly, and it's just so prestigious. So that's how I picked Purdue.

>> Awesome. It's amazing how certain things in life happen and then drive you towards a specific direction or calling profession.

>> Yeah. So kind of going off of that.

So throughout your professional career, you've worked in many pharmacy related spaces. Can you just give us kind of a snapshot of what that's looked like for you, and how you got where you are?

>> Yeah. It's very diverse. I would be what most people consider in the pharmacy world, at least during my time.

And now I think we're seeing more non-traditional roles in general, or the ability to kind of shift within different settings within that. So I've kind of taken a very interesting approach to my career and kind of understanding where I place myself and where I contribute. And a lot of it is driven based off of the idea, and a lot of my career path and where I was is driven on the idea of where can I think that I can add value or provide, make an impact.

And a lot of it is focused on maybe particular problems in those settings that I wanna solve or kind of understand or contribute to. So after pharmacy school, I decided. I ended up pursuing a fellowship in health economics, pharmaco-economics, and outcomes research. But what led me to really pursuing a fellowship is the idea of understanding and being skilled in creating evidence based, or understanding and creating evidence based decision making in general within the field of healthcare.

What I found is from an academic standpoint, as pharmacists we're really well, like they do a really good job of training us as clinicians, right? And so, as clinicians, you try to understand the clinical evidence that drives you towards maybe recommending a specific medication, having the first line of therapy, understanding all the evidence that would entail.
And so when you go to make a recommendation as a healthcare provider, you're like, I will make this recommendation cuz it's a first line agent for this specific health condition based off of the research. But what was interesting that I found is, as I was working out in practice and things like that is that, a lot of the decisions that we were making also have elements of economics, right?

And so there's not that you might recommend a first line therapy, but it might be more effective, but it also costs significantly more. Or if you're going the route where you're trying to save money, it also might be less effective. And so you have to make difficult decisions.

And there's a whole decision making process, whether you're a clinician working with a patient one on one, and they're telling you, this is great, but I can't afford it. And so you have to make an economic decision there or incorporate economics within that or policy decisions and try to understand what that means.

And so I found that building my skill sets and understanding how do we integrate economics within clinical decisions led me to pursuing a fellowship. And so I let me build my skill in this area and so my fellowship was at University of Michigan in the school of Medicine, public Health and Pharmacy.

And so it was a very multidisciplinary fellowship in trying to understand how do we use health economics and outcomes research to drive decision making in general. And so from there, I was really interested in drug shortages and access to medicine and involved in the study that was called the impact of drug shortages on us health systems, which is a very big paper on the topic of how drug shortages impact health systems.

And so it's kind of recognizing the different skill sets that you have that you're building and where that can add value. So in those kinds of settings, it adds a lot of value within health systems. I come from a house of academics, right? My sister was also faculty at Purdue so she taught in the pharmacy school.

And so kind of being in academia was always in the back of my brain. And so I taught as well. But then I also thought, okay, where I, where can I add value? Be it in the retail setting, be it in the hospital setting, be it in the payer setting as well, so I've worked in that space.

And then, as well as I've always had an interest in public health, how can we change policies? Whether they're policies or institution specific or countrywide specific, how can we change policies to affect hundreds, if not thousands or even millions of people? And so that's kind of like when you follow the course of my career, you would say there's different settings, but there's kind of an intentionality to that.

And the intentionality is one where can I add value and learn in order to kind of help solve. And you realize, too, that many of these problems, the solutions come from multiple areas, whether it's multiple areas within pharmacy, whether that those areas are different settings or across different stakeholders.

And so your ability to be engaged with those stakeholders, to work with those stakeholders and understand what their goals are, their incentive structures, where they're coming from and how they can contribute to the solution was really great in terms of having that diversity, right? Because then you're able to sit with different individuals and say, I understand that pharmacists on the field or even healthcare providers, this is what they're witnessing, for example, during a drug shortage.
Or from a payer perspective this is how it impacts, from a public health perspective, what does that mean? What does that impact on the pharmaceutical supply chain? So it's nice that when you build upon that, there's that intentionality behind having that. And so then now I'm the CEO of Salas Vitae Group and so I've been able to take all of that experience to say, I understand all of these different settings, being there's so much more than I've obviously been through as well.

But in order to understand that tackling a problem requires a holistic solution of subset of various different settings and understanding that kind of bringing that to the table. So yeah, that's a little.

>> Yeah, well, that is such an amazing, rewarding career path. So having all of that experience in those different pharmacy related spaces, what advice would you give somebody in the professional program right now, as well as prospective students that are looking at pursuing a career in pharmacy or like pharmacy industry, anything like that?

>> Yeah. So there's so many, there's so much advice I think I would give. But I think a primary piece of advice to kind of start that off is that there's no wrong field. Like, in the sense that a lot of people come into pharmacy knowing what the traditional pharmacy roles are, of maybe a pharmacist in the health system, pharmacist in the retail or in the community setting.

And they kind of recognize how that could be. Then they come and they're like, my God, there's so many different options, and now I don't know what to choose. And they kind of have that burden of, like, having too many choices, right. And so when you have sometimes too many choices, which is always a privilege and a luxury not to, like, take that into consideration at all, but it kind of makes you think that you have to choose the right one, right.

And then you realize that your interests could change. How you want to contribute can change. So you might have come in maybe saying that, I wanna do clinical pharmacy and I wanna work in a hospital, and come out saying, no, I actually wanna work industry, and I don't wanna set foot in a hospital and that can change.

So I think first being very open to all the different possibilities because there's so many possibilities, but because of that, not to have that burden you in the sense that yes, you might choose to do community at the beginning and then you can always change it. There's no reality that you can never move from one or the other, right?

In order to do that, you need to build your skills in different areas. But I think that takes away a little bit of the burden of saying, like, I have to get the perfect job right out of graduation reality. You just have to think about where can you make an impact at that point, right?

So as a pharmacy student, when you're about to graduate or even when you're deciding to go, some people would decide to go into a specific profession because something of experience that happened to them or why they're interested in a specific thing. Or you can take it as what kind of problems do you want to solve.

And so from that, you can say, like, many people want to work within the community setting because they see a need within their community to help the community, right? Whether they live in a food desert and there's only one pharmacy and there is basically the healthcare provider in that community.
And so I think that becomes, you know, your kind of North Star at the beginning within that. But again, keeping an open mind as to all the different things you will learn and experience. I was talking to some pharmacy students earlier too, as well as like rotations and internships are a wonderful opportunity to get exposed to maybe an area that you wouldn't have thought of.

Right? So nuclear pharmacy is a big area right now. Most people, if they would have entered or even gone to think about pharmacy, wouldn't have thought about nuclear pharmacy as an option. So I think first, the second one is exposure. Practical experience teaches wonders and gives more clarity, right?

And I think another point is conversations. Talk to as many people as possible and be genuinely interested. Because the more pharmacists you talk to, and it's not just a matter of do you like your job, it's a matter of what about your job do you like? Or what about your job that you dislike?

And you will just begin to realize it's not that somebody, maybe if they dislike an element, it's not that they dislike it as a profession, but maybe they just don't like their hours, right? And so then you learn a lot more about what it is that maybe pharmacists do or your opportunities are.

So that kind of helps direct you there.

>> Yeah, that is such great advice because there's so many things in pharmacy school that we're exposed to, so being open and having an intentional career path is awesome.

>> What's some of the best advice you got? Some of the best advice I've probably gotten is something kind of along the lines of that, that in pharmacy school, we're going to be exposed to so many different things and so many different avenues, and it's kind of hard to know exactly what you want to do or like where you want to be in, let's say, ten years.

The kind of best advice I've gotten is take it in small little chunks, what's your five year plan? What would you like to see yourself doing in five years and then kind of work on a goal towards that, and then maybe after five years, if it changes, working on a different type of goal that, like, if you feel driven towards something else.

So I think that's the best piece of advice I've gotten.

>> But I was surprised that people are still saying five years. Five years seems like a century these days with like, how quickly things are changing, right?

>> Yes. So now at some point it becomes like, what are you interested in doing at the moment within the first years before things change and things like that?

So, because, but that actually gets to the point of things are changing so rapidly. So even if you think you have it all figured out, you might not. So that reality of it makes it seem like it might shift, it might change. And there's beauty in that, right?

Because that means with that change, you can create things. You can kind of understand where the profession is going better.

>> Yeah, kind of going off of like career paths and stuff. Now you're an owner of a consulting firm, Salus Vitae. Could you just give us a little bit more insight on that
and why consulting is a passion for you?

>> Yeah, of course. We’re a healthcare consultancy. We focus on helping institutions create interventions or improve processes. The ultimate goal is to achieve better health outcomes. It’s a healthcare consultancy. It’s been wonderful because we’ve been focused in, we have focus areas in terms of different types of clients, whether it’s health systems, universities with educational programs and things like that, or policy development.

And so it really, really varies. But ultimately, the idea is that we help try to solve complex problems within healthcare, whether it’s institution specific or a larger scale, or whether it’s convening multiple thought leaders to start thinking about how do we begin to address these types of issues.

Having that, it’s been really great because it gets you to think about all of the, access to medicine is a very complex issue. If someone claims that they have the answer or the solution to access to medicine, it means that they don’t understand the problem. So many different intricacies with that and trying to understand, really the elements of having that.

And so in something that complex, like excess, you realize that you have to work with diverse stakeholders. You have to engage people that aren’t just pharmacists, even though it’s a medication issue, right? You have to go beyond health systems. You have to have conversations with payers. You have to understand the pharmaceutical supply chain and all of the individuals involved with that.

You have to talk with industry. And so that’s really the beauty of consulting, is that you are now working towards answering a question, which is answering the question that addresses solving a particular issue. And so the diversity versus that, the way to be able to think differently, to strategize, to listen, so much of providing recommendations is really listening.

There’s kind of the idea that you have two ears and one mouth, listen twice as much as you speak. The idea to be able to hear these different perspectives in order to solve these problems has been so fascinating because oftentimes, especially in healthcare, we kind of operate in silos.

And so pharmacists are doing amazing work, but they’re among pharmacists telling other pharmacists that they’re doing amazing work, right? And so these are these types of silos. When you break that and say there’s a lot of value that pharmacists have because they have significant skills that can be applied to addressing all these healthcare issues, you see so many other professionals within the healthcare space, and even not within healthcare, in terms of traditional education of health care, talking about healthcare issues.

And so, really, pharmacists are at the forefront to continue to talk about, especially something that we’re the expert in, which is medications, right, as an example. Then there’s so many others. One of my areas is also pharmacoeconomics. So I wrote a book. It’s called the art of pharmacoeconomics, on the topic.

The whole idea with that is to also make certain information more accessible and more easy to understand. I mentioned before, economics is a huge deciding factor for in clinical, even in decision making in clinical settings. But more people need to be well versed in it. Like the term cost effective, for example, is often used incorrectly by people because the terminology isn’t the same in terms of
understanding what that means, right?

The point of the book was to kind of clarify or write more simply about the concepts of health economics and pharmacoeconomics and how we can more easily talk about it. That's kind of the idea is like, how do we make these big topics that are more technical across the healthcare system more accessible, whether it's to healthcare professionals as individuals?

And so we have different training programs targeted to specific individuals for that, and then as well as training within organizations and having that. It's like trying to make knowledge go viral in the sense of like, how do we get important foundational elements that would impact and create sustainable solution and help with sustainable solutions and make that information more accessible.

>> You are the 2024 Eaton Entrepreneur of the Year award recipient. Congratulations. This is an award that goes to an alum in the College of Pharmacy recognizing the entrepreneurial career. What was your reaction when you first found out about this?

>> Yeah, I was obviously very happy. It's so great because, like I mentioned before, I was considered very non traditional.

My interests, all my interests were like, well, that's not available yet in pharmacy, or that's not a thing yet. It was very nice to see, to be recognized, one from the college that you went to, and Purdue's is so great, kind of to recognize that you've excelled in that area as well.

It's kind of that humbling experience of kind of looking at it, but then also to be back in the classroom, to be on the other end. Of like presenting, because earlier I presented to the class around my journey and kind of talking about that. So it was very humbling to me.

It makes you kind of also self reflect. And thinking about your own milestones and your career and what that means so far. But at the same time, it also gets me excited because you're like, I still haven't done everything I want to do and I want to do more.

And I think that's also what's great about within these recognitions is that you get some time to kind of celebrate what you've done. Because when you're highly ambitious, you're always like, the next thing. Let's work on the next thing. The problem is so big. We've made like a drop in the ocean, it might feel.

It's nice to kind of take a step back and say, you know, what you've built and how you've gotten to that journey. And then, of course, to be back in the pharmacy school and to talk to the students. I think that was also really great.

>> Well, congratulations again.

You've had such an amazing journey, and I know you'll continue to do great things. As we're nearing the end of the conversation, we like to ask each guest a fun question. Do you think pineapple should belong on pizza?

>> My God. I've had pizza with pineapple. I ended up, at some point in my life, I don't remember the year or when I did, I'm like, I'm gonna order the pizza with pineapple cause I felt there's people that had such strong opinions about it.
I was like, I have to see. And I was like, to me, it was fine. It was good. It wasn't this groundbreaking thing that I felt like either I was gonna love or hate. So I feel like eventually, with that, it became a mood. Do I, am I in the mood for pineapple if we want the pizza?

So I think it's, like, one of those things. It's like, one of those things people like to talk about as kind of this game changer. You realize people's palates are very different, I guess, with these types of things. So, for me, it's never been a hard no because what I ended up doing, it was a hard no until I tried.

The kind of he moral of the story of even with the pineapple, it's like, just try it if you don't like it. You kind of have that experience to be like, you know, no, unless, I don't know if people can be allergic to pineapple. But so that's kind of been my approach with that.

Even if everyone says it's good or you have a handful that are extremely passionate about how great it is. Like they say it's not good, and then some that are very passionate about it, you still got to try it yourself to see if it's your cup of tea.

>> Yes, that's great. And you're also bringing in your advice that you never know until you try. That's so great.

>> Do you like pineapple on pizza?

>> Personally, I do not care for pineapple on pizza. I have tried it, but I don't personally, personally care for it.

But maybe my palate will change one day.

>> But does it have to?

>> Not necessarily.

>> But there you, like you said, you're like, I tried it. I gave it a chance. Give it a win.

>> Gave it a try. Not my favorite. Well, Rola, thank you again for being on Living the Farm Life podcast and sharing your experiences and advice with us.

It was so great having you today.

>> Thank you for having me. This was fun.