



Highlighting the Stories of Women in Agriculture – One Podcast at a Time

Byline: Erin Kelly for the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

Former U.S. president Barack Obama once said, "You can change the world just by sharing your story."

Indeed, stories can do more than share good (or bad) news. They can help invoke change, shape a culture, and inspire a new generation.

Inspiring others through storytelling is something that Katelyn Duban is wholeheartedly passionate about. Duban, who jokes that she takes her title of storyteller very seriously, is the host of The Rural Woman Podcast, which she launched in the spring of 2019 after noticing a gap in the market of podcasts celebrating the achievements of women in agriculture.

"I started the podcast specifically to highlight the voices of women in agriculture because there wasn't a platform at the time for women in this industry to just share their story," Duban explains. "Back in 2019, when I tried to find a relevant podcast, women's stories were being shared but it was also kind of tongue in cheek. It wasn't anything to be celebrated. It was downplaying women's role in farming."

Having not grown up around agriculture, Duban says it was never her intention to become an active member of the farm when she married a third-generation grain farmer and moved to her husband's family farm in southern Alberta. But it wasn't long before Duban found herself working in the fields, igniting a new passion for agriculture and for sharing the stories of women in the industry with whom she began forging connections online.

Now a proud first-generation farmer working alongside her husband on his family's farm as well as a podcaster with more than a million downloads worldwide, Duban has continually striven to amplify the stories of women in agriculture, highlighting achievements and challenges alike, since her podcast launched seven years ago.

"Women carry a lot of weight when it comes to farming operations and their stories are unique and special. Stories that these women find ordinary, but ... their ordinary is truly extraordinary," says Duban.

"Stories build trust. And most importantly, the stories remind us that agriculture is human; behind every field and every fence and every animal is a person with a dream, with challenges, and with a reason why they keep working. That's what makes agriculture more than just an industry; it makes us a community and stories create that community."



Sharing stories can also help protect that community. Duban explains that one of the most powerful things she has witnessed through her podcast and the nearly 250 interviews she has conducted is how pivotal women’s voices are in reshaping conversations around safety in agriculture.

“Sharing these stories and the power of women’s voices ... they ripple outward and shape how families talk about safety and how communities respond to risk,” Duban says.

“Storytelling is one of the most important safety tools we have. We may forget statistics, but we remember stories. I remember the mother who shared the story of her child nearly drowning in a stock tank, and how that experience changed the way her family approached supervision. I can tell you about the woman who lost not only her father-in-law but her brother-in-law to their mental health struggles and how the next day they still had to go milk the cows.”

Perseverance is a well-known trait amongst farmers, but so too is the perception that struggles should be kept quiet. That silence, says Duban, can be just as dangerous as a piece of machinery. But sharing stories can break stigmas and encourage others to open up as well.

“When someone is willing to share, not just their successes, but their close calls, their burnout, their fears, they give permission for others to do the same,” explains Duban. “Vulnerability becomes prevention. When one person admits, ‘I was exhausted and I made a mistake,’ it does not make them weak. It makes them a teacher and it opens up the door for cultural change.”

While everyone knows about the risks associated with tractors and chemicals around the farm, there are less visible risks in agriculture that can be just as concerning.

Mental wellness is not a new issue in agriculture, with farmers facing unique stressors due to the multitude of challenges they encounter. But Duban notes that stories about depression and anxiety typically aren’t shared the same way as a story about a broken PTO shaft, despite both posing safety risks.

According to the National Survey of Farmer Mental Health, conducted by Dr. Andria Jones and others at the University of Guelph, 40 per cent of Canadian farmers reported they would feel uneasy about seeking professional help because of what others might think. At the same time, suicide ideation is, alarmingly, twice as high among farmers compared to the general population. Research has also found stress and other mental health problems to be higher among women, attributed to what has been called “[role conflict](#)” for women in agriculture.

“We talk about mental health as a whole in our industry, but there’s a lot of burden on women’s shoulders,” says Duban.

