

WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY

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WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO WORK IN THE FERTILIZER INDUSTRY?

I'd say I got lucky to get a job in the fertilizer industry. I was very interested in biological sciences and chemistry so I did a degree in soil science. I grew up in the city but I was shaped by my early experiences on my uncle's farm where I learned it made better economic sense to grow more on the best acres on the farm and leave the trees and grassland as wind breaks, forage for cattle and habitat for wildlife. Working in the fertilizer industry aligns with my personal values around land management and agriculture.

HOW DID YOU START YOUR CAREER IN THE INDUSTRY?

I started out doing small plot field trials on new fertilizer products and application practices working out of the Redwater fertilizer production facility that was owned by Imperial Oil at the time and is now owned by Nutrien. There was a cohort of research agronomists from industry and government that were very welcoming as I started my career and they helped me develop my scientific knowledge as well as professionally.

WHAT DO YOU FIND THE MOST REWARDING ABOUT YOUR JOB?

The most rewarding part of my job is helping people understand how farms can use science and technology to grow food and care for the land. There is a lot of fear around science and technology in farming, some of it comes from a lack of science literacy but it's also a bigger issue of trust. If I can help people outside the agricultural community understand that farmers also want what they want, clean water, safe food and abundant wildlife, and if I can help farmers understand tools and technology that improve their farm management practices, that is the ultimate reward.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU HAD TO OVERCOME?

When I started my career, the job that I wanted didn't exist in the company. In order to continue to advance, I took all kinds of roles to build my knowledge and skills. The big challenge was having the courage to say that I wanted a job I didn't see and then finding support from leaders in the company to help me create it.

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WHAT ACHIEVEMENT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

As an agronomist with science oriented interests, I am actually very proud of the time I spent in sales and marketing to build my business literacy. I was a square peg in a round hole, and often the lone woman on the sales team, but the knowledge and experience I gained is invaluable in understanding the cost/benefit equation for investing in sustainable agriculture.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON YOU'VE LEARNED IN YOUR CAREER TO DATE?

Share your ideas, you know more than you think!

DO YOU THINK YOUR JOB AND THE INDUSTRY WILL CHANGE IN THE FUTURE?

Yes and no, my job and the industry changes as our understanding of the challenges that agriculture, the environment and food production face, but the outcomes that we are striving for – safe, sustainable and productive agriculture – don't change.

WHICH FEMALE LEADERS DO YOU ADMIRE AND WHY?

The female leaders I admire understand agriculture at the farm level and have a bigger picture for what agriculture can be. To name some risks leaving out many but a few come to mind:

Dr. Cynthia Grant – for leading Canadian science and opening the door to young women in agricultural research
Lara Moody – for guiding sustainability in the US fertilizer industry and herding cats (you cats know who you are!).

Kaye Reitzenstein (Nutrien Sr VP Retail Finance) – for bringing her farmer sensibility to her leadership at Nutrien.

WHERE DO YOU SEE THE BIGGEST CHANGES AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS?

The amount of time spent having scheduled zoom calls!!! The humour and spontaneity that comes with in person interaction is missing, so we are missing out on an important component of building relationships, trust and creativity in the work world. There is also an increased awareness of the length of our food supply chains and the disconnection from where food is grown to the consumer.

HOW DO YOU SEE AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS CHANGING IN THE FUTURE?

The challenge of growing more food on the same or less land and with a lesser environmental footprint will become more urgent and imperative every year as population and median incomes rise globally. We know farmers are resourceful, innovative and capable of responding when the value equation makes sense. Productivity and efficiency gains will continue to be important and increasingly the creation of financial value for environmental performance will influence agriculture and food production.