

Murnong Mamas Interview with Ira Barker, Barkinji and Gunditjmara

Ira - My name's Ira Barker. I'm a Gunditjmara and Barkinji person. I use they/them pronouns. I was born and grew up on Dja Dja Wurrung country in central Victoria. And I do a bit of cooking, a bit of growing. A lot of my work is around educating people and myself about native Australian foods.

Maddy - So we wanted to talk to you a little bit about your project with, or your work with Murnong Mamma's because we're interested in this place where ecological restoration, care for Country and community economy meets food and what happens there and what kinds of consideration and things that might come up for you in thinking about that, those things. And I guess for us, we've been cheekily saying that it's a way of, disorganizing our relationship to capitalism, but also we're interested in the sort of sensitive relationship to place that is built through that as well. So I don't know if there's a question in there.

Ira - I grew up in a town not too far from where I am now. So I'm currently based in Castlemaine. But I grew up in a town called Bendigo. It's a small town of about 200,000 people, I want to say, I could very well be wrong. That was a town that I lived in up until I was 24 and it didn't have any sense of community. It was large enough and it was sprawling enough that you just really didn't connect with people, and you really have to search for a way to actually meet people that are like-minded. So it wasn't until I started working here in Castlemaine. I was running the local family video land, the DVD rental store. And that's when my mind was kind of opened up to how important a sense of community actually is. And how really putting yourself out there and saying what you want and what you need and what you value really is a pathway to being able to action those values and those thoughts. So I met one of my customers who was a regular Melinda Harper and she works for Murnong Mamas. She used to come in and we used to chat quite informally all the time, it wasn't until the store was inevitably closing down that I talked a little bit about looking for employment. Once she found out that I was Indigenous, she was like, tomorrow, come cooking, we'll show you the ropes. I'd heard of Murnong Mamas before. I had a local woman come in, talking about it, saying, you know, we use it's amazing gum leaf that tastes like strawberries and wattleseed, and it really sounded like a dream to me.

I've always really enjoyed cooking for people and creating for people. I always say my love language is feeding people. So, the opportunity to kind of connect more with my ancestry and my Indigenous heritage, I'd be able to cook with things that I wasn't coming across at all was a really exciting prospect for me. Within a month of working Murnong Mamas it really felt like a family and I felt really secure and safe with them. So making that connection, just completely started the ball rolling, between cooking, working in community, doing some educating as well, and now really excitingly doing some growing, which I've always been a

keen gardener, but I do have a little bit of... or I have had a bit of a black thumb. I think I'm learning from Elders now to really listen to the plants, and hear what they need. So I feel like I've learned so much through that community. And I know if I hadn't made the step to come and work in Castlemaine, I wouldn't be the person that I am today. This community has really shaped my outlook on life and how I value myself. I think my confidence has grown quite a lot and being able to speak to people about what I'm passionate about and then really respond and react and become passionate about that too has been probably the best thing that's ever happened to me. Even though it's been a rough couple of years with the pandemic and everything. These have been the best years of my life. Being able to work with the community and be able to grow this family of people in a community that really supports each other. And it's something that I never thought I'd be a really community minded person, but it's completely changed me and my outlook on life. I always wanted to travel around and see the world, but I think everything that I need is right here. And it's a small country town in Australia, but yeah it's got everything that I need. And everyone here is just really, really beautiful, supportive and quite like-minded.

Maddy - Can you tell us a bit more about what Murnong Mammias does? Just what it is and how it works and how it makes money maybe?

Ira - So, Murnong Mammias is a social enterprise, we are auspiced through the local Castlemaine Community House, so we're lucky enough to use the industrial kitchen here. Absolutely anything that we need, the admin staff and the manager here, Martin Shadok, are incredibly supportive. So we do try to, well, we do actively employ indigenous people. It started off obviously being called Murnong Mammias and the aim was to employ Aboriginal women from the community. But I came in, I identify as non-binary. So, I think we're kind of making it a little bit more gender neutral at the moment. Rather than just a mamma, I'm not so much a Murnong papa, perhaps Murnong People. So I have been lucky enough to cook for some really amazing local organizations. So we cook for a lot of and cater for a lot of Indigenous organizations in the area. Dja Dja Wurrung in Bendigo, which is the board of traditional owners and Jarra Jarra people, that we cater quite a lot of their events and they are a massive support to us. So it's not so much a profit driven business or enterprise its main focus is to empower and employ local Indigenous people that otherwise wouldn't be quite as active in community. So, for me, I had a lot of trepidation, kind of getting more involved in the community because of a range of reasons, mostly because of the way that I perceived myself as a light-skinned black person or a person of color. And that was immediately something that was not an issue. And that was really incredible to me. So the group of people around Murnong Mammias around some of the other social enterprises and corporations that are indigenous led here, has been really impactful to me. And it's been a way for me to connect with culture, play around with food, which is a massive passion of mine and be able to connect more with the community around here. So it's, yeah, it's been fantastic.

Maddy - It sounds like an amazing network of organizations and people, and that you're all kind of relying on each other and supporting each other and connecting and making each other's ambitions possible.

Ira - Yeah. There's a massive framework, you know, of elders that really support the younger people and the older people that may have been disengaged in the past. And it's an empowering community to be a part of. I'm kind of sad that I waited so long to get more involved and meet the families around and the people around because they've positively impacted me in so many ways and there's always something happening around there's always opportunities. And if there isn't people see what you want to do, what you like to do, what you value and what you're passionate about, and they make those opportunities happen. So it's a really supportive community.

Maddy - I would love to hear you talk a little bit more about the growing element that you're working on and about the kind of practice of learning to listen to plants if that's okay.

Ira - Yeah, definitely. So I started growing Bush foods at a really interesting time. So in Victoria, we've had quite a few lockdowns during the pandemic and it was the second lockdown, I think the second lockdown was about a hundred days or more. I don't even know because time doesn't mean anything after being in so many lockdowns. I live alone. So for me, before we were able to have a social bubble and be able to connect with people outside of our household, I was really isolated. We weren't getting any catering work. Melinda, my boss connected me with a group called Gung Ho growers. They work or they're based at the Harlequin organic co-op here in Harcourt, which is really beautiful, volcanic soil, amazing growing. And I started volunteering there on Thursdays and because of the week would go so quickly. And I was so isolated Thursday, it's really grounded me for quite a few months.

So initially I was learning how to grow more European and African fruits and vegetables. But once we realized that it was a good opportunity for Murnong Mammias to start growing their own food or produce. We thought it was a good opportunity to partner up with these people who I got to know over some months and have grown to love like that people that have made a really positive impact in my life and the outlook that I have. So we all kind of got together. And one thing that they are really passionate about is food sovereignty and empowering First Nations people to take land back essentially, and reconnect with the Country and reconnect with culture. So they were really excited at the prospect of us working together. So what we've done is we've created a big plot of about 400 plants. And with the help of Auntie Julie, McHale, who's a Palawa woman and essentially an adopted elder of the area. She made me much more confident in growing because I had put myself down and been like, "I kill everything!" "It never works." She really went through and, and helped me connect with a lot of the plants. Some of them are important in local teachings. So, there's certain plants that are symbolic of the importance of different parts of community and, and **every plant has a story and a meaning behind it**. So I think that really opened up my eyes to valuing these plants themselves and really listening to what it is

that they need. So we've planted quite a lot and it's going really well. We've got a native spinach called Warragul Greens and within six weeks of planting plants they completely took over the plot and they just grow like absolute mad.

So that's been fantastic. We've got things like pepper leaf and pepperberry trees, which I'm really excited about, murnong our namesake, which of course we have to grow. Chocolate and vanilla lilies, Bowl vine leaves. So, at the moment, through the changing of the seasons, it's been really interesting to see the ebb and flow, and how the plants respond to the weather. Obviously, during climate change, it's incredibly inconsistent weather, but I like to try and go off the Kulin nation's calendar, which is local. I think there's about six seasons we're in Guling at the moment, so well, we're about to be, but of course, everything is flowering earlier than we expect. And it's all orchid season at the moment. That's what Guling means and it usually stops roughly in August though we're obviously using a Gregorian oriented calendar. Which doesn't really fit, sorry. It's been interesting really, valuing the seasons more, being in one place. **When I was living in Bendigo, I really wasn't valuing the place and the, the local ecology and everything. Being in one place now and being able to really see the changes in the seasons, be in exactly the same place and see it evolve and change and grow and die and come back throughout the year. It's taught me a lot. And I think that speaking to Aunty, Julian McHale, especially she's really taught me to listen to those plants and see what they need, because they're always going to tell me, I just need to open my eyes and open my ears and really listen.**

Meenakshi - Yeah, I'm also sort of listening and learning and it's interesting, I'm in India and, Delhi its an urban city and it's also, a place that at least in our context, one we are learning about, even throughout interviews, just learning about some of the connections you start to see with different projects and different geographies and you know, different places. And so I was really curious actually, you know, about how you spoke about the town and being in one place and really living there creating that community. And, uh, so there's some slowness as well, you're going to take your time with the plants with, with the land, with, you know, those who are around you. I was just wondering if at any point, like there is an interaction with other communities or other locations, is there an exchange, you know even with the catering, like the recipes, is that's also a certain kind of knowledge. And so we'll like eat that food. They're also actually gaining something that they might not read, but it's, it's really in the tastes. And is that how you would think, you know, the sharing is happening across community.

Ira - 100% like maybe we are growing a lot of plants that are native or Indigenous to this particular area. So are a lot of subtropical plants that you wouldn't think would survive in a really frosty, cold, wet place. But again, Aunty Julie McHale is just incredible. When it comes to her plants, she has hundreds and hundreds of Bush foods and things that are really difficult to make fruit in the right environment. But somehow she's able to get these tropical plants to really thrive and fruit. And I think it goes back to her being at the same place for so long and being able to really be in tune and in touch with the weather, the climate, what

plants need. So that's been absolutely incredible to see that, yeah, if you do open your eyes and really listen, you can make incredible things happen.

We've been lucky enough, this, uh, corporation here called Nalderun Education Aboriginal Corporation, and then been holding some tours in the area they've just started out and they've actually been really successful, started going through and doing your typical kind of tours, the local area, but from an Indigenous perspective. So going out and seeing really important places, and artifacts and things like rock wells and, and people that otherwise wouldn't be looking at their surrounds in that lens. It really opens their eyes. So we've been able to go through and do a Bush Tucker sample pack for them. So that was a really fun opportunity because we were able to use things that we weren't using otherwise. And it was a learning experience for us as well. And I haven't been able to attend one yet, but the feedback that I've gotten is incredibly positive to have people end a tour, seeing this Country as it once was, and as it will always be. That people will be able to try all these different flavors and, and really unusual, diverse fruits that we have here.

I know a lot of the really popular ones that, for example, **Lemon Myrtle seems to be a good start for a lot of people and people think, oh, lemon, I'll use it in the same way. But in reality, it's really different. It's got a really nice vanillary kind of light flavor. And I know that it's a good entry point for people to be able to use it as a replacement and think about it in relation to food that they're familiar with. But in reality, it's not like lemons. It's like Lemon Myrtle. These things have such interesting flavors that we're just simply not used to.** I've been lucky enough to forage from a Riberry tree that my mother has been growing for four years now. She planted it at about this size and they're considered a slow growing tree. And it's about 12 feet now. In four years. So that shows you the kind of disconnect that people have with the knowledge of the plants and it's an interesting fruit quite astringent. So when you bite into it, it makes your mouth quite dry. And people do try to equate it with cloves or cinnamon or sour, apple, or something like that. But in reality it only tastes like itself. Um, and that was amazing not to realize that my mother had those trees. She considered, she refers to them as her “neighbors be gone” trees because they used for screening. And one day I was there and I looked over and I smelled the fruit. And I was like, “Mum, that's *Syzygium luehmannii*, that's a subtropical tree that grows up north.” And she was like, “I wonder why the birds liked it?” And so I've had the opportunity to go through in the kitchen, to have the opportunity to really create and experiment with all these places that I don't want to equate them with, what people consider them. **I have a couple of books, bush tucker books that are mostly based on colonial diaries and things like that. And one of the examples that they said that Riberries didn't have much nutritional value at all. In reality, if you ate 100 grams of Riberries, that has 50% of your full vitamin requirements for the day.** So it's antioxidants like, you know, through the roof, like it's insane. How nutritious things fruits are, the vitamin C content of quite a lot of the fruits. Like a, I believe it's a Kakadu plum has the amount of vitamin C as fifty oranges.

Such incredible value, but because people just, yeah, completely disregarded it's insane. And the Bush tuck industry is growing. Um, it's a, you know, a million dollar industry now, but unfortunately 90% of ownership is actually non-indigenous. We only count 2% of the industry. **Which is really distressing because there's a lot of things when people have completely rejected and made a massive effort to just completely wipe out your culture and then they pick and choose what they like. And then they'll make a profit off of it for us to be able to have that autonomy. And, you know, it's in reality, it's our intellectual property that we've known and we've, you know, cultivated over thousands of years and hundreds of generations, and now it's being valued as a really trendy/cool thing. And so that's white people coming in (forgive me), and growing and making an incredible profit for something that has been out, out lively with the way we feed ourselves and our families and conduct ceremony continue our culture for millennia.**

Maddy - I was wondering about that. Whether you wanted to see it become, because colonialism obviously terraformed Victoria in such an intense way. And I think Victoria agriculturally and botanically was really transformed by these quite crazy practices. And I wonder if all of that thinking that restoration and thinking about reversing that impact is such a big project. And also, it absolutely will be at First Nations led. And I wonder about the impact of your work in thinking about how to share that knowledge. And then also thinking about the actual seeds themselves as a place where you might store and exchange different kinds of knowledge with other parts of Victoria. Because it's such a big project, isn't it to, to really, to have this land, these seeds cared for by the right people.

Ira- Yeah. It's a massive undertaking to go and try and revegetate and bring this country to what it once was. I was going through and doing a little bit of research. I was trying to find some more details about my family and see if I could find some more information. And I came across the report for the protection of Aborigines from 1861. And each report went through and spoke about the different missions that were either run by the church or the state or something like that. And the efforts that they were making to create farmable land. So one of the massive things that people are trying to regenerate right now is wetlands. We always talk about the importance of forests when it comes to CO2 and everything like that. But wetlands are really, really valuable when it comes to trying to reduce our CO2. I came across, they were trying to, I'm not sure where it was. I think it was in Victoria that we're trying to make the land farmable. So they spent years compacting the wetlands and trying to make them what they considered farmable land but unfortunately they completely ruined an eco-system.

There is a massive dialogue that's happened. It's a myth that, Indigenous people of Australia are nomadic people, hunter / gatherers, that's a simplified narrative that people tend to have about indigenous groups. But not realizing how complex our agriculture and aquaculture systems actually were. One of the things that, to be honest, I cried when I read it, I was reading Uncle Bruce Pascoe's book, Dark Emu. And he was talking about how incredible the thousands of years of cultivating soil, like the incredible impact that, that

there are places in South Australia. We could barely walk on the ground. It was as light as ash. It had been turned over and cultivated for so long. Things like Murnong and other tubers. And within 50 years that was completely ruined by cattle. The land that people consider, Australia really dry, really cracked, really compacted. It wasn't like that. We had, you know, thousands and thousands of acres sprawling massive farms. But it didn't fit the colonial narrative of what productivity and what farms and agriculture actually are. So that was something that was completely disregarded.

I've read things about, you know, colonial, people going through and witnessing Indigenous people, whether they be fishing or something like that. And they see these amazing feats of and engineering, they describe them as the Blak fellas being lazy. All they have to do is just sit there and grab something. But because they've gone through thousands of years, we've went through thousands of years of honing these engineering principles and being able to live a really lovely life. But to that lens, it was just completely, "oh, they're lazy. So they don't do this". One of the things that came up a lot in the report that I was reading was that the Indigenous people that'd be great on the cattle farms for a couple of months, but then that just, you know, they'd disappear and they weren't good at long-term work, but they don't think about the actual scale of the work that, you know, these people at this time were actually doing, like taking care of and being custodians of land all year round and not just one year, thinking about things in the scale of tens, hundreds of years.

So short-term work on a cattle farm may seem like, you know, their idea of what good work is and your hard worker worked 10 hours a day, blah, blah, blah. But we had time to live our lives in a way that we wanted and preserve our culture and, you know, continue on with traditions because the systems that may have were so much better. So being able to see people bringing these farming methods and this agriculture and aquaculture back in contemporary times has been really rewarding. I don't know how long it would take to cultivate this soil to get it back to that light ash soil again, I don't think in the world that we live in today, capitalism that we would ever be able to do that, which is a really pessimistic thing to say, but it's really great to see a lot of Indigenous organizations coming out, starting amazing projects like Dja Dja Wurrung and Jan Jac, which is their land management side of things are currently doing a yam daisy project. So with fire stick farming, the women are going through and planting so many murnongs and trying to bring the land back to what it was.

A couple of people that I know that work in land care management, and they work a lot with cutting down invasive species of the area because of course they have a really negative impact. Things like gorse are absolutely everywhere here because it flowers pretty much all year round, it spreads everywhere. Of course, that was brought over for things like dye and things like that. So all of these things seemed valuable to people coming over, um, obviously had a really negative impact, so to see Aboriginal organizations going around, trying to reverse that is amazing. I think it's really important to, I wouldn't say gatekeeper, but to really, emphasize the importance of indigenous led projects and programs, and to empower the next generation to keep these traditions and these, these practices going that's, I think

the main focus, but I think educating the wider Australian community and instilling a sense of real pride and one demand about the things that we've been doing for thousands of years. I think that's a really important aspect to decolonizing the land that we live on today.

So there's amazing seed banks around and projects. And, you know, you can get heaps of Bush Foods from Bunnings, which is, you know, the big box hardware store, and they die as soon as you bring them home because of course they're in a hot house and then they actually get out into a real world environment and then they die and the soils crap, but it's amazing even though they're being driven by, you know more of a white market, I think it's really valuable that they're around more, people can see the amazing parts of this country that, you know, were completely ignored for hundreds of years. And it's really amazing to see non-Indigenous people have a sense of pride and excitement about the industry and the revegetation and, and all of these efforts that are happening. I think it's really important.

Maddy - I brought home some chocolate lilies and I put them in like a bed of composted soil they didn't like it. And I think about that ashy soil, I think about sand and what kinds of soil might sustain those plants? And it's exactly what you're saying. It's how to learn to listen to them. And then also to listen, not only to that, but what other forms of life that makes possible, like the bees and the insects. And, you know, when you look at a tree, you look at a gum tree in my street, like a silver gum, princess gum, I think it's called and it's filled with bees. And then you look at a Plane tree, it's got nothing on it, and you can see there's a kind of life, no life, life, no life. And that must be incredibly confusing also for the, for the insects and, birds and things like that, that are, that are kind of wondering what's going on Country.

Ira - Definitely. It's amazing when we were doing some filming of some Bush Tucker education at Aunty Julie McHale's house, she has a beautiful Banksia tree, and I was doing some slow motion zoom shots of it and everything. And there were about six or seven different species of insects that we could see that were European-based, that were native based. So there's about three different types of ants and they were all just enjoying themselves, you know, pollinating everything, having a great time. And yeah, that's not something that you really see on a lot of the European plants around. Like, I know that there's definitely a lot of bees on, you know, certain things because, you hear the buzz, but it's amazing to be able to see, you know, people that are creating these little boxes for the native bees and trying to plant plants that they're really beneficial for them. And it's not just because the honey is amazing. It's really, really good. Luckily you can only really get the Sugarbag Honey from remote communities up north. So it is mostly an Indigenous supplied food, it's amazing. Like I've always been really interested in wanting to do some beekeeping, but I think that I really want to focus on, on native bees and help regenerate the species around here. I've been really lucky to speak to some really knowledgeable people, I talked to my dad about it all the time and he tells me exactly, you know, how to find the hive. If you find one bee and you irritate it, and then it goes back to it's hive. So you go in that direction, you can find it. It's yeah, it's really rewarding to be able to see and value, these animals and these insects in this ecosystem that have been generating thousands upon thousands, millions of years here. And it's just something that people, you know, we used to European

bees, but the store may make beautiful species of bees specifically in Australia. There's one (bee) that looks like a little fluffy Teddy bear and it's really cute.

Meena - Uh, yeah, we, we actually spoke to another project. A bee collective that is based in the north of India in Himachal Pradesh. And so it's in the mountain ranges, they're actually a nomadic tribal community, but then they also do have bee farmers. Malini was one of the individuals running this collective, was just telling us about how they're actually using Italian bees, because they work of faster and like, you know, and so all the Indigenous bees, the populations are affected and then how they're coming back, and so interesting to hear you talk about the bees as well in, in that similar fashion, these European bees that have been brought even up to the north in India, you know, it to produce more and be productive, right. It's bees.

And, she spoke about lining the pockets of the bees, you know, as much as the farmer produces and she's like, you have to respect the bee. And then, you know, because the bees are gonna just, you know, do what they need to do to correct things. And that's going to sort of affect things on a larger scale. And I just really loved how all the connections are there. I mean, it's almost sort of similar in terms of like, even the colonial history in this country and, what that has led to with plants, you know, because even in Delhi and there are all of these main sort of central parts of the city, because, it's just been designed by British landscape architects and none of the plants are native actually, you know, they look great, they just look really clean, just like the architecture. And then, you know, they even have British names, like it's Lutyens Delhi which is the center which is (named) after one of the administrators that worked in Delhi at that point. And it's, yeah, it's incredible. It's like in little gardens that I have actually worked with someone who is working with local plants and it's always like, you know, there's bees and butterflies building cocoons, you can see life, and it's so different, you know? It's really it resonates; you know in a way as a practice.

Ira - I, I definitely killed a lot of house plants that was, I had quite a few waves of death and then I'd be like, oh, maybe I've learned my lesson, but, um, but yeah, it wasn't until I learned about these, these plants in relation to the teachings that have been told by the Dja Dja Wurrung people for, hundreds of thousands of years.

It's almost like a bit a pneumonic device. Like, you know, you can remember one particular symbol and say like, oh, well that means that, but it really is like a value in a respect of the plants. And it's really hard to value and respect a lot of the plants that were brought here by the colonizers. Um, and I'm, I'm sure that, you know, and they have their place they're valuable, you know, supermarket they are cheap. But in reality, like it's, it's so much easy to respect and value. And I think a lot of those links that are happening in all these different places, having these really like water tight kind of methods of colonization that have, you know, they've been used all around the world for a reason, because for them, they worked, they did exactly what they wanted in stifling, the Indigenous people of, you know, wherever that is.

So I think there are a lot of similarities in the way that these things have happened, the way that people have been stifled in the way people want to really reclaim ownership and instill a sense of pride. And it's amazing how revolutionary going back to old ways is... So like I know, I think COVID here having many lockdowns has created a sense or completely altered the way we perceive time. Because we've a lot of us have been so isolated for so long and we live in a world of so much uncertainty because you don't know, you know, when there's going to be another lockdown, having a slower life and being more in the present has been a massive revolutionary thing for people, which is amazing. My ultimate dream is to have a homestead. And I think a lot of people are feeling the same way at the moment because living, you know, day-to-day in the present, but growing your own food, it's so revolutionary because we have been so confined to, and essentially brainwashed by, you know, the capitalist structures that we all live in, because think all, if we want food, we'll go over to the supermarket and buy this. And it's coming from the other side of the world. And a lot of people have no idea where their food comes from. So being able to grow my own food and connect with the people that grow my food has been of massive value to me.

There is an advert for the local farmer's market and it's, "Meet the Hand That Feeds You". And I think like, I, even if I'd be like, okay, I'm a great get some milk and I'm going to do this. I'd always spend my time going around to each store and talking to people about what they are producing, why they're doing it and what they're up to, and being able to put a face and a name to, you know, the people that are growing, what you're eating, you value the food so much more. Um, and it's, yeah, it's absolutely invaluable to be able to have a community where if you're not able to grow the food yourself, you can buy it directly from the people that are growing it here. We're really lucky that we have a load of organic produce at a farmer's market. It's amazing. I'm trying to go through kind of zero waste, I'm trying to cut out all the massive amounts of waste in my lifestyle when I first moved here because I was living alone. I didn't have to worry about people being like, oh, but I want to break the soft plastic in the bean, but I'm like, no, we put it here. And then we recycle it and I take it to this place. So being able to really be able to do exactly what I wanted to be frugal or just, you know, hardline as I could about that.

One thing I was really excited to find was a local organic dairy that had, you know, 10 cows and have a glass bottle exchange program. Even though I was buying milk in cardboard (containers). I didn't have enough room in my fridge. I couldn't lay it down. Cause then it'd go everywhere. So I was like, I'm not buying plastic. I just won't drink milk. And then it got to the point where I was like, okay, I'm working on this farm. There's this amazing farmer that has the most beautiful cows that I've had the privilege to be able to feed when I'm weeding the plots at the farm. I can go over and give the cows some food. I know exactly where it's coming from. It's still homogenized, but it's not thousands and thousands and thousands of cows in god knows what condition. It's these really beautiful cows that are free to roam. Obviously they get milked in the morning and, but having a small scale dairy that is organic, it is community minded.

Like she has a massive waiting list, but that doesn't bother her. She's not going to birth more cows and buy more cows just because she wants to produce more for people. She's got a year-long waiting list. And that's fine. Like the line would be standing in it for 45 minutes, but because you knew everyone you'd be chatting. And even if you didn't know anyone you'd be chatting anyway. So being able to have that connection with people, making your food, the people like the actual animals and knowing that you're having, you're not having a negative impact on the environment now by, you know, using single use materials, knowing that the milk was coming five kilometers away from where I am. So transportation isn't an issue. Yeah, it's so beneficial. And I know that a lot of people don't have access to the food systems that I do because I'm really lucky to be in the town that I'm in.

And I have a lot of privilege in being able to access this stuff. And I totally understand that not everyone has the time to grow their own food. I don't have the time to grow my own food. I'm growing other people's food. I don't have time to cook my food. I'm cooking other people's food, but that's okay. I feel really lucky, really lucky to be in this community and, and have the access to the services, the food and the products that I do here. And most importantly, being able to speak to the growers and the suppliers and make connections and have a real sense of investment in what these people are doing.

Maddy - One of the things that strikes me is this amazing ability to see both as valuable, both the Western system carefully cultivated. You know, I can get quite hardline. I'm like get rid of all the cows, you know, it ruined they ruined the water tables, look at them. I used to go from Adelaide to Melbourne when I was younger. And it would bother me a lot that the cloven-hoofed animals had made the ground so dry, like had changed the water table and all of those things I could connect to climate change and obviously to colonization so I get quite like get rid of it all, but I think I really value the way that you're seeing both as having value in proportion. And I would like the proportion of Indigenous led food projects to be a bit bigger, but to see both (systems) as valuable is really lovely.

Ira - Yeah. In an ideal world, I would love for things to go back to the old ways. Like, I'd love that, but practically for everyone that's not necessarily possible. That's fine. I hate sheep so much for the same reason. Like we grew up, I don't know how old you are, but we grew up in a time of drought to me, it was absolutely endless. And that's obviously the agriculture industry is pretty much solely responsible for that for many different reasons. But in saying that I still use wool I, I hardly feel the same way about cows, but the cows that I see at the farm, are just beautiful. I love them. And my mother's side of the family, my mum grew up on a dairy farm. So I do try and be a little bit more lenient and flexible when it comes to those things. I am a massive black and white thinker. I have been in the past. And I think that can lead to a lot of cynicism and pessimism being a black and white thinker. But I think it's important to value everyone's experience. Obviously I'm going to have criticisms of a lot of experience, especially from the last several hundred years, like it's devastating. But I think it's really important to think about, you know, people today where they are, what they need, what they have access to, the level of poverty in our countries is absolutely insane. Um, and not everyone has access to the systems that I do, and I wish that it could just be a change

overnight, but unfortunately it can't. And I'm a big believer that if you shun something and you, if you say something's wrong or someone's bad, or they're, you know, doing the wrong thing, that's not a way to reach people and to create change. I think empathy's important, which has really been a lesson for me.

Because there's a lot of people I don't want to empathize with, but I'm going to, because if you demonize people, then that just pushes them further into that direction. So even my father, he turns up his nose at the food that I eat. If he finds out I've served him something organic, he's disgusted, and I'm not going to shame him about that. And, you know, but as much as I'd like to, I'm trying to keep people open. It's the only way to create real change. I think there's definitely a time and place for like, you know, being really hard and strict about things. Like there's a lot of things in the world that just needs to be completely dismantled right now. But I do try to think, realistically, but most of all have empathy.

Maddy - It's been really lovely speaking to you. Thank you very much.