



**Leading Women podcast
Commonwealth Bank Women in Focus**

Episode 7: Brigid Price, Founder of Rural Resources Online on diversity in agriculture and leading an intergenerational rural family business.

**Hosted by: Rebekah Campbell
Interviewee: Brigid Price**

Featuring: Julienne Price, Executive Manager Women in Focus

Brigid talks about diversity in agriculture and leading an intergenerational rural family business. She also shares insights on the value of storytelling, the responsibility of stepping up and the role technology plays in the succession of emerging leaders.

Julienne [00:00:02] Welcome to Leading Women, your place to share and celebrate real stories and access the tools and resources to help activate your leadership. Hi, I'm Julienne Price, Executive Manager of CommBank's Women in Focus and Leading Women is just one of the ways we support women at all stages of their business journey. So no matter where you are on your journey, we're here. Enjoy this episode as we redefine the business landscape together.

Rebekah [00:00:34] Welcome to Leading Women, the place to ignite your leadership and redefine the business landscape. I'm your host, Rebekah Campbell, and today's episode is a fascinating one as Brigid Price, Founder of Rural Resources Online, speaks candidly about diversity in agriculture and leading an intergenerational rural family business. She shares insights on the value of storytelling, the responsibility of stepping up and the role technology plays in the succession of emerging leaders. And she leaves us all inspired by how her simple family charter guides every decision they make as a family and as a business. Hi Brigid, thanks so much for joining us today. Where are you joining us from?

Brigid [00:01:23] Hello, I am chatting to you today from our home property in the Arcadia Valley, which is located in Central Queensland and respectfully acknowledge it as Karingbal Country.

Rebekah [00:01:34] We start this podcast each episode asking our guests to describe their unique leadership journey. Can you tell us your journey from where you started and how you became such an advocate for rural Australia?

Brigid [00:01:45] Yes, it's been quite a challenge to reflect on this one, but I think it goes back to the fact that I've always been quite curious by nature. I really think you can learn something from everyone and every interaction. I'm really fortunate also that my parents always encouraged me just to take an opportunity if it's presented and say yes and work out the how it's going to work out later. And importantly, what they also instilled in me and all the members of our family is the importance of serving others and contributing from the perspective of if you can do something, you should. I was working as a finance manager for Queensland Health in middle management when I met, fell in love and married a farmer or a grazier long before they made reality TV shows on the program. And if you fast track that two and a half decades, I'm part of an intergenerational farming business. We are both organic and conventional in our beef operations. I am essentially the business and compliance manager and my husband is the operations and production manager. We've got three children, two of those are daughters and we're committed to giving each of them an opportunity in our business to join it if they are prepared to step into the arena and work with us. Along the way that curiosity has meant I've observed, I've questioned and I've obtained an inside out perspective, I guess you call it into the agricultural industry from that city chick who's moved into it. And at a workshop a few years ago, I just questioned why the delivery of information we had so many important resources in the room and knowledge, but the people who needed to access information the most were really at home, and they had quite a lot of jobs to do outside. So I said, is there not a simple way that you can share this information on a

website or a platform, get all the departments together and have a chat and see what you can do. And they essentially said it was too hard. So that set me down the challenge of seeing what I could do. And a couple of years later, ruralresources.com.au came about and from that challenge and that creation, other opportunities presented themselves and opportunities also to look at not only how we engage with landholders, but also how we engage with other stakeholders in our industry. My journey into rural advocacy and that leadership, I would have to attribute to the fact that other people have seen qualities in myself and identified those and encouraged me to say yes to opportunities. So that's gone now, right from going into, you know, opportunities to be part of programs, learning about diversity in agriculture to now being part of, on the other side, mentoring other people.

Rebekah [00:04:30] Thank you, Brigid. So with Rural Resource Online, I mean, you really are at the heart of the agricultural industry in Australia. I'm interested in learning more about that, particularly about diversity and just walking into, you know, all those meetings where you're bringing all the resources together. What does it look like around those tables?

Brigid [00:04:50] It's really quite interesting. So if I sit around at the grassroots level, it's quite a 50-50 split because we're all essentially small business owners working together. But traditionally in our industry, the higher you go up at that advocacy level in particular, I first heard the phrase the wasps, the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant males. And I learnt that a lot of the women who were working and engaged in the industry weren't actually at the forefront. But now it's quite fantastic if you look at our industry, our National Farmers Federation president is a female. In Queensland, rural advocacy has led the charge by Georgie Somerset. In politics, we've got Senator Susan McDonald, so there's really amazing role models now. And it was actually Fiona Simpson, who in her tenure, she identified this lack of women at those higher levels in agriculture and she devised a program of diversity in agricultural leadership. And that was a mentoring program that I was really fortunate to be part of the first mentoring program, and I was mentored by another really inspirational female lady.

Rebekah [00:05:58] Is there anything that you learnt on that mentoring program that has helped you become a better advocate or champion diversity?

Brigid [00:06:05] Essentially I learnt that it is not capacity or capability that women lack, but it's essentially more a confidence, connections, but also clarity in terms of where you'd like to go and what you'd like to do. And also connecting with other women who are those role models that you can see and really aspire to actually think, look, this change can happen if the right people get in and start taking action.

Rebekah [00:06:35] It sounds a lot like change is happening, which is great. Rural Resources Online, you do a lot as an organisation to advocate for change, establishing industry benchmarks, can you just tell us some of the things that Rural Resources Online does?

Brigid [00:06:48] Rural Resources essentially was my idea just to put a platform together to help manage the overwhelm. And I thought if we could all just share our tools and resources so that other people, if they needed to look at a policy or a procedure or a template within their business, there was a baseline that they could come and look at. A few years ago, we were part of a best management practice program and my background in audit and finance meant I put together those policies. So really, it's a platform that's our contribution and looking at this is what we do in our family business and sharing it with other people. And from that, it's also looking at different platforms and different ways we can engage with people. So other opportunities that have come from that is also writing opinion pieces. So Rural Resources I originally put together out of a sense of frustration, but the opportunities that have come from that have meant when I've gone to areas and I've been able to question, why don't you have producers on your information sessions? So at conferences now, the Australian Farm Institute have produced the panels. So when the scientists and the other consultants come together, they're sitting right beside a primary producer who's really in the thick of it. So what the opportunity Rural Resources has essentially given me that independent platform to say, look, I'm a primary producer. But also from the flip side is that connecting loop back to other primary producers to say, we've got to mind the narrative that we're using ourselves and how we choose to engage with people.

Rebekah [00:08:25] You saw a need to bring resources and information together and you created the platform. What a great tool for the industry, but also a great platform for you as well as a leader. I want to

come to the family business, I think our listeners will be really interested in this idea of how do you integrate family and business. And I'm particularly interested in coming from a kind of a city job and how you've applied some of the approaches that you might have taken in business to the family farming business. So one, for example is I understand you created a set of values and a charter for your family business. Can you tell us a bit about that, how you went about it and why you chose to do it?

Brigid [00:09:05] Absolutely, I think my family are used to me over the years going, what do the big guys do? What do the corporates do? How do they look at things? What can we do and how can we implement it? And I, after we'd gone through the whole process of writing policies and procedures and templates for our business, then I really looked at, well, what's the next level? In organisations we talk about the culture and we talk about what other areas that we want to focus on and I'd gone to a session that talked about having a family constitution and the thought of a constitution sounded quite formal. But I really liked the idea of imagine if we actually sat down and said, who are we? What are our values? What is our intention? What do we do? What don't we do and what's truly important? So that actually came about and it was a New Year's Day. I had an idea and the family was together because I couldn't get away, we had the day off and I got out a butcher's paper and I just started to say, okay, what are our family values? What is it that we stand for? What are we looking to do? What type of business? There's a lot of talk in agriculture about that iconic image of the traditional farmer and, you know, we battle, but we get on and it was like no, if we want the next generation to be, you know, passionate and enthusiastic, you know, we have to be profitable. We have to be purpose driven and we have to be proud of the fact we can do that and still look at the other areas that are important. So particularly for us, the separation of the family and the business of family from the family business, I guess, is how we word it. And that was, the intent for us was to grow a values based business and we had to identify it. And so it's been a really good process. We've had to edit it along the way because in the context, so I have a 12-year-old, a 16-year-old and an 18-year-old. So obviously over the years it'll extend and I'd also like to bring in so what is our purpose? So the next thing when we're ready for it, we'll actually put our purpose document together. So yes, it's been great by actually really identifying in who we are and what we do and what's important to us. We've had some really great, yes, really interesting outcomes from that.

Rebekah [00:11:22] So with the evolution of your family charter, how does that happen, is there anything that your children have added?

Brigid [00:11:27] It's quite interesting. So I'm in that, you know, what a business is doing in business and I'm thinking, you know, we're going to move into the governance phase soon, and that will be quite important and this 210-word document will change. Whereas my youngest daughter, we've had it for a couple of years now, and her older brother was being an older brother and was being, well, she thought he was being a bit mean and not so nice. So we actually sat down, we pulled out our charter and we read through it again and we had to add, we had values of integrity and efficiency and profitability. We actually then had to add kindness. So kindness was a value that's been edited and added in our updated version.

Rebekah [00:12:08] So the charter governs how you act as a family as well as how you act as a business.

Brigid [00:12:13] Absolutely, yes and in there it actually says our long-term success strategy is guided by the vision of growing a legacy which acknowledges our previous generations. But it also says that the competitive advantage for us is the relationships between the people in our business, so it's not just the people. The more we've refined it, it's getting down to the nitty gritty of what's really important to us, and also that we choose to do business with people that align and other business that align with our values.

Rebekah [00:12:43] So from a business perspective, is there a time where you've used your charter to make a decision?

Brigid [00:12:48] Yes, look, we had spent about two and a half years, we'd sold a property further out west and we then started the process, the due diligence on quite a few looking at what would meet our criteria moving forward. We actually had a property signed up. We'd gone past due diligence. There were aspects of it that we were saying, okay, what are we comfortable with? And in the end, it turned out it was my husband's call. And he said, look, we have said we choose to do business with others that align with our values. There were aspects of the transactions and the documents that weren't sitting well with us. And yes, in a rural setting, it was quite a big call. I mean, rural properties are a significant purchase, and I think it was about a

\$30,000 legal bill that we accepted and walked away from that deal, and it came down to making a judgment call on that because what message were we sending to our children if we weren't living by that fundamental document of who we are and what grounds us?

Rebekah [00:13:48] It's great to have a really clear set of values and vision for the business. I want to come to the definition of success and how that might have changed for you. First of all, how do you define success, Brigid? What is success for you?

Brigid [00:14:00] Look, the definition of success for me, obviously, it's changed over the years and even the narrative and the words that I use to describe things that I do. I used to think, you know, it's the principle of the matter that I'm looking at. And when you look at it from that point of view, it's like, what am I fighting for? Whereas now that we've really aligned and said, what are our values? It's a lot more comfortable to say, well, am I living or am I operating? Am I interacting in alignment with my values? So then that comes that whole definition of how do you change what ambition is, what your definition of ambition is? How do you change what your definition of leadership is? And really, over the years, it's really looking at this particular point in time, what will success look like? And then, you know, in a couple of years later, what will success look like as well? For me, it's really looking at who are you championing and who are you taking with you along the way. It's terrible to say, but women have that added burden of, you know, to go away to step up into leadership roles. There's layers of logistics and particularly for in a rural area, it's not just a matter of babysitters because babysitting in our area is, you know, my husband taking time out of his area or brownie points with friends, other family members. So the definition of success really comes down to if it's in terms of my family, longer-term, I'd like Christmas to be a celebration, not an obligation. So what are we doing along the way? There's a whole different layers as a parent, you know, are your children going to meet their potential, you know, are they happy? Are they confident? You know, we've had to make decisions at a whole range of levels. And it's really going back to, are we living in alignment with our values and our important roles in life?

Rebekah [00:15:43] You talked before about women lifting up other women. I'm just interested, farming is known as being this very strong supportive community. Is there anything you've seen in farming in terms of women supporting other women that you feel like the rest of the country could learn from?

Brigid [00:15:59] Look, I think absolutely the one thing about when you work with nature and you live with nature, it's incredibly grounding and leveling. It really doesn't matter if you're the best at what you do. Things can happen in life. And so I've had fantastic lessons from women about resilience and what's really important. And I think too in rural areas, it comes down to skill sets, so egos go out the window. So a lot of the stuff I do, particularly advocacy in our local community, it's because people say, oh, Brigid, look, you've worked in government, you know the language. I'm not the best cook, so I step up and I'll step into those roles. But it's really because the women who've said, look, we'll handle this. For me to step up, essentially other people have to step in behind me. And what's really lovely is I have this fantastic network of people that go, what you're doing is important. You do this and we'll take care of the rest. So and also different context, I remember years ago going to a program and someone said there's different types of drought. And I think when you have conversations like that, that really connect at that personal level. Drought in this day, you know, we manage it. We're a lot, we have a lot more knowledge and we generally have markets to move our cattle. Years ago, they didn't even have that option. So when you put into the reality of when things go wrong, years ago, it was a lot different. So I think the wisdom of the older generation is usually short and succinct, not like me that likes to have a good old natter. But there's really profound messages and lessons that we can learn from those women, but also the men as well. Men have a different angle, and they usually might say one or two words, but it's absolute gold if you have the time to sit and listen.

Rebekah [00:17:47] Is there any structure around how you support each other or come together to share information? I mean, obviously Rural Resources Online is a kind of macro way of doing it. But is there any particular groups?

Brigid [00:17:59] Oh, look, absolutely. Yes, look, and I think Rural Resources is essentially about those how do we share those tools and resources, was essentially how it came about because I wanted people to think although they're geographically isolated, they don't feel alone. And then I learnt from that there's actually really important stories and conversations that we need to have. Traditionally in farming, we've been quite conservative. And you know what the issues in the business, particularly areas like succession planning, we

didn't really talk about it. We had a lot of, there's a lot of hurt in our industry, and we haven't really spoken about that so well, like what happens to the next generation. And it's very traditional male, male inheritance. This generation is different, which I think is fantastic, and it's the men supporting the women just as much in terms of giving opportunities to females. But we have local organisations. Everybody would have heard of the Country Women's Association, the CWA, and that a brand in itself, you know, when there is massive millions of dollars from the government to give out in drought, it goes to those women in the CWA because they're recognised as being the women in their business that do the books and run. And they also have that connection in the community so they know who needs something and you know who won't speak up. You know, they're a pretty resilient bunch, but then they won't ask for help. So we have these amazing networks and also ways of delivering services so that it's not considered charity, it's just considered helping a mate out. And I think that's what I love, the sense of community in rural areas. I don't think you get in a lot of other places. Yes, it's pretty special.

Rebekah [00:19:44] Yes, it sounds really special. And it also sounds like things are changing. I mean, I know in my head when I think of what a farmer looks like in a farming community, you know, you've painted a very different picture and it sounds like it's changing even more. You said before that the next generation is different. I'd love to end by just asking you, how is the next generation different and where do you see agricultural industry going in the future?

Brigid [00:20:09] The next generation is different in that we've realised as a farming industry that we need to be sharing our stories more and we need to understand that as small business owners, we need to chat at that level. But we also need to say to our children, hey, this is a great industry to be part of and really start including them in our family business because it is a business and being open, but also the industry for acknowledging. So there's fantastic leadership programs, I'm mentoring a program now for future beef leaders, but also we're looking at the conversations that we have with children. So instead of saying you're a smart kid, you know, you should be an engineer. We have those conversations where we say, you're smart, agriculture needs you. And that's not just from children within rural businesses at the moment, but it's also that AG tech industry, you know, the areas where we're going to add value, the areas where we are able to open up our processes and be a lot more transparent in our communications. It's not because we don't, we don't have a problem sharing what we do, we just haven't had that capacity and opportunity to do it, so, but now it's quite positive in that younger generation, you know, they're really across all of these online devices and their iPhones and sharing stories. So yes, it's a fantastic time to be in agriculture and it's really positive right across the spectrum in terms of saying, you know, if you're a male, if you're a female, if you're part of our industry now, if you'd just like to get involved, we've got a lot of pathways now, which I don't think we necessarily identified before.

Rebekah [00:21:48] Thank you so much for that discussion, Brigid. That was really inspiring, I feel like I've learnt so much more about farming and agriculture, and it's quite different to what I had in my head before speaking to you. Our final question is at Leading Women we are committed to igniting women's leadership. Can you give us a tool for our Leadership Toolbox?

Brigid [00:22:06] I think the one I'd love to chat about for me is managing that overwhelm in that to-do list really based around for me a couple of years ago. It's to do with aligning with your values. And for me, the easiest way for me to manage it, or if I've got that conundrum of what to do and how to keep everybody happy. It's really looking at saying, well, what are your values? So at your funeral, if three people spoke to you, a family member, a friend and a work colleague, what is it you would hope that they would say to you and essentially three things, they're your core values, it could be more than that. And then if you sit and actually list what your roles in life are, so wife, mother, business owner, daughter, friend, community member, all of those things and then if you essentially put them in order of importance, what's important to you. And so then when you do have key decisions to make, or if you're in a situation where you're a bit torn, you really look and say, well, if I'm operating in alignment with my values to make this decision, will a higher order role be trumped by lower order roles? So the best way to explain it is a few years ago, when my daughter was having some issues at boarding school and we had work planned for the weekend, we had helicopters booked, we were going to do a muster. Now she was having a bit of a tough time. So we made that decision as parents that our most important role at that point in time was to be parents. We were fortunate it wasn't a major work schedule, so we could delay everything. We all jumped in the car, we went down and we spent the weekend with my daughter, just making sure that she was okay. And so, you know, from that, my daughter,

won't think about it. But for us as parents and generally you would have just gone like, it's work. We've just got to do it. She'll be right. We'll go and see her later. And essentially in a lot of things that I do, I'm just making sure I get my brownie points up sometimes. So if I do have to go away, you know, my children are covered. But yes, essentially it's that, I suppose value matrix where you look at how you can operate in alignment with your values and also your roles in life. And I suppose it comes back to what's my definition of success at this point in time and which role do I need to put my hat on.

Rebekah [00:24:15] Thanks so much, Brigid. You've given us so much to think about. I love the idea you just spoke about prioritising your values and your roles. I mean, I know that I go through a process of working on goals every year with my husband, and we have an overall vision. But prioritising, I can see the way that you described it was a very easy decision for you to make to go and be with your daughter that weekend because you've done that prioritisation work. I think that's an awesome tip. So thank you very much for that. And thank you for your other insights and for painting a really vivid picture of rural Australia for us today and a really optimistic picture of how things are changing. It was a great conversation, thank you, Brigid.

Brigid [00:24:53] Oh look, thank you for your interest in Australian agriculture. I'm really honoured to give that insight to you.

Julienne [00:25:00] Thanks for listening to Leading Women where we can all activate and redefine the business landscape. So now it's over to you, access the links, tips and tools discussed in this episode at womeninfoocus.com.au and subscribe to Leading Women so you don't miss an episode. Leave a review, spread the word and let's commit to keeping the conversation going at [#leadingwomensaus](https://twitter.com/leadingwomensaus)

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