# GRDC PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

**EMERGING LEADER: JANA DIXON**

[00:00:05] **Hilary Sims:** This is a GRDC podcast. Each year, the GRDC Emerging Leader Award recognises the commitment of a professional with less than ten years’ experience in the grains industry. At the Adelaide GRDC update event in February 2024, Jana Dixon was presented with the Emerging Leader Award for her work as an agronomy consultant for Pinion Advisory. Since finishing university five years ago, Jana has quickly become a highly regarded agronomic advisor in South Australia's lower and mid-north grain growing regions. I caught up with Jana to hear about her career so far, and what being recognised with the GRDC Emerging Leader Award means to her. Here's Jana.

[00:00:52] **Jana Dixon:** So I did a Bachelor of Agricultural Sciences at the University of Adelaide. I was always very interested in the agriculture industry, especially the grains industry. I grew up on a property just east of the Clare Valley, and thought it was a pathway which opened up so many opportunities, and I always had a very keen interest in science and plants, and especially how growing plants can produce food, which is so important for the world. And throughout that course, I had lots of really awesome opportunities through scholarships and work experiences to get exposed to agronomy as a career path. So once I sort of got a taste of agronomy, I had my eyes set on that as my career, and I was very fortunate to get asked to do some work experience with Rural Directions, which is now turned into Pinion Advisory, where I work now. So for my last two years of uni, I was able to shadow the agronomy team for a day, a week, a day a fortnight, a bit more in my uni holidays, and get a real taste of agronomy outside of the lecture theatre because it's so pretty theoretical at uni. So to be able to have a hands-on role with an agronomist for my last two years of uni was awesome. And then started a graduate position at Rural Directions once I finished uni in the agronomy team. So I've just ticked over five years doing that and making my way up to a fully fledged agronomist and graduating from the graduate program. So it's been awesome.

[00:02:36] **Hilary Sims:** What a fantastic opportunity that was for you in uni to have that exposure to agronomy so early on in your career, is there a particular aspect of agronomy that interests you most?

[00:02:47] **Jana Dixon:** It really is the working with farmers part, dealing with clients and helping them through their decision making. I love the science behind agronomy and understanding the technical aspects of how things work, and then using all that information in the background to help a farmer make a simple decision that's essentially going to make them money is the plan. So I guess the people skills that come with it, distilling down the science and technical information that I get to hear everyday with my job, and then helping farmers make decisions. I don't like to overcomplicate it. For growers, I hope to make it really simple and effective decisions, and that's probably my favourite part.

[00:03:31] **Hilary Sims:** And so what does a typical day in the office look like for you, Jana?

[00:03:34] **Jana Dixon:** So it varies so much different times of years. So most people really working in the agricultural industry would understand this, that it is such a seasonal workflow. So during the growing season it's a lot of paddock work really. So going straight to people's farms and catching up with clients and going across paddocks and making notes on growth stage, and weeds and disease pressure, and making recommendations from that. And talking about long term improvements as well as the short term things, what needs to be sprayed now or what needs to be spread. And then we might sit down after driving around in the ute and go through a nitrogen budget - so look at where the crops fed to at the moment and where we need to be targeting. So doing those sorts of things. So that's mainly the peak season. We do crop plans in the springtime and the autumn time. So spending a bit of time around people's kitchen tables and going through rotations and long term improvements and making plans for the year ahead, which I really enjoy. And now at the moment, it's this sort of funny time, like all the crop plans are done now, we are in April, there's not much paddock work to do because it hasn't rained for so long and I'm just waiting on phone calls from clients to see if they are keen to start dry seeding. So yeah, we've been going through soil test results and spending some time writing newsletters at the moment. So I don't mind the office work knowing that I'm going to get busy in a month or so time.

[00:05:04] **Hilary Sims:** Absolutely. It will all ramp up before too long. So Jana, Pinion Advisory have obviously been sort of the mainstay for your career so far. Who were some of the people who have been positive mentors for you so far in your career?

[00:05:18] **Jana Dixon:** Yeah, I've had lots of really great mentors. I've been very fortunate. So I guess in the agronomy team who have sort of been there right from the get go from when I started my internship at uni is Patrick Redden, another agronomist, agribusiness consultant and general manager. So Pat and also Tony Craddock, who is a senior agronomist and agribusiness consultant and heads up the agronomy team. So they really have been amazing mentors. I feel so fortunate to have spent a lot of time shadowing Pat and Tony and working with them and just some of the underlying principles; life skills, people skills that they're able to share with me. And of course, the technical knowledge that has come from their many years of working as agronomist has been incredible, really. And the rest of the team at Pinion - I do a little bit of work in the farm business team. So we've got a number of awesome business consultants that I'm always chatting with when I've got to do a business case for a client looking at machinery, or go through some benchmarking with the agronomy client. I've got a really great network at work and then also outside of work, so I've been very fortunate.

[00:06:35] **Hilary Sims:** Congratulations on being recognised with the GRDC Emerging Leader Award this year. What does that recognition mean to you?

[00:06:43] **Jana Dixon:** I feel very fortunate to have got the Emerging Leader Award. It came as a very big surprise, so I just feel very flattered and privileged to be acknowledged as part of the wider industry for my role, I guess as an agronomy consultant, but also my work that I do with extension for the wider industry. So I would say mainly through my role with WeedSmart doing extension agronomy through that program. And I feel lucky to be given the opportunities that I have to work with amazing people who probably have quite literally thrown me in the deep end at times to do various different extension workshops, presentations that I probably felt like I wasn't ready for. But they believed in me and they told me, you'll be right, we think you know what you're talking about. So yeah, the people that have thrown me in the deep end are the ones to thank for this award, because, yeah, I probably wouldn't have backed myself quite as much as what other people have backed me. So yeah, I hope that I can continue to be a leader in the industry, and I'm very thankful for the people that I was worthy of this award.

[00:07:50] **Hilary Sims:** Thinking more back to your role now, Jana, what are some of the key issues facing the growers that you speak with when we look at the season ahead?

[00:08:00] **Jana Dixon:** There's always a few things that farmers have to deal with - some short term, some long term. But probably decision making and probably more from a business sense. I think he's probably where there's more strategic issues rather than specific agronomy issues to work through. So I would say, I guess increased input cost and commodity prices coming off, sort of seeing like a smaller margin looking at the season ahead. So just working through that with clients and just sort of needing to take more, bit of a risk-averse approach to this season. We've come off the back of some handy years, and we probably ought to be sort of reining in things and looking quite closely at every dollar we spend on the farm and making sure we're spending that on areas that are going to give us the biggest return and managing the risk. So yeah, probably the more business issues is where I see that. And understanding financial position, and understanding the cost benefit of every decision that we make, and then ongoing agronomy issues that we're facing. Weeds is always a big one, so we're constantly dealing with weed issues, and I hope that we're making some headway, but certainly some summer weed issues we've dealt with this year so far.

[00:09:14] **Hilary Sims:** What other sort of projects that you're working on at the moment or have, you know, coming up in your immediate future?

[00:09:20] **Jana Dixon:** Probably the big one that's very exciting is the WeedSmart Wheat Conference, which is coming up end of July this year. So I've been involved in the committee to bring that program together. So it's hosted annually and it gets rotated throughout the states of Australia. So South Australia is lucky enough to have it this year, so we're hosting it in Port Lincoln, and it's just such a great conference. I enjoy working with the WeedSmart team so much and especially bringing the conference together. So it's growers and agronomists that talk at the conference on day one, and then we do farm visits, which are so great. I always leave the conference thinking, gee we are so lucky that farmers are happy to share what they're doing with other people. It's incredible the amount of collaboration that goes on out there, and that's probably the big one. So keen to share the program when that gets released and it's going to be a great event.

[00:10:14] **Hilary Sims:** Jana, thank you very much for speaking with us today, and congratulations again on being a GRDC Emerging Leader.

[00:10:20] **Jana Dixon:** Thank you so much.

[00:10:28] **Hilary Sims:** That was agronomy consultant for Pinion Advisory, Jana Dixon. More information on this topic can be found in the description box of this podcast or online at GRDC.com.au. I'm Hilary Sims, and you've been listening to a GRDC podcast.

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