

EPPTV Episode 5 Transcript

Liam (Host)

Hello, and welcome to another episode of EPPP TV. My name's Liam Muldoon, and I'll be filling in for Jasmine today on the beautiful North Coast of New South Wales. We're here to explore some amazing growth opportunities that are available in this region. today , we're looking at everything agriculture. I mean, it's not all early mornings and cows, but there is a fair few of those guys around. There are some amazing and interesting opportunities happening in this field. In this episode, we'll meet Nathan and Michael from the Department of Primary Industries who are all about providing opportunities for young people to build their agri-skills, students, Nellie and Myles, who are tapping into these areas with their school based traineeships, and Adam Gibson from Venture Organics, who will talk about all things, farming, food, health, self sufficiency, and regenerative business. And if you're not sure exactly what that means, don't worry. We'll have you filled in by the end of this episode. First, Let's hand over to Nathan and Michael, and find about all the interesting things they're doing here.

Nathan (Guest)

Hi, my name's Nathan Kempshall, and I'm the senior project officer here at the Department of Primary Industries on the North Coast. We're here at the Wollongbar Institute, and I'm here with Michael Beumont, the farm manager. Can you tell me a bit about what you do, Michael?

Michael (Guest)

Yes, so I work here at the Wollongbar Institute. It's 102 hectares. We've also got three other farms with Pearces Creek, Duck Creek, and the tropical fruit farm where we research horticulture, from macadamias, blueberries, as well as pecans and passion fruit. We come back up here, we're researching cattle, pasture, tea tree.

Nathan (Guest)

Great, and you've got, yourself has got two school based trainees here, and there's three trainees over at Alstonville. What do they do in their day, and what kind of things are they learning?

Michael (Guest)

Yep, so they're learning to run a real, operational farm, day-to-day operations, as well as liaise with researchers and any projects that come up. There's a project at the moment happening, the launch paddock, so you probably could talk a little about that.

Nathan (Guest)

Yeah, so that's one of the projects that I'm working on currently. It's an education and career pathways program where we basically are looking to educate and inspire our kids from kindergarten right through to university. So we'll have a school excursion program on the side, which utilizes our amazing assets and the projects that we have. We have a work placement program, which is for the students that are studying ag or primary industries at school, and they've gotta do their work hours. So that program is really great, because they get to have a snapshot of primary industries as a whole on this site. So they get to work with you on the maca farm. They also get to spend some time with the researchers around soil and water exams. So it's a real snapshot for them as to all the opportunities that they can move into as career.

Michael (Guest)

Definitely, Nathan. Primary industries have a big thing to offer up in this area.

Nathan (guest)

Great.

Liam (Host)

So Michael, how do you find the challenge of not being a challenge to working with kids? What's interesting about that work?

Michael (Guest)

So I've got five school-based trainees that come one day a week, and I've also got a full time trainee. We went through a process of interviews. So we threw it out to schools. They had to have a primary industry background and be studying that at school. So we were quite lucky. We got kids, all very interested, a couple come off the farm and a couple were kid that lived in town. But they've all hit their straps. I guess, I lead by example. I'm not scared to be the first one to show them what to do and my staff the same. So most of them have been here sort of 12 months to 8 months, and they've hit the ground running.

Liam (Host)

So you're a fairly young man, how did you start into this career pathway?

Michael (Guest)

Yeah, so I was going quite well at school, but I actually left school when I was 14. I was in all the top bands, but there was an opportunity, and I was a washer boy in a butcher shop, and they seen a opportunity for me to do apprenticeship. So I did that. I was

finished with that when I was 18. My heart was always in agriculture. My grandfather and my family had farming farms, but never, ever could employ me. So for me, I actually left this area and went out to the Darling downs, didn't know anybody and started my stint there. I sort of started on as a Jackaroo, probably quite small, and went all the way up to managing a feedlot 2 ½ years ago for 3 years. Ended up seeing a job back in the area here as a farm supervisor, and I've got my way up to being a manager now.

Liam (Host)

So that's a really interesting pathway to end up where you are now as a farm manager. So if you could speak to someone at school who's sitting at school right now thinking I'd love to do what you're doing, Michael, what advice would you give them?

Michael (Host)

There's no boundaries, just if you wanna be something, definitely push forward to what you wanna be. There's a lot of mentors out there that will help you. So I was very guided, and fortunate to the people I worked with and for, taught me as much as I could learn. I never had a lot of tickets, I suppose, to have come here to the Department of Primary Industries. So I believe, that's definitely a way you wanna be these days.

Liam (Host)

That's fantastic. Like I say, it's interesting the different ways you can end up in different positions, and I think it's a really an incredible role in what you're doing, training that next generation.

Michael (Guest)

Yeah, definitely. And like I said, I'm all for having trainees here. This is only just a starting point for DPI. We've got five on the books now, next year we'll have the same again. Then, we'll start putting them kids out, after the two years, back into the industry. And I think, for me, it's going to be a really good feeling to hopefully know them in 10 years time and actually see what career path they went down. They'll either be agronomists, or be farmers, or share-farming a farm, or whatever they may be. So for me, it's been great being able to mentor and give the kids real-life experiences here on the farms.

Liam (Host)

That's awesome. Why don't we go meet a couple of the kids now?

Liam (Host)

So Nellie, thanks for joining us today. Can you just tell us a little bit about yourself?

Nellie (Guest)

Oh, no worries. So I'm Nellie Witt, a proud Warramite-indigenous female. I'm currently studying here at the Department of Primary Industries in Wollongbar, and I'm also a school student in year 11 at Alstonville High School. We come here once every week. So my days are Thursdays, so I come out here and work with the farm crew on a Thursday. We do everything in between vaccinating cattle, soil tests, things like that. We get to work with the other guys from the labs, like the cattle tick team, and things. So yeah.

Liam (Host)

Is it?

Nellie (Guest)

A really wide option.

Liam (Host)

Yeah, awesome bit of variety there. How do you find juggling that with schoolwork? And are you starting an ATAR as well?

Nellie (Guest)

Yeah, so I'm actually doing an ATAR at the moment. It's been difficult. But I think once you're at school, it's working consistently to meet the timeframe that you've gotta have things done by. To have the practical side of things as well that we're learning in the classroom every day.

Liam (host)

How do you find them? Do you find the school's really supportive of that?

Nellie (guest)

I actually found out about this job through my, actually, my ag teacher, and my careers advisor was really, really supportive, so they nominated me for the position. And I just haven't really looked back. They're supportive. Like if there's something coming up, and I need to have an extra day off or whatever, it's just like nothing's a problem. It's straight up into the role done.

Liam (Host)

That's good. And moving forward career wise, do you think it's something that you'd wanna do or?

Nellie (Guest)

Yeah, definitely. For me it's something that I wanna do. I'd hope that having all the training we've had here at the DPI, that at the end of it, there's a full-time position comes up. But yeah, if not, definitely moving down the field of agriculture, taking the skills and stuff that we've learnt from here with us.

Liam (Host)

That's great. Now, I've heard you've got a little bit to boast about as well having been recently successful lately with your showing and...

Nellie (Guest)

Yeah, no, I've shown cattle for the last seven years myself so coming into this position was very welcoming. This year, with the help of our farm supervisor, Michael, who's from a feedlotting background, we were able to establish the Department of Primary Industry's first ever livestock show team. So we sent 10 head from here to the Brisbane Ekka show. So they competed up there in the Paddock to Plate and Carcass competition. But yeah, no, we have some really great results. So we're pretty chuffed about that.

Liam (Host)

Okay, you should be proud. It sounds awesome.

Nellie (Guest)

(Laughs)

Liam (Host)

And also I heard that you do a little bit of other work as well, around representing women as well. Quickly talk about that.

Nellie (Guest)

So in 2018, I won the North coast National Teen Showgirl. And ever since then, I've kind of had a bit of a passion for promoting the importance of women in agriculture. I've been really blessed here to be mentored by one of our full time farm members, Kimberly Phelps. Kimberly's definitely been a big support for me to kind of get through a working life in a male-dominated industry. But no, I think that's something that Kimberly and I will always have in common is that we can do the job that a bloke does. And just kind of to help take that stigma away and encourage other women to follow their dreams if it is in ag, because they are just as capable and they can get the job done.

Liam (host)

So for you, personally, being a young woman coming into the agriculture industry, do you have any advice for anyone else out there who's thinking about it?

Nellie (Guest)

(Laughs) Yeah. No, definitely, as a young female, I mean, it hasn't been easy. I know myself and Kimberly have both been told you can't do it, it's a bloke's job, whatever. But I think here we're very lucky. We've got a really supportive team, and the boys just treat us as, no different. We're one of the workers. We all work together to get the job done. But for other young females, try and push through the hard time. If someone says something, don't let it define you. Raise up, be above it, know that you can do it yourself. And just get in and give it a crack. That's all you can do/ The worst thing that can happen is someone tells you no. So give it a go.

Liam (Host)

Well, that's fantastic. And I really think you're leading by example there. You're setting a really good standard.

Nellie (Guest)

Yeah, thank you.

Liam (Host)

So we've got Myles here today to talk about his experiences. So myles, why don't you tell us about what you're up to?

Myles (Guest)

Yeah, so I'm completing a school-based apprenticeship as well as doing school. So I do one day a week, which is usually on a Thursday, and I come and work and get involved in an industry that I wanna be involved in while still completing school.

Liam (Host)

What does that actually mean? What does that mean for you day-to-day? So how does it work?

Myles (Guest)

Well, usually just Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday, I'll just go to school as normal, and then on Thursday I'll work obviously. But sometimes, I might change it up, cause there's a few projects in that, that we might be working on that I really wanna be involved in. So I can juggle up with school, which is all right.

Liam (Host)

Oh, that's awesome. So a little bit of flexibility in there as well. That's cool.

Myles (Guest)

Yeah, which is very good.

Liam (Host)

That's awesome. So tell me about your background. How did you get involved in agriculture?

Myles (Guest)

So I've always grew up on a small farm. My family have beef cattle so I kind of done a little bit of show cattle and that kind of thing. So I've met a few people, and then the school actually told me about this traineeship position they had up at Wollongbar here for the DPI. So I jumped at the opportunity and was fortunate enough to get it.

Liam (Host)

Oh, that's awesome. So you spoke to them about showing cattle, and I've heard you've had a little bit of recent success in that area?

Myles (Guest)

Yeah, Yeah, so DPI actually showed me some cattle up at the Ekka for the... So we actually, Broker and me, and the other trainees, we went and did that. And we actually won an eating-quality award and also third place in one of the classes, and then we also did some Paddock to Plate, which is where they all, all these different breeds of cattle and all these people, they send their cattle and they compared and same feedlot Fe feeding regime and that kind of thing. And yeah, the brothers are the steeds there actually were the ones that, they won Reserve Champion overall. End up on a plate. (laughing).

Liam (Host)

Oh, that's amazing. I mean, to put those practical skills, and the theory skills, together like that in that combination must be really inspiring for you and a great industry experience. So can you tell me about something, is there anything really exciting happening at the moment in the industry?

Myles (Guest)

Yeah, we;;, I think the future of the industry is very much about sustainability. I think that's where everything in the world is going, and I think the agricultural industry is starting to push towards there, which I think is very good. So I think one that DPI's doing that I've been involved in is they're actually, they're doing a multi-breed trial, which is about comparing different breeds against each other, of beef cattle obviously, and just looking at them. One part of it is they're sending them away to feedlots and that, and they can actually go compare and see which breed of cattle is actually eating less and putting on more weight, you know? And I think that, myself, the technology that they use to be able to do that is very interesting.

Liam (Host)

It's so important. Sustainability in the world of which we live in these days. So that's amazing and a really, really cool thing to get involved in.

Myles (Guest)

Yeah, definitely.

Liam (Host)

Thanks for your time Myles. I really appreciate it.

Myles (guest)

Yeah, good, thanks.

Liam (Host)

So we're finishing up here now at the Department of Primary Industries. We've met some amazing people and learned some incredible things. Next up, we're gonna meet Adam Gibson, who's passionate about regenerative agriculture. So let's go find out what that's about.

Liam (Host)

So Adam, thanks very much for having us here at Tathra Ridge, an absolutely beautiful location. Can you tell us a bit about what you're doing and what regen agri is?

Adam (Guest)

Sure, well look, what we're creating here is, a bit of a blank canvas. This is home for us. It's a 16-acre property in the hinterland, through the Byron Bay Bangalow hinterland. And we're using it as a bit of a demo site to see how much food, good quality, nutrient-dense, chemical free food we can create in one space, in a small area, and using that as a teaching facility. So we've got a workshop here today, for example,

we've got about 20 farmers from all over the country, learning biodynamics, which is a regenerative ag technique, and the idea is to have a facility where people who otherwise wouldn't get the opportunity, typically kids, kids at school, young kids, right through the teenagers and so on, can come and learn, not just about how to plan a farm out, how to grow, but also how to harvest, cook and also learn about the business of food production, actually learn some business side of it. So it's a bit of a blank canvas. We're growing into this sort of teaching facility, right from the ground up.

Liam (Host)

So your background, would you say is in agriculture or?

Adam (Guest)

No, no. Look, I've had a passion, I've been reading about permaculture and things like that since I was a child. Literally, at six years old I read my first permaculture book. But where I've come from is actually the wellness industry, the fitness industry. So I was in the gym game for, I owned a gym for 17 years in Brisbane. And after that I was coaching and mentoring, natural health practitioners, like integrative doctors, and naturopaths, and chiropractors, people like that.

Liam (Host)

So you mentioned permaculture there. Can you just tell us a little bit about what that means?

Adam (guest)

Yeah, without giving an expert definition, but I think that the term itself is about permanent agriculture. So it's about creating systems in using the land, and the environment, and animals, and everything, and sort of why that works in harmony with the natural systems around it. But it's part of what has now become regenerative agriculture. It's agriculture that leaves the land in a better condition than when we started. So it's improving the life and biodiversity of soils. Improving the natural water-carrying capacity of water in the soil, better quality plants and animals. Healthier food, healthier people living off that food.

Liam (Host)

So this is obviously amazing and really inspiring. Where do you see the future careers coming from this?

Adam (Guest)

So to some extent, we have no idea how big this can be and what careers are there, because it's so exciting and the future's unknown. So there is this space probably the first piece of advice I'd say. But the myth to dispel, it's not just about becoming a farmer. You don't have to be growing vegetables or running right around after a mob of sheep to be involved in this space. Rather than just think about it as agriculture. We think about it as our food system. So for me, you can work on the farm, you can be involved in the supply chain, linking produce with consumers. You can be involved in the tech side of that. There's a lot of tech opportunities now. Consumers are looking for good food, but it's not necessarily on their supermarket shelf. But they can go to their app and deliver it, and so on. There's a lot of tech out there that can fill gaps in this space. And then, there's a consumer piece too. And so, if you're more involved in the marketing or helping change people's behaviour or good storytelling, helping the general public understand this concept of nutrient -dense food versus, it's not just about organic, and it's also about, not just chemical free. It's actually food that is nutritionally more enhanced because of the way it's grown than grown in a more conventional manner. Whoever can tell that story well will make a lot of money and make a big impact in years to come.

Liam (Host)

Well, obviously, you really explained a lot of career opportunity there that sort of comes from an idea and a concept and then to grow from that. So obviously, there's a mountain of opportunity there for young people to look out there.

Adam (Guest)

There is. I think whatever their particular skillset might be, it could be applied at different levels along that supply chain, from growth to the marketing, to the consumer, to logistics, everything in between. It's not just about growing. It's not just being on the land at all. That's probably the biggest thing to dispel.

Liam (Host)

So just to wrap up, Adam, if you were to speak to a 15, 16-year-old tomorrow, and they were looking for some advice. Looking back on your career and your life, what would you tell them?

Adam (Guest)

Look, it's a big question. It sounds a little bit cliched, but I'd say don't chase the money. By all means, don't rule it out. It's not like you don't need money cause you do. But it's not the only thing. Find the thing you love to do and know you can make an impact... So some sort of burning passion, something where you feel there's a purpose attached to

what you're doing. And it's something that suits your skillset. Everyone;s got a genius, and if you can dig into that and find out what your genius is, not just stuff that you just love to do. So i think not underestimating your own impacts. Some of the most dynamic entrepreneurs I see now are under 20 sometimes. And they're switched on, and they're happening, and they've got it working.

Liam (Host)

Amazing words of wisdom right there, mate. Look, thank you very much for having us here at Tathra Ridge, an absolutely beautiful location. And thanks for spending some time with us and talking careers.

Adam (Guest)

Thanks, Liam. It's been a pleasure, mate. Okay, cheers.

Liam (Host)

So that's another episode done of EPPP TV. Thank you very much for joining us. Absolutely incredible stuff being done by a lot of people there. Thanks very much to the DPI and Adam. They're doing some great work out there. I hope you all got as much out of it as what I did. See you next episode.