

MWAF Champions Interview: Iris Meck, Iris Meck Communications

Work title: Founder Advancing Women in Agriculture Conference

Educational background:

UM grad crop protection double major in Plant sc. & entomology,

1. What are the main milestones of your career?

I grew up on a farm in Manitoba and moved to the big city for high school. I have to say my first milestone was graduating from Grade 12! I attended the University of Manitoba and graduated with Bachelor of Science in Agriculture. Upon graduation I started with Cargill Limited as a GOP and am proud to have had the opportunity to work with many men and women who were tremendous mentors. It was a tremendous learning experience for near 11 years from the elevator pit to the corporate office. Many of the skills I have today are honed from the lessons I learned in my first years of employment. While at Cargill I completed my Certificate in Management at U of M which broadened my business skills. After the experience of working for two of the largest ag public relations firms, stepping out on my own was one of my largest milestones. It was a tremendous risk at the time, but 21 years later, it was the best decision I have ever made. I was able to realize my potential and be proud of my accomplishments. It proved to me that thinking positive, being dedicated and working hard is all worth it. Creating and hosting the Advancing Women Conferences has been a great honor for me to bring women passionate about agriculture together to learn from each other and network.

2. What were the reasons of your milestones?

As I stepped through my career, there were several women who were leaders in the industry that I admired. I wanted to be in the same ranks as they were. One of those women was my mother. That is what drove me. She told me to build my own future.

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

Life is good and I appreciate every day. Of course, obstacles come in the way; unknowns are greater than most think; the risks are high, but I take the positive road as much as possible and believe it will all work out. I appreciate what I do have and recognize how fortunate I am to have good health, a safe place to live, and good safe food to eat. I appreciate my network of friends, co-horts and those who care about me. That is what gets me through the tough times in running my own business.

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

I don't consider myself a leader. I do recognise that since going to the farmer's market in the city with my parents selling our farm produce, that I was an entrepreneur from a young age. And as an entrepreneur, you are always taking a risk. Every day is a risk. And I am a risk taker, as much as I don't like it – I go for it – “go big or go home” was my motto for many years early in my career. I think, being a leader in agriculture is contributing to the industry in some way every day.

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

I want to see women be recognised for their contribution to the agriculture industry.

I want to see women continue to invest in themselves, to learn and build networks, to be confident. Most of all I want women to be given equal opportunity to hold leadership positions and roles that they are qualified for. My hope is that every woman will take the opportunity to grow through the Advancing Women Conferences.

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?

We see more women leaders in the industry of agriculture and food now than ever before. The needle may not have moved as far as I would of liked in the time that I have been in the industry, but I think as we see more women continue to be in STEM and agriculture, we will see more women in leadership roles, more women in politics, R&D, ag and food production, be involved in succession plans and take greater roles in being advocates in our industry.

7. What are you doing now? Why?

I am running my own business and hosting the Advancing Women Conference today, because it is what I love – meeting new people, building my network, learning from someone everyday.

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

Retirement? What is that? I hope that what we have created with Advancing Women will have helped women have a seat at the table in the future.

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

The good habit of returning phone calls and email messages. Not doing so in my opinion – is disrespectful.

And inquisitive mind and the desire to learn.

Good listening skills and empathy.

Good instincts – we all have to listen to our gut.

A good sense of humor – some things are just not that serious.

A strong character.

Smarts.

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

I think it is critical that women must take a leadership role in the ag industry and bring gender issues to the forefront. As the industry is dominated by men, women have to take the initiative to talk to men about gender issues. In my experience, men are receptive to the discussion.