



Chris Baker & Marissa Mulligan

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Annalies Corbin: [00:00:14] Welcome to Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. This is Annalies Corbin, Chief Goddess of the PAST Foundation and your host. We hear frequently that the global education system is broken. In fact, we spend billions of dollars trying to fix something that's actually not broken at all, but rather irrelevant. It's obsolete. A hundred years ago, it functioned fine. So, let's talk about how we reimagine, rethink, and redesign our educational system.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:49] This is Annalies Corbin back again for Learning Unboxed. We're back in the studio today. And I'm excited, as always, to have two amazing guests. And we are going to talk about ag education and the infinite possibilities of careers that are available, quite frankly, exploring ag. And so, with us today are my guests, Chris Baker. Chris is the Executive Director of the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation. And the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation, an ancillary organization of the federation, which Chris, will explain how that all works, are the brainchild behind the notion of this program called Explore AG that we're gonna talk about today. And joining us is Marissa Mulligan, who is Extension Educator with 4-H Youth Development and the Explore Ag Program within Ohio State Extension. Did I have that correct, Marissa?

Marissa Mulligan: [00:01:45] Yes. Specifically in Franklin County.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:47] Yes. So, it's a big giant lion thing. And so, Marissa has actually been involved with the actual implementation of the program on the ground piece. And so, I'm really excited to have both of you today to talk about Explorer Ag. So, thank you for being here.

Chris Baker: [00:02:00] Thanks for having us.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:02:00] Thank you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:01] So, I want to start, Chris, with you. And I really want you to, first and foremost, let's talk about the notion of why the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation said, "Hey, we need to get in the middle of career development, and workforce development, and career exploration." I think a lot of folks don't necessarily think about Farm Bureau in that space. So, why?

Chris Baker: [00:02:25] Absolutely. Well, a lot of it has to do with the realities as they present themselves to our partners. So, the Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation is the philanthropic arm of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation. So, that's the state's largest membership organization really focused on agricultural producers, commodity groups, everybody from your small organic farmer to the large row crop operations that you may drive by. And almost universally across the board, everybody is in a little bit of a tight space when it comes to labor. It's certainly one of the things that we acknowledge.

Chris Baker: [00:03:03] So, as our foundation was putting together our priorities several years ago, that was one of several topics that was on the horizon. And as we dug in a little bit more, we decided that that was really the thing that we wanted to focus on. So, it kind of became our clarion call. And since then, we've done a lot to engage partners, including Ohio State Extension, as you're going to hear a little bit more about. But in the beginning, it really started with meeting the needs that our agricultural producers and food processors, everyone within the farm and food community, was seeing in regards to labor.

Annalies Corbin: [00:03:43] And labor, this comes back to lots of conversations that we've had on this program. From a workforce development standpoint, there are very few industries in this country that are not facing a labor crisis right now. This is ubiquitous to what's happening in our country and lots of places around the globe. So, it's intriguing and interesting to me as we continue with these conversations how many places are wrestling with these very ideas. So, Marissa, then, so, first and foremost, is the notion, at least, in the US - I want to preface, we have listeners all over the world - but within the US, there are county extension agents from an ag sort of perspective all over the US. Correct.? We have this correct?

Marissa Mulligan: [00:04:34] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:35] Right. So, any—you—anybody in the US anywhere could find their local extension agent. Those resources are available. So, as an extension agent, what does it mean that you do? And that's part one of my question. I'd like to talk to my guests with multiple-part questions. And the other piece is, do we see similar types of things in other parts of the world or is this unique to the US?

Marissa Mulligan: [00:04:57] Yeah. So, the first part of that, being an extension educator. So, I'm specifically in youth development. So, more specifically, workforce development. But a lot of what my colleagues do is 4-H. So, engaging children in 4-H projects, anywhere from livestock to cloth projects, things like that. And also, extension has an arm that is directly related to education for farmers. So, extension educator can mean a lot of things, but all of it is facilitated through your land grant university. So, mine specifically is Ohio State, but there are other land grant universities in every state across the nation. And you can facilitate finding your extension agent through them.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:05:35] As for the world, I'm not quite sure. If we're talking about extension, I don't think so because I don't think land grant universities exist. I could be wrong. But as for labor, I think every situation, every country is so different that they might have labor concerns, but they might be different than our labor concerns.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:53] Sure, sure. But agriculture, generally, globally, is one of those things that everybody is working on.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:05:57] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:58] So, there will be a variety of resources depending on where you are.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:06:01] Definitely.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:02] So, Chris, then, as the Farm Bureau makes the decision that they want to actually fund a program to tackle agricultural workforce development, so what does that look like? How do you decide you want to fund this versus that? I want to get into the specifics of what the board actually put resources and dollars towards building.

Chris Baker: [00:06:30] Yeah. So, right off the bat, we've committed to two paths. The first was we felt it was important that we try to engage using our broad network a little bit. And that's where we first started getting into the space with some programming around Explore Ag. And originally, that started this past year with a total of two summer camps. And the idea was that we would bring in students that had an interest in the STEM-related fields and really put them through a twelve-hour-a-day programming where we're presenting STEM topics solely through the lens of food and agriculture. So, we started that out just to have some representation in the programmatic space. So, that was one of our initial approaches.

Chris Baker: [00:07:18] The second was to put together a large grant opportunity and ask others to bubble up their solutions as well too. So, we funded a \$100,000 RFP and put that out last year in the hopes of having other organizations take a look at this and see if we could create youth pathways to careers and food and agriculture jobs. And ultimately, we ended up funding two grants. One to Ohio FFA Foundation. So, they have a program focused on bringing free opportunities to a middle school age audience. And interestingly enough, the second program that we funded, which was a partnership between the Green County Farm Bureau in Central State University, also was really targeting that middle school population, really to begin communicating about the opportunities that exist in the farm and food space.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:15] And middle school is such a key time, right? Because if we don't capture the imagination or inspire, we often find, not always, but the likelihood is we could lose potential folks who had no idea what they would have loved if we wait too late in high school, lots of times, decision to get made for folks. So, I'm not surprised actually that so much stuff in the middle school space. So, Marissa, the program gets approved. And so, now, it's time to actually think about the components. I want to dig into the components of the program as you ran it this past summer. So, this is the second summer. It scaled from two-week programs to four week-long programs across three sites. And we'll talk about that in a moment. But as you really sort of think about what the components of that program are, could you walk us through some of the program components?

Marissa Mulligan: [00:09:10] Yeah. So, a lot of the programming is tours and speakers. So, the idea behind every tour, every speaker is you're really interested in engineering, how can I get you interested in ag engineering? You're really interested in technology, how can I have you create technology that can benefit farmers? That's kind of the idea. So, we do a lot of tours of like the Ag Engineering Department where they learn how to drive a tractor, what is in a tractor, what do we use tractors for, so that you can use your engineering to better agriculture? Some other things that we did was food safety. So, if you have a mind for that, and you didn't even know that you felt passionately about food safety or that it was an issue in this-

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:53] What's food safety? If you just tell people what food safety means.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:09:55] Yeah. So, like food safety is when auditors come in from the State USDA or ODA to inspect food to make sure that it's safe to sell to the public, there needs to be that inspector. There needs to be the person working at the plant that knows the protocol, so that we have secure food in this nation. And that has really impacted kids from these Explore Ag camps. They didn't even realize all the backend stuff that is required to have for us to have safe food to eat every

day. So, it's just exposing them to a lot of things. And I think I'm really passionate about it because I'm from the city of Philadelphia. I don't have an agricultural background at all. And if I had had the chance to be in a program like this where I was exposed to many careers in agriculture, I would have realized my passion before college and been able to start the process of getting involved in agriculture sooner.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:10:47] So, that's a lot of the programming. So, when you look at Ohio State, we use a lot of Ohio State's resources on Waterman Farm to teach him about dairy, dairy producers, and fruit and vegetable producers. Waterman has so much going on over there. And then, when we were elsewhere, we would tour. Like we toured Dole Foods to learn about food safety. The thing that I found with the programming is that people want you to come and tour their facility. They want to come and speak to you about what I do because they're passionate about it. So, they want you involved in it as well or, at least, educate you on it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:24] And is there a hands-on component for the students when they go to these places? There's something for them to do there?

Marissa Mulligan: [00:11:31] Yeah. That's the goal.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:33] Right.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:11:34] I like the interactive components the best. So, when we were doing—when we are at Waterman Farm learning about real crop farming, they got to do soil samples, which is a really great way to get them hands on learning about those things. Yeah, they definitely have many interactive components.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:50] Yeah. Kids definitely do best in that environment.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:11:53] One hundred percent. If there's one thing I learned from those camps is that kids don't want to sit and be lectured to for an hour. They want to be out there doing stuff.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:01] Absolutely, absolutely. So, Chris, when you think about the bigger policy or economic development impact potential of a program like this, how is—whether it be the Farm Bureau Board, the foundation board, or the federation, what do those conversations look like as it relates to being able to justify programming? I mean, that's one of the big things that we always see, right. Industries are struggling. And the best place, the best and highest use of dollars, often, is in your education, your outreach. But it's, oftentimes, very difficult to make those decisions. What does that look like inside of an industry like agriculture?

Chris Baker: [00:12:47] So, right now, I think a lot of it is driven by certain realities that we're just now starting to wrap our minds around. In fact, one of our key priorities in really building the business case for why we wanted others to partner with us, we noticed there wasn't a tremendous amount of data within the State of Ohio in terms of, "Let's send kids to these jobs. Well, how much do they pay? What are some of the things that parents may have questions about?" So, right now, we're actually in the process of kind of finding many of those items out. So, we've started by Commissioning, a survey of Ohio agriculture in the business climate. And we found some interesting things there.

Chris Baker: [00:13:31] For instance, jobs in agriculture actually pay a little bit better than other jobs in related fields, which is an amazing narrative to be able to bring up. It certainly surprised me quite a bit. So, as we've gone out and done some of the baseline research, we've been able to come back to our partners and say, "Hey, we want you to sign on with us." And like Marissa alluded to, most everyone in this space is very interested in solving the problem of attracting more labor. And they see

delivering any type of programming to kids as being particularly beneficial. And frankly, it also gives them a chance to brag a little bit and show off what it is that they do. So, that was really kind of some of our focus there.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:20] Well, and one of the things that I like most about the program is the notion that it was really trying to reach into students who were not already involved in ag. So, it wasn't excluding students who come from an ag background, not by any stretch of the imagination, but really trying to balance that, so that you didn't just have students who already knew most baseline or even in depth, right, what ag might be, but that you're really trying to attract new people into this industry.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:54] And one of the ways to do that is to go into bigger cities, like Marissa was talking about, but also to make sure that the places that you took folks were places that even kids who are already involved every day in ag wouldn't think of. So, I'm thinking about, for example, Coalescence, one of the local partners here. So, Marissa, could you explain a little bit about what Coalescence does, and sort of why that sort of taps into the nontraditional thinking about agriculture?

Marissa Mulligan: [00:15:21] Yeah. So, Coalescence is really involved with food science. So, they do a lot of the recipes for how you get certain spices or how do we get food to taste a certain way.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:32] They're like the flavors of Doritos, right?

Marissa Mulligan: [00:15:34] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:36] Come out of there, right?

Marissa Mulligan: [00:15:36] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:36] So, it's pretty amazing food science.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:15:38] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:39] Because some of those flavors are bad, and some of them are really awesome, and some are just weird.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:15:43] Right, right, yeah. So, what they do is super important. And what I have found with my traditional ag students when they come, they don't even know that food science is-

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:52] Is ag, right?

Marissa Mulligan: [00:15:52] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:52] Yeah.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:15:52] So, it's really interesting to see them with their eyes wide open like, "Oh, I didn't even know this was a thing."

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:01] Yeah.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:16:01] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:02] And for the kids who who've had no exposure whatsoever, that, for example, that experience, you're tapping into chemistry, a lot of chemistry. You're tapping into the biological sciences of taste and smell. And you're talking into a lot of the process pieces that go into the production side on the back end. It goes back into those food facilities, whether they'd be the chip factory for Frito Lay or anything else, right? So, that's one of the things that I really love about the program. And Chris, you've had many opportunities to talk to kids because you get to go to all the graduations.

Chris Baker: [00:16:37] That's right, yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:38] I've been to a few, but not all of them. And so, what do you hear from the students about the experience that for you was that sort of powerful piece as it relates to, "Yeah, we should keep doing this"?

Chris Baker: [00:16:52] So, without question, it's kind of the connections that are made. So, even our traditional farm kids that come to the program, every one of them leaves with a broad knowledge of career opportunities. So, when we do have our graduations, we ask everybody to kind of share their favorite experience or maybe something that changed, hoping to make that connection to, "Hey, maybe I would be interested in being a food scientist, or working in the meat industry," or whatever the case may be. So, for me, without a doubt, that's certainly one of the coolest.

Chris Baker: [00:17:30] In terms of the actual programs that surprised me the most, we took a tour of Bob Evans Sausage factory. I was a little bit concerned about that. Frankly, I wasn't sure if we were going to be contributing to a lot of salad eaters or how people might respond. And it ended up being one of the most highly regarded things that we did, which completely shocked me. And I think there was two elements for that. (A), people actually got to—the students got to go behind the scenes and see something that most—very few other people will actually get to be able to experience. And we also tied it in with a biotech research company that is using porcine, pancreas cells, to help fight Type 1 diabetes and maybe even possibly cure cancer.

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:15] Yeah. So, that's an amazing connection because those kids would not have ever connected all that together. And then, all of that comes through that ag lens. The would have no notion. And on this program, we talk an awful lot about the fact that we have to expose kids to potential opportunities. And then, we have to give them the chance to actually explore those. And those are two very different things. And oftentimes, what happens is I see frequently in schools is we think they're one and the same, and they're not. And the magic difference, which is the piece of the pro, the magic difference is time spent immersed in that opportunity. So, the exposure can go from, "Hey, I just have been given lens to this too. I've rolled up my sleeves, and I've played with this."

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:02] So, Marissa, as you sort of think about the students' experiences, how do you gauge from year to year and change or add elements in? And let me give you an example. So, one of the young men that I had the pleasure of getting to speak to, I think, at this last graduation, was really talking about some of the mechanisms tied to automation in agriculture, which is a big thing, right? Automation all over the place and autonomous automation, right? In this case, the kid was really talking about the uses of drones in farming, which is a big, big to-do, right? And so, it's like I'm not interested in agriculture at all, but I really, really love drone and drone technology. And so, I want to be a drone designer or operator. And this is a great opportunity for me to do it because there's all these jobs. They're looking for people. So, how do you make the decisions in real time from season to season about how you plug in what?

Marissa Mulligan: [00:19:59] Yeah. So, we always talk about how in agriculture, how the face of agriculture is constantly changing. And I think technology is a huge part of that. When you talk about

drones and all the amazing things that they can do for farmers, we tend to be aware, like self-aware. I talk to a lot of people. I get to know a lot of people, and they will talk to me about, "Hey, drones are like a huge thing, and your kids might be interested in this." And I think it's—when I'm planning these camps, it's diversity of experience. So, food science and going to Coalescence is a lot of fun. The kids really enjoy that, but they also really enjoyed the drone experience.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:20:32] They also really enjoyed when we went “creeking”, where you go into a creek, and you learn about all of the natural organisms that are in the river, what makes a healthy river, what makes healthy water quality. And I think each kid is going to identify with different tours more. So, the girl that was really into the natural resources and how we can preserve them might not have been into the drones, but it's giving them a wide breadth of diverse experiences that will help connect with each kid with what their passion might be.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:03] Right. And so, then, how do you capitalize, Chris, on this experience? Because that's, quite frankly, the big next question. I mean, I'm sure that one of the questions that, as an organization, you have to wrestle with is sustainability. But the next one, then, is really around that space of, how do I capitalize on the fact that X number of students have participated in this program, and how do I make sure that those experiences turn into or translate into workforce? How do you do that?

Chris Baker: [00:21:35] Well, we're trying to figure that out literally, but we've got a few good ideas. At least, that's our hope. The first is, when you look at Explore AG itself, very much by intention, we build that, so it was going to be incredibly intensive. You're there for a week, and you're going to 12 hours a day around the clock.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:56] And it's residential. Just so our listeners understand, these kids come, they spend the night, there's dorms available. If you did it in your local community, you could do it as a long day camp. But just as an FYI. So, you have them captured.

Chris Baker: [00:22:08] Yeah. So, we do. And we're kind of-

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:10] You do?

Chris Baker: [00:22:11] We've got them on the hamster wheel-

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:11] Yeah.

Chris Baker: [00:22:13] ... which is great. But right now, we're being very intensive with the small group.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:17] Right.

Chris Baker: [00:22:18] Right? Roughly a hundred right now. We hope to continue to scale that up. So, we see that as one of our key strategies. But another is, how do we continue to engage those kids came through a very intensive program? Hopefully, they come in, it was life changing, but we all have lots of life-changing experiences in our adolescence. How do we translate that, ultimately, into a career? Well, we think part of it will be to be very diligent about inviting them to come back to other opportunities. So, we're currently scripting out an entire continuum of engagement that includes opportunities for young people who went through Explore Ag programs to continue that outside the summer camp. So, we're working with other partners right now to plan a career-based training. So, think maybe like a Saturday, come out, do a clinic. You'd self-transport to the place to experience this

great thing. We buy your lunch. So, the costs aren't too terribly expensive. And our industry partners are absolutely interested in doing it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:27] Sure.

Chris Baker: [00:23:27] In fact, we're mapping one out right now with Ohio Electric Cooperatives because they're very interested in kind of showcasing that other connected element of agriculture, which is power generation, and everything has to do with electricity. So, we're going to take kids to alignment camp, and they'll be able to climb poles, but they'll also get to see the chemistry that goes behind how we generate clean power and all of those types of things. So, we think that's an important element to it as well, having that continuum of engagement. So, even if you did go through the weeklong program, you've got the opportunity to continue with your experience. But we're also marketing those clinics more broadly in the hope that we pick you up because you're interested in renewable energy or something along those lines. And now, you're going to continue and go into some of the other camps.

Chris Baker: [00:24:19] And the last thing I would mention there is we're also in the process of incentivizing folks. So, we want to make sure that if you engaged with us in a rather significant way, when it does time to seek that next level of training, we're going to be there to help you out in a pretty significant way. So, we're creating scholarships just for Explore Ag students at this point.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:40] Yeah. And I love those aspects of this. I particularly love the opportunity to think about that initial experience and to expand on that exposure and exploration piece, right. Because then, I think that the energy cooperative is an awesome one because, again, coming back sort of full circle around, what the heck is agriculture, and how many industries play a role in what we think that thing is? The reality is it's hard to turn, and look at, or talk about any industry that doesn't have some connection back to ag. And so, that's a great way to sort of help and amplify that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:22] Marissa, what about the opportunity, if you will, to scale at readymade audiences? Let me preface this a little bit. So, these kids go to that program. They have an awesome experience. And I can say because I've talked to these kids numerous times. Almost universally, it is an awesome experience had by all. So, every participant is profoundly impacted by what they did. And so, that's a huge win. So, congratulations for that. But the other piece of it is those kiddos go back to their communities. They go back to their family farms, or they go back to their cities. They go back to their schools. They go back to their places of worship, or their community centers, or their sports teams, right? How do you take that experience and find ways to mainstream it? Is that through teacher, PDs helping other folks understand? How do you translate that?

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:23] That's a really tough thing to do. But for the sake of sustainability and long-term impact, you can't do this without that. So, what does that look like, or how are you guys thinking about that? I know this is a big bombshell I just threw you. I could see even the look on your face. And that's okay. You don't have to have an answer. But how? And either of you can jump in, right? How do you think about that? Because it's a small audience here. Very profound. But then, how do you take that small audience and turn it into an opportunity to get that same kind of messaging out very broadly across a state that's got way more jobs available in the ag industry than people who are looking in the ag industry?

Marissa Mulligan: [00:27:03] So, I have two answers to this question. The first one is during the week, we strategically help the students become good advocates for, not only careers in agriculture, but agriculture as a whole. So, they have a presentation at the end of the week where they talk about a certain ag topic. A couple of them were sustainability, technology, what does it mean for agriculture? To them, that might just be, "Oh, like homework during the week," but it's teaching them

how to communicate with their peers about a topic. Hopefully, when they go back to their community that they can be talking about agriculture and what they learned at this camp, so that they feel more comfortable in communication.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:27:44] And then, two, as I move forward, it's important to me when I look at strategy for recruitment next year to work with teachers, I've found that I have recruited the best this last year when I am talking to their FFA teacher or just their regular school—their classroom teacher. I think that having a strong relationship with them is very important, one, because then they can send their top-of-the-notch students every year to the Explore Ag camp, and they know that they will plan on that, but also having a good relationship with them will, hopefully, disseminate again in their classrooms.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:20] Chris, do you have anything you want to add to that? So, the reason I-

Chris Baker: [00:28:26] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:26] Here's the reason I asked this. Well, here's the reason, though, that I asked the question. And think this is where—how it's relevant to both the Farm Bureau Foundation and, ultimately, I think to the Federation of Farm Bureaus as it stretches across the state. I'm just sort of thinking about what's the best and highest use of those dollars. So, I'm putting on a fiscal hat, right, as organization and entities are constantly funding new programs, right? But we always get into these questions tied to sustainability. And one of the mechanisms that ever really tries to leverage and rightly so, is how do I take that experience that's a singular experience and mainstream it? That's the hard thing to do. But at the end of the day, it's probably the most critical component, right? And so, I know, as an organization, you're ferreting with these things, right, because you have to. And maybe, for sure, it's totally okay to say, "We're just still working on that," but I'm really curious how, as a community of practitioners, I guess, and partners [indiscernible] are leveraged in there, how folks think about that sort of ideology?

Chris Baker: [00:29:35] I think, you used the right word, sustainability. And I would look at that, not just on the standpoint of like how does the funding mechanism work, but our ultimate goal and what are kind of the driving forces behind it. So, one of the ways that we think about this particular issue isn't just attracting young people to careers here. What are the large challenges that we're facing as an industry? And frankly, as a society is how we're going to feed ourselves coming into a future? And that's one of the things that I love most about this generation of young people. They're incredibly driven around cause. And every one of them I've talked to wants to change the world. Well, this is a great opportunity for them to be able to do that. I'm not sure that there's probably any other industry that you could jump into and have a larger impact, whether it's dealing with access to foods, increasing our food security, or eliminating food waste, or any of those types of things. So, certainly, the sustainability piece is certainly important to us on both of those fronts.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:50] Right, yeah. And then, what have to be. So, as we sort of think about what comes next, Marissa, so you're already—you're finishing up this summer. And so, you're already thinking about what it might look like next time. Is there any key things that you're going to add in?

Chris Baker: [00:31:11] Yeah. So, what I'm very excited about with this fall is to have continued communication with the kids. So, my biggest project right now is, how do I engage with them in a way that is natural? So, social media is the main way. And I've been having some success with that so far because email and newsletter, I'm definitely going to put together a newsletter and send an e-mail, but that's just not the way the kids communicate nowadays. So, how can I communicate with them? And I was very intentional this last summer about asking them, what did you think of this tour? What

could have been better? After this, would you want a newsletter? What do you want in the newsletter? I was very intentional about having this conversation with them.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:31:49] I would like to incorporate more out-of-the-box agriculture. So, when I think about the electric cooperatives, that's really good. I worked a lot with the opioid crisis in my last job. And I think that that's a huge part of the agricultural community. Could we incorporate a speaker around that? How can we support rural communities? There's like so many things you can do with this, and I'm very much of a ideas person. My mind will run wild if I let it with ideas. So, right now, it's getting all the ideas down, and then pinpointing the ones I think would be best for the kids. But it's important to ask them what they want and what they want to see out of the program. We were very intentional about that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:28] Well, and just because folks are going to be wondering, I can hear the wheels are spinning. So, what social media platforms do kids tell you they wanted you to communicate with?

Marissa Mulligan: [00:32:36] Instagram.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:38] Instagram right now.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:32:38] Instagram was the main one.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:40] The funny thing is two years from now, they're going to have something totally different.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:32:43] Totally.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:43] But right now. Okay. Perfect. Good to know. So, I always like to to end this program with sort of thinking about those for the high lobs. So, I'm a teacher in Tucson, Arizona, let's say, right? And I very much would like to pull together an Explore Ag-like program. What are the two or three most important things I need to know as I start to build this? Marissa, I'll start with you. What's your last lob to someone who is jazzed, excited, "I'm gonna go do this"? What do they need to know?

Marissa Mulligan: [00:33:14] Connect with your community partners. Connect with your land grant university, your local farm bureau. There's a farm bureau in every state. Connect to people that know about agriculture because they'll direct you to the best resources and the best places to go for tours. I'm very much of a network-based person. I like having a large network of people that know more than me, and I can call on them when I don't know the answer. So, if you're someone that doesn't know anything about agriculture but wants your kids to be exposed to that, I would definitely reach out to community partners and community leaders that can help you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:43] Perfect, yeah. Absolutely. Chris, what was your recommendation?

Chris Baker: [00:33:48] Well, frankly, I would just piggyback off that to say that everyone within agriculture is deeply interested in sharing what it is they do, whether it's kind of marketing that direct to consumer, informing, "Here is the role of GMOs and things," or showcasing careers that do happen within their field. If you do reach out, I would be very surprised if you didn't get a tremendous amount of engagement because there's such a strong culture that exists within the food and ag space around a willingness to engage with the public. So, I'd absolutely say to go there.

Chris Baker: [00:34:26] Then, on the funding side, I would certainly look up your local farm bureau and other farm-based organizations or commodities because many of them, this is an important topic. In the case of the commodities, they do have dollars for education as part of their checkoff, and many of them are already putting those to work through great partners as we speak. So, just be mindful of that. Many of them have submission periods throughout the year, and you can apply for dollars yourself.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:58] And it's not actually that hard to do that. And I think that's a really, really great point that you make, Chris, that the reality is that you can do a program like this relatively cost effective, especially if it's not an overnight scenario, right, because it's limiting the different food resources that you have. Lots of communities have programs that will make it possible for summer programs, especially if they have a mechanism for at-risk, high-needs populations to have food provided through Parks and Rec or local community centers. But also the fact of the matter is, like you said, those industry partners want to share what they do with you. And so, you can pull together some really amazing day experiences, relatively cost effective. And then, hopefully, great teachers are always really good at taking those amazing experiences that they have with their students and turning them into programs that will impact what they're doing in the classrooms every day. And at the end of the road, that's kind of what we're looking for. So, I want to thank you both for taking time out of your day and sharing Explore Ag with all of us. So, thank for coming.

Marissa Mulligan: [00:36:05] Thanks for having me.

Chris Baker: [00:36:05] Thanks so much.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:09] Thank you for joining us for Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. I want to thank my guests and encourage you all to be part of the conversation. Meet me on social media, @annaliescorbin. And join me next time as we stand up, step back, and lean in to reimagine education.