

Women in Leadership Positions in Canadian Agriculture

**SARA MANN | COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS, UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH
[GUELPH, ONTARIO]**

As an associate professor at the College of Business and Economics at the University of Guelph, Sara has led the way in conducting agriculture human resource research in Canada.

Sara says the career path that led her to human resource research was not planned, but rather a series of opportunities that were the right fit.

While completing an MBA, Sara was motivated to pursue a PhD by a professor who demonstrated not only an exciting career opportunity, but how to balance that professional life with her role as a mother.

“She had four kids and a fantastic job that allowed her to focus on family too, and she was so passionate about her work. If I hadn’t had her as a prof I never would have gone down the path that I did.”

Sara was accepted to the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto where again she benefited from the advice and encouragement of professors.

“They taught with me with tough love. It was a rigorous program but at the end of the day it allowed me to be successful because they had taught me all the skills and tools I needed for academia.”

Sara’s passion also saw her through an intense balancing act of the personal and professional.

When she landed a tenure track faculty position at University of Guelph, she was 8 months pregnant with twins. The university offered her a full maternity leave if she’d like it, but she was so keen to get started that when the twins arrived on a Friday, she was back at a meeting on a Monday. After settling into the role, she did eventually choose to take 3 months of leave. Perhaps unsurprisingly, that wasn’t Sara’s first crack at balancing newborn care with her own goals. When Sara was earning her PhD, she had her first son. She says it’s always been a challenge to balance family, which she values highly, with the amazing opportunities she’s pursued.

“For me, personal success is success in multiple different aspects of my life. I really wanted to make sure I found a job that allowed me to be the best parent that I could be and of course have success in that job too.”

Sara says the University of Guelph was a good fit. “It really attracted me, to take a position at a university that would value work in ag,” she says. She and her husband own a beef and cash crop farm near Hamilton, so her interests naturally fell in agricultural labour.

When she first began working at UofG, Sara discovered there was a dearth of academic research about labour in agriculture.

“There was a huge opportunity to make an impact, both from an academic perspective and a practical perspective,” Sara says. OMAFRA had noticed the scarcity of research in the field, and offered seed funding for Sara to get started.

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Her work day varies significantly depending on whether she's teaching or researching that semester. The majority of her teaching is done online for the Master of Leadership or MBA programs, but during her research semesters Sara is working with colleagues, analyzing data or in the field.

Much of Sara's career has been spent taking research back to the communities she studies. She has trained employees and employers on finding the right fit for roles in agriculture businesses. Recently she was a part of an OMAFRA project, training greenhouse and farm supervisors on effective management.

Sara says she is ready to conquer more problems facing labour in agriculture.

"I'm at a point now where I can do work that makes more of an impact on people and society. It's exciting and a challenge."

One of the ways Sara is doing that is through her work with the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC). Sara sits on its Labour Task Force, which brings together commodity groups, who then convey messages to different levels of government.

"Building a network and presenting a united front is a good vehicle to communicate that the issue of labour in agriculture needs attention."

When it comes to getting more women into the agricultural workforce, Sara is impressed by the efforts of the Ag Women's Network, the Advancing Women Conference and AgScape.

"[AgScape] Going into high schools to promote agriculture is an opportunity to attract females at a young age to agriculture careers and have them realize there are a lot of opportunities and agriculture can be a lot more than what the usual stereotype of it has been."

Sara is a great example of the unexpected and unique career possibilities in the industry.