GRDC In Conversation - John Hamparsum

Wed, Jan 31, 2024 8:40AM • 37:15

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

farm, people, soil, guess, fishing, crop, flood, cotton, bit, years, water, good, programme, australia, father, licence, work, business, cotton crop, agriculture

**SPEAKERS**

Gregory McNeill, Oli Le Lievre, John Hamparsum

**Oli Le Lievre** 00:00

Well, John, I think we just can roll into it. It's obviously very conversational. You're the last stop on our tour up here in northern, northern New South wales.

**John Hamparsum** 00:09

You're sick of it then.

**Oli Le Lievre** 00:10

No not at all no. I'll say I just reckon it keeps getting more interesting. The different people you meet and the different stories.

**John Hamparsum** 00:16

Like any of those deep dives, the deeper you go, the more the rabbit warren just sucks you in.

**Oli Le Lievre** 00:21

Does it ever and that's the beauty of this In Conversation style.

**John Hamparsum** 00:24

Yes.

**Oli Le Lievre** 00:24

Yeah just see where it goes. Mate, I guess Yeah. Firstly, what we've been asking people is just to tell us a little bit about what you're up to here. We're obviously on the Liverpool plains I'll get in early and say, many people around here would be calling it God's country, but also many people around Australia would call this area of God's country. Tell us a little bit about your pocket of the world. What makes it special?

**John Hamparsum** 00:45

Well it is special. Liverpool plains is, you know, some of the best soil in the world. There's, you know, only a few pockets of this black vertisol soil. And we're just so fortunate to be here. And we didn't come here by accident, though. So, you know, my father actually was instrumental in us getting here, I suppose. But yeah, it is. It's the most beautiful soil you'll find it's guarded very jealously.

**Oli Le Lievre** 01:12

So what are you guys farming here?

**John Hamparsum** 01:13

So we're haven't got a big operation we're sort of 1500 hectares, and we've got irrigation. So we've got groundwater as well as surface water. So the groundwater resource is well, it used to, we used to have a much bigger licence, but then through water reforms, we lost 69% of our licence permanently, which had to happen because the government over allocated the licence by you know way too much. And then so our other water source is the Mackay River, which is an unregulated river. And that term unregulated basically means that there's no headwater works on the river. So there's no dam that controls the flow of the river, the river is ephemeral. So it just, you know, and we're have a licence that when it's flying above a certain level, we're allowed to access it, and pump it to our licence size. So they're the two sources of water we have which we use on the farm, which is predominantly yeah, it's about 950 hectares is irrigated, and the balance is dryland or riparian and river area. And we've got some areas there. We're doing a koala tree planting project on too so.

**Oli Le Lievre** 02:20

Yeah Right?

**John Hamparsum** 02:21

Yeah, that's with country road and Landcare Australia. It's a great little project we're doing. So yeah, we've got this breakup of our farm, I suppose.

**Oli Le Lievre** 02:30

And who, who's farming here with you?

**John Hamparsum** 02:33

So my sister is in partnership with me. And she is also involved in a lot of other off farm boards. So she's a director on Namoi cotton and cotton seed distributors and, and a number of other things interest as well. So her other time is spent here on the farm. And yeah, we run the business together. And my son Ben has just returned temporarily home while you know, just finished his four year degree or double degree in agriculture and business. And then he's heading out over to the States and Canada later this year. And I don't know he might come back, I hope.

**Oli Le Lievre** 03:07

Yeah unreal. Now, tell me we just can hear a little bit of rain coming down outside is this welcome Rain? is it

**Gregory McNeill** 03:13

Well yeah it is.

**John Hamparsum** 03:15

Rain is rain. You know like. Everyone loves rain and I we're look, we're on a floodplain. So sometimes we don't like it. But this is yeah, it's welcome. I mean, it's a bit difficult at the moment, because we're actually irrigating and black soil. For those who don't know what black soil is like. When it gets wet, it really sticks to you. So you will grow in height by you know, sort of three or four inches very quickly when you walk in wet black soil. And when you're irrigating and changing syphons at three o'clock in the morning and it's wet it's tough, it's hard workk, and so when you get a little bit of rain and you still got to keep irrigating because a crop needs water rain can be a bit of a pain in the bum to be honest and yeah, I was out at 4:30 this morning and it was sticking to my feet and yeah so I wasn't cursing it because it's nice to get the rain but yeah we're starting to get a little bit more now there's a couple of storms today I think we've had 14 mm's there this morning and then a bit this afternoon so I mean we'll we'll stop irrigating if we get enough to tie it off and if it becomes dangerous to get around the farm but we'll we're just shut the water down until it dries out enough we'll get going again because with irrigation and cotton and peak flowering with a cotton you just don't want to get behind you got to be a bit careful there.

**Oli Le Lievre** 03:15

Is rain rain? Crops chasing themseles.

**John Hamparsum** 04:31

The crop is still using water so.

**Oli Le Lievre** 04:32

You said before that your your old man didn't come here by chance, so you're not farming here kind of by chance, based off the decisions your old man made. So tell me a little bit about what led him out this way. Wow.

04:43

Yeah, so I've been a bit I guess the family history. I mean, on the Hampersum side with my grandfather. He came from Armenia. And he was a basically I guess you could say a refugee in a way when the Australians invaded the Gallipoli, the Turks use that as a good cover up to start the genocide of the Armenian people. And my grandfather was able to escape onto a French refugee ship. And then he went to Nice in France. And then he came to Australia and according to the Armenian society, and I believe he's the first Armenian to come to Australia.

**John Hamparsum** 04:52

And there he was down in Melbourne, was involved in the textile trade business. And then my father was born down in Geelong. And then he moved or the family moved to Clara and Sydney.

**Oli Le Lievre** 05:35

Yeah.

05:35

And my father grew up in Stanhope rose at Clara, but he always wanted to be a farmer. And his father was involved in textiles and trading textiles and spinning businesses. But my father, he always wanted to be a farmer. And so he went to school in Sydney, in the north shore. And then as soon as he could get out of school, he went to Hawksbury Agricultural College. And during his holidays, he came up here, or to Barn barr actually, to work on a family friends property because he just wanted to be on a farm. And so when he was at Hawksbury, he had an old A model Ford, which I've still got. And he used to drive up to Barn Barr to work. And there's a shortcut that went from Breeza through to Gunadai down the Pullamine, which was a black soil track, and it went through the plains grass back then. And it was the dry weather road. Otherwise, you had to go up around where the Kamilaroi highway is now, which is up through Breeza, up through Curlewis, and then round through to Gunadia, up on the hills. And he knew about this black soil from that experience of getting bogged here I think.

**Oli Le Lievre** 06:40

Just out the front here.

**John Hamparsum** 06:42

Basically, probably weather like this, where a storm had gone through, but not the whole area. And he drove through and got caught in the middle. And he got to know about this black soil anyway. So back long story short, but when he went farming down in South Australia, and didn't do very well at that game and sold the place and got out of it. And then he went to South America, where we've got relatives over there and he visited them. And then he went to America and he bought an old pickup Ford pickup and he drove across America and looked at farming and to learn about agriculture because he's just passionate about it. And and the Brazos Valley in Texas where there's black soil similar to here, he saw what they were doing with this black soil they were growing cotton and corn and soybeans and sorghum and you know, all these different row crops and he just a the the light went on in his head, I know where some of that is in Australia, and it's sheep and wheat. So he came back here and he went to the local real estate agent. And he said, I want to buy some country on this black soil. And the real estate agent was like, you know, this guy's got wood duck written across his forehead, because nobody wanted black soil. Wool was a pound a pound back then the wheat that grew here, because the soil was so fertile. It grew up and then just fell over. Because at that stage the gavover variety it hadn't been invented, or developed sorry, and so yeah, the people who are here mostly were soldiers settlers, so they came out of Second World War and through the ballot system, which is up on the wall here, you can see the lots that were made up, they drew these lots and the lots down on the black soil were 1800 acres each, whereas on the red soil in the hills are 600 acres. And that sort of gives you an indication, you know, this is fit for purpose. You know, the hill country was good for sheep. So they got 600 acres, the poor buggers drew the black soil. They got 1800 acres, you know.

**Oli Le Lievre** 08:32

Poor bastards.

**John Hamparsum** 08:33

Yeah it's really tough. But you know, and that's the old story. But no, my father knew something that they didn't. And so he thought, you know, I'm gonna get some of this country and the guy that drew this block Dray- the property. Drayton, which was 1800 acres back then before it was expanded later on by my father, but he was a soldier, settler. And they under the rules of soldiers settlement. Basically, when they drew their lot, they were given the property to farm to and they had to put a house on it, put a boundary fence and permanent water. And after 10 years, if they did these things, and looked after it, obviously, the title then transferred to them. So they actually owned the property. And he this guy that drew this property of vocal Charlie Stokes, he got it in 1951, through the ballot system. And on the first of January 1961, was the first day that he actually owned the property. And that was the day in the Curlewis pub that he had handed over the title to my father. So the first day he could get out of it, he got out of it, and he went bought some red country, place called konenny up in the hills, near spring ridge. So he my father was sort of like, you know, everyone was going, what do you want this stuff or you know, but he had a dream and an idea and he had a, he had a thought there would be water underneath as well. So he got the place in 61, January 1, and then in 1965, he put his first irrigation bore down, but in the meantime, he'd actually started you know, to be, so with the cattle here, he got rid of the Sheep straightaway he hated sheep, wretched nibbling creatures he used to call them and then he yeah and he put down the first oh sorry he started doing a bit of row cropping and put down the first irrigation bore in 65 successful irrigation bore in 65 and started irrigating. And so he was a real pioneer you know, I guess he was first to do row crops sorghrum and corn and how to Dibble in safflower, some he grew a lot of sunflowers you can see the woods on the wall there. And yeah, really got into some pioneering type agriculture and changed the land use around here, like a lot of people thought he was going to go broke, and then their property value started going up. And then they were angry at him because they had to pay higher rent rates and because the values of the land was going up and those that wanted to, you know, either switched over to row cropping or they sold out and other people came in.

**Oli Le Lievre** 10:51

Wow.

**John Hamparsum** 10:52

That's a bit of the story. So that's how we ended up here.

**Oli Le Lievre** 10:55

What a history.

10:56

It's just, I guess, he knew the value of it. And he had a dream and he knew what you could do with it and got it and did it and so then, yeah, he's, he's been pioneering a lot of things he was he and another guy called Jock Wall first to grow cotton down this far south, in the early days. 1982. And now it's it's a predominant cotton all around us now. So, yeah.

**Oli Le Lievre** 11:19

So what were for you was, was the opportunity or the want to come home?

11:24

I guess well growing up on a farm and free labour as a kid. I actually I shouldn't say free labour. My father was always pretty good. He did pay me for my work. They weren't big wages, but I had a bit of money in my pocket. So I guess I just loved doing what I was doing back then. And I wanted to be a farmer as well. I went to Hawksbury agricultural college as well.

**Oli Le Lievre** 11:46

Same car?

**John Hamparsum** 11:47

Ah no, I did have a Ford, old Falcon station wagon year and, and yeah, and then after I left college, I went work my way around Australia. And in an old Toyota troop carrier and yeah, worked all the way around as one of the dreams I had and set myself a goal to do it. And and then after that, I came home. Nice thunder there and the rains pouring outside. It's lovely. And then yeah, I had to come home there because I was going to stay up. I was up in the in the northern territory at the time. But we had these wet harvest year after year in the late 80s it was. And it was in 1990. It was I was up there in July. And there was a dry season mustering season up there. And the my father's sort of was intimating that, you know, we haven't even got our cotton crop harvested. And we've only we're running out of time before we got to plant it. And I thought I got probably should get home. And I was just get that feeling that it'd be good idea. And so I came home and I'd been home since so. Yeah, in the end, we had five weeks to go from the end of picking through to planting.

**Oli Le Lievre** 12:55

Just a quick turnaround.

**John Hamparsum** 12:56

Yeah, it was crazy. It was just so wet. And we were driving cotton pickers through mud and the long story that one, but yeah never want to go there again. And that's actually set up a lot of the mindset on our farm of earliness is next to godliness. So you know, if we can get things done early and on time, trying to you know, prevent picking in the wet and things like that we we've sort of managed a lot of what we can do you I mean, who has a business without a roof over it, you know, that's what a farmer is so yeah, we're at the vagaries of the weather, but we try and do what we can to minimise that impact.

**Oli Le Lievre** 13:31

How has, so you talked about mindset, but how has discipline come into that? And I guess, looking at like forgoing opportunities based off timing?

13:39

I guess... Well, I mean, some might say that I employ too many people but we work on the basis that if we don't get the job done on time, you'll more than pay for your wages with what you lost, you know, so yeah, we probably run an extra person and then a lot of other people but then we try and get that job done on time. So that is that which is yes, yes.

**Oli Le Lievre** 14:00

Yeah. So timings everything and you'll. It's you and your sister farming but you employ extra staff for those key periods.

14:05

Yeah well, we keep trying to maintain just permanent staff here and every now and then we use casuals but predominately just permanent people get in on good and bad times.

**Oli Le Lievre** 14:16

And so what stage did you end up taking over the the day to day running?

14:20

Well, the really sad part was my father got cancer in not long after I got home and it was prostate cancer that was unfortunately misdiagnosed by a doctor so it developed further than. I mean today it's a curable or reasonably curable disease unless it's a very aggressive form but anyway it with dads that was reasonably aggressive, I think and by the early 90s I got I got home in end of 1990 August 1990. I think it was 92 he was diagnosed and he died in 98.

**Oli Le Lievre** 14:54

Yeah, righto.

**John Hamparsum** 14:54

So I was fortunate the gift that cancer gave us I suppose Was that we knew what was coming. Well, my father did. He didn't tell me everything, but he was very good in mentoring me into, into managing the farm and running it. And, you know, I was really fortunate that I had that experience of sharing it, you know, and he gave me enough rope to hang myself, but then just before I would he'd cut the rope, and helped me out, so having that that handover period, I guess was a gift that cancer gave us, you know, as compared to say, a car accident or something like that. So yeah, I had time to ease myself into management and other skills. Good, really good period. And then, I mean, look, I was only 30 When my father died. And it was or 30 31, I think it was, yeah, so it was, you know, like, straight into running a farm managing all the staff had to learn the hard way, you know, what's your management style, how to manage people, probably the most stressful thing I think, probably running a business is the people, you know, hail storms, and floods and they're all things you can manage, but you can't manage people, what they bring to work, that sort of thing. So you got to learn how to do that. And that was probably the biggest learning curve I had.

**Oli Le Lievre** 16:08

I'm interested how how or when your sister came back into the business and you two partnered, but also how, how did that come about? And how is it managed? Well,

16:17

Well so she she was over. She's a chartered accountant by trade, and and she was over in London working for Goldman Sachs.

**Oli Le Lievre** 16:24

Yeah wow.

**John Hamparsum** 16:25

She had worked for Ernst and Young in Australia, and very, she's very highly regarded.

**Oli Le Lievre** 16:31

Yeah.

**John Hamparsum** 16:32

And then she was, so she's had some very good jobs and experiences then. And she'd done her travel too. She'd been through South America, and stuff like that, and all through Europe and but when my father in the later stages of his cancer, she decided to come home, and it was in 96. I think she came back. And she came back into the into the farm then. And we sort of Yeah, we worked very well together. And was she has been with me with me as a partner in the business since

**Oli Le Lievre** 17:03

obviously, your old man really evolved farming really for this area, but also for him. Did you have as your sister came back, as you took over the managing of the business. Did you have an area that you're really looking to kind of hang your hat on in terms of farming within the business? Or was it just continuing on with what your old man had started? And

17:24

Yeah, I think that probably it was continuing it was an evolution, like everything you've you take a while to work out what your style is, and what you enjoy and how you you do it, and how you run the business, I suppose. And I'm not sure where the proverb or the saying comes from, but they say a man never really grows up until his father dies. And I think that's true. I mean, all of a sudden, you you're the person has to make the decisions. You're the person that has to, you know, live or die by that decision, you just can't pass it back and say you know, it's your fault. It's up to you. And so, I guess that's how, as a young person growing up, and you know, we had trouble with the banks when Arthur dad had died. And, and, you know, we had a very good relationship, we developed the relationship with a new bank, at the time Rabo came in, and they backed us, which nobody else would at the time, and they've been very good to us over the years. And so finding out how to do that type of thing and how to and we went through some terrible times in the two early 2000s Dad died 98 And then we basically had in 1998, just after he died, we had five floods in that winter. So we lost our winter crop and then had trouble getting a crop planted and all those problems and and then all the insect issues that came with it. We had a currency position that was out of the money we had to buy back and that's all anyway. We basically went through about five and a half years of hell, because we then in November 2000, we lost our we had a flood over the whole farm and lost our wheat crop and most of our cotton crop. This is Juanita my sister Juanita and I we were you know quite young and we're trying to run the business and the banks were at that time we're, were, were chewing on us and anyway, fortunately, we were able to find somebody who backed us financially with Rabo and then we had hailstorm came and wiped us out. And then I think the year after that we had a sandstorm we had a drought, sandstorm which then you know it ring barked all the cotton plants. And so we lost 30% of the cotton crop with that. Then we had a 2,4-D drift over our crop 80% of it wiped out. So yeah, we went through a really tough time. But one of my uncle's said to me at the time, he said, Johnny said, cherish it. And he said, because if you can survive this, you'll be able to survive anything. And when you do have that money, you won't be stupid with it. And yeah, we came through the other end of that tunnel. It was a dark time. I don't know if you can swear on this. But yeah, it was. It was a shit waterfall and no one turned the tap off or would turn the tap off for us. So yeah, until finally that did turn around and things started getting better. We knew how to run the business in a tough time. It was a it was a great learning experience at the time, but as tough.

**Oli Le Lievre** 20:18

Was your uncle, right?

20:19

Yeah.

**Oli Le Lievre** 20:22

I'm interested. So today with what you guys are doing here, like how's it I see that you've got a few different signs farms for climate action. You're obviously very progressive in the sense of the areas of agriculture that you're involved in and supporting. What's happening kind of in the paddock, what do you what do you guys looking at and how is that evolving as well?

**John Hamparsum** 20:42

Yeah, I guess well, my father's always very progressive in you know, he used to use the word balance rather than sustainable because back then the sustainable wasn't a key word. But I guess that instilled in me that same philosophy that, you know, if you're here for a short time, well let's let's get in and just rake it, but if you're here for a long time, which we are, you know you want to improve the soils, you want to look after and, and he started that journey back in, I remember back in the early 80s, he had a Japanese soil scientist, a guy called Eric Uaby, who was you know, revolutionary in his approach to managing the soils. And I guess that instilled in me that the need to your soils are your backbone. That's what looks after you. So we've always I've Well, I've always continued with that approach to looking after the biology in the soil and how we farm it and the fertiliser types that we use. And you know, the rates of fertiliser, all those things come into, you know, sort of the the ethos of of trying to achieve the best result, but also the best result for the future and for the future generations. So, yeah, I guess that's the that's it came it's just an evolution of time and having those teachings as a young man, I guess, and then continuing on and developing them. As far as you asked about farmers for climate action and things like that. I was always thought that, you know, climate change was an issue, I didn't think it was gonna be a major issue. But in 2013, I went to China, on a tour, a cotton, we were going lookin at spinning mills and working out whether we could deal directly with Chinese spinning companies. And that was my aha moment. That was my, whoa, this is real when we were there for 14 days. And we can look at the sun every day without hurting our eyes because of the pollution. Being on the 70th floor of a hotel and not being able to see the ground because of the pollution. Driving for five hours at 120 kilometres an hour on a bus on these massive freeways and, you know, between areas and you just don't get out of the pollution. It was pollution pollution all the time. driving past these massive coal fired power generations that had hills, nearly the size of the bruiser hill of colt, beside them, belching out the smoke. I then realised and I and the real aha moment was when we were showing this cotton spinner, a Chinese cotton spinner, a photo of our John Deere cotton picker. And he was going Photoshop Photoshop. We're going what do you mean? He said, That's Photoshop. We're going the cotton pickers real mate, that's what we pick our cotton with. He said no the sky. And we're going what do you mean? He said the blue skies, he said that's Photoshop and we're going Nah, that's what it's like in Australia, mate? And that was sort of like, wow, that's what these guys accept what they've got is their reality. We've got this blue sky we accept as our reality but we don't realise. And that's when I came back to Australia, I started thinking climate change is really gonna be serious. We have no concept in this country. And look, I've done you know, we've got, we've put in a lot of solar on our farm to we've got, I think 250 kilowatts of solar now, but another 100 kilowatts to go in. And that look that's hopefully reducing our footprint, but it's also reducing our costs as well. And I look I fully understand that. Thinking that in Australia, we're going to change the climate by doing these actions. It's a bit like standing on the Harbour Bridge, to use a friend of mine sayings's, standing on harbour Bridge peeing in the water and hoping you're going to change the temperature of the water well that's not going to happen. We got to have everybody's gotta be on board, you know, and we are just a grain of sand on this beach, you know, as far as climate change goes. But if we're not setting the example, how can we ask somebody in a third world country? Look, you got to change, you're making this terrible. So we've got to set the example, I suppose. And so for that reason, yeah, I've done that. And then 13 years of my life fighting a coal mine at the back I suppose that's all part of it yeah.

**Oli Le Lievre** 24:42

Yeah, I want to ask you about so the last few years you've had, so you went through those five years in the early 2000s of losing crops. History repeated itself only a few years ago.

24:52

Yeah. Well, that's true. So we had the drought that I don't need to tell people out there with how bad that drought was. So For us, it was three years we had two years first in our history of having a farm with no crops other than what we had irrigation water for. So with the reductions we've had, you know, as I said to 69% reduction in our water licence, you know, that really cut back the area of crop we could grow and we had no winter crop, there was no dryland crop. So 80 nearly 80%, of our farm was fallow, that was a an absolute eye opener, we kept their staff on, although we had one guy who wanted to leave and we said, well, we're not gonna hold you back. We didn't replace him. But we made it through the drought and came out the other end, a bit bruised and battered, like everybody, but we, we survived it. Then unfortunately, the year we came out of drought, we then had a beautiful crop. And November 2021, our farm went underwater. So it was a repeat of 2000 As far as, but we'd learned from 2000 We learnt how to manage after that, you know, those floods, and at that timing, it was horrible, you know, picking wheat up, you know, it was a week of harvest, and then it suddenly went underwater. And and I don't know, somebody out there bought that wheat I don't know why it woulda had bloody roots growing out of it and full of dirt but anyway, we were able to sell it. And the cotton crop that didn't survive, we quickly very quickly turned around and planted other crops in there, and fortunately, through our herbicide programmes, you know, with the Roundup Ready cotton, we don't use any preemergent herbicides on our cotton country. So that didn't lock us out of you know, planting sorghum or sunflowers or whatever. So yeah, we quickly turn things around him. We did it. And then just for to rub a little bit more salt on the wound, November 2022 came along and the basically a week later from the previous year with the whole farm went under water three times. And so yeah, we had to and one thing you know, we look, the reason why our soils are so beautiful is we live on a floodplain. We're a narrow part of the floodplain so we can't flood protect, we can't put levees up, we've got you know overtopping bank. So when we, when it floods, we don't impact our neighbours, we share the flood, so to speak. And you know, with the privilege of these beautiful soils comes that damage that the flood brings so you know, I own a grater and I own an excavator for a reason. And you just get stuck in it and rebuild the farm because it all gets knocked down. You basically have to rebuild all your infrastructure. And so there's a lot of work. And that's when I brings casuals in to help out, you know, to just still gotta farm, still gotta grow. Try and resurrect what crop we've got and go again. So yeah, look, it's but that I guess, five years of tough when we're 2023 24. Now we got through 23 harvests just we had about a bit nearly half of it off before it rained, and downgraded the rest, but a very dry winter, here last year, and I go and we had no in crop rain. But these beautiful black soils that hold so much water, you know, here we had a full profile from the flood in November 22. So we were able to grow a crop on a full bucket. Because there's there's bugger all in crop rain. And we still got a reasonable harvest. Yeah.

**Oli Le Lievre** 28:10

And so when you go through events like the early 2000s, and then the last few years, you mentioned, you're taking this long term view of it, but it must hit the bank balance pretty hard, like how do you how do you balance that? I guess the desire? I don't know, if that's the right word to go hard to try and recover?

**John Hamparsum** 28:28

Yeah, I think look, it's and go through succession planning at the same time. I guess it's you really got to draw on your experience. And that five years I was telliong you about after my dad died, was great experience to draw on it when these things hit us again, because you know, one, key your mental health and don't, don't lose this stuff. You got to you know, keep thinking straight. It's a business without a roof on accept it, get over it and rebuild. So the mental side is very important. Getting in and just doing things, you know, like try and surround yourself with good staff as well that have got a similar sort of belief in what you're trying to do. And don't, don't throw the you know, the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak by going in and going hard and wrecking your soils just because you're a bit behind. Stick to the game plan. You know, stick to what you know, you can do well and try and make every you know, post a winner. Doesn't always happen that way. I mean look, the things we quit easily with the forecast we could easily get another flood in February. So because the Madden-Julian oscillation wave that's due I think in sort of late February is going to be a pretty strong one, I think looking at it and that could be another flood that one will hurt because everything's out in the table now like you know, we're basically at the roulette table and all our money is on the table. So but yeah, we'll make it through.

**Oli Le Lievre** 29:57

We'll see what happens. You mentioned mental Health. I want to ask you about fishing. It's a pretty good little conduit. And I'm sure the two are very well intertwined. Tell me a little bit about that passion for fishing, but also how that time away from the farm benefits you?

**John Hamparsum** 30:10

Yeah yes, that's a good question. I mean, look, I warn people out there I mean, fishing can't be the solution, you can easily go and hide in fishing to hide your problems. But I use it because it's a call it the flow. I think in these boat, people go on about stuff but it's getting into that zone where you are so focused on what you're doing that you forget about all your other issues. And that's for me when I get on a stream when I'm fishing for cod trout or I'm out in the ocean fishing for tuna or chasing bonefishing pure bass, you know, whichever it is, to be honest, when I'm fishing, I'm not thinking about anything else. I'm so focused on that target. It's a primal need for some people. I mean, I enjoy you know, catching and releasing I used to do a lot of hunting when I was younger and I don't do that now I prefer to catch and release but it satisfies that hunger that need to go out and hunt for me and you can basically everywhere I go fishing is beautiful. Like it's you just have to slap yourself and go Yeah, can you believe you're here you know you look up and you're in the mountains or beautiful trout stream in New Zealand or up around in the New England you know chasing cod and you just look around and you just go wow, you know I'm really in this place. Now I go up to Harvey Bay and go on the inside of Fraser Island chasing tuna on the flats with fly and you know you look around and he's got this is the most beautiful place in the world. And so it ties all those loves together for me I love bushwalking I just love fishing and so yeah it puts everything together I'm just planning a trip right now to New Zealand so.

**Oli Le Lievre** 31:52

Watch this space.

**John Hamparsum** 31:53

It's back country though it's choppering in and backpack job.

**Oli Le Lievre** 31:57

Hoa good. Tell me about the Bayer was it the big fish competition.

32:01

Yeah so I'm trying to remember what year was it 2000

**Oli Le Lievre** 32:05

Do you want me to go and get the trophy for you?

**John Hamparsum** 32:07

Yeah somewhere around there.

**Oli Le Lievre** 32:08

2018. It's a big trophy that's how it's so easy to see.

**John Hamparsum** 32:12

The trophy is bigger than what is actually represented.

**Oli Le Lievre** 32:14

It would be at least 20 metres away from me and that 18 is very big.

32:17

Yeah okay it was 2018 so Bayer came up with the concept about you know, well they wanted to put something back into agriculture and in particular they wanted to put something back into rural mental health and some very smart people with imbiah Thought you know, well, how can we do this and they they I don't know how they came up with the idea but they worked out you know, farmers generally love being outdoors, they love fishing and when they go fishing, they all talk and they you know they share their problems and stuff like that. So they created the Bayer big fish challenge which basically you're in a team and I encourage anybody listening podcast to look into this, you get into a team or group of mates and you form a team you can call it some stupid name I think we're the the Dry Creek fishers or something. First as real dry creek fishers is the name of our team but and when you go fishing, you basically catch a fish different species hopefully and you put on the fragment and the number of centimetres. So the biggest one you catch of that species the number of centimetres then Bayer donate money on based on number of centimetres towards the, what's called the fly programme, which is a mental rural mental health retreat for people to go to from people in agriculture. And this money that is raised through going fishing with your mates helps fund it so you can then if you've got a mate or you know somebody that is you know, going through a pretty tough time mentally and they need a break away. You can nominate them to go to this the fly programme and the metal retreat. And they will get the opportunity all expenses paid the travel everything to go to this and experience you know the snowy mountains or wherever the programme is being held and be out with other people like minded people and they've got facilitators that help you through the issues you're dealing with. You get reconnect with nature and you might learn to fly fish. You don't have to but they do fly the fly programme is about fly fishing. And it's been identified around the world. I mean, in America, there's some massive programmes with fly fishing, which has been proven to help people like a lot of breast cancer sufferers. There's big groups in America where they go fly fishing, because it helps them to deal with their issues at the time. So yeah, I encourage people look into it. It's been a great programme. Anyway, I'll look at the trophy I was on the first programme I was a bit of a pilot project. So it wasn't that big of competition, it's a lot bigger now. There's a lot more people involved and it's a much more prestigious award if you get it so I was I sort of I share that reward with another guy from Victoria, yeah so Kevin Brooks yeah.

**Oli Le Lievre** 34:49

We'll include a little bit of info in the show notes around that. And a couple of links.

**John Hamparsum** 34:53

yeah, I really encourage people to look into it, I think it's a great programme and it's a great programme if you know somebody that's going through a bit of a tough time to have a look at nominate them for it. Because it is. It's a rare retreat, you know, you get away and you're dealing with people who are professionals at that too. So they know how to deal with it and give you that that break away from the farm.

**Oli Le Lievre** 35:13

So, John, looking ahead, what's over the hill? What's what's coming up ahead? Obviously, we've got New Zealand fishing that's in the very, very near term. But what is within the next five to 10 years or so look like, for you guys out here?

**John Hamparsum** 35:24

On the farm?

**Oli Le Lievre** 35:26

Farming life - What's happening?

**John Hamparsum** 35:27

Yeah, so look, we just want to get better at it. We're still novices, I think. But there's some stuff we're doing with our soils, which is starting to really pay off, it's a bit of like a flywheel. As you get the soil biology, right, it just starts to run itself. And that's helping reduce our inputs a lot. And we're getting much more efficiency out of the products we're using the solar, we're expanding on slowly. My envisage is probably not five years, but closer to 10 years, where hydrogen, you know, we'll be making our own hydrogen and powering our own tractors and headers and irrigation boards with hydrogen

**Oli Le Lievre** 36:06

Yeah wow.

**John Hamparsum** 36:07

Because look, there's a lot of time with that solar is just put pumping power back into the grid. And we're not getting much money for that. They're thieving it from us. But I'd rather put that money into Hydrogen Generator basically and storing it for when we need it. And using that energy on the farm. We looked at bio diesel there a little while back, but it was quite achievable. But the price of fuel dropped too much to at the time to continue with that project. So but I really believe that hydrogen will be a major contributor to agriculture in the future. So yeah, I see that that's definitely going to be the future for us in that area. What other things in in five years time? Well, I'm not sure one of my children, Sarah or Ben will come back to the farm, hopefully, and I'll get more time to go fishing.

**Oli Le Lievre** 36:52

Sounds pretty good.

**John Hamparsum** 36:53

Yeah so that's probably where we're going.

**Oli Le Lievre** 36:56

Fantastic. Well, John, thanks so much for taking the time to sit down with us, I think. Yeah, it's a beautiful part of the world where you guys farm here and really interesting story as well, which I'm sure so many people are going to get so much out of.

**John Hamparsum** 37:07

Well, how can I bore anybody too much.

**Oli Le Lievre** 37:10

Nah I don't reckon so. Thanks mate.

**John Hamparsum** 37:12

No, thank you.