



I married a farmer: Choosing a life in agriculture **FCC Knowledge Podcast: Talking Farm and Food**

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Interviewer: Marty Seymour (MS)

Guest: Sherri Pauls (SP)

MS: From AgExpert, it's the FCC Knowledge Podcast, a show that features real Canadian producers, real stories, and real good conversations about the business of farming. I'm your host, Marty Seymour.

SP: My poor father-in-law and mother-in-law. I am a bit of a ... well, I'm a redhead and I feel like that should speak for itself.

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MS: Today's episode marks the start of season 2 of our podcast. We've been gone throughout the summer, but we didn't forget about you. We'll be releasing new episodes every month until the spring of 2022. Make sure to subscribe to the podcast and never miss an episode. Today on the show, we're featuring Sherri Pauls, a farmer from Southern Manitoba. You might know her better as the Ginger Mom on Instagram, where you can follow along as she shares her comedic insights into farming life. What's interesting about Sherri is that she didn't grow up on a farm. She married a farmer and moved to Osborne Clay Farms roughly 17 years ago. She's going to talk about what it's like to marry a farmer and adapt to the agriculture world, which includes trying to fit in, in a farming family. She's also going to share a lot about her farm's business planning practices and how they keep non-farming family members in the loop. Sherri's story is full of lessons on resiliency, collaboration, and interpersonal communication. Stick around. You won't regret it. Welcome to the FCC Knowledge Podcast. Today on our show, we've got Sherri Pauls.

Welcome to the show, Sherri.

SP: Hello

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MS: Alright, Sherri, I love to find out where people are from. We've got listeners from across the country. Put your town on the map.

SP: We live in Southern Manitoba, Canada. And our farm is roughly a half-hour south of Winnipeg.

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MS: I actually spent seven years of my life in Steinbach, so I know a little bit of your geography. Tell me where you're really from.

SP: Well, we're on the farm, so there isn't really a town close by, but I guess the closest one would be, like there's a little, little town called Osborne, Manitoba. It's about five houses. And I would say the next closest one would be Rosenort, Manitoba, and that's where my kids go to school and that's where I grew up.

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MS: Okay, so Rosenort you said. I know that space. Isn't that the home of what's the grain auger company? Are there in Rosenort?

SP: There's Westfield.

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MS: Yes, Westfield.

SP: Yeah, for sure.

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MS: Yeah. It's a great little manufacturing pocket in Manitoba. So, I know that area also from the flooding of the Red River Valley in the day. Did your farm ever get some of the big floods we would have seen on TV?

SP: Absolutely. Yeah, '97 was a very hard year for a lot of people.

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MS: I have a visual, I was a flatlander from Saskatchewan back then, of the water being at the top of the stop signs. Was I right?

SP: Absolutely. Yeah, in Rosenort we have kind of an obelisk stone statue that shows the levels, because there was also the flood of, I believe, 1979. I was not alive then, but I definitely remember the flood of '97, I was in Grade 7, and everyone got evacuated and we spent our time at the Holiday Inn in Winnipeg until the waters went down. Yeah, the water got really high.

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MS: Yeah. And for those people that aren't familiar with the Red River Valley, I actually don't describe it as a valley. It feels like the flattest place that I've ever been.

SP: Oh yeah.

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MS: So, an inch of water spreads a long ways.

SP: Oh, very much so, because we have the Red River, but then we also have a bunch of other little rivers that overflow every year, so we kind of gauge it with whatever happens in North Dakota, we know that that's coming. That's going to be doubly here in Manitoba as the water rises and as the snow melts.

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MS: As Sherri confirms, Southern Manitoba is famous for its floods. A quick web search reveals that Red River floods are a fairly common occurrence, but definitely '97 and 2009 stand out as some of the worst floods in recent memory. I recall being on the road in Morris, Manitoba around the 2000s and someone pointed out the water was above the yield sign at the crossing. Think about that. That's 8 or 10 feet of water above the highway. Floods aside, the Red River area of Manitoba is also well known for some of its other unique traits. Okay, so another fun little Manitoba-ism that I learned was a term called Ditsied and Jantsied. Are you familiar with that? Tell our listeners what that means?

SP: Yes. So, a lot of us in Southern Manitoba are Mennonites and we speak Low German or Plautdietsch. So, again, the Red River is kind of this divider, and we are on Ditsied which means this side, and then Jantsied is the other side, which we kind of make fun who has the better side. But then if you go to the other side, which is exactly Steinbach and those areas, they will say that they are Ditsied and we are Jantsied. So, it's this side and that side.

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MS: That's kind of like Shelbyville and Springfield on the *Simpsons* kind of which side of the river you're on. Okay, you also live in some prime agriculture land area. So, what's the price of land in the Red River Valley?

SP: You will probably find this very interesting. We are in a clay deposit, so our farm is called Osborne Clay Farms because our soil is very clay. So, the price of land here varies between how close you are, let's say, to the river, anywhere from \$3,000 to \$4,000 an acre, but all you would have to do is drive a half-hour southwest and it gets sandy and then it goes up like \$5/6/7,000 an acre. So, it's quite interesting how the soil changes so drastically if you drive around Southern Manitoba.

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MS: Yeah, but based on that flood plain history. So, tell us about your farm then. What do you guys grow and what's your farm structure look like?

SP: We are a third, fourth generation. Our daughters will be fourth generation. Although I did hear that a grandma once lived on this yard, so I guess that makes it fifth generation. We plant everything from wheat, canola, soybeans, oats, barley, sometimes edible peas. We did flax last year for the first time, yeah.

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MS: So, I'm actually interested in that because I love to use canola and soybeans as kind of the standard yield measure. So, you're living on this land at \$3,000 to \$4,000 an acre. What kind of yields would you get on a canola crop, for example?

SP: That is a great question and I have not a hot clue.

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MS: Okay, then I'm not going to ask you about the soybeans then.

Sherri wasn't up to speed on the specifics of their farming crop yields, but there might be a simple reason for this. Sherri didn't grow up on a farm. She married into agriculture and spent the last 17 years on the farm learning the lifestyle. And as you'll learn later in the podcast, Sherri has some valuable roles in the farm that don't involve tracking crop yields.

Okay, so I think your story is kind of fascinating as somebody that didn't grow up on this farm, so tell us a little bit of your background and then how did you marry into agriculture.

SP: I grew up in the small town that I mentioned, Rosenort. I grew up around agriculture and I am a Mexican Mennonite, so my relatives they all are in Mexico on Mennonite colonies, so I did have a foundation of farm life I would say, but my family didn't farm. My dad was like a truck driver. So, I met my husband in high school in Grade 12 and was thrust into it. Pretty much, it's either sink or swim. And I learnt very quickly how

different of a life it is than I thought it was. I thought I knew about farming. I did not know about farming. It was definitely an eye-opener for me.

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MS: If you think back to those early days then, I find this super fascinating, what was the 'holy moly', I didn't know that's what a farm life was like? What really sticks out for you?

SP: I think just the commitment they have to the land and how much they care about every single aspect of their job. And it is definitely not a job. It is 100% a lifestyle. I think the biggest thing was as soon as the seeder went into the ground until that last field was worked in October and November, there was no date night. It was, yeah, you can come hang out with me but I'm in a tractor. Or, yeah, you can come and hang out with me but I'm hauling grain today. And the only time you would even have a little bit of downtime was when it was raining. And when it's raining, you service machinery. So, it was very eye-opening for me how busy the busy season is, but also how it seemed like every single one of the members of his family loved it. I don't know. It's hard to describe. It's like it's in them. It's this engrained pride and the value they take in every single thing they do, and nothing is half-assed. Everything you do to the best of your ability. Yeah, I would say that was probably the biggest 'holy moly'; they do this actually 24 hours a day all the time.

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MS: That's got to sting a little bit, doesn't it? I'm in the early dating stages and I want to date night. I want to go to the lake. And your husband says, yeah, well, I've got to go spray canola. How did you rationalize that sort of he's choosing the farm ahead of me in the early days?

SP: I would honestly say it was tough. If I could tell anything to my younger self, it would be, and if any young farm wives are listening, the biggest help for me was when we sat down and said, okay, either I have no social life or I have a social life without you. And that's really, what it came down to. Realizing that you can still have a social life, but you will be on your own. It's not bad. You just have to scoop up your kids and you've got to go wherever you want to go. But there has to be this mutual understanding that either I'm going to continue my social life or I'm going to be here on the farm raising kids and potentially being, yeah, super lonely. It's a very fine line.

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MS: As you can tell, Sherri spent a lot of years learning to adjust to the farming lifestyle. She did, however, mention that she grew up in a small town surrounded by farmers, so I don't think agriculture was really that foreign to her. But before all that, Sherri was training to become a mechanic of all things. You probably already understand that this could come in handy on the farm. Get it? It's my dad joke.

SP: I met my husband when I was training to become a mechanic, so I love being involved in the farm. I love the vehicle maintenance. I love getting my hands dirty and being right in there. So, any time he needs help, he says, sorry, you can't go anywhere, I need your help, you have to drop everything. And when you realize that that's not a bad thing, that that is actually something to be super proud of, it makes, I would say, at least 80% of your problems go away, because it is 100% your mindset. The big question I often ask myself is this. Let's say something like going to the lake for the weekend, is this more important than my marriage? Is this more important than my farm? And if the answer is no, well, then it's very easy to make a decision.

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MS: Well clearly, you're gathered and thoughtful, but I'm listening to you, going, man I'd be resentful. You can't keep picking the canola over me. It takes a lot of courage and self-discipline to turn the self-talk off and say, no, I understand, I'm going to make a choice and support the farm. Help our listeners understand how you got there, because admittedly, I'm just on this end of the podcast going, resentful, and you don't exhibit that at all.

SP: I've been married 16 years, so I hope not. At first, it was, yeah, I guess learning to think outside of yourself, like realizing that you are not the centre of the universe. But also, I learnt that asking for help is very important as well, whether that be my extended family, whether that be my mom or my dad or my sister, I need help or I need company. I wish I would have asked for help more. I think my mental health would have done a lot better. And then also instead of having those arguments in your head, where you are sitting at home alone all wrapped up in yourself, getting madder and madder and madder that he said he was going to be home in 20 minutes and it's been three hours, realizing that there needs to be instant communication to not let things brew. Because that is very easy to do and that, I would say, is a very quick way to ruin a very good relationship. Communicate. 100% communicate. Even when it's tough, even if it's 3:00 in the morning and he's coming home and he's exhausted, it's looking him in the eye and saying, this is worth it. If you want this to work, we need to now communicate. It's tough. It's so tough, and I'm not going to say that I'm perfect at it. I still on the daily remind myself that it's not about me, there's more here than just me, and there are more factors and more variables that you need to realize.

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MS: We do podcasts on transition, the business planning, and all kinds of stuff. If I had to pick one currency, it's always communication. The lighter side of me is I happen to be an ex-husband. And I always say to people in jest, man, if my ex-wife could have read my mind, we would have had way better communication.

SP: Oh, how many times have I said, can't you just read my mind? Or vice versa, I can't read your mind, so you need to tell me what you're thinking. Yeah, it is the bread and butter of not just a really good farm life, just a very good marriage, I would say, all around.

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MS: Yeah, that's sage wisdom on your part. I want to shift gears a little bit here because I'm not Dr. Phil but I love talking about people's in-laws. So, you move into the farm. You're an outsider. What's your journey been like trying to integrate into the whole family who are part of the farm?

SP: I imagine you have people say, no, I'm not touching that with a 10-foot pole.

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MS: The wise people don't take the bait, but I see where we're going here, so the floor is yours.

SP: Well, I'm going to say this. Again, and I'm not perfect at this at all, but it is saying the touch stuff when there is something said flippantly, whether that be me because I excel at that or whether that be someone else said something. If it is something that genuinely bothers you, you have to take that person aside and talk to them, as hard as it is, as awkward as it is, it is just part of life. Or realizing that we don't know what's going on in their head. You have to give them the benefit of the doubt, because in the long-run this family that I have married into, I've never ever met someone so dedicated to each other and so dedicated to have this farm succeed.

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MS: Sherri's family is the third and fourth generation on the farm, maybe even a fifth, as she mentioned earlier. So, obviously, the family she married into has a long history in agriculture. This doesn't always come easy given the challenges associated with farm transitions. It sounds like Sherri has won the lottery in this regard.

SP: There are non-farming siblings. When we all sat down and had our meeting about transition, they 100% said, we want the farm to succeed, it is not about money, it is not about inheritance, it is about this farm succeeding. And I was so blown away and impressed by that. It's hard to have bitterness or have any stuff left unsaid that doesn't make you feel good when the attitude is love and respect. Now, that being said, oh man, my poor father-in-law and mother-in-law, I am a bit of a ... well, I'm a redhead and I feel like that should speak for itself.

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MS: I'm not touching that. I'm not taking the bait on that one.

SP: So, I feel like there are so many times when I cannot keep my mouth shut. I'm a very passionate person that stands up for what I believe in 100%, and I know that that has stepped on many toes. So, I think there just has to be so much grace when it comes to your in-laws, and again, those awkward conversations where, okay, what did you mean when you said that, did you actually mean that I'm a bad mom because I don't separate my socks from my jeans? It's little stupid conversations that you either have to choose to talk about, or you have to choose to get over, because you can't have both. You can't have the in between where you're not going to get over it but you're not going to talk about it, because that's just going to make everyone miserable.

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MS: That has me thinking here kind of about doing a 180. So, lots of times we had these conversations with people on this Knowledge Podcast. We talk about them and what they do and what they think. If you switched this 180 and spoke to the in-laws on this call or to the parents on this call, speaking to the next generation, and said, when you do or say this, this is the impact it has. What would be an example of common things people do or say that they don't even realize have a barbed edge to them?

SP: Oh, man, I would say, I think mostly to the in-laws, if you have someone that has never been in a piece of machinery or has never lived on a farm before, don't assume that they know. I would say more so the attitude of acting like they should know something, like you should know this. When how would I know it if I've never been taught it? And to have grace there as well, to say, when you're teaching them something don't say, well, you should know this, or don't you know that, or didn't you know that. Anything that starts with that, that is an instant recipe for hurt feelings or for frustration. The more you can put yourself in their shoes and realize that they are absolutely terrified to screw up, and that if they're there, that means that they desperately want to be a part of it and they're really just wanting to learn. Like I said, I've been married 16, 17 years. I think it's 17 years. Don't ask me. But I still want to learn everything and I still am terrified to screw up. And I don't think that that will ever go away. And as long as I keep learning and keep realizing that I'm going to make mistakes, I have numerous times said to either my in-laws or my husband, you can't get mad at me for making a mistake for something you never taught me how to do properly. And realizing for the in-laws, I can only imagine how hard that must be when you've grown up with it. My husband, I'm pretty sure he at five months was already saying, I'm going to be a farmer. He was born to be a farmer. You can see it in him. It's a part of him. And it just comes naturally. And he does such a phenomenal job with me and our girls teaching us the patience and the grace that he has. But every once in a while, there does have to be that conversation of, how am I supposed to know how to this if I've never been taught. Don't assume.

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MS: That's super wise because I think about, we wouldn't necessarily use that language with the hired hand but we do with the family. I was just having this conversation recently as I was chasing cows with somebody. Now, I recognize you're not in the cattle business,

but if you want to see the worst come out in a family, it's just put them in a pen of black cows and put somebody to watch the gate, and then tell them to let the black one out. And then offer no more instruction, right? They should know.

SP: Yes.

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MS: I think only farm people get that, so I love the civility in what you're saying about that choice of words. You've just got to think about how that lands on the audience.

After the break, Sherri talks more about her role on the farm and shares some of the unique ways that the family collaborates to plan for the future. Don't go anywhere. There are some valuable learnings to come.

SP: I can honestly say that there is not one shred of bitterness when now we're building this new shop. Okay, so now Andrew and Sherri are clearly just loaded because we're building this new shop. No, we had to take another loan out of the bank and we had to finance this and do that and everything that needs to get done. And we openly talk about that with the non-farming family members.

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Can we shift gears a little bit? I understand you guys do something kind of unique around business meetings and the frequency you do them, the why behind them. Can you just describe that for our listeners?

SP: Oh, absolutely. So, it was quite a number of years ago, my mother-in-law and I were at one of those seminars they have Brandon Ag Days. I don't know if you've ever heard of those. But there was a seminar that my mother-in-law and I went to, and it had a professional mediator talking about transition and the importance of communication, not just in the farm but also with the non-farming families. What my mother-in-law and I kind of decided to do or kind of made this pact that we would have these meetings. The men always had had meetings about what they were going to seed and when it was time to start harvesting, and we always kind of felt a bit detached. Now what happens is that every, I would say, three or four times a year we will have a meeting. It'll be right after

harvest to discuss how harvest went and whether or not we know already what we're going to be seeding next year, or whether or not, okay, is it time to buy seed now or should we wait a little bit, and then how each crop did. And then as the year goes on into the next year, January, February, we discuss what's the seeding going to look like, who is planting what/where? And then after seeding, well, then we talk about spring. And there are these meetings where it's my mother-in-law and my father-in-law, my brother-in-law and his wife, and then myself and my husband. We sit down and we have papers and we write stuff down, and we take minutes. But the coolest meetings by far have been the transition meetings with the whole family. There are two sisters. My husband has two other sisters that are non-farming, and they're both married, and then including them in the transitional meetings. We don't really have those big ones anymore because we have transitioned, but I would say those by far were the most powerful and I would say brought us together the most, just with hearing what everyone's thinking and hearing where everyone is at. So often, in farming families you'll have the dad and this son talking, and then the other son is working so he's not in that conversation, but then stuff gets discussed there that maybe should include everyone. And then there are all these little conversations. And then you get frustration and miscommunication. And I would say that having these meetings has not completely eradicated it, but very much so where we all sit down.

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MS: Admittedly, I'm pretty blown away by how involved the family is in planning for the future of the farm. Even the non-farm family members are included in their meetings. And it really feels like no one is excluded from the table. Sherri also took a lot of extra initiative to really cement her place within the family farm operation.

SP: Something cool kind of happens just with the women. So, my mother-in-law and my sister-in-law and I, we sit down and we plan harvest meals. And we plan two, three months' worth, and we all take two days a week. And Sundays we normally don't farm. That is our day of rest. We plan meals right up until harvest is done and then we have kind of an Agassiz covered trailer that we have tables and chairs, like all the stuff to have supper on the field. So, we'll pack that up and hook it up to the pickup truck and we bring it out to the field. We all take turns. And we just completely rock harvest when it comes to meals. I would say the more meetings a year we have, the better our farm does. I can say that with absolute confidence.

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MS: The farm meal thing is just quintessentially Canadian. I know we do it in the US too, but this idea that that's a big part of harvest and it creates opportunity for better communication, so we're not just yelling at each other on the radios, but you sit down and take a pause. I love it. I think anybody listening who is part of a farm that does that, it's just a gift that lots of our peers that don't work in agriculture never get to experience. Okay, you said something that I can't glance over, because you said you take minutes.

I'm fascinated by that because I've actually never heard anybody declare that they take minutes. Help me understand what that means.

SP: I'm technically the secretary here. I don't do books or anything like that, so don't get the wrong idea, but I'll sit down at the meeting and I will either type up or write down who was at the meeting and then main topics. I'll kind of break it down into what are the main topics discussed and then the point forms of what was discussed. Because often you'll say, when did we talk about that, and then I can pull up the minutes or pull up whatever and say it was discussed on January 24th. It's very helpful when you don't remember what the plan was or what was talked about, especially since you don't want to have a hundred meetings just to discuss every little thing. You can go back and look at the minutes. Because everyone then gets minutes, they all have a copy of it, and so then, they can reference it when they need to.

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MS: I'm not going to lie. I'm sitting here with my mouth open, super impressed. I love the idea that you've got this diary that you can go back to. As formal or informal as it is, it says back in January we all agreed to this thing, and you have it diarised. Then, that takes me to the formality piece once again. Does that mean you arrive at the meetings with an agenda as well, or is it the Wild West and you just happen to have the minutes that document the Wild West?

SP: I would say we definitely have an agenda. We know what's roughly going to be discussed, because we say, hey, we need to have a meeting about seeding or we need to have a meeting about harvest. Not quite recently but a few years ago, my father-in-law went through cancer treatment and that changed the game huge. So, then we had a meeting of, what is this year going to look like, how much can my father-in-law be in the yard, what can he do? And then again, there isn't this underlying assumption. I think there's so much garbage that comes from assuming. Oh, I just assumed that you were going to do this, or I assumed you weren't going to do this. Yeah, I would say definitely we go into the meetings with an agenda, for sure.

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MS: In terms of this business meeting piece and the dynamic, is there something else like another best practice in there that you think people should really try to implement into their own farm management communication structure?

SP: It's such a tough thing because you're in a business with your family. It's not like you're building houses so it's A plus B equals C. Farming is spaghetti. It's this whole menagerie of different choices, and they change and evolve every year. I would say if families out there are struggling to have meetings, like just not finding the time, there was a professional that we consulted probably 10 years ago already, right when we were talking about transitioning and starting these farm meetings. It was a mediator and someone that specializes in farm transition. I would always encourage families,

especially transitioning families that are having serious issues, which often happens especially if there's more than one sibling farming or non-farming family members, to get a mediator. They are worth every penny. They are professionals and they see the big picture, and they also don't know all of you and have bias or stereotype prejudice, whatever that might be.

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MS: If you listen to season 1 of the podcast, you might remember just how valuable a third party advisor, a mediator, can be when it comes to farm planning and transition. An objective third party can often illuminate things that people so close to the business can't always see. Sherri's experience clearly reminds me of this.

SP: The biggest thing I would say if I remember back to those times, she had these forms where it had a pile of questions. What are your expectations for this? And it was just a whole list of what's your expectation on this and this and this and this and this. And I'm pretty sure there are templates online people can even access. And that is such a good stepping-stone or foundation to start off these meetings, to realize that everyone's coming from a different mindset. And physically having to write down your expectations is pretty enlightening, even just for the person filling it out. A lot more grace is given when we write things down and realize for ourselves where we personally are at, because often I don't think we do. We're so much in our own head that often we don't put pen to paper and realize, oh, these actually are my expectations, or I didn't realize that this was so important to me. So, I would say that would be my stepping-stone or my foundation first before you even start having the family meeting.

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MS: In terms of transition then, you've got some off-farm siblings in this model. Actually, I'm always kind of fascinated. You described it sort of their ambition was to make sure the farm transition succeeded and carried on. But how do you talk about money in a model like that where there are so many people? I've got to think everybody has a different interest in what's fair. And I'm not even talking about the transition money, but the end of year, how we divide the pie. How do you guys structure your conversations around money?

SP: Openly, I would say. I think money is such a garbage-y thing to talk about. No one wants to talk about it. I don't know why with traditional families, so often the older generation doesn't want to be open with money because it seems inappropriate for some reason. I'm not sure why. But just to have legit those bank statements and those loans and all the expenses and everything that it costs to run this thing out in the open for everyone to see is so refreshing and clear. And then there is no wondering. A perfect example, we transitioned onto this yard. Now, if we did not openly communicate to the non-farming families, it would be very easy for them to think, oh, we just were given this farm. And we were not. We bought this farm from our in-laws. We are paying them monthly. And it's all very official and there was loans and papers and mortgages all

signed and made very official that we moved onto this yard, we are buying this yard, we are buying this house, and we are buying the bins and the shed and everything that comes with it, whether that be land and the whole nine yards.

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MS: Yeah, I totally see it your way, but I have to think if I put myself at the table, well, sure, I'll show my non-farming siblings my FCC loan balance. But I'm probably a turtle as soon as they said, well, Marty, you took \$42,000 out of the farm last year and had free farm fuel and a truck. That's real to me.

SP: M'hmm, yeah.

0:32:43.9

MS: So, what does it sound like at your table? Is that the level of transparency that exists?

SP: Oh, 100%, because again, I am blessed with two non-farming sisters. They grew up in this yard. They absolutely love this farm. They know what it takes to be a farmer, and they also know what comes with being a farmer. I can honestly say that there is not one shred of bitterness or kind of raised eyebrows when now we're building this new shop. Okay, so now Andrew and Sherri are clearly just loaded because we're building this new shop. No, we had to take another loan out of the bank and we had to finance this and do that and everything that needs to get done. And we openly talk about that with the non-farming family members. I've described it to a non-farmer saying, how can you afford to buy this land? And I said, well, we didn't afford to buy it. The bank owns it and we make payments on it. It's not a 9:00 to 5:00 job where every two weeks you have a paycheque that says this amount. You get stuff in chunks. You think, okay, well, we made, I'm just using a completely irrational number here. We made \$1 million on our canola. Well, our fuel cost \$1.2 million. So, where do you break even? It's realizing that the money that's coming in, yes, that is a large amount in chunks. But also, the money going out in expenses is a large amount in chunks. So, you have to have balance and reality needs to be kind of used, a little bit of logic needs to get used, and again, transparency.

0:34:14.7

MS: I like what you're talking about in terms of your rational siblings are sitting there and when they start to see the real numbers, the doubt and the raised eyebrows, as you put, it just looks different because you're being open and it sounds to me you're a pretty gifted family in terms of this level of communication. So, bravo.

SP: No, they're really good people. And often they'll look at those numbers and say, yeah, no thanks.

0:34:40.8

MS: As we kind of get to the end of our chat here today, I love to ask people, and you kind of even opened with it a little bit, but what's that advice that you would give your younger self? Of all the things that we've talked about here today, the one thing that you want our listeners to know?

SP: Ask for help when you need it. And when I say, ask for help, that doesn't mean physically you can't do something. That means if emotionally you're just done being alone sitting in that house, especially if you have little ones, ask for help. Have people come over and keep you company. Mental health in farming, they go hand in hand. So, if you are struggling, whether that be as a young mom post-partum or even just anxiety or depression or anything like that, how important it is to not suffer in silence and to ask for help, and to reach out when you need to professionals. And whatever that looks like in whatever capacity you need it, it is never weak to ask for help. It is never weak to admit that you need help. So, I would say the most important thing for people out there to know is that it takes such strength to ask for help, but it is never ever, ever, ever a mistake.

0:35:50.6

MS: Thanks for sharing that piece of your life as well in terms of being a role model, but also helping break the stigma, that it's okay to not be okay, but it's not okay to not reach out for help.

SP: M'hmm, 100%.

0:36:03.2

MS: I really appreciate you joining us today and sharing your story.

SP: Oh, my pleasure. Thank you so much.

0:36:07.8

MS: What a great way to start season 2 of the podcast. It was a ton of fun getting to know Sherri. Sherri had a lot of wisdom that she gained from transitioning into the farming lifestyle. I think like many in her boat, she experienced a major period of adjustment and had to learn how to co-exist with her husband and their family who really have known nothing but agriculture their whole lives. So, what did she teach us? Lesson number one, just like we've seen through all of these podcasts themes is communication and transparency are the key to a successful ag business and a happy family. Sherri emphasized how important it is to stay honest with communication in their family. She tried her best not to hold back when she needed to discuss difficult topics with her husband and her in-laws. When it comes to the business side, everyone had a vital role to play in the planning of the farm's future, and even the farm siblings who are not part of the farm were still part of the inner workings. Number two, take the time for yourself.

Sherri had to decide to accept the realities of being married to a farmer. This didn't mean that she was hijacked in terms of what she could do to build her social circle and maintain her good mental health. So, being married to a farmer can sometimes be isolating and maybe you feel like you're alone. But Sherri took ownership and decided to build her own social life and find time to connect with others outside of the farm. I think point number two segues really well in point number three, and that's, ask for help when you need it. Sherri didn't shy away from reaching out to others, whether it was her friends, her family or even professionals. There's a saying that says, no man is an island. Basically, everyone has a need to find community, and things are much easier accomplished with the help of others. The farm reflects a reality, too, that families all participate in their own way to keep the farm functioning, even bringing in mediators to help them when it's needed. Successful farming really is all about community. And lastly, there are a few cool planning tips I took out of our conversation as well. Have an agenda for the family meetings. Ask everyone to write down what they want. Schedule the meetings in advance. Take some notes. It's simple. Well, that's it for now. I hope you enjoyed today's chat. If you want to follow along and learn more about Sherri Pauls and her farm life, you can follow her on Instagram. Her handle is @theg_mom. She actually has a lot of really funny content. I think she'll put a smile on your face. If you're looking for more resources to help you run a better farm business, check out FCC.ca and go to our Knowledge page. There's a wealth of valuable information about almost every ag business topic. Before we go, just a reminder that we would love to hear from you. Shoot us a note at podcast@fcc.ca. Thanks for listening folks, until next time.

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