

Despite growing up in a family farm environment, Lori was not always interested in becoming a farmer. Although they watched their dad drive off every morning to raise soybeans, hay, barley, and potatoes, she and her siblings never took much interest.

But by the time Lori went to university, she knew that she wanted a career in agriculture. She earned a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) in Agriculture with a major in agricultural business from the University of Guelph in 1991.

Lori stayed on at the university after graduation to work on soy and canola research trials, but three years later, she returned to PEI, planning to apprentice with her father and eventually take over the family farm.

However, her apprenticeship was cut short when her father died in a car accident shortly after her return. With little experience or training, she had to learn how to manage a farm and a staff of 25 employees.

"The staff were great," Lori said. "We had many career people, people that had been with us their entire lives. They helped with my initiation."

Many of the same people continue to work on the farm today: in fact, one has worked on the farm for more than 50 years.

"It's like having a family within the family," Lori explained. "They're loyal, appreciative of the work, and dependable."

Over the years, Lori has risen to the challenges, and is now the farm manager for Eric C. Robinson Inc., part of a three-business consortium that includes the farm, Island Lime, and PEI Agromart. She is also involved in a produce marketing company, Garden Isle Farms, that markets the farm's potatoes. As a result, Lori is involved at every step, not only grows the potatoes, but also looks after grading and packaging for potatoes and merchandising all of the farm's grain and soybean crops. To keep everything on track, Lori works anywhere from 50-75 hours per week.

"I am usually the first person there in the morning and the last person that leaves in the evening."

When asked how she maintains a work-life balance, she laughed and said she tries not to let the little things stress her out. She takes her dog, Griffin, for long walks, travels frequently, and tries to take regular breaks from the hectic pace. However, breaks and travel need to be scheduled around farm requirements.

"I am never away during planting or harvesting," she explained. "I make all the decisions during those seasons so I need to be hands on."

The only part of her schedule that's non-negotiable is taking lunch with her mom.

"It might mean I land at the house in a tractor, but I meet her every day for lunch."

While Lori has seen women become more prevalent in the Canadian agriculture industry, she believes there is still some ground to cover.

"When I would attend grower farm meetings 25 years ago, I would be the only woman in the room. Then as time went on, there would be researchers or scientists that were women but still not many growers."

As for her own career, she credits her father for smoothing the way. When she was young, he would often take her with him to visit farms or attend meetings, introducing her as "the next generation of the Robinson farm."

"Lots of people were used to seeing me," she said. "The staff here knew me and Dad would often comment how I would be taking over the farm one day. The areas I still feel some push back or resistance is with sales or when I'm looking for parts for equipment."

She said salespeople often express shock or surprise when they ask to see the manager and she walks through the door.

In addition to her work on the farm, Lori has been a board member on the Crop Insurance Board of PEI for eleven years, and was chair of the board for the last two years.

She is often contacted to participate in interviews or commercials, but said that it used to bother her when she discovered it was primarily because she was a woman.

"My parents didn't raise us that way," she commented. "They never said you can't do something because of gender."

However, an interviewer changed her mindset by pointing out that she is a role model and inspiration for a whole generation of girls because of her gender.

"That made me think about it differently," Lori said. "Now I don't mind the interviews and commercials as much."

Lori is active on social media and uses it as a platform for teach the general public about farming. You can follow her on Twitter @spuddoc or on Instagram @lorirobinson44.