

**The AgVocate**  
**Training the Change Makers of Tomorrow - Kelly Hodgins**  
**S01E02 Transcript**

**Simon:** Welcome to The AgVocate. The podcast that advocates for agriculture. I'm your host Simon Pampena.

With this series of podcasts we'll be telling stories from the people of this ever-growing community, be it industry leaders or those just starting out, because each and every one of them shares a passion for Ag and are doing their part in feeding a hungry planet.

**Simon:** A true AgVocate understands a problem and looks for opportunities to find a great solution.

Youth Ag Summit alumna Kelly Hodgins is one such true AgVocate.

Kelly has been thinking about food security since before she even knew what the term meant, and the conviction that more people need to be engaged with issues around sustainability continues to drive her forward.

Kelly's contribution to Feeding a Hungry planet has been in establishing a course at the University of Guelph to find and train the change-makers of tomorrow.

The story of how she made this happen is inspirational... and it all starts from humble beginnings...

**Kelly:** I was born on a dairy farm - I think I was probably in the milking parlour at like six days of age... and that was in the west coast of Canada in a really popular, really productive farming region called the Fraser Valley, and... I was on the farm literally every day of my upbringing and, during calving season for instance, it's all hands on deck. All us kids were out - it was a family affair. It was really a great lifestyle growing up.

**Simon:** Kelly was very fortunate to have been born into a farming family. In fact both sides of her family had been farming in Canada for generations. When her parents married it was a very special event.

**Kelly:** My mum's side of the family was pork and... then my dad's side was dairy and... there were literally, cows and pigs as like the wedding topper on their, on their wedding cake and on their wedding napkins it was like it was a big thing - the coming together of the pig farmers and the dairy farmers... I don't know why I'm telling you that! [laughter]

**Simon:** Thankfully the union of Kelly's parents proved very successful and luckily for her, both of them had a sense of adventure, something which would have a big impact on her future.

**Kelly:** So when I was nine years old - that's kind of a formative time of your life - we moved to New Zealand to start dairy farming there and some would argue that New Zealand is not completely dissimilar to Canada [laughter] but, but having that enormous move at a young age across the world allowed me to kind of gain a global perspective at a young age that has been really, really important in making me recognise that there are

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different world views, different perspectives, different people, different ways of living and knowing and thinking and doing and that has inspired... curiosity in me to recognise what are my biases, what are my world views, and, and, and to really be deeply curious about other people in the world. If my family hadn't moved to New Zealand I don't think I would have been as interested in other cultures and other individual people on this earth and as well I don't think I would have been as adventurous. This global perspective has been the foundation for everything I've been trying to do since that time in the realm of food security.

**Simon:** It's what made Kelly such a great participant in the first Youth Ag Summit, held in Canada 2013 and then again as a team leader in Brussels 2017. A spirit of adventure, a curiosity for other people in the world, and a shared passion for Feeding a Hungry Planet.

**Kelly:** I was invited to participate in the Youth Ag Summit, the first ever Youth Ag Summit, in Calgary Alberta, and... it was such an incredible opportunity to get to discuss food and agriculture with people from all over the world, who had so many different experiences and perspectives when it came to ag and food, and... I didn't really know at the time how many ripple effects would have come from... from the relationships that I built there, and the friendships that I made, and the connections, and... most... one of the biggest ones was getting to go back 4 years later in 2017 to the third Youth Ag Summit, this time as a mentor for delegates who were, kind of, just like me back in 2013... it was a really exciting opportunity for leadership.

**Simon:** Jump forward to the present and Kelly is now working at the University of Guelph situated outside Toronto Canada. There, Kelly teaches students what she's learnt about food security and food systems through her studies and her extensive experience farming in both Western Canada and New Zealand.

**Kelly:** I run these programs at the University where I take students from all different disciplines and they work together in teams of mixed ages and mixed subject areas... and then they partner with an organisation or company off campus to work on a problem or a challenge that partner is facing in the realm of food security or agriculture or sustainability.

**Simon:** Kelly is usually the one who has the inspiration, making connections between a business and a food producer and then it's her students task to make it work - the learning is in the doing. One such connection came about after visiting a local craft brewery and trying some of their latest offerings...

**Kelly:** So, they had the idea that they wanted to do more fruit infused beers - this is just becoming a trend - but they just bought the fruit at full price and it was perfectly fine for retail sale. So it didn't need to go into a mash tun and get brewed up... it could have gotten eaten. So instead my students worked with them to sort of figure out how can we get you the seconds and the off grade from farmers and thereby providing farmers an alternative market for that fruit that otherwise would get dumped out in the back of the field.

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**Simon:** Kelly's focus is on closing the loop in food systems by creating new efficiencies along the food chain. It's what she is trying to teach students who may have had no experience with food production or agriculture at all. But Kelly's mission is clear.

**Kelly:** The linear line from farm to fork, is not an effective way of thinking about a food system and also when we think of farm to fork that ends at the fork and it doesn't consider anything around food waste and what happens to that waste and... so when we start to think of a food system in a circular way, we're trying to think of food from production all the way through to consumption and beyond... and then how does that waste product become revalued into the system again. If we're going to have a sustainable world we need to be thinking in terms of circular systems.

**Simon:** Circular systems seek to minimise waste in all stages of the food cycle. They are an essential part in the future of food production because waste is much more than what we leave behind on our plate. Any byproduct in growing food, processing food, or transporting food has the potential to be reused, recycled, or repurposed.

The global population is projected to rise to almost 10 billion people by 2050 which means, based on our current food systems, we would need 50% more food to meet the needs of these extra people. But if circular agrofood systems were enacted, we could meet this need right now. It's sobering to think how much inefficiency currently exists in global food production.

**Simon:** Which is why Kelly is so motivated. The opportunities are all around us. In theory it's so simple and clear, but in practice what Kelly is trying to do is far from straightforward...

**Kelly:** This was one idea that worked in this specific context with these small number of local breweries and these particular farms and not all the farms that the students approached - it wasn't going to work for all of them, right? Everyone has different contexts, and so... what I really try to teach the students is to really, really understand the problem landscape and the context of the challenge that you're looking at. So anyone listening to this podcast [who] would [say] "oh that's a great idea - [putting] off grade fruits into my local craft brewery's new batch of beer"... maybe that doesn't work there [in that situation]. Maybe there's a different solution though. There's so many different ways to address a problem that the most important skill as an entrepreneur or as a change maker is to be able to really deeply understand the context of your problem area... really deeply. And that takes a lot of work and a long time... but that's when you know that your solution is going to be effective, whatever you come up with.

**Kelly:** ... I mean that's exactly what I did with the delegates at the Youth Ag Summit that I mentored in Brussels. By understanding the issues really, really, really deeply, you can come up the best solution and that's what they did... they came up with an awesome solution - one of the three projects that were funded at the end of the Youth Ag Summit to carry on, and that was really, really exciting.

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**Simon:** The wisdom Kelly imparts to delegates from the Youth Ag Summit as well as her students from the University of Guelph speaks to a larger truth... one that connects back to her life on the farm, and the co-operation required to get a difficult job done.

**Kelly:** If food security could have been solved by one person or one, even one discipline or one, sort of, approach they would have by now. And that hasn't happened. And that speaks to the need for us to work together - it's the only way that we're going to be able to move the needle and make progress.

**Simon:** Working together is Kelly's focus, and creating real world partnerships is the most powerful method she employs is to teach her students. Because honing the practical skills of connecting research with businesses, and government, and various funding bodies is how innovation is brought to life. And Kelly practices what she teaches - the course she runs now wouldn't exist had Kelly not used the same innovative thinking that she teaches her students...

**Kelly:** My colleagues Dan and Shoshannah, they had submitted a grant application for a really, really big project that they wanted to do and they got rejected... and so they were nursing their wounds sort of over a beer one day and they kind of hatched plans for "how do we get students thinking about real-life problems and working in mixed discipline teams?" - that's really key. And then I came in six months after that initial idea was hatched and I said "Yes, and..." I said "Yes, and agriculture. Yes, and sustainability"... and yes, we need to do this... really focusing on developing students who are change makers and who feel empowered to do something about the state of the world.

**Simon:** Kelly's courses were conceived, created and finally delivered at the university by her and her colleagues Dan and Shoshannah. If you thought this was a fresh and innovative idea, it's because the people who came up with it were fresh and innovative!

**Kelly:** I owe great thanks to my colleagues for doing a lot of the hard work on this but a lot of conversations with every department at the University to say "hey, trust us with your students, we will ensure that they get a really awesome learning opportunity" where really what they're what they're learning is problem identification, problem solving, communication, teamwork... all of these really foundational skills that they're going to need for real life... and they're going to come back and come out of this as better, more active engaged citizens of the world and that's good for everybody. The subject area that we choose to focus on is around agriculture, food, and sustainability but the skills that the students are walking away with are helping them to become change makers in general, in life on whatever issue they're concerned about in the world. So... the departments at the university are pretty happy to support their students to go into the course.

**Simon:** Kelly and her colleagues are welcomed disrupters at her university...

**Kelly:** It's kind of a hack yeah we love it.

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**Simon:** ...but they still had one big problem. Who was going to pay for such a risky venture? That's where Kelly found the final piece of the puzzle to make it all happen.

**Kelly:** The grant that that funded me, that created my position in the first place three years ago was from the McConnell Foundation in Canada - which is Canada's largest philanthropic organisation - They provided the resourcing... like, they provided the funding for me to be able to do this because universities are incredible they're also slow-moving and quite traditional so having that external funding to allow us to experiment and iterate and fail and try again was so important and we would not have been able to do that without the funding the external funding from McConnell.

**Simon:** And this is what opportunity looks like. Creating partnerships, meetings and consultation, putting in the hard work until a respected tertiary body is able to say "You make it happen. You show leadership... and we will support you."

**Kelly:** Exactly. Yes, they catalysed these opportunities and it's exciting to think that things are happening in different ways across the country.... yep.

**Simon:** Kelly's work creates a case study that could happen anywhere... and when I mentioned that I would love to see the same program in Australia universities, she was already one step ahead of me.

**Kelly:** Well invite me over and I'll come and you know talk, talk to some Australian Universities... [laughter] yeah, if you need anybody, you know... [laughter] I wouldn't mind a trip to Australia! ... [laughter]

**Simon:** Spoken like a true AgVocate - always ready to seize a new opportunity!

**Kelly:** ... [laughter]... Hilarous.

**Simon:** Thanks for listening to The AgVocate. This podcast is brought to you by the team behind Bayer's Youth Ag Summit. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Google 'Youth Ag Summit' and visit the website. Subscribe to our newsletter and be part of the AgVocate community.

Applications for the next Youth Ag Summit, to be held Brazil next year, are open from now until January 2019... so if - like Kelly and her students - you are passionate about making it happen and creating real solutions, now is your chance to apply.

Special thanks to Kelly Hodgins for making time to talk us.

We'll be back next month with a new guest but before then please share this podcast far and wide and let us know what you think of this episode. We're also interested in suggestions for any future episodes... perhaps we could even tell your story. Get in touch with us and let us know.