

Careers in Primary Industries – transcript

Matt Notley, Precision Agronomy lecturer, Tocal College

G'day I'm Matt Notley, I'm the Precision Agronomy lecturer at Tocal College, part of the NSW DPI (Department of Primary Industries), located in the lower Hunter (Hunter Valley of New South Wales).

What is the purpose of your role?

The major purpose of my role, I guess, is to disseminate production technology and put a spin on that for management and then design courses around that. I teach at sort of three levels associated with the College. So I am involved with the youth education program, adult education and – so that's the online side of our training – and I also go and do external courses all 'round New South Wales with farmer groups.

How does it fit into the role of DPI?

DPI's all around stronger primary industries and building resilience, so I feel that technology is going to have a big part to play in that in the future, especially aiding management decisions. Using data, using sensors, automating fairly mundane, labour intensive roles that we can just get more efficient and more productive, more profitable systems in our primary industries sector.

What is a typical day like in your role?

So I am still studying uni so of a morning I do one to two hours of uni before coming to work and then will start work anywhere from 7 to 9am depending on what we've got on. So that could be doing lectures with our students, we could be doing practical activities with our students, could be out central west New South Wales somewhere hosting a grower group, I could be monitoring a few of our paddock trials, I could be marking online Diploma students, I could be hosting a webinar, you name it I help out.

What do you love about your job?

Probably working with the students and some of the other staff that I get to work in with, we always collaborate really well and try and get productive outcomes that you know meet the needs of our students whether that be our youth ed students, farmers, online students or whatever we're working on at the time. I just think it's rewarding seeing that end outcome of someone being able to do something more advanced, more efficient and with a more profitable outcome.

What could you do without?

The big thing for me is I get approached regularly about technology that is not always for the benefit of the industry, it's very primitive, so I spend a lot of time either having students come to me (asking) what do I think about it and then we spend hours breaking it down and realising that it was a waste of time ... that would make my day-to-day a lot better and I could do without a lot of the paperwork that we have to do.

Does creativity play a part in your role?

We're constantly, especial in my role, looking for new and improved ideas, ways of getting information out, new technology that's out so trying to find a fit sometimes for the tech, very, very creative sometimes.

What personal attributes are beneficial in this role?

Communication, getting along with people; definitely being able to read and disseminate information is definitely a key part of my role; being ... some people will laugh at this ... being organised yeah definitely just trying to be on top of, you know when I am involved with so many programs, making sure I've got my time management on top of things like that.

What qualifications do you need for this role?

So specifically for my role a very important qualification is the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment so it allows us to train under the vocational framework which is what the College operates under and then just relevant skills and qualifications. So I hold a Certificate III and IV in Agriculture and Diploma in Agriculture and as I said earlier I am obtaining my Bachelor in Agriculture and then we can also have a few other side specific skills as well that includes just going to short courses and things like that, that may be unaccredited so just staying up to date. A big thing for me, that helps me, I suppose it's not really a formal qual but going to industry events like GRDC (Grains research and Development Corporation) updates. Things like that, of that nature they're always, that just how you stay on top of relevant information once you get out there.

Where did you study?

I was a student at Tocal College so I did my Cert III, IV and Diploma here. I did my Certificate III full time so I was on campus and then I did my Certificate IV as a trainee so that involved me working on a farm most of the time and that was in a position based at a town called Beckom which is down near Wagga, in New South Wales so that was on a cropping enterprise with some prime lambs as well and the I also studied my Diploma externally at the same place. My uni course is through the University of New England in Armidale, I'm a distance student obviously if I'm working.

What other roles have you had?

I've had a few roles, mostly based around being on farm and mostly around cropping farms. I floated in out and out a fair bit of where I did my traineeship. I also worked at Elders for a short period of time so I did one of their training courses so that was mostly in a livestock role and I decided that I still liked crops so I went back into the more agronomy technology side of what I am doing now.

Where did you grow up?

I was born in Gosford and went to school on the Central Coast and my parents bought a block around Walcha which we became involved with as we were growing up but yeah went to school on the Central Coast and did a tree change and went into agriculture.

Q. Were you always interested in ag, did you study ag at school?

Yep, studied ag in high school, did work experience and worked at weekends on farms in the New England area so yeah always had a pretty strong connection with agriculture.

What impact do you see technology having on this work in the next 20+ years?

Impact technology will have in the agriculture industry? It's going to be huge. We are going to see a lot of automation and a lot of telemetry and data driven management. We are seeing that now and I think that is only going to become stronger. So think its going to become very important that farmers and new entrants into the industry are making sure they are aware of the fundamentals of how these systems work and how they can implement them into their day-to-day jobs. But I think becoming more digitally aware and capable is going to become a big skill set of agricultural workers.

What advice do you have for young people who are interested in this sort of work?

If you are interested in the line of agriculture and technology, a bit of self-promotion, absolutely come to Tocal or come and do one of our short courses in technology. Go with your gut and get out there.