

## **MWAF Champions interview: Ginelle Pidwerbeski**

**Work titles:** Co-Founder & Executive Director of Women in Ag, Marketing & Business Development Consultant, Musician

**Educational background:** Bachelor of Commerce at the Edwards School of Business - Human Resources, University of Saskatchewan

### 1. What are the main milestones of your career?

It's been a busy decade. These are the top milestones of my career thus far:

- Creating a partnership and farming full-time with my Dad. I grew up involved in agriculture, but not directly on the farm as I attended High School in the city of Prince Albert and only spent time on the farm on weekends and in summer. After graduation, I dove in and became a full-time employee of EP Farms Ltd at the age of 17. At the time, there was no greater feeling than operating our STX450 Case Quad Trac with a 3320 Bourgault Air Drill and I was so proud when I could say that I put the entire 5,000 acres of canola in the ground that spring, by myself. After that first harvest, I took some time off for an opportunity to work at Disney World in Florida, at the Canadian Pavilion of the Epcot Centre, where I made friends from all over the country and the world, to some of which I am still very close. When the Disney contract ended, I returned home for post secondary education and enrolled in the College of Commerce at the University of Saskatchewan, still unaware of the opportunities agriculture had to offer. After two years of college, I realized agriculture was where I wanted to be. That was enough incentive for me to complete my degree, with a major in Human Resources, and start farming full time with my dad. In no time I was running equipment, managing all employees needs, marketing grain, making cropping decisions for the year ahead, and so on. Finding my path within the industry was the launch pad for so much more that has since followed.
- In 2012, I felt it was time to move-on from the farm and pursue a career in other branches of the agricultural industry, so I began applying for sales rep positions with various companies. Interview after interview I was turned down because my background consisted only of "on-farm" experience, rather than "summer student experience" at one of the desire corporate or retail ag companies. In addition, it was a degree in agriculture that most Sales Managers were after. My break came when Brian Cummings, the Sales Manager for CANTERRA SEEDS out of Winnipeg, gave me a chance and offered me a Territory Manager position for the North East District of Saskatchewan. With his help, and also that of the other Territory Managers on the team (Kevin, Jon, Brent, Jesse, Brian, Kristie, Renee), my learning curve steepened, and daily duties presented challenges that took me out of my comfort zone and forced me take control of many things that were still quite alien to me. As a result, my confidence grew, along with my sales numbers, leading me to my next milestone:
- In 2015 I was awarded the Top Sales Award at CANTEERA SEEDS, for territory growth.
- In 2016, I made a move to ADAMA Canada, taking on a new territory in Alberta, in the exciting and complex world of chemical sales. This introduced me to a whole new set of peers and industry leaders, who would guide and teach me along the way.

- During my time on the farm, my sister and I, along with another friend in the industry, felt there was need to connect with other women in agriculture. We knew there were a lot of women around the province doing exceptional things within agriculture, but we had no idea how to connect to, network with or learn from them. As such, Saskatchewan Women in Ag was born, and I am proud to be a co-founder of an organization that is still very active.
- Women in Ag accepted the challenge to host the “CONNECT – The Heart of the Farm” Conference in 2018, culminating in the most recent, and the most significant milestone for our group. To see a team of young individuals come together and pull off an event of this magnitude during their “volunteer” time, is one of the most inspiring things I was ever fortunate enough to be involved in. To have an industry, and more than 300 attendees, appreciate the work we did to bring such an event to them, added even more icing to the cake.
- The biggest milestone in my other “career”, which is music, was releasing my 6-song EP in 2018, with 3 singles going to Country Radio during the year and receiving air play on both Satellite and AM radio stations across Canada and the USA.

## **2. What were the reasons of your milestones?**

My accomplishments (milestones) have all come as the result of an intense desire to learn, to develop as an individual and to lead people that share a common passion or interest. Every experience, hurdle, phone call, sales call, performance review, disagreement, and accomplishment, etc. is there for one to learn and grow from. If you start to pay attention to what you’re good at, what you’re not so good at, what inspires you, what drags you down, etc., you can begin to crush your goals and work towards success.

## **3. What motivates you in good times and through road blocks?**

People. Positive people who like to find solutions to the roadblocks ahead of them. And taking the time to look back on the accomplishments you’ve made and give yourself a little pat on the back for the boxes that you’ve managed to check off. In the Women in Ag group, there is always someone who is just as busy, or busier, than you are, and just as discouraged or even more discouraged with what they’re working on than you are, but they keep the ball rolling and moving forward no matter what comes their way. I feed off that energy and as mentioned above, I view every accomplishment or road block as an opportunity to grow and develop. If all else fails, grab some red wine and popcorn and know that everything looks better in the morning.

## **4. Did you see yourself as a taking a leadership role in this field before?**

I’ve always enjoyed being the best role model I could be for those around me, but I never saw myself taking on a leadership role to the extent it has developed into now. It’s been a discovery and I don’t always see myself as a leader as there are many times when I’m the one who is learning from those around me.

## **5. Why are you involved with gender issues in ag?**

Because I want every individual to be in the role they deserve to be in, and I want them to enjoy what they do. I think the industry as a whole can thrive when we have all the right people, regardless of age, gender or background, in the right roles. I want those outside of the industry, the individuals that grew up in urban centers and are several generations removed from the farm, to not only see the importance of agriculture to overall economy, but also to see it's vitality and even possibly consider it as a viable career option, whether they're interested in marketing, sales, science, etc. The agricultural industry has just as much potential and just as many opportunities to offer, as any other industry in the country.

**6. Please comment on what's been going on with women in ag up to now? What's going on now? What do you see happening in the future?**

Women in ag are currently doing incredible things in the industry. One of our previous directors just took a seat on the board of one of the leading commodity groups in agriculture and we're excited to see what her knowledge and experience can do for the industry long-term. Women in Ag specifically will continue to work towards connecting all women related to agriculture, and providing support as they step into new roles, seek a promotion, or go back to the farm full-time.

The focus for Women in Ag in 2019 will be:

- 1) To bring the industry another comprehensive and rewarding "CONNECT – The Heart of the Farm" Conference. With a mission to support, empower, and connect all women related to agriculture, while strengthening the industry as a whole, we find the CONNECT Conference aligns seamlessly with our goals. We provide several networking opportunities throughout the event, offer a tradeshow segment to support small business around the industry, and bring in a line-up of speakers that not only encourage attendees to tackle the next goal on their list, but also provide hands-on tools and techniques for making it happen.
- 2) To develop our Membership program by providing key benefits that our network can grow, develop and learn from. We have a group of 10 mentors with exponential knowledge, skill sets and experience in the industry that we can draw upon, showcase and feature throughout the year.

**7. What are you doing now? Why?**

I have moved back to Saskatoon after living in Calgary for two years, and recently left my position as a Territory Sales Manager to focus full-time on my music. I am also doing independent marketing & business development consulting for ag companies around the province, as well as a medical device company in Saskatoon. Finally, working as an Executive Director for the Women in Ag group as we continue to expand our offering to the ag industry.

**8. What would you like to leave behind you after retirement?**

I hope to enjoy my work so much over the next few decades that I never really feel the need to retire. Ultimately, I want to leave behind a "swath" of young men and women that are confident, comfortable in their own skin, and willing to take risks in their careers or personal lives. I want to

be a part of giving them the courage to pursue their passions, whether it be agriculture, music, art, being a good mother or father or whatever else makes them tick.

**9. What do you think are the most important characteristics good leaders should have?**

That would be their ability to actively listen. People will tell you what they want, the tools they need to be successful in their role, and their preferred method of communication and learning styles, if you just listen to what they have to say, while watching their body language, their actions, and so on. Good leaders need to take a genuine interest in the lives and development of those they lead, and be passionate about the direction in which the team is headed.

**10. What do you think is necessary to engage industry in gender conversations and make progress for the women's file in Canada?**

It's important to engage in conversations and maintain open communications because there are women in the industry, including myself, who have had experiences that either held them back from doing what they love or from asking for things of which they were deserving. Ideally, we will work towards an industry where women in ag groups don't need to exist.