

A FARMER'S LIFE

Interview with Tim

Tim: *I didn't wanna let my dad down. We'd been on this farm since the 1930s and it's that feeling of, 'You failed.'*

Richard: *This is Messages of Hope and I'm Richard Fox. In times of drought, where can you look for hope? Many farmers around Australia are experiencing a tough time because of drought. Even with all the best risk management and forward planning, nature is still something we don't have control over and the price can be high financially, emotionally, and relationally. You may not be a farmer, but we all have things we can't control: losing a job, poor health, a death in the family. Where do you find hope to keep going despite your circumstances?*

Today we're talking to Tim, a farmer from the Mallee of South Australia. Tim, how did you end up being a farmer?

Tim: I think I've always been a farmer. Never pushed into it. Dad always said, 'Choose something else than farming.' I guess when it comes down to it, it's what I love to do, I suppose.

Richard: What do you love about it?

Tim: The variety of the spice of life. I guess there's always something different to do. There's always another season. There's always something to look forward to. Whether it's fixing fences or feeding sheep or moving sheep or selling sheep or putting a crop in, there's always something different. As a dad, there's nothing better for the kids to be able to just go ride their bikes outside and play with the dogs and jump on the trampoline and play up in the scrub. It's allowing kids to be kids, I suppose.

Richard: You've got three young kids, so how do you juggle family life with all the work you have to do on the farm? I imagine it's a lot of hours needed to get everything done.

Tim: Yeah, through the busy times, it can be up to 18 hours a day, I suppose, six or seven days a week. We do make time for church on a Sunday morning and then family time for lunch and then, generally, back into it when it's really busy. Yeah, but we know those seasons don't last forever.

Richard: How is your season going at the moment? Are you affected by the drought?

Tim: We haven't had a proper rain event since December last year. We had no paddock feed going into March or April, and so we've been having to hand-feed sheep pretty much while they're lambing and just trying to keep the mums and the lambs close.

Richard: Is that an extra cost?

Tim: Oh, an extra cost and an extra time burden, I suppose. Yeah, I guess we did sell 400 the other day, so that was just a decision we had to make because we didn't have paddock feed. We had such a small amount of rain early, we sowed a lot of our crop dry.

Richard: What does that mean, to sow your crop dry?

Tim: Put it in without any moisture, not knowing if it's gonna come up, I suppose. There's obviously an element of risk.

Richard: How does it affect you?

Tim: I still farm with my father. There was some robust discussion during those times.

Richard: What kind of robust?

Tim: Well, there's a fair bit of yelling.

Richard: Why is that?

Tim: I guess we both have different ideas of how we should progress. You know, we put so much money into the ground and there was just no rain on the horizon. Everything was done without having any idea if it was even gonna come out the ground. Obviously, based around that, there's always emotion.

Richard: Do you ever worry that you're never gonna get a crop?

Tim: Yeah 'course we do. We wouldn't put stuff in that we didn't think we were gonna get something back from. But that doesn't mean it's gonna grow. We've had quite a lot of acres that have blown away this year, not only the dry period, but it's actually been the wind that's associated with it.

Richard: What helps you get through those times and those decisions and even conflict with your dad?

Tim: I guess it's really interesting because, obviously, I'm a farmer and I really enjoy farming, but that doesn't actually mean I can't do anything else. I think it's a lot different for my dad where the farm defines who he is. I think it probably would have been a lot harder for my dad to go through that period than me, because obviously I'm still reasonably young. I can go truck driving or I can go and pick oranges. Yeah, at the end of the day, if we would have lost the farm, we'd still have each other, I suppose. That's obviously the most important part of any situation.

Everybody goes through traumatic times. It doesn't matter if it's on a farm or if it's an occupation where you've lost your job or you maybe become redundant or you lost a close family member, but the reality is there's still always a tomorrow. I guess it is to ride the wave and to be able to see the dawn. That's obviously easier said than done, but if you don't believe there's

hope for tomorrow I guess today's pretty dark, isn't it? But there is hope for tomorrow.

Richard: Where do you find hope when circumstances are out of your control?

Tim: I guess it's what every struggle you have, how do you see that as a positive? I think that's a real interesting question to ask. Those times that you struggle the hardest are actually the times you grow the most. If there's anything I do, it's to find God moments in the day, whether that's a sunrise or the other day I was listening to a rain bird tortling away. I guess I call them God moments. Even to see my kids laughing on the trampoline or whatever, it's those kind of moments that make the day special.

Richard: How important is your faith in God?

Tim: I have a mother-in-law that says, 'Have you prayed about it?' I guess she challenges me in that a little bit, but then I say to her on the other hand, 'Well, it's not gonna get done if I spend all my time praying about it.' I suppose it's a challenge. The problem is with God, you can pray all you like that it's gonna rain, but it doesn't mean it's gonna rain. I think it's really important what you pray for, and that might be guidance or something like that instead of things. I guess it's really looking for the doors that are opened for you, because if one door shuts and God will open maybe three more doors for you. You just gotta be open to those opportunities and be ready for them when they do arise.

Richard: What are you praying for at the moment?

Tim: Rain. I guess I'm praying for my health and my family's health and the chance to be here tomorrow, I suppose, because there's nothing sure. We don't know when our time is up. I guess I pray for every moment, really, that I can experience it.

Richard: In the moments when farming is really hard, why is it still worth it?

Tim: I wouldn't be farming if it wasn't worth it, I suppose. The fact that we supply the nation with food, I think gives us a real reason to do what we do. When you take all the stresses and all the unknowns out of farming, it really is a wonderful, wonderful place to live in and to bring up a family. I think as a farmer, we see the fruits of what God can really provide on a daily level.

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