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Kristan grew up on St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands before earning her B.S. in Animal Science from Cornell University. She spent three years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the mountain nation of Lesotho before returning to school to complete a Ph.D. in Animal Biology at the University of California at Davis. She has a research and extension position in the Department of Animal Science at Cornell focused on using modeling tools to support dairy farm management. The Ruminant Farm System model is a major component of her research program, through which, she aims to improve dairy production efficiency and sustainability.