GRDC In Conversation - Anna Madden

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**SPEAKERS**

Oli Le Lievre, Anna Madden

**Oli Le Lievre** 00:00

Yeah. So Anna, we're here for the GRDC In Conversation podcast. Milly was telling me a little bit about your property and the area that you guys farm here. So I'd love to know a little bit about that if you'd share with us where we are.

**Anna Madden** 00:14

So we're just west of Wee Waa, we're two kilometres from the town, so we're not very far at all. We have a very small irrigated farm here. It's all on black soil, pretty much all developed for irrigation. So yeah, this year, we have cotton in the ground, but we haven't had cotton for a couple of years. We had canola. The last not last winter season and winter season before that was an interesting harvest. We had to harvest in between flood peaks, which was pretty unexciting, very exciting at the time, but you know, I look back and go oh my gosh, that was a bit stressful.

**Oli Le Lievre** 00:14

Logistical nightmare.

**Anna Madden** 00:32

Yeah. You know, yeah, trying to get get it out and beat rainfall events and in between flood peaks. It was interesting harvest. And prior to that we'd had a mix of canola and maize in.

**Oli Le Lievre** 01:07

and reason to go into cotton this year. What was that?

**Anna Madden** 01:10

We'd had enough of a break from cotton. We don't like to grow cotton every year. So yeah, we have a break and we use corn actually is good break and also winter winter crops as well.

**Oli Le Lievre** 01:23

So Wee Waa as a town what's a famous for for us out of towners?

**Anna Madden** 01:27

Oh for you out of towners it's the oldest town on the Namoi. Wee Waa the name means fire for cooking. It is, it claims to be the birthplace of cotton in Australia. It was certainly one of the areas that developed cotton very early and irrigation. I probably should stop saying cotton, but developed into irrigation very early in the piece. And certainly their Hadley and Carl family have there's been a lot of press around them over the previous decade about their involvement in getting the irrigation systems up and running for cotton.

**Oli Le Lievre** 02:06

Can you give us a little SparkNotes version of that? Like how was the area developed by them?

**Anna Madden** 02:11

I think well they came over from the United States and they use their skills from there to you know, bring the variety the cotton varieties in develop gins bring the technology over I guess to farm in Farah irrigation, so I'm not really all over it, to be honest, but it's certainly it's I'm certainly very thankful for that coming to Australia because I've made a nice career out of it.

**Oli Le Lievre** 02:40

Absolutely. And I think what I'm really interested to chat to you about biologicals and everything else, but I think upfront we probably need to address that this is the first brother sister combination we've had on the podcast.

**Anna Madden** 02:52

Yay, Marky!

**Oli Le Lievre** 02:55

You listen to his episode? Because you've got the privilege of being able to critique now.

**Anna Madden** 03:01

I'm not gonna critique him at all and I don't know whether he will of me either. Yeah no, Mark and I both came from grazing background of all things. I studied Ag. I'm actually quite a bit older than my brother. So yeah, sorry, I'll lead the way.

**Oli Le Lievre** 03:20

So how did you end up like down this pathway obviously working now in agronomy, but also farming yourself?

**Anna Madden** 03:25

Yeah. Um, so I obviously went to uni. I was really fortunate to get a really good scholarship to go to uni. And I studied agriculture. I studied rural science. And I knew from year seven at school, that's exactly what I wanted to do. I wanted to study rural science and go into agriculture because that's what I knew I grew up in around the Narromine district, I went to Narromine high school, I spent every day with my father and grandfather on the farm. So I and you know, I guess you love what you do at the time. If you're that sort of person, if you're a glass half full person, which I think to be a farmer and and in agriculture, you really need to be a glass half full person. Otherwise you wouldn't do it. Being that glass half full person I decided in year seven. That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to study agriculture. I wanted to do rural science at the University of New England and that is exactly what I did. I managed to get a really good scholarship to be able to enable me to do that. At university in the first six weeks a professor Wall Whaley came into our lecture theatre and gave us a lecture on how we were going to feed the world with the amount of very small amount of agricultural land that we had with the growing population with all of the, I guess the growth of population, how that was going to happen. And it was really interesting, I went to university to get into the livestock industry. And as soon as I came out of that university lecture I went, not on your, nowhere near did I think that we're going to feed the world with animal protein. So I switched and went I think I'm want to go into agronomy. And that's what I did. Now, I was really fortunate that their scholarship I got was with a corporate ag company called off scott. And they had always said to me, if you want a summer job, come and see us in about June, July, and we'll see what we can do. I did that. And I crop scattered for them for three years. When I came out of university, there was no jobs available with them. But I had already been offered three jobs in cotton industry, straight out of uni. So I went straight into the first job I was offered, obviously. In the middle of a drought, I went and work for a plant breeder. And that was a great experience I loved working for that I picked up my one of my mentors, who was the Australian vice president of that company. I only worked for them for six months. But he always whenever he saw me, had took me under his wing and looked after me and really helped develop me, he gave me more than money. And I will always say that I've said this to his family. You're too I, you know, I've worked for his, his family ever since, or for a long time. And I've always said, Your father gave me more than money, he gave me the confidence and ability to make my own money, and I will be forever grateful for that. So that was my first job. It was not my favourite job, that I went into retail agronomy. And I got the skills to be able to start my own company. So I left that company after four years and started my own company called swift agriculture.

**Oli Le Lievre** 05:33

Yeah wow. Can I ask you that first job, the skills that he gave you more than money? Like, what was it like what What kind of boss was Eve for you?

06:37

Well he actually wasn't my direct boss. Believe it or not, he was the vice president of the company but whenever he saw me, he would just talk to me chat to me about cotton. And you know, his experience. And he'd asked me lots of questions. And he'd helped me out when I needed that help. He actually wasn't my boss. He just, he just, I think he noted a kindred spirit in me. And I was really fortunate just before he died, he said, I really need someone to drive me for half a day while you do it. And I got to thank him. And he got to tell me lots and lots of stuff about himself that I'm really fortunate to have to have discovered outside of agriculture.

**Oli Le Lievre** 07:19

That's so cool, it's even more than a mentorship. It sounds like a true friendship as well.

**Anna Madden** 07:23

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

**Oli Le Lievre** 07:25

So I want to jump back to the kid in year seven. Was there any any stage like I think it's interesting that you say that, like, you didn't get drawn away from from agriculture. And I've chatted to a few different people, and they say you either get born into it, or you kinda come across it. And once it's in your blood, it never leaves. Did you ever think? Or yeah, consider doing anything differently?

**Anna Madden** 07:48

Well, before that, I wanted to be hairdresser. Okay. And up until I was seven, I wanted to be a jockey. And by that stage, I was taller than my grandmother who was four foot 10. And she said, Look, Angie, because that's what she has to call me, you are way too tall to be a jockey now, you're going to have to do something else. So no, not really. No, not really. And but there are days when I go, Oh, my God, surely I could have picked something a lot easier than what I do now. But you know what, at the same time, I really just love it. And look, I grew up in a family. And Mark will tell you this, my brother, there were no girls and boys, they were just people, and everyone did everything. So I guess growing up in a situation where there was not that gender, or you're a girl, you need to go to the house and do whatever they do in the house, there was the 'come on, you'll be right.' Go and wrestle that sheep and bring it over here. And you know, we'll go and catch that flyblown sheep or you know, start that irrigation pipe. There was never any, you know, I think because there was no issues with confidence with me. And I think that's that was part of that whole introduction into agriculture was I knew I could do everything that I needed to do.

**Oli Le Lievre** 09:01

Yeah. So that university lecture, it seems like a lot of those conversations that were being had in the 90s probably are still dominant today.

**Anna Madden** 09:12

They're worse. I think they're getting more dominant, because we're moving away from that conventional chemical and conventional type of style of farming to a more sustainable, friendly sort of type of farming. I think there is a little bit of a divide in the perception of agriculture and what actually goes on but in some ways, that's good. In other ways, it's not so good. There's some very strict regulations that are coming on. Oh, my gosh, you know, that's, we don't even do that. Well, why are we being regulated for that? I guess in other ways, it's making us think of alternative ways to do things that are better. And that's what we need to be in agriculture. We always need to be striving to be better.

**Oli Le Lievre** 09:57

Do you think there's a real mind shift change happening in the sector or for the sector at the moment, or do you think we're still lagging behind a little bit in terms of where maybe society is moving?

**Anna Madden** 10:08

Oh absolutely. Innovation in agriculture is incredible. There's so much innovation in agriculture, it happens at a really rapid pace. different sectors of agriculture adopt their innovation and technology at different rates. And certainly the cotton industry, which I'm, you know, part of, is a very rapid adopter of new technology. I think there are some statistics about 14 months or something. But, you know, when I say that, because I don't know where it came from. But yeah, we are doing things a lot better. And we're measuring a lot more. I think some of the issues that we're having is that we're actually doing better, but we're perceived as not doing better. You know, there's always that doubt of really, is that what they're doing, or is that just what they're making up? You know, that that that really mistrust. And I think that's a really big societal issue is that we're not out there, trying to make things worse, we're actually out there trying to make our farms sustainable and profitable. And to be able to hand that on to the next generation. We're not trying to just mine it. I think the problem is with primary production is that we're all lumped into one big basket, and miners do mine. In agriculture, we tend to sustain. And I think there's a big dis, there's probably a little bit of a misrepresentation of what we actually do.

**Oli Le Lievre** 11:36

yeah, I think that's fair. Yeah. And I think it's because people, I think it's from a point of fear as well of like, Oh, if people know what happens, maybe they'll stop us from doing it. But I don't actually think it will happen.

**Anna Madden** 11:47

I think Yeah, there's, there's a couple of things. You know, in Australia, we we certainly work on a threat basis. So is there a threat in Europe where they work on a risk basis, like, Oh, my God, that's a risk, we'll just stop it. And because it's such a vocal community, the EU, I think that some of that probably filters into the vernacular of our community. And I think that is a little unfair.

**Oli Le Lievre** 12:16

Yeah. So tell me a little bit about your business today. And how long have you been running it for And okay,

**Anna Madden** 12:22

so Well, I stopped i When my husband and I got engaged, we I closed down, we were only engaged for a very short time, and we got married, I had the longest shotgun with a shotgun pregnancy ever. I, we just decided to get married before the cotton season. So we got we weren't engaged for very long. And I shut down with it didn't seem to make sense to have two sets of accounts to set some books, you know, two businesses. So when we did the same thing, we're both ag consultants. So we've been running the business together since 2001. No, no, no, no, we worked with each other. So for the first year, actually, we do different companies, but we I would go and help Steve and Steve would come and help me so no, always work together. Yeah, so shut that business down in 2001. And Madden agriculture became it. We do a range of broadacre crops irrigated and and raingrown. So I, we checked both by types, summer and winter. Grain. fibre. oil seeds. Yeah, the whole

**Oli Le Lievre** 12:59

Were you competitors before? Whole shebang.

**Anna Madden** 13:36

Yeah, pretty much. Yeah, that's right. And, you know, occasionally I'll get pulled into Goondiwindi to look at pastures or something even as equally exciting.

**Oli Le Lievre** 13:46

what's your what's your true passion, like, in around agronomy?

**Anna Madden** 13:50

Oh, my true passion, or my, I guess my philosophy and what I aim for, is to make my growers as profitable as possible, because I want to see them there next year. It's not about me, getting as much as I can out of them. No. And if one of my growers is watching this, he'll laugh when he hears this,

**Oli Le Lievre** 14:12

talking to someone specifically.

**Anna Madden** 14:14

yeah no. But yeah, so I, instead of going ahead with something that I don't think it's profitable, I will always be upfront. So I guess my my philosophy is to treat everyone else's crops as if they're mine. To do the best for them, and to be to have them as profitable and as sustainable as possible.

**Oli Le Lievre** 14:35

And I think that'd be pretty well received by them. Wouldn't it?

**Anna Madden** 14:38

I hope so. I hope so.

**Oli Le Lievre** 14:40

Do you find it hard, like step stepping away? Like from work? If you are truly that passionate?

**Anna Madden** 14:46

Yeah, I do. I do. I'm a workaholic. Yep. Absolutely.

**Oli Le Lievre** 14:51

And what about though like as an agronomist, in terms of your spheres of control, like you can, you can provide the advice to a point, but it could also be.

**Anna Madden** 14:59

You work with the grower, you don't work against them. So if you something's not working for your grower, you work with them. That's, that's the bottom line, like, don't get frustrated, work with them. Because it's at the end of the day, they pay the bills. And at the end of the day, what I say is a recommendation. It's not a demand. So work with a grower. It's all about communication. That's the biggest thing. And I'm happy to listen to a grower and their philosophies, as long as they're, in turn respectful enough to stop and listen to what I've got to say as well. If I feel really passionate about it, if it's a line ball decision, let it go.

**Oli Le Lievre** 15:40

Have you got a key moment or like a learning across your career that has really probably shaped shaped especially I think that philosophy of working with the growers and providing recommendations as opposed to demand?

**Anna Madden** 15:52

Ah, no, no, no, I think I walked into agronomy when I was I was with a company that was associated with elders and at the agronomy conferences I was the single female in the room for a long time. I certainly wasn't setting glass ceiling breaker, no way. There are women that came well, before me, one of the people that I really admire so much is Christine Campbell, who was the the she she was the head of Twynam for quite a quite a while. And she's someone I looked up to as a child. And then as a young agronomist, as well. I guess, coming into agronomy, as a young, as a young woman, I had to learn the skills to be able to convince people that I knew what I was talking about. And it was all about communication, and working with people and not pretending to know everything. Because I still don't. Yeah, I mean, I'm 51 I don't know everything. I'm still learning. And as my greatest mentor always said to me, I've only got one year's experience. I've had that one year's experience 40 times, but I've only got one year's experience to draw from.

**Oli Le Lievre** 17:05

So on that, like, overcoming that barrier at like at quite a transformational point in, I guess agriculture, like in 92 was when women were allowed to list themselves as farmers.

**Anna Madden** 17:16

That was my first year, second year at uni.

**Oli Le Lievre** 17:19

So like that, that convincing, like, obviously, there was support from previous bosses and others. But still, you had to make your own kind of headway as well.

**Anna Madden** 17:29

Oh absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. You know, I did have support of bosses. And I'm sure there were times when they would get phone calls saying, hey, help

**Oli Le Lievre** 17:39

you say whatever you like,

**Anna Madden** 17:42

what are you doing sending? Anyway... Look, I'm sure that happened. But I'm not gonna let that so I guess with my upbringing, and that confidence I was given as a child knowing that I could do whatever anyone else could do. You know, I could pull the calf down in the, in the yards I could, I could pull a ram out for the shearers, I could do all of that, like, you know, there was no, you better not do that you know, get in there and do it. So I guess that attitude, I took that attitude with me into my, into the workplace wherever I went. If you tell me I can't do something I will prove you wrong. More often than not. So to my detriment that and I don't think that's a good trait to have.

**Oli Le Lievre** 18:26

I'd say though, in running your own business, that dogged determination is pretty important.

**Anna Madden** 18:31

Absolutely. The dogged determination is the never say, tell me I can't do anything. It's probably not a good thing.

**Oli Le Lievre** 18:38

When's it caught you out?

**Anna Madden** 18:39

Oh just, you know, I work probably too long hours.

**Oli Le Lievre** 18:43

As in just completely over commit.

**Anna Madden** 18:45

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, the inability to say no, yeah.

**Oli Le Lievre** 18:49

So let's then, you're saying you're not a glass ceiling breaker. But women in agriculture, you're incredibly passionate about supporting

**Anna Madden** 18:56

Absolutely.

**Oli Le Lievre** 18:57

Women and creating pathways and opportunities to develop them

**Anna Madden** 19:00

And not even so much that those those pathways are there. The opportunities are all there, keeping women in agriculture, and that's providing a support framework to keep girls and females in the ag sector and to stop losing all of that brainpower when they might think that there's other things that you know, that they need to do if we can. I see a lot of girls are really passionate about ag but well, how do I do it all? Let's provide the framework for that. Let's help those women think of things that are slightly outside the box. I mean, my parents didn't live on the farm. We didn't have a farm when my kids were born. We lived in Wee Waa, my parents lived three and a half hours to five hours away. They moved in that period and my husband's family lived three hours away. We didn't have a family close by to help us. We just made it work.

**Oli Le Lievre** 19:56

How did you like did you keep working through?

**Anna Madden** 19:59

Ah yeah I did. I did definitely slow down for a little while. We did have a nanny for a couple of years. We did have a nanny for a couple of years, when we were really, really busy, and it made more sense to employ someone to help with the children in the household than to actually employ someone else who wasn't as experienced or wasn't as passionate or committed to the business. So yeah, we did do that. I guess the, the kids have just got used to being in the car with me when they were little and coming to work. And it's quite funny, because some of the growers now go missing your kids in the car.

**Oli Le Lievre** 20:37

Will any of you kids follow in the footsteps?

**Anna Madden** 20:41

No, no, no no.

**Oli Le Lievre** 20:42

Wasn't in their blood.

**Anna Madden** 20:42

I don't think so much that I think we have given them the opportunity to go on to, to create passions for themselves rather than create those passions for them.

**Oli Le Lievre** 20:56

And do you think that's slightly easier? Like being in a rural community, but not having the, like solely being on the farm?

**Anna Madden** 21:05

Ah, I think so. Yeah, I think so, um, well, actually, no, probably not. I've really enjoy farm life. I grew up on a farm. But that's me. That probably isn't everyone that yeah, that's, that's different. Yeah, I don't know. It's, it's an interesting one. And I mean, when we even the boys didn't go to school at the local high school, they went to a school away from here. And when we were looking at the school, one of the things that I really had in the back of my mind is that, you know, they need to go and experience other things outside of agriculture. So they didn't go to a country boarding school.

**Oli Le Lievre** 21:46

yeah that's fair enough. If the opportunity was there to be farming full time, do you think you do it? Do you love the spice of variety?

**Anna Madden** 21:54

I don't know, when I don't farm I miss it when I don't consult. I absolutely miss it. So. I don't know. I, That's a hard question. Because I.. And I think that's the disadvantage of never being able to say no, see that there is a downfall. Yeah. Yeah. So I think if, you know, I There will come a time when I'll have to give it all up. Obviously, you know, my body won't go forever. But yeah, look, I really love the mental stimulation of agricultural consulting, a lot of people go in and go, Oh, my God, I hate this. You do the same thing. 100 times every day, like I bet I see something different. Every time I walk into a field, it's never all the same, every crop is different. And I think it's that eye for detail. And that, that being able to note the change that I'm really passionate about. And that gives me mental stimulation. So I think I'd miss both of them if I couldn't do either.

**Oli Le Lievre** 22:47

It's interesting say that because it was literally I've had a bit of a drive to get here, 14 hours. And I was thinking that as I was driving past hte paddocks I was like, yes farmers are farming a crop a year.

**Anna Madden** 22:57

Yeah.

**Oli Le Lievre** 22:58

But actually, there's so much variety and so much nuance in different land types, of different

**Anna Madden** 23:02

absolutely,

**Oli Le Lievre** 23:03

yeah, what what can happen here compared to five K's away is so different. Like, it's

**Anna Madden** 23:07

It's interesting, you say that my, one of my uni friends, really close uni friends is from Tasmania in a beautiful part of Tasmania, where it's hilly, and it's you know, ideally sheep farm. And she came to visit me out of Trangee, which is completely flat. And she said, how do you live out here? It's so boring. Righto. Okay, you're gonna learn a little bit about landscape right now. And I showed her the differences in the vegetation versus soil type versus elevation. And when she saw that she went, you know I would never have seen that Had you not told me that? How do you know that? And I said, Well, I grew up here. And I also had a grandfather that was really interested in teaching us about nature and landscape.

**Oli Le Lievre** 23:53

Anbd a great conduit, but has that... Would you say that the nature side of things is a real fundamental piece in your interest in agriculture?

24:01

yes and no. biodiversity. I love that whole biodiversity but I work in a monocultural system. We can bring biodiversity into the monoculture. And I started in the bad old days of cotton, where you know, we were spraying heliothis constantly and resistance and all of those types of things. I started my career in the cotton industry, the first year Ingard cotton was being introduced into the Australian system. So I've gone from, you know, the conventional days right through to botnet what we now have Bollgard three and you know, in, in within the next 10 years, we'll probably have Bollgard four, and potentially other insecticidal and herbicidal traits. So I think what that has done for me as in development is allowed me to Look at the biodiversity within the monocultural system, and how that works and how it can make things a little bit better and a little bit more sustainable.

**Oli Le Lievre** 25:09

Yeah Well, it's something that I, I guess it's the part that fascinates me about ag and and it's that balance between what was said to you in that uni lecture of the need to feed people. But in the same time, it's this management of them, the natural environment, the ecosystems and everything that happens

**Anna Madden** 25:26

absolutely

**Oli Le Lievre** 25:27

in and around the paddocks actually has flow ons far more broadly.

**Anna Madden** 25:30

Absolutely. You know, what we see out in our stock routes, the vegetation there when that when that dries up, all of a sudden, we get a whole new population of, you know, mammal, bird, and insects into our crops. So we have to manage that to at our best ability, but well most sustainably. And you're right, it is that real balance about with the environment, and production. And I think that as people in ag, we're getting a lot better. But I think there's a lag in that perception of what we're actually doing. We're not out there killing everything like we used to, in the field, were out there trying to manage and maintain what we've got. And I know there's, you know, people say, Oh, you you're putting this on and your'e killing all the weeds. And what's that doing? But yet What are we doing by turning that soil over and killing the microbes? There's a real, you know, I think there's a great lack of understanding and knowledge around the general from the general population about what we do and how we do it, and how we can do it better and what we are currently doing to make it better. For example, and I'm sure you'll talk to Steve more about this, we actually put insects into the field to enhance what we will get. So in a normal situation, the pest numbers will rise really quickly. And then the prey or the predator will come in afterwards, what we do is we put the prey and the Predator when the pest numbers are low into the field, and that keeps the pest low. So that we are reducing our footprint by reducing the amount of insecticide or whatever else we might need to apply to control that pest.

**Oli Le Lievre** 27:27

And so that's the the term biologicals that you

**Anna Madden** 27:30

Yeah so I get I guess so. And biologicals is not really associated in Australia with broadacre cropping. It's more it is really, really limited to horticultural and greenhouse systems because it's small, and in most and even in Europe, because I got a lot of questions about this. When I was at a conference in Switzerland. How do you get farmers to spend money they don't even know that they've got a problem for and I said, Well, it's easy because it's cheaper than having to spray at the end of the day. So even in Australia in our horitcultural system, it's a reactive system. It's not a proactive system. We we look at things a little bit differently. We're proactively trying to control that pest before it becomes a problem. Rather than a reactive situation in a horticulture inside a greenhouse when you know Oh, we've got a thrip problem. Let's get some predatory thrips and mites or you know Oris in there and control them. Yeah, we're doing that before we have a problem.

**Oli Le Lievre** 28:31

So for the uneducated person like me, because when you said biologicals the other day, I was thinking probably what I've heard more of on, I'll say in Ag News, ag media around biologicals has been, yeah, live seed coatings to help draw carbon down and things. Is there a broader definition which explains to...

**Anna Madden** 28:50

So I guess, so in our situation, we're talking about a biological control of insects. There's other biologicals, when, at that same conference, I was learning about funguses that you add to the soil that are parasites of the pest funguses. And they reduce the amount of fungus in a say a potato crop. There's other biological, you know, herbicides there's biological insecticides, there's funguses that we can put out there's there's a virus that we're putting out that are actually a live virus that kills only this lepidopteran pest.

**Oli Le Lievre** 28:54

Incredible.

**Anna Madden** 28:56

And so yeah, they you know, there's lots of things we do and it's quite common practice in sorghum to do that.

**Oli Le Lievre** 29:45

So tell me about some of the travels I know you went to Europe last year, but what have the the different areas and travels exposed you to around agriculture and and maybe comparatively where we're at versus other parts.

**Anna Madden** 29:57

It's really interesting. I spent a little bit of time with an agronomist in Italy last year, she worked in Floriculture. And I learned that farmers are universally all the same. They have the same questions. They have the same arguments. They all have the same. They really there's really no difference. You know, you have the kids are really passionate. So she worked for a company called bioplanet in Italy and they provide insects to like what we do but to treat pest insects, such as mealy bugs or white fly, which is what we we doing Australia with the hayati. They use a different group of insects to do that. You know, there's guys over there that are you know, they've got the old gear and they're really passionate about this biologicals, because they think that's the future. And you know, they've seen the bad old ways, and they going really well. And then you've got this big corporate who's got, you know, 80 hectares of glass houses, and no, we just don't want any pests so we will just spray. But you know, they will have a dabble in the biologicals. So, what I learnt spending time with Martina in Italy, is that universally, farmers are all the same, they all have their little nuances and quirks. And they're all very passionate about their products. And they want the best. But they all have their own way. And that's great. And it's all about communication. And it's about how to deal with that, that system, but they all want to do the best they can and be the most profitable and sustainable they can be. They just do it in different ways. I guess. Certainly, I didn't get to look at the broadacre systems over there to see how the the climate and what have you is really important. But certainly in one of the conferences that I was at, I learned about the corn borer being becoming resistant to nearly everything can you say, everyone... Universally we all have the same problem. So just different, specific problem.

**Oli Le Lievre** 30:16

yeah yeah yeah

**Anna Madden** 31:00

And it's about overcoming those problems.

**Oli Le Lievre** 32:06

And was she doing anything differently in terms of how she was approaching it? Or was it

**Anna Madden** 32:12

It's actually, the other girl that was with me who has seen me at work before said it's just like watching you at work, only Italian.

**Oli Le Lievre** 32:23

Will you try and get here out here?

**Anna Madden** 32:25

I would love to have Martina come and visit not to work just to come and visit and show her I've kept in contact with her. In fact, at Christmas on Christmas day, we were swapping messages and videos and well wishes so yeah, yeah, she's quite a bit younger than me. But I'm Yeah, I just, I really would love to have her over and say, Look, you know, it is possible to do this and keep going. Because I think as females in ag worldwide, we can help each other. And, you know, if we can build each other up, we're so much stronger together, stop fighting each other. Just build it together and really encourage it because I think it's a great, great opportunity. And I met a lot of really great, beautiful agronomists in the floriculture greenhouses that were just amazing women. I couldn't speak to a couple of because I can't speak Italian and they couldn't speak english.

**Oli Le Lievre** 33:22

Need your Google Translate.

**Anna Madden** 33:24

Yeah, that's what we did. That's exactly how we did it. But really, I really one of the girls I would really love to catch up with again, she was really fantastic lady.

**Oli Le Lievre** 33:34

So why why did you head over there? Was there a specific reason or something you were looking to get your head around?

**Anna Madden** 33:38

So we went over and Steve will talk to you about crop capsules. So the crop capsules company were the finalist in an innovation award in Europe. And so we went over to the conference that all of the that award was presented at. So it was part of the international bio biological control Manufacturers Association. We went to their conference, their annual conference, it was fantastic. I met people from all over the world. I saw some amazing developments. met some amazing people. It was really incredible the amount of CEO owners of these big companies that I actually met over there. It was incredible. So yeah, it was and very small, very small conference. But and really personable. But it was just really a great conference to go to. I didn't I went to a couple of the presentations, but I really got out of it just walking around the the trade displays and talking to people about what they're doing differently and you know what we might what I thought that we might be able to come back to Australia with and then certainly, yeah, was a really good experience. Eye Opener. It was an eye opener every second display was a consultant on registration in the EU, for biologicals, because it is becoming, you know, their cap on inputs is getting closer and closer and closer, although I did see EC a few weeks ago that they had extended glyphosate for 10 years, which, of course, you know, everyone's up in arms about in Europe, but that's probably good for us in Australia without MRLS going into the European market.

**Oli Le Lievre** 35:23

So I've got a couple of questions. One, just going back to what you said before about, like the different types of farmers. And and it's probably a very dumb question, but something that you've made me think about here. So the different types of farmers we have globally, early adopters, call them laggards, the corporate, the different ways of farming? Like, is there a reason why there's not more people just doing it The way that the top 20% Do it?

**Anna Madden** 35:48

Absolutely. There's so many reasons like there's not one.

**Oli Le Lievre** 35:52

And like, I guess, yeah, like, what are those those reasons like, and I think it's, so what makes me think about it is when you look at, say industry bodies, and whatnot, and as they're representative of everyone. But the end of the day, every everyone ends up being grouped as agriculture, and those different.

**Anna Madden** 36:10

And you know, what, they're not any different to each other as far as how good they are at what they do. They're all as good as one another. They just have different attitudes and different risk levels of risk management. You know, some people can't afford to be the early adopters, because what if it fails? You know, not everyone has the funding to do that. They need to know that this, they're going to kick a goal out of this year. Some people it's just a matter of, well, you know, I've already always done it this way. And it's worked and I don't need to, I'm comfortable with where I am. It's a comfort level as well. So I think there's a whole separate layers, where you're talking, you're talking about, where's my risk profile? Where's my comfort profile? Where's my care factor profile. And not any one of those people lumped in agriculture are any better or any worse than any other, they're all great at what they do. If they weren't, agriculture is not business that they need to be in. And most of them sell up, So And, you know, we need corporates in ag, we need that investment, to make us better, and to become innovators. So I think that, that the kickback and flack that a lot of the bigger corporates or even the small family farmers get, it's really unwarranted, we need the whole range of people in agriculture to get the best out of agriculture, and to actually get that innovation to where we need it to be.

**Oli Le Lievre** 37:49

Yeah, yeah yeah.

**Anna Madden** 37:50

look, agriculture is so exciting. You know, anyone who's watching this, and listening this who wants to come into an industry that's really exciting. AG is the way to go.

**Oli Le Lievre** 38:04

Yeah

**Anna Madden** 38:04

I don't care whether you're, you know, where you're from, you know, whether you're male or female, whether your're old, you know, it's never too late. You know, we're not ageist agriculture. We're all old. So, yeah. Look, it is so exciting. I took some of my son's friends to the cotton conference, they'd duck into, I said come on boys, We're going I'm going to show you what what you're missing out on here. One wanted to be an engineer. One wants to be a merchant banker. I can't remember or the engineer it was engineering and merchant banker. There was another one with us. And he had no interest in agriculture whatsoever. But we ended up finding somewhere for him to fit the engineer came with me and He goes, Oh, my God, I could go into agriculture tomorrow. Like I showed him what we do with the capsules. I showed him the big machinery, the probe, the moisture probes and all the innovation that was there. And he's like, well this is so funny, he was from Melbourne, he'd never had any agricultural experiences apart from meeting the boys at school and going up to their farm Jack who wants to be a merchant banker, he's like, Oh, my God, what do you It's unbelievable. You know, he could see the potential for him in agriculture in an investment. And this really is a place for everyone in agriculture. We certainly need physios and dentists and everyone to come out and support our ag industries and have a great time and move to these little towns that can be so vibrant, if we have great communities around us. So look for anyone who thinks all that's a bit scary no no no. Come and visit us. We're really nice people.

**Oli Le Lievre** 39:47

Well, I think that's part of the social fabric, isn't it? You've got

**Anna Madden** 39:50

Absolutely

**Oli Le Lievre** 39:51

As I was driving through Finley yesterday on the way up I've got a few good mates that live there. And I've played a couple of games of footy and it's there's I don't even know if we're allowed to say it and it's my podcast no, there was the local drunk who was just sitting down at the street, but everyone says G'day, any and he's a friendly fella. And then yeah, there's there's the corporate, there's the nurses, there's the teachers, there's all these different people that we actually need that really I think are I see them as part of being part of agriculture because they are so important to the community and the community wouldn't exist and ag wouldn't thrive without all the ancillary, ancillary people.

**Anna Madden** 40:27

But we can't forgetm, The people in the deli owners, they're part of our agricultural industry as well. They're selling what we produce. And they're really passionate about what they sell.

**Oli Le Lievre** 40:37

Yeah.

**Anna Madden** 40:38

So they're really passionate about what we produce. So a great example of that was my sister lived in Artarmon. And I went into this little local deli. And she went in there most days, and the men would say, "g'day, what can I get you?". And she'd say Hello, I'll have... Anyway I walked in and went, "hey, how's your day?" ... Really well. It's been going great. Thanks for asking. And we got chatting and he wanted to be an olive farmer. And my sister walked out, she goes, Oh my God, I've been going there for years. And he's not ever spoken to me once. I said, Well, you know what, it's the country way, you've just got to remember what you grew up with. But that is a great example of someone right in The city who is a part of agriculture and doesn't even realise it. The local produce manager at Woolworths in Hornsby they're part of Agriculture too because they're displaying proudly what we're producing. So those people in the cities who go oh my god this ag... you know, part of it, everyone is part of it, because we all eat, we all wear clothes.

**Oli Le Lievre** 41:50

You've nailed the definition really of what a human of agriculture is, and what we're trying to do is anyone who's who's passionate about the decisions they make at their little point, wherever that is.

**Anna Madden** 42:01

Absolutely and it's really, really important that people realise that, you know, don't stop and think, you know, are we are those people doing something that's really, you know, that you might think, or perceive it's being bad, but what do you really know about it? You're part of the agricultural spectrum too, you're wearing that cotton, those cotton undies. You know, you've got that cotton shirt t shirt on like, you know, cotton, you know, traceable Australian cotton country road t shirt, or dress or whatever you're wearing or jeans. You know, you've been to cotton on and its BCI cotton wick, you've got that beautiful woollen jumper from wherever, North Face, I don't care, wherever that's been, you know, sustainably choose this system as sustainably as possibly produced for you to wear, you're eating really healthy, fresh food, whether that's the fried chips at the local chippo, you know that cottonseed oil came from somewhere and those potatoes were probably go in somewhere in Australia, by a farmer who's really passionate to give you the best, most sustainable product possible.

**Oli Le Lievre** 43:11

For you, what is it that makes you passionate? And why do you do what you do?

**Anna Madden** 43:15

Becasue I always wants to be better, is do better. That's why I'm passionate, because it's all about positivity, that half full glass that I have, hopefully one day it will tip over.

**Oli Le Lievre** 43:28

And so then why is agriculture the vehicle that you're choosing to have your impact through?

**Anna Madden** 43:33

Don't ask me that. I'm going to tell you because it's what I know. It is what I know. And I probably be passionate about that. Growing beautiful green grass. That's what I I knew and that's what I did, or, you know, being the best possible lawyer or doctor or dentist or whatever it was. I'm just that sort of person. And AG is what I know. And that's what I'm passionate about.

**Oli Le Lievre** 43:56

yeah cool

**Anna Madden** 43:57

Sorry. It isn't a very good answer.

**Oli Le Lievre** 43:59

Well, I think it was a great answer.

**Anna Madden** 44:00

No, it's I think it's really boring. It's actually really does show a great lack of imagination on my behalf. As one of my dad's best friend's mother's used to say, darling, you're so lucky, you know, you can travel I had lack of imagination. I married the boy next door.

**Oli Le Lievre** 44:19

Moved a few districts away.

**Anna Madden** 44:20

I still laugh. That saying from my dad's best friend's mom, who I had a great relationship with.

**Oli Le Lievre** 44:28

So well let's let's spark your imagination a couple of quickfire questions. Because this is the GRDC in conversation podcast. So what's your favourite grain based dish?

**Anna Madden** 44:41

Oh, that's a really hard one. For me. Um, I really love nice, really good fermented pizza base that I've just learnt to cook from coming back in Italy and some beautiful pastas that we ate over there. But of course, you know, I can't go past anice risotto or even really Good corn chips. I actually made cornship flour.

**Oli Le Lievre** 45:04

Add that to the bucket list. Who'd be three people, if you could have anyone past present around for dinner, we say for freshly, freshly made cornchips, who would you have?

**Anna Madden** 45:16

both my grandfather's

**Oli Le Lievre** 45:19

And a third

**Anna Madden** 45:21

That's really horribly hard question. I can't actually pick one because there's I've got so many great people in my life, and I want to have them around.

**Oli Le Lievre** 45:31

So you're having a party instead.

**Anna Madden** 45:32

But you know what, actually, I lied. I have all my grandparents for dinner, and I couldn't I don't know which one I could possibly drop out. Because you know, there was such a great influence. They all had agricultural backgrounds. They were all incredible people, whether that be with academic, whether that be their business acumen, whether it be just being the head of the local Red Cross, you know, one of my grandmother's who would always say, so I'm doing, you know, whatever, some of the stories that I've heard about her and what she did, are just incredible. So I'm sorry, it's all my grandparents. So I'm sorry. I would just have to, I would just have to stand up around around the table and be the server

**Oli Le Lievre** 46:24

You just crop in the conversation.

**Anna Madden** 46:26

I'd be the waitress.

**Oli Le Lievre** 46:27

Okay. What's something on your bucket list?

**Anna Madden** 46:29

Something on my bucket list? Ah, do you know what I always wanted to do? Is do a cattle drive in the snowy mountains?

**Oli Le Lievre** 46:38

Oh yeah. You know, I'll just drop mine in here as well. I was thinking about it over Christmas. I'd love to do dog sledding in Alaska.

**Anna Madden** 46:44

Oh, that'd be really good.

**Oli Le Lievre** 46:47

It just popped up on Instagram.

**Anna Madden** 46:48

I'm dying to go so we took a train fast train through Tuscany and Umbria and I'm dying to go and stay on a farm and get to know a farming family that I did that in Wales. When I was in my 20s. I went to and stayed at the young Welsh, head of the young welsh farmers associations farm. And I milked cows at four o'clock in the morning and four o'clock at night so two dark milkings because it was winter. And I got to know this family and they were just beautiful. And I want to do that in the I want to do that in a lot of countries.

**Oli Le Lievre** 47:22

Yeah.

**Anna Madden** 47:23

That's the first one I want to go to because it's so beautiful.

**Oli Le Lievre** 47:26

That is cool. We're able to speak the same language as them or was it

**Anna Madden** 47:31

they spoke Gaelic... When they didn't want me to know what they were talking about, but and you know, they that was their first language, obviously, but they know I could speak they all spoke English they'd been to boarding school. So, you know, that was really good. That was really fun.

**Oli Le Lievre** 47:49

And so one final question. If there was a, I'll say a type of person or someone in particular that you think is someone who we should really chat to? Have You Got someone in mind or type of person who might?

**Anna Madden** 48:02

Yeah actually I do. But I'm not going to say it on on. I'm going to tell you privately later, because I'm not going to put her out there.

**Oli Le Lievre** 48:09

Okay.

**Anna Madden** 48:10

Actually, there's two of them. I think they will be really good. But one in particular, I think would be fantastic. She's She's a real. She's someone that I look up to. And she's quite a bit younger than me.

**Oli Le Lievre** 48:23

Well, that's cool. Can I ask? So without giving away? What is it about it? What are the characteristics that make her so remarkable?

**Anna Madden** 48:32

the fact that she walked into something that she probably that no one expected her to do. That she came from a very traditional family. Yet she's doing she's gone into something that would be probably perceived as not the norm. But I think that she's the start of potentially, this sort of thing happening more often. And I really want her to see her succeed so that more families do succession planning like this

**Oli Le Lievre** 49:08

cryptic I'm intrigued. Well, Anna, thank you so much for joining us and having a chat. Hopefully you've enjoyed it.

**Anna Madden** 49:14

It's great. Thank you so much Oli.

**Oli Le Lievre** 49:16

it's been great to sit here in your backyard.

**Anna Madden** 49:18

It's lovely here, isn't it? I need to get the boys on to this tiling job that they haven't done yet.

**Oli Le Lievre** 49:24

Thank you.