GRDC In Conversation - Tony Lockrey

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**SPEAKERS**

Tony Lockery, Oli Le Lievre

**Oli Le Lievre** 00:00

Well

**Tony Lockery** 00:01

Straight down the barrel, hey?

**Oli Le Lievre** 00:02

Yeah, yeah we're another victim.

**Tony Lockery** 00:08

I'm not sure what to who I owe this pleasure. Anyway, that's cool. I reckon you do great work. So I'm happy to be involved. I think it's good.

**Oli Le Lievre** 00:16

Well, I think were we cross paths was Moree Young Aggies, the ball

**Tony Lockery** 00:20

And Susie's crusty old dog kicking around with the young people.

**Oli Le Lievre** 00:23

Mate that was. That was a tough gig that night. I don't know how I signed myself up for that.

**Tony Lockery** 00:29

It's like there's yeah everyone's at a party. They don't want to even sing Happy Birthday. They just want to party all night. It was Shanna Whan, Shanna Whan did it the year before and she struggled.

**Oli Le Lievre** 00:39

Yeah.

**Tony Lockery** 00:39

And then within six months, she was Australian of the Year. So look out mate, like you never know what could happen to you.

**Oli Le Lievre** 00:45

I can tell you where I'm where I'm heading. And it's not. Not not the calibre of Shanna. But it it's an interesting community here. There's a heck of a great young presence and young crew getting out Moree.

**Tony Lockery** 00:58

Yep. No a really good vibe. And it's been like the drought was a big blow. Like we'd lost a lot of people. And then since then it's been building so just got more and more people in more action. It rained pretty well for three years. So we grew summer and winter crops overlapping the whole way through. So there's been really good. You know, it's a moisture fed industry, basically agriculture here. So yeah, we've had that opportunity. And this year was looking down the barrel of a drought and all of a sudden it rains again. BOM got it wrong again. And then we're on.

**Oli Le Lievre** 01:29

What is it about Moree you reckon as a community that? Yeah, what is the vibe for people who have never come to northern New South Wales here and experienced Moree, What's it like?

**Tony Lockery** 01:37

I don't know. It's a real dichotomy, because you'll hear so many different stories about Moree. And the further away you go, the more often you hear the bad stories. But it is a great community, and it's particularly a good farming community. So it's, we talk about agriculture, well, it's a culture, that's part of what we're into. And we really like so the production that comes out of this area, the opportunities that people have had to, to get into agriculture and carve out a career, carve out a fortune in some cases, has been yeah, there's a lot of those stories. So it's, there is that that level of not quite pioneer spirit, but it's definitely you're up against it. And it's it's tough work, but really good rewards. And because you're doing it together. It's a great thing to, you know, to be in a community where blokes want to play footy together and want to get together and do other things support the community. Yeah.

**Oli Le Lievre** 02:28

SO GRDC have listeners right across Australia, so people from Western Australia right across, can you tell us a little bit about the farming and the soils in this area? Yep. So

**Tony Lockery** 02:37

Yep so we we farm in every direction for 100k. So it's a very productive area, we're mostly on eluvial soils are heavier clay soils, cracking soils, but we do have some loamy stuff we've got, you know, plenty of silt near the river. Our soils hold 150 to 250 mils of stored moisture. So that's our bank that we farm. So quite often in the dryland or rain fed part of our agriculture where we'll be monitoring that checking how much moisture we build up in the soil before we decide on a crop rotation. We can grow summer and winter crops. So we've got the weather that we can do both so we can flexibility if we miss the summer crop we can roll into a winter crop. We're predominantly grain and cotton so grain and oilseed, I should say. Nah, I'll say that again. We grow. We grow everything. No we don't. We grow we grow cereals, pulses and oilseeds, as well as cotton they're our main crops. So an irrigated area is dominated by cotton just at the moment because that's what's making the most return in terms of dollars per megalitre. We also have some some tree crops so some citrus and pecan nuts in the valley and they're on our security water, they you know beautiful eluvial soils. So we can grow a crop definitely can grow our crop. Our rainfall is probably a little bit winter dominant so our winter crop is a more secure one, but we have the ability to grow summer crop and that helps us rotate out of you know, weed or disease issues that we've got.

**Oli Le Lievre** 04:10

And so you farming as well yourself on the side?

**Tony Lockery** 04:13

Yep, yeah I've got a little handkerchief patch that 30 ks west of town on the river. And I just love being I love farming and we run some cattle as well. So I've grown most of the crops that are grown in the district, we've grown at home. There's a couple we haven't ticked off yet. But yeah, we're running a rotation. So when it comes around to a break crop, we might we might grow some canola and and some faba beans. We haven't grown them yet.

**Oli Le Lievre** 04:36

Keeps you honest at the at the pub, you're not just giving the advice you're.

**Tony Lockery** 04:39

Yeah it does and I'm really happy I don't have a fishbowl block that everyone's looking at so they can see my mistakes. But it definitely gives you a little bit of credit that you've you know, you've got a crop in as well and you're sort of in the same game.

**Oli Le Lievre** 04:51

Yeah, just a trial is how you can phrase that one yeah.

**Tony Lockery** 04:54

Yeah, that'd be good tax deduction, mate yeah research farmer.

**Oli Le Lievre** 04:58

Mate, tell me why agronomy? What was it that drew you into it?

**Tony Lockery** 05:01

I loved being outside I was fascinated by insects and plants, especially as a kid. So I was the youngest of six, I spent a heap of time just exploring outside climbing trees down the creek, turning rocks over to see what was living under it. Oh, I thought I'd discover a new insect or something that no one else had seen. So I had that interest in the back of my mind, but just as a general interest, I guess, love going outside, riding motorbikes, shooting, whatever. Dad went through Hawkesbury Ag College. So he would, I'd look at a grass species, and he'd tell me its scientific name, it's Latin name, and I'd go, oh wow, that's cool. Not too many people know the Latin name of a weed, you know. So that was of interest as well. Mum was about fifth generation in the New England, grazing, family Merino, mainly grazing country. So there was definitely some farming in the blood. love being outside love being out of town, basically. So definitely want to end up on a farm.

**Oli Le Lievre** 05:05

So what did your old man do?

**Tony Lockery** 05:56

He was an ag science teacher.

**Oli Le Lievre** 05:59

Yeah right.

**Tony Lockery** 05:59

He grew up in St. Mary's in Sydney.

**Oli Le Lievre** 06:01

Yeah.

**Tony Lockery** 06:02

Went to Canterbury boys. He was Johnny Howard, and then loved spending his holidays on a on a good friend's dairy. So he was mad keen on cattle and chooks and went to Hawkesbury Ag College, went through there, came up to Armadile and did Teacher's College after that. And then it was an ag science teacher.

**Oli Le Lievre** 06:19

There you go, because you went to University of New England didn't you?

**Tony Lockery** 06:22

Yeah yeah yep, I went to Armidale, yeah.

**Oli Le Lievre** 06:24

And I've got here that is interesting story. It wasn't just straightforward for you apply for the first job you get. And you kind of in and off in your career. You had, like it wasn't easy just to step into the workforce.

**Tony Lockery** 06:37

No there was a lot of graduates at the time. I did think and I think I reflect I probably was a little bit overconfident that I was a shoe in for a job because I'd worked. You know, I'd come off a grazing farm, I decided I was very strategic. I went, I wanted to take a gap year. So I went and worked in I wanted to go west work on some farming country. So I worked on a large wheat sheep place and then on an irrigated cotton place. So I thought I've got some practical experience. I'm gonna put that together with a degree and I'll be employable. You know. During my degree, I went back out to Warren and did a thesis, honours thesis in cotton IPM in cotton, so I thought I was tracking pretty well. And then I don't know there was probably 50 graduates applying for five cotton jobs at the time. So I went and applied for all five of them and didn't get through and what, that's interesting. Wasn't sure why, but yeah, they all had a reason some of them were probably the most common was we don't want to employ someone straight out of uni. You've got the cred, but we just think we'd like something a bit more settled. Which just made me determined that the first job I got I would work three years minimum just slogg it out and make sure that I gave back. You know what I'd been the opportunity I've been given I guess so. Yeah, I was working on my thesis over the Christmas holidays and a fax came through to the agronomy department. No one else saw that fax it was dropped in front of me. Are you interested in this and I went sure I'll apply for that. And I drove myself to Bundaberg to have the interview because I was pretty keen and turned out later that no one else had seen that job advertised that was only one fax that went through to the agronomy department at Armidale and I picked it up so, when I got there they were like we're not sure that we actually do have a job but come and have a yarn to us anyway.

**Oli Le Lievre** 08:20

Were you hell bent on cotton or did you did with those couple of setbacks you thought I'm just I just want to do agronomy? And that Bundaberg rage and I well I. I've never been but I'm so fascinated by it because it just has such an interesting spread of everything.

**Tony Lockery** 08:26

Nah I just wanted to be in agriculture. I was actually hell bent on being a beef farmer. I was really keen on stud cattle or showing bulls at the Ekka and the Royal and I was definitely going to be a cattleman and I just realised partway through that that I was never going to own a farm getting paid 30 or 50 bucks a day doing what I was doing. So I looked around there's definitely jobs in Ag in agronomy, there was better pay in agronomy. And I thought that there was a chance to make a career there and then buy a farm. Well nationalities, crops. Geography so I think I checked in one week I checked 50 different crops there.

**Oli Le Lievre** 09:09

Yeah right.

**Tony Lockery** 09:10

And you could come home with five different veggies and a couple of watermelons and this in the back of the ute at the end of the day. Yeah and a ginger beer. And maybe a slip passed the rum, especailly on the weekend. Frequent fliers. So no we were checking all sorts of small crops in in a trickle irrigated tomatoes caps melons squash, zucchinis, snow peas, you know cherry tomatoes and then we go duck into a greenhouse that was growing tomatoes or eggplant or Lebanese cucumbers go to a macadamia plantation and then run through a couple of cane farms on the way home so you just such a big diversity of crop you know in terms of registrations and products that could be used and pesta that we were dealing with. It was very good grounding in IPM and nutrition in irrigation management on sand lot of Sandy country That was just all the things that I'd learned at uni I thought wow that I actually initially thought they have undercooked me seriously, I did not know enough stuff for this job. And then within three or four months, I realised that the skills that I'd learnt during uni, I couldn't possibly prepare everyone for every job. But the skills I've learned just in researching and understanding a system and managing, you know, a whole suite of crops, from a pest point of view or something of that really good learning.

**Oli Le Lievre** 09:17

And a ginger beer. Because it nearly would have been, like, overwhelming in the sense of 50 different crops straight out of uni. It's not just, I'll say learning how to work and get used to talking to people it was.

**Tony Lockery** 10:37

Yeah, that and I'd worked since I was a kid I always worked Jackaroo like I was roustabouting or spraying thistles or drenching sheep for someone and

**Oli Le Lievre** 10:44

Yeah.

**Tony Lockery** 10:46

Holidays would be away, living on someone's place with them working for them, doing stock work. So I always did that on the family farm. But yeah you never you never know exactly what you're in for actually learning that new job was one of the easier things the other thing that was going on at the time is we just moved to a new house with a eight month pregnant wife that had chickenpox.

**Oli Le Lievre** 11:05

Oh God.

**Tony Lockery** 11:05

So yeah there was plenty happening. We had a little

**Oli Le Lievre** 11:08

How old were you?

**Tony Lockery** 11:09

I was 23.

**Oli Le Lievre** 11:10

Jesus.

**Tony Lockery** 11:13

I've got grandkids, mate. It's all happening at my house hold. We've got an awesome family.

**Oli Le Lievre** 11:17

Holy moley. Like you said, the the first step you got you wanted to stick it three years, sink your, sink your teeth into it. And I guess, build a bit of that credibility. Was did the strategy around your career kind of go beyond that? Like you mentioned the endpoint of wanting to own your own farm. But yeah, what did the early part of your career and what was the thinking going on in the background?

**Tony Lockery** 11:37

Well I don't think I knew enough to strategise heavily. But I knew I wanted to work outside I wanted to be involved in in cropping and agronomy so that that part of it was fulfilling. Also want to look after my family. So I found that at the end of three years, I was away two or three nights a week, had two little kids on the ground then. And I just needed to move out of that scenario or or change something I didn't I had I probably dealt with 15 different nationalities in Bundaberg as well. Like you've got a lot of different cultures and heritages going on there. And not always the straightforward Western culture that I was used to. So I missed that a bit. And I found myself gravitating to that. So I was doing a lot of work in emerald and Darby and Chinchilla, so a lot of the cotton valleys, I was ending up back in doing work. And that's so actually, I, what would you say, I suggested that I open a branch for that company in Dalby on the downs because I was doing a lot of work down that way. And that's what I did. So I ran that for a year and then moved over to a local firm that was happening in a much bigger way down there and doing a lot of cotton and other agronomy. Lot of broadacre work.

**Oli Le Lievre** 12:46

What did you learn in in that in terms of actually putting ideas in front of the business owners and then actually seeing them go, You know what, that's actually a bloody good idea.

**Tony Lockery** 12:55

It was tough because, you know, I'd help them grow their business a lot. It's actually the business that you've interviewed Jack Milbank about so I was a predecessor to Jack in a crop tech. So I got Yeah, Patty Jenkins and John Hall and I had in basically introduced that in virusscan probe the capacitance probe and been running all over the place. We had the lab running and humming. And lots of IPM projects going so John at the time and that business was, was growing so quickly. John's a brilliant individual Penny's a really solid back backstop and operator also agronomy trained. The business was growing overseas already. So he was Oh no, don't, don't go inland like like we're happening in LA we're happening in California, Japan, Spain. The world's your oyster.

**Oli Le Lievre** 13:04

Yeah, right. Yeah.

**Tony Lockery** 13:44

I said mate, it's not I've got a wife and two kids at home. So it was a real, there was definitely some tension there and trying to put that from an agronomy point of view and a business point of view I should have been going overseas and going crazy with the business but I had a family look after so it was that responsibility and and wanting to make the two work I guess that that had me coming up with the idea of either going to Emerald or Dalby. There's an equal amount of work in either. Emerald was just about 10 grand a year dearer to live in at the time because of all the mines around there. So Dalby was the spot, so they they didn't necessarily embrace it straightaway. It was more of a yep we could grow the business down that way. It looks like you you really want to go that way rather than you know, punch overseas. So.

**Oli Le Lievre** 14:25

So how did you end up down around Moree, here?

**Tony Lockery** 14:28

Probably Probably a similar thing. I then developed the broadacre business for the company I work for which was tags in Dalby, which is an awesome again, family owned business. When I joined it was pretty well a cotton business. So they did cotton work on every farm but not the broadacre work. So my remit I guess was to build the broadacre business. I think about the year I left. I was there about eight years the year I left the broadacre business went past the cotton business so we we grew it well. We had some big years and we had some tough ones. But again, I found I now had four kids and they were all at school, the last one was about to start school. Six weeks of the summer holidays that they were home, I was hardly there. I was just checking cotton flat out, and other crops. So again, it was a family choice to, to look for something that was more still, still agronomy, still cropping still, you know, in a similar area, but the business I bought into down here was mainly a broader business. So it wasn't dealing with irrigated cotton at the time, and I should say, mate, irrigated cotton back then, like late, late 90s, less extended early 2000s. We were checking those crops three times a week, we had bedbug checkers in the ute, we were spraying them, you know, 10 to 15 times a year, it was intense, there was no ball guarding guard, Roundup Ready, it was just full on. So now to be back at checking crops three times a fortnight and not being as concerned about how many white eggs per leaf we have in the crop at any one time, certainly a lot more relaxed than it is than it was then.

**Oli Le Lievre** 16:00

I think that's been something which has been so interesting chatting to different people. It's just that advancement in I'll say the in the chemistry but in the genetics and the science that sits kind of behind it, how how much it actually has really changed people's lives. Yesterday, we were looking at a bankless irrigation system and what that actually then allows instead of five or six staff you'tr back to one to do it, innovations just across everything.

**Tony Lockery** 16:24

And the changes that we've seen in this industry have have all been driven by, you know, we're up against, we're always up against it. So it's, we need to become more efficient all the time. We just can't sit still. And I've had the privilege to go to the States and other areas where they grow cotton and in a less pressured environment. They got crop insurance, if they don't grow the crop, they still get paid. And they just can't understand how we can grow the yields. We can they actually don't believe us. Some of them they like is that every like you grow 16 bales every two hectares or every hectare. It's like no every hectare. Well what are you growing? We can get up to eight.

**Oli Le Lievre** 16:56

Yeah. Wow.

**Tony Lockery** 16:57

And so they haven't haven't had that pressure to innovate to change to keep moving ahead of the curve, I guess all the way through. So yeah, I think the Australian cotton industry is as cohesive and innovative as any industry I've seen.

**Oli Le Lievre** 17:10

I'd love to know how's that, I guess yeah, as you said before the the efficiency and the the profitability of cotton has has really driven water use in and around this area. How's the grains industry benefited from I guess that that pressure and that competition that cotton's brought to the table?

**Tony Lockery** 17:27

Well we talked a little bit before about the community and the vibe I think that that cotton industry brings a vibe to a valley as well so there's innovative growers they're looking at their cotton and go oh wow, we've we've advanced a new variety every two years you know, we've got we're using 98% less chemical than we used to we're using half the water like we're really kicking goals here. The tension also goes to all the other crops and that they're growing on the farm. No one's just a cotton grower, no one is just a grain grower, we're all growing, you know, most crops and have the opportunity to so I think that that that drive to innovate and improve and become more efficient, more profitable, more sustainable all at once. Like it's you can never just focus on one thing and run with it. It's it's all encompassing, that transfers in everything else we do so we learned something you know, with nitrogen efficiency and wheat, we'll bring that back into cotton if we learn something with IPM in cotton we take that back to mungbeans or we take it back to sunflowers, you know like we it's a whole system we just improving wherever we can and adapting and applying it wherever we can.

**Oli Le Lievre** 18:28

I think what was really interesting was that we were chatting with Steve Madden, and he was talking about the crop capsule piece, but that the way they're using the beneficials in the crop and distributing it. Yeah. Learned in cotton, starting trials, the GRDC in canola around aphids and things like it's it is that true, Yeah, I guess marry in. Yell me a little bit more about your business hear about your team and like what is it here in Moree that makes AMPS successful?

**Tony Lockery** 18:49

Yeah so going right back to Bundaberg in the greenhouses. That's where I first use that technology where we were able to control what came in and out of those greenhouses to a certain extent. So we would release predatory mites and white fly parasites and other things in that greenhouse on leaves like on soybean leaves all the time. So you get a little canister like a Pringles canister, pop that open pop your Pringle and you'd have 100 Soybean leaves in there with predatory mites on it, and you'd go around and just paperclip them up to a tomato plant in the greenhouse. So it was cool. Yep. So AMPS started 25 years ago this year, it was started by a group of growers that wanted to get closer research to home they wanted to see trials in their own farm and be able to learn from that and it was the research lead and then the commercial side of it followed that so rather than charging each other themselves, I guess like they had to work out how to best fund that. So they they started a commercial business to buy all their inputs through so then it would be in relationship to what area they farmed that they would spend and then percentage of that profit goes into research every year. So that AMPS hasn't always well, this business hasn't always been AMPS. It was originally Buy Smart Ag that the business I bought into. And then in 2011, we sold two AMPS or return to shareholding in AMPS. And we welcomed that research addition to the business basically. So we had a good agronomy and supply business. But we've now got an awesome combination of that with our own research. And it's driven the research is driven by our growers and our product consultants in this valley, and in each Valley. And yeah, we've set about finding people that are, yeah, we try and everyone does, but we try and pick the crop of the young graduates and and show them what we can achieve in the paddock I guess and how that involvement in research brings them to the forefront of what's happening in commercial agriculture as well. So they like these young blokes you've seen here today. And Amy, who's away on holidays, they're all involved in looking at trials for the season. We're looking at varieties or a number. The next year we're putting 20 tonne of that out the paddock and growing paddocks full of that variety because it ticks all the boxes that we've assessed it for, I guess, over the last two years, three years.

**Oli Le Lievre** 21:11

Is there one that leads and the other follows like between the research and the commercial side or like. And maybe initially versus.

**Tony Lockery** 21:19

It's a really good question. I think it's I think it's a cycle, I really do like it, you could we could take off and put branches everywhere and put flags on the map or dots on a map. And we would just be another commercial supplier and agronomy company. So we won't progress without research. Because we know it's one of the you know, it's a really core founding principle of our business. But also it's something that provides so much value and vice versa. We've got growers that would definitely love research to be in their backyard. And we've explained to them well, this is the model. It's paid for by commercial investment. So it sticks together.

**Oli Le Lievre** 21:19

Is it scalable?

**Tony Lockery** 21:33

Yes, certainly is. Yeah.

**Oli Le Lievre** 21:56

And so are you guys operating across other other regions and geographies?

**Tony Lockery** 22:00

We've expanded from one branch to six Yep, in 25 years. And we have absolutely we look at other areas, we get requests from other areas. All the time. We're not looking in WA or Victoria at the moment, but we will certainly look to within our reach to expand

**Oli Le Lievre** 22:16

Good part of the world.

**Tony Lockery** 22:16

For the sake of our growers. Yeah, like they want it.

**Oli Le Lievre** 22:19

And I think what what would be interesting if people do want to know more is that they can reach out to you guys and have a yarn and find out if there's growers or Agros, or whoever it might be that people are only hearing about it for the first time.

**Tony Lockery** 22:29

Yeah, that's right.

**Oli Le Lievre** 22:30

Be good to reach out. Let's chat about young people because it's something that you're pretty bloody passionate about. I have here that there's a little bit of a ground truth in the importance of networks and mentoring. Why is that such a focus and well not even a focus, a passion for you?

**Tony Lockery** 22:48

Yeah, I reckon and going back to when it was three or four knock backs on job applications. Like I'll never knock back a work experience kid or like we have kids as young as year nine that come in here and jump in the ute for a week and we show them the best of what we can show them and we show them all of it. Like we don't hide anything. I think I was blessed to have some really good mentors. The first one was my dad who'd done ag science and was teaching this stuff and knew it and then Hally and in Bundaberg, you know, guys that I worked with in Dalby, Mas and others and and there's always been if you'll open yourself up and humble yourself enough to approach people and say, oh mate, any chance I could jump in the ute with you for a day and just learn some stuff. And in when you first do that you're not giving them anything really, they're only doing it because they want a legacy they want to be able to pass on what they're learning. But there's such a I mean it's a community thing we're built for community it's something that we can can grow and accelerate our learning so quickly by a bumping into people in our network that are peers and and you know, just rubbing shoulders with them and learning from each other, not making the same mistakes learning what the new things are that are happening. And then also having mentors that are that can save you so much time and teach you the smarts that aren't written down anywhere that aren't on a label and in some ways that those older mentors also is more around the human space that you deal in and so well and that's just understanding people a bit better and how to deal with them you know you can have the best technical mind and an aptitude but you can cock up a relationship really quickly if you're if you don't treat people well or don't understand their attitude to risk or their Yeah, that's you know, how they operate what their farm culture is and you can you can do the wrong thing pretty quickly you drive on a fallow paddock or or drive over the top of the contour bank and leave a deep track and you know, you can get a fair roasting. So just understanding some of those things but young people i guess i i mean I'm I love having fun. I love stirring up young people I love being stirred up. I was the youngest of six so

**Oli Le Lievre** 24:58

Yeah.

**Tony Lockery** 24:58

I hang out more with my nieces and nephews and with my brothers and and sisters at times at family get togethers so that we're always looking for something fun to do. So that's part of how I operate I guess. And, and I like that energy that comes with young people and I love seeing the, the moments when they get it. Yeah. And they dig in. And in the moments when they actually slog it out as well, you know, like you're seeing people commit and hook in and you just want to encourage that.

**Oli Le Lievre** 25:24

You know, it's interesting, and something's probably you talked about that, that human side, and probably that realisation I've had one I reckon in the last week, and it's like, well, not every, not every farmers out here to be a top 10 20% grower. And those people who are the pioneers are just as important as the people who are doing it for the lifestyle or doing it for because yes, it's what they love and enjoy, because they still make up the fabric of the community. And I think that's something which is really highlighted to me where I think of, yeah, you want agriculture to be front and centre and leading the way but at the same time to community, such huge

**Tony Lockery** 26:00

Not at the expense of the people involved. Yeah it's got to be, it's got to be giving value and like, it's not easy. We know that it's not always easy, but there's some absolute gems of times that you get to spend with people. And sometimes it's planned, sometimes it's unexpected, you know, and and also just getting to see into people's lives that you don't, it's an absolute privilege, you know, when you're on farm, and you're the only person that they've seen for a week, and you they, you know, they might unload on you, or they might just have something that's really bloody funny that they haven't been able to tell anyone all week, on the balls of their feet because they got to tell someone you know, something stupid that happened or anything you know, so it's, it's our privilege to be on their farm and interacting with them and, and it's our responsibility to understand them well, and you know, get the most out of their farming system, not just agronomically, but from their family and human side of it as well. Yep.

**Oli Le Lievre** 26:02

Yeah. Well, here's one that I've been sitting on, because I found it so funny, Hannah has joined our team this week. And last night, we were coming back from dinner with a couple other people and someone's like, righto, well, we've seen kangaroos, we've seen emus. It's like well righto, we'll try and find you a pig. Within about 10 seconds. As the lights come over the hill, there's a pig just standing in the middle of the road. And it's the funniest thing like ever. That I think is for me, like that's one memory that will probably just stay.

**Tony Lockery** 27:19

Yeah, spoken into being.

**Oli Le Lievre** 27:21

Yeah yeah yeah, put it out there. And it'll come. The Talk to me about the men's campfire dinners and the

**Tony Lockery** 27:29

Yep

**Oli Le Lievre** 27:30

That community that has been created.

**Tony Lockery** 27:32

Yeah a couple of things. So I think from just having a heart for, for people and wanting to be involved and and seeing people hurting and wanting to help them, I realised, probably, I think it was 17 I started that there just wasn't a place for blokes to get together. If they weren't playing footy or involved in other sport, then it was often quite a long trek between times that they would get to catch up with someone, you know, a lot of us are blessed with really good mates, that you can just pick up the phone, and they're half a country away. But you can pick up where you were, or you can unload or you can learn or you can spin a good yarn. And remember some good old times, but not everyone's got that and and we're always faced with new challenges as well. So you're not sitting still, there's always new stuff coming at you. So I just, it was through our church that we thought, How about and, I guess I drove it. And I hosted it. So we did it at home, we probably had, I don't know, for three or four years, we would once a month on a Saturday night, I'd just cook a barbecue. And we have a coffee and a feed and we sit down around the fire blokes aren't good at, you know, eye-to-eye, crying and hugging, they're really good at not looking at each other. sitting side by side, if it if there's low light that's even better. There's something else to look at. But we've just had some really good conversations and often we'll just lead it off with you know, this is what's happening or what do you think about this or we don't we don't talk about politics much we don't we definitely don't judge and we're very confidential we make sure that this is not a gossip joint, this is blokes trying to help blokes and if you share something here this is where it stays and we're going to learn from it but we can also encourage you through it. So it's really just it's it's an overused phrase but it's doing life together but at a much higher level emotionally and and almost spiritually I would say so that ability to get together like that just was gold and I still we we didn't get to do much of it obviously through COVID We've done a few sinice but not enough I've just been flat out and I really want to kick it off again this year. But I've probably had an equal number of wives as well as blokes say to me Oh, when are you going to kick that off again, Tony? And I went yeah, okay. So that not only did they value it, the blokes, but there was value that their their hubbies were going there which I thought yeah, that's got to happen.

**Oli Le Lievre** 29:48

How those different stories and and I guess Yeah, going from the point of wanting to start something to help people, how's it actually shaped your perspective, the understanding of community of just the people who you interact with Every kinda day?

**Tony Lockery** 30:01

Yeah that's a good one. I think, I don't know, I guess my view on life is we're all individually unique, we're all highly valued as individuals. So giving everyone that value when you meet them, whether they look like they need it, they deserve it or not, that doesn't matter. Like we're looking through all that and just going you you've got good value, what's happening in your life. So that's part of it. We all we all migrate or enjoy being part of a tribe or a community. Like I said, it might be a footy club, it might be a grower group, it's, it might be your family. So we all like to have people around that that can affirm us, but also correct us at times. We've all got a spiritual aspect that we probably often don't recognise. So we do have a soul that lives on forever. And that's part of the deeper part of us that I think we need to get in touch with sometimes, and we don't even understand it really, certainly in modern society, we don't. But we do feel that when we, when we connect with someone, we definitely notice that and understand that that's a good thing. So I guess that's, it's just enhanced the some of the relationships that you get to, to enjoy, it also means that you hear a lot of stuff that you probably could weigh yourself down with. And I think that's something else that we all need is a way of unloading that so not holding it not carrying it around. So that's important. And I say that to any agronomists, you often, you start out in a technical career, you often end up in some form of counselling career as part of that. You can't take that home, you can't offload that on your family. That's not fair. You know, you can't carry it forever yourself. It's too heavy. So you got to you've got to have a way of processing that and offloading it and understanding that that's their life at the moment. And you've actually helped them by just being there and listening. So that's yeah, I guess that was another learning from it as well. And, and, and that probably leads into to the rugby club to that chaplaincy work I do at the rugby club. It's a very similar thing. Like I'm not there to absolutely flip anyone's world upside down I'm just there to listen, and have yarn and, and maybe give a few points from across the bloke that's been through, you know, some of that. Not all of it.

**Oli Le Lievre** 32:07

Tell me more about that. What are you doing then at the footy club?

**Tony Lockery** 32:09

So I'm the chaplain at the club. I' have bee, for since 2017. I love my rugby was involved in it when I was a young bloke played for Bundy, Bundaberg and Dalby. We had our B grade Captain coach committed suicide the night before our first game 2017 I reckon it was. The club president at the time Kingy rang sports chaplaincy Australia, and said, Can we please get some some people up here? Sports chaplaincy rang our church and said, all our humans are at the Commonwealth Games at the Gold Coast, we just don't have anyone is there anyone in your church that loves rugby, and would be happy to go out to the rugby club. So three of us shot straight out there. And just, we'd all had some level of association with the club or with the sport, whether it's Junior Senior, whatever, when you know, most of hte blokes between us we knew all of them. So it was just really a time of grieving together as a club, and a rugby community. And from that I stayed on, I wanted an excuse to be involved in rugby, still, I couldn't play the game. So I was like, Oh, this is a cool way to still be involved and help. So I think it's yeah, probably six years now that that I've been involved and. And that role is has been a very, very occasional role as in I'm not, I'm probably get to training once a week, and I'll get to every second game or a bit more. But I keep in touch with the players as much as I can. I don't interrupt training and give them a devotion or anything like that. I just hang back catch up with people as they come or go. someone's injured and they're by the sideline, I'll have a good yarn to them, you know, and often, I reckon in that first year, it was more talking to the older blokes that were involved in the club that that were shook as much as the as the players were by what was going on. So yeah, we've had some tough times since then, occasionally. And it's just been nice to be. It's been a real privilege to be involved and to be able to lead them through another time of grieving when we lost another bloke and yeah, we've had some other stuff going on there that you just, you're pleased that you've been there, and you've got some skill that you can help with. I guess that's all.

**Oli Le Lievre** 34:16

Yeah, I want to ask you what it was like, the role that you have, I guess, in the community, as other people would have known before that time would have been we know Tony, he's the fellow the other agro, whatever it might be turning up in, what's a pretty different role in the community is it was that like, something that you had to balance or not even be mindful of but just yeah, the Tony, who might be the knockabout bloke, actually, Tony's here coming out in a hugely empathetic way and kind of doors open?

**Tony Lockery** 34:50

I would hope that they saw the same bloke.

**Oli Le Lievre** 34:52

Yeah.

**Tony Lockery** 34:52

Because I do remember having a bit of an identity crisis when I was about 15 thinking that I was actually a different kid on the bus than I was at school than I was at church on Sunday than I was on the soccer field on Saturday like I was, I was very good chameleon, like, I would fit in with that bunch really, and really tight. And then I'd be in another situation socially, and I'd fit that bunch really tight

**Oli Le Lievre** 35:17

Gotcha.

**Tony Lockery** 35:17

So I was changing all the time to fit into that crowd. So I guess I learned that lesson early and just decided I had to be me. Yeah, wherever it was, I just had to be the same bloke and live out the same character and ethics and whatever, you know. So yeah, there shouldn't be any surprises. But yeah, it is different. It's definitely a different role. But I can move easily between the three, you know, like a, an agronomy, and chaplaincy and whatever other role I'm very comfortable with, with the situations and you know, and the overlaps huge, you know, you see the same bloke on the footy field at training, you've just checked his crop for him, and you're talking to his old man.

**Oli Le Lievre** 35:23

Yeah yeah yeah.

**Tony Lockery** 35:48

You see him at the pub as well, when you go down and catch up with him and and the pub. It's like, oh, he's a chaplain, he goes to the pub, but I don't drink heavily. I had an older brother who was an alcoholic, and I saw what that can do to people. So I'm very much a four pot, sit back and catch up and have a yarn to people I actually like that atmosphere. It's when people do open up a bit sometimes. So it's yeah, it's good to sit around here.

**Oli Le Lievre** 36:18

Absolutely. I want to talk to you about the helicopter accident. Before I get to that, I would love to know, like, what role is faith, And obviously, you mentioned the church and the chaplains. What role has faith had in your life? And how has that shaped you?

**Tony Lockery** 36:31

It's a good question mate. It's, I guess, it's given me that internal perspective. So I, I'm a firm believer in God created this earth that we're kicking around on, like, it's just too random that it could have happened by accident.

**Oli Le Lievre** 36:42

Yeah.

**Tony Lockery** 36:43

So I see him in everything that I deal with on a daily basis, you know, I see a sunset or a rainstorm, or a or an animal or a crop, you know, I don't, I don't look at it and go, geez, I wonder how that happened. You know, I see a plan, I see designing stuff. So that's, and then to me, and in my I guess upbringing, I understood that there's that we have a soul or a spirit it carries on after the short time that we spend on Earth. So you want to get that sorted, I reckon like you want to know where that's going. I think it says in, in Matthew, it says, don't fear death, fear, the fear the bloke after death that sends you to heaven or hell. So that's that perspective has always been with me. I'm not scared to die. I mean, I value life very highly. And enjoy it and have, you know, feel the privilege of being here. But so I guess that's, that's given me some perspective in everything else I do. And I think the other thing that's a big part of that is, I talked about it before unloading stuff. So Jesus said, Come on to me, if you're heavy burden heavy loaded, and I'll My burden is light. Like, it's, it's not that hard, because you can look at everything you've done in the past that cock ups, the good stuff, whatever you can park that, like you said, I can put that away, it's done. You don't have to carry that you don't have to stress about what happened before and what you did or whatever, just, you know, forgive and forget. And you're also not looking into the future that far either. Because you can sit here today and rob yourself of today because you're so stressed about tomorrow. He says, Don't worry about that. It's sorted. It's organised. So you will be fed, you will be clothed. That's alright. So to be able to just live in the moment live in the day and not be carrying, you know, everything from the past or stressing about the future. I think that gives you some freedom. I guess that's how I carry carry myself in life. I guess that's how. Doesn't always work like that. You definitely get bogged down and you're definitely forget and and stress.

**Oli Le Lievre** 38:40

What an incredible place to come from.

**Tony Lockery** 38:41

Yeah, that gives me the base of the platform. I guess that I live off. Yeah.

**Oli Le Lievre** 38:46

That's incredible. Tell me about the chopper accident you're out, doing some pest control, talk me talk me through the moments in the lead up to the crash.

**Tony Lockery** 38:56

Yep standard, standard day like probably, I don't know. For 15 years I've been involved in in feral pig eradication out of the chopper and other means as well. It was a standard early morning start load up. I think we shot 130 Odd pigs that morning on a couple of farms. We were just working our way up a creek line. We had a mob that was moving out into the paddock under some power lines so we were pushing them out under the powerlines we were holding off waiting to get them through the power lines to engage them I guess would be the technical term. Clean them up two pigs broke away to boards broke off that mob and headed back, you know towards the scrub we'd push them out of and we just spun left to pick them up before they hit the scrub line. We we'd gone further than we thought and came back to it or come back further than we thought sorry. And the powerline that we were looking at out in front of us that went across us that actually the next poll it angled back under us. So we just clipped the top wire sorry, we picked up both wires but just with the bottom of one skid. So we both felt the the tug, I guess or the the pull on the chopper. I looked down there was two wires, you know hooked on the skid and I went hmmm right. And I had peace in that moment, I went righto, well, I'm either going to heaven or I'm still on earth you decide big fella, I'm I'm in your hands. Very obviously it happened very quickly. I had a very skilled pilot who, who pulled us out of that situation. But we still ended up hitting the ground but not as hard as we could have. We hit spun, thrashed around, like those helicopters are always fighting themselves. There's a lot of momentum spinning around there. So we jostled around a bit and we're both gratefully very still alive and alert and, and chatting to each other as soon as we hit the deck. So a lot of noise, a lot of a lot of action, but I was hanging out the door as I do shooting so my knee drove into the ground, and I popped my hip and broke some part of my pelvis. The funny thing is, you're allowed that funny things in these accidents mate, was my as an agronomist, you know, my shotgun went into the ground and had about a 10 inch mud core inside the barrel. So I was definitely soil testing on the job. But the other end of the shotgun went into my ribs and busted a few of them off at the front and the back, sir, was a little bit uncomfortable. But we I don't know what the stats are. I think it's one in, it's a 25% survival rate for chopper accidents. And I was reading lots about them when I was sitting in hospital into 100. But now we as I said, skill pilot bad situation, our fault, definitely human error. But we came out of it extremely well. And in that, yeah, that moment. And then that couple of weeks and the absolute outpouring of love and support from a community that I think some days you just don't know who's backing ya.

**Oli Le Lievre** 41:55

Yeah.

**Tony Lockery** 41:56

And it reminded me and I've had this yarn to the rugby boys sometimes in the change room, you start a marathon, you kick off in the crowd and you're running that marathon most of the time you just run it by yourself. What you don't realise is there's a massive crowd in the stadium watching you on the big screen cheering you even though you can't hear it and and I think that's what life can be like sometimes you get isolated and you're puffing and you're doing it tough, you don't realise that the crowd of people are actually cheering you on in whatever you're doing in your endeavours. So you run into that stadium and you feel it Sure. But not everyone gets that experience. Not everyone gets to hit the deck and survive like a lot of people get crook and die, you know, and these people don't know how to talk to really sick people. They know how to talk to someone who's had an accident survived, they think it's triumphant. And everyone wants to have a yarn to you and you know. So it was. Yeah, I mean, what a what an experience to have to be still alive. Not not looking from above at your own wake, you know, I got to see and chat to the people who valued me as a person which was it was pretty exciting.

**Oli Le Lievre** 42:57

Mate, I love that analogy that is so good. I think this whole conversation there's so many different elements. I think what's really cool is I'll say there's probably parts of I'd say, when I we generally shy away from marrying things up together. I think that you touching on the mental health aspects and and blokes show emotions, the faith side of things. It's it's areas that we probably don't really talk about enough.

**Tony Lockery** 43:22

Nah we're scared, scared to broach it.

**Oli Le Lievre** 43:24

Yeah.

**Tony Lockery** 43:24

Quite often. But to normalise it, yeah it makes it really easy to have conversations around that. And I've got mates that model that to me as well. Like it's not something I've come up with, you know, I've got people in my family and and good mates that'll ring me and go mate how are you going today? And you go why, why, do you care? Like you know, you've got heaps on, I'm flat out like, do you really want to know how I'm going? Yeah, yeah no. How are you going today. Like, yeah, cool. Like that's that's to have that sort of Mates is gold isn't it and to be one of those mates is an aspiration of mine. So I won't show you what's important. Yeah. It's important.

**Oli Le Lievre** 43:59

What's over the hill? What's what's ahead for you both here in the business sense, but also community, everything else that you're involved in?

**Tony Lockery** 44:06

Yeah, so I think, well, I guess to lead on from that accident. And I think that was a strong realisation didn't it wasn't a lightbulb moment, it was more of a gradual realisation that, that I'm definitely past my physical peak amte, which is disappointing because I still thought I was going to play something for Australia, but I'm not sure what, would have to be darts now.

**Oli Le Lievre** 44:25

Bowls.

**Tony Lockery** 44:25

Yeah. Could be. You go through different peaks in life. I talked to an old bloke that said if you're well past your peak mate, you know, you're over the hill and I went like there's so many peaks, you know, like, sure I passed my physical peak when I was 30, or whatever it was 25 Nah it would have to be 35 I reckon. But in terms of peak wisdom, peak knowledge, peak empathy, what is it you know, like, there's so many different things that you can be good at at different times in your life. So you definitely don't want to write yourself off early. I think what I realised after the accident was that I wanted to live the rest of my life in a way that left a legacy rather than said, Look at me. So I definitely felt early on that I was trying to, to prove myself to start with that I, you know, I came off a little farm, I wasn't on a big farm. Yeah, you've come out of the city and you've seen the same thing. It's like, oh, but you're not a big farmer, well you don't have to be to contribute to this agricultural, the whole ecosystem of agriculture, like anyone can contribute that's interested and wants to be involved. So I think I felt definitely felt I was the youngestof six so I was always I was a crash test dummy, you know, they just didn't, wasn't sure if something could work they'd throw me at it first. So I was always trying to prove myself. And then it's in your career you're trying to, you know, not, not show off. You're just trying to be competent. You're just trying to not make mistakes and just do things well and be reliable. And I don't want to not do that. I just think there's ways now that with the experience, I've had both physically workwise emotionally, spiritually, whatever. There's ways that I can help other people and lie a platform for them to go further. That's what it's about you know, you want your kids to be a better version of yourself. You want you know, people that you've helped lead and mentor to kick on and you keep cheering them while they get past you.

**Oli Le Lievre** 44:42

You. You want to get in that stadium. Watch them on the big screen. I'll just sit back. Nah well Tony thank you so much for taking the time to sit down, I've bloody enjoyed this morning's chat.

**Tony Lockery** 46:26

Nah awesome mate, thanks for what you do. I think it's a great it's a great tool to bring, bring this sort of message to people. We get a lot of, as I said earlier, we get a lot of technical information. And that's awesome to get the job done and to earn money and that but it's it is a community. It is a culture, agriculture. And it's important that we that we when we weave that tapestry, it's not all about agronomy. It's not all about money. It's about everything that goes into making that tapestry. So it's part of it mate, you you do it well. Good, on ya.

**Oli Le Lievre** 46:57

Thanks, Tony. Cheers.