





on the farm with liz wunsch

This 26-year-old is ploughing the way for women in agriculture.

Liz works on her parents' farm in the country town of Warra, Queensland, growing wheat, barley, chickpeas and mung beans.

I loved growing up on the farm. I remember my two younger sisters and I would run outdoors when the rain came bucketing down, splashing around mud puddles in the paddocks. We would perform somersaults into our cotton crops! We rode a motorbike from a young age, and learned to drive. Mum and Dad emphasised safety, but we were given freedom and responsibility.

I studied agricultural business and applied science at university. In my fourth year, we had a guest lecturer from Vanderfield – one of Australia's largest agricultural machinery companies. It was a practical lecture showing us how technologies are developed from a theory, or a great idea, into something worthwhile in the paddock. I was intrigued! A year out of uni I reached out to the guest lecturer. I was invited in to Vanderfield for a meeting which somehow turned into an interview for an internship!

Over the next three months, I circulated around the Vanderfield support office and dealership branch. I got to sit with each person and learn about their role within the company. I was exposed to some technical training, exploring the mechanics behind the machinery. I did a few projects with their precision agriculture team – analysing the data on soil water and nutrient properties.

I think it can be challenging for women to enter any male-dominated industry but I've always found mentors who are happy to help me along. When interning for Vanderfield, I met women who played major roles in the company. It was inspiring to see!

Our farm is classified as a broadacre or grain farm. Our wheat and barley go to animal feedlots – for chickens, cattle and

pigs – and our chickpeas and mung beans are exported to Bangladesh and India as a food crop.

Our work is determined by the seasons. If we're planting, we'll hop up early, make sure the tractor has fuel, feed and fertiliser ready to go, and keep those supplies topped up as they run low. Right now, we're in more of a maintenance phase so we're checking our tractors and trucks and occasionally spraying for weeds. No day is the same, which makes it exciting.

The greatest challenge we face is the weather.

Our income, crop yields and business all rely on something we can't control. We have a dryland farm, which means we don't have irrigation or water to put on the crop. We rely solely on rainfall for growth. There's been hardly any rain for five years now. We use a system called 'minimum tillage' where we try to till or plough the ground as little as we can, to help conserve moisture. It's how we've been able to grow our crops in recent drought times.

In the past, farmers used ploughing for weed control. Then along came herbicides. At the moment, we do rely on spraying herbicides to grow our crops. Agriculture attracts bad press for its chemical usage and I admit it does bother me but I encourage people to ask questions and learn more before passing judgement.

When the drought is so persistent and we don't get much relief, we're hanging on, hoping for the seasons to get better again, and every bit of support helps. If you come across farmers, even on social media, ask them how they're going or about their farm and business. Someone showing interest will make a big difference to their day.

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