# **Matthew Evans - Grounded Festival 2025 - BCC - 24 September 2025**

A group of men sitting in a room

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**Barry Green:** It's 1005 on [**Donnybrook- Balingup Community Radio**](https://dbcr.com.au/). It's this is business and community Conversations sponsored by [**Harvest Highway. Com.au**](http://www.harvesthighway.com.au/) and this is a live show. And the views of participants may not necessarily be the views of DBCR or HarvestHighway.Com.au on the weekend, I attended the [**Grounded Festival**](https://groundedaustralia.com.au/)in Bridgetown, which is about regenerative agriculture, and I recorded a number of interviews that I'll be playing today. Also, I'll be talking later with Di Haggarty, who was, uh, with her husband. Ian was West Australian winners of the Australian of the year award for their work in regenerative agriculture. And also Heidi Mipi, who's an Aboriginal lady who's working with, uh, with, uh, Haggerty's. There's a sort of realization in the regenerative agriculture movement how much we can learn from Aboriginal, uh, understanding of the Australian ecosystem. But my first guest today Day is the organizer of the event. Matthew Evans and Matthews, a chef turned farmer, writer, broadcaster, food activist and the organizer of the grounded event in Bridgetown, G'day Matthew.

**Matthew Evans:** Hey, Barry. Thanks for having me.

**Barry Green:** You're welcome. So the event was about regenerative agriculture, and I like to think what we're doing with community radio is regenerative media. We're having conversations that might not be had in the mainstream media. So tell us a bit. Tell us what what brought about the the founding of the grounded festival?

**Matthew Evans:** Yeah. So I guess what I'm interested in is how can we grow food better? Because I'm a farmer and a chef, but I guess I've got, um, you know, an ecological bent in that. I'd like to think that we can grow food and, um, clothe ourselves and not ruin the planet that provides for us. Um, and so I was in the UK. I went to an event there that was sort of, um, very, sort of inspired what we do called groundswell. They have up to 10,000 Thousand people over two days on a farm just north of London. And, um, the idea. The idea is that I love from that is you have lots of different talks, uh, ability to walk around. But having it on farm, I think that's really important to say, you know, this idea that you can talk about all these things, but but if we're doing it not on country, it may not resonate as much. And I know from my perspective, um, you know, the open air classroom, uh, works better for me. And I thought, well, maybe it'll work better for other people. So we do. Yeah, we have some blah, blah, blah talks and, you know, people with big brains, you know, discussing things. And, um, but we also have ability to walk around and see, you know, look at, um, virtual fencing, you know, the electronic collars or, or, um, check out dung beetles.

**Matthew Evans:** Um, we have music, we have some good food. So we just sort of tie all those things to make it a fun event. Um, and I guess and the other thing is a couple of things. I'm only one of the organizers took an amazing team, um, to pull it together, including Galloway Springs, uh, Rachel and Murray. But, um, we're also we're not just regenerative. We're sort of we're a bit agnostic. We include that. We include organic, but it's from our point of view, it's what is better. I don't know what better looks like for every farmer. Um, I can't I can't know their landscapes. But what we try to do is give people information so they can go away and say, you know what, I could have less inputs or I could cut my chemicals, or I could increase my profit, or I can have more time with my family or or greater bird life. You know, this amazing guy talking about mistletoe and how cut all the mistletoe off your trees and you lose a third of your bird life, you know, it's like, wow, it's a good thing. Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's complex. Yeah. And that's we're dealing with very complex systems and that's what, you know. So it's like, oh, well, let's have fun trying to understand some complex systems and our role in managing those.

**Barry Green:** J.R.R. Tolkein quote, which I kind of like and use on the website is *“If we valued food, cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world”* . . And I think that encapsulates pretty much what the festival was about because it brought all of these things and of course, economics is important. We need to be economically viable to survive. Um, I like misquoting Bill Clinton. He once said it's all about the economy, stupid. But my take on it with the new science of biology, it's actually all about the biology, stupid. And if we get the biology right, so many health problems in the soil and human health go away.

**Matthew Evans:** Yeah. And it's super interesting, isn't it, because I think we forgot about well, we didn't really understand about the microbial biology, you know, the, the things that humans can't see, um, that have these amazing functions. So, you know, when you look at a human and, you know, the majority of the cells in their body are not human cells, they're the microbiome, the things that live in, in and on us. They're really important. But they the plant has their own microbiome. Animals have their own microbiome. So these things exist in the world. And some people think that microbes farm us. They get what they want by, um, by running, uh, us, um, you know, including they can they can swap out DNA and have an impact on our DNA. So, you know, it's you're probably right. You know, it is biology stupid.

**Barry Green:** And, um, I attended a soil seminar in Manjimup in, oh, about 2001 of the presenters was Andy Gulliver from Custom Compost. And he said then he drew up a triangle. He said the soil has made the chemical, the physical and the biological properties. We got pretty good at understanding the chemical and the physical. The biological was too bloody hard, so we ignored it. But what's exciting now with the new measuring equipment, we're starting to be able to measure and understand the biology. And and that's the new frontier of science. And it's it's really a lot of this science, like regenerative agriculture generally, the science of organic or regenerative agriculture is pretty much a community asset, like open source software is distinct from the the science of industrial agriculture, which is owned by a handful of corporations. So, um, and we're living through this interesting time in history where the internet has Democratized information. And so you, you know, probably 20 years ago, you wouldn't have been able to pull together an event like this. But because of the internet, it's made it possible to do that. Matthew.

**Matthew Evans:** Yeah, yeah. We're very I think we're at a moment in time where there's this confluence. There's there's farmers who are open to new ideas. You know, I was talking to organic farmers, you know, who've been doing it for 40, um, 40 years. You know, four decades ago, you didn't tell anyone you were organic, you know, because you'd be laughed at. Um, um, you know, maybe ten years ago, you might not use the term regenerative or anything like that or biological farming. And so we're at that moment, we've also got the technology to measure and, and see the biology a little bit easier through, um, uh, genomics testing. And then we've got, um, as you say, the internet, which has allowed us to reach the people who would come to an event like this because it's, um, you know, we don't have any budget for marketing. Um, uh, you know, we don't have any budget to send out press releases. You know, we're we're we're it's very much done, you know, on a shoestring. Um, but we, we managed to get I think it was up to I just saw the numbers. Like, I think it was about 290 people registered, uh, on the Saturday and slightly less on the on the, um, Friday. All they're saying, well, this matters. You know, I'd like to know something more. I'd like to see what's going on. Maybe they're just curious. Maybe they're a long way down that path. But the internet allows us to, I guess, find the community that we know exists, but a little bit easier than it would have been, you know, two, two, um, two decades ago.

**Barry Green:** Charlie Massie, the author of call of the Reed Warbler New Agriculture, New Earth, who was brought to Western Australia in 2018 by the then Labour agriculture minister, Alannah Mactiernan. And the talk he gave, he said basically the change has got to come from the bottom up. It simply can't come from the top down because those at the top ought to be there and like it the way it is. And I think this is very much what this event was. And, uh, one of the speakers, which I think is was really important, was, uh, Patrick O'Neill, who's WA small farmers, who's endeavouring to get small abattoirs going because this is what we face. They used to be something like 50 small abattoirs in the south west. They've all gone because government regulation sort of put them out of business, basically. And now we've only got a handful of largely corporate, uh, abattoirs. And it's very hard to get small, small numbers through. So, you know, these things go in cycles I guess. So I guess this is a return to the the true private enterprise free market if there's, um, abattoir facilities available for smaller producers.

**Matthew Evans:** Yeah. And look, I think what's really nice about, um, like, what we're trying to do is find people who are doing interesting things and then put them in front of an audience and say, look, this is bloke who's set up the small farmers of WA. I think they've got 2 or 300 members. You know, it's a, it's a pretty well, um, you know, well-known group in that area. And they're all people saying, well, you know, how do we if we want to run our farms and look after landscapes? That involves oftentimes animals, and those animals need to, um, be killed so that, uh, you know, we can sell the meat, you know, um, legally. Um, so the absence of infrastructure is stopping them doing looking after landscapes, you know? So if you don't want bushfires, if you want to manage landscapes properly, you've got to actually consider abattoirs, which a lot of people probably didn't. I hadn't thought of that until, you know, a couple of years ago. Yeah. Abattoirs are part of the, you know, the bushfire risk management strategy. Absolutely. Yeah. And it's people that's the thing I think, you know, it's this groundswell of support, these people who this very, um, democratic sort of way of trying to get information to people where topics that matter sort of bubble to the surface and get put on the stage. And someone like Pat. Amazing. Um, knowledge. Um, but then we also found people in the audience contributing to various panels as well. So there's, you know, it's sort of like everyone just building stuff together rather than cutting each other off at the knees. I think that's what I really enjoyed about it.

**Barry Green:** Absolutely. This program is called Business and Community Conversations, and the byline is it all starts with a conversation. And there's lots of conversations started at the grandest festival. And one of the people who's involved in the Maha movement in America is Joel Selden, who's a vegan farmer. He's been to Western Australia a number of times, worked with people here, and he's saying, in America, you know, years ago, the people you spend about 18% of their income on food and about 9% on, on, you know, on the medical industry. And now they're spending 9% on food and 18% on the medical industry. So, Houston, we have a problem, but we can talk about it. So and I think what's happening now in America with the Make America Healthy Again movement, and this is what um, Dan said, and I'll play this later. But, you know, he's saying it's becoming such a movement in America because nothing matters more to people than the health of their children.

**Matthew Evans:** Yeah. And I think this is what's really interesting. There's a lot of crossovers between various things. So when I, I talk to organic groups, there's a lot of crossovers with what, um, regenerative are doing. And there's a lot of crossovers with the health community. One of the speakers who unfortunately, um, fell ill and couldn't make it that we were hoping to have in WA, um, that we had last time, actually, the last time we had grounded Felice Jacka, she's a nutritional psychiatry researcher, so she looks at how what you eat affects your gut health and how your gut health affects your brain health. And they know that by changing someone's diet within about three days, you can sort of start to see a change, um, in, in them and, and even changing the size of part of the brain. And after three weeks you can completely, you know, um, alter um, the, these health markets and mental mental health markets. Now she's looking at farming systems and saying, well, actually, it's not just the food, it's how the food was grown. And what's happened to that food from the from the soil right through. You know how it was processed, how it was trucked, how it was treated, how long it sat there. And this this is this lovely thing where we're finding that these interconnectedness and. Yeah, I mean, if you want to reduce your health, um, burden then then starting at the, you know, the, the earliest point, which is soil health is a really good place to, to put some effort, um, because we've got spiralling costs in the medical system these days. I think more than half the money they spend in the medical system is on preventable diseases that come from lifestyle, and a lot of that lifestyle is to do with, uh, the food we eat, how it was grown, how it was processed, and how it was kept.

**Barry Green:** And, uh, we had the, the life being that, um, movement in Australia 50 years ago, which was, uh, probably 50 years ahead of Maha. But anyway, um, community radio, we do have to pay some bills. Uh, Matthew. So we'll just run a few spots messages and come back and continue the conversation.

**Matthew Evans:** No worries.

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**Barry Green:** That was Boz Scaggs and Breakdown ahead on Donnybrook- Balingup community radio business and community conversations. My guest this morning is Matthew Evans, the organiser of the Grounded Festival held in Bridgetown on the weekend. And there's something that came out of the festival. Uh, Matthew Mine, from a fairly technical background, but there was a really a sense of, uh, spirit, whether it's religion or spirituality, uh, coming. And certainly Dan Kittredge talked about that. And, uh, and it got me thinking. There's an Albert Einstein quote floating around in the on the internet that says science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind. So there's something at another level that in our analytical world, maybe we've been overlooking. What's your thoughts on that?

**Matthew Evans:** Yeah. Look, I'm a bit like you, Barry. I'm, um, not religious, and I don't think of myself as, you know, sort of very spiritual. Um, and there was a lot of people were talking, had had conversations, whether it was indigenous spirituality or Dan, sort of in this sort of more cosmic realm and, um, dark matter, you know, the physics sort of recognizes the 5% of the of of what exists is, um, is the physical world, and the rest is, you know, this dark matter. Um, I think what what was really interesting is, um, there is this sort of connectedness and people have this deep, um, feelings and, you know, needs and wants and, and there is this, you know, I have this thing that, you know, I'm not into the woo woo, but I can be sitting somewhere and someone can be near me and they don't say anything, but I kind of know they're there or I feel something from them. And I'm kind of like, well, you know, that's kind of woo woo in its own way. So I have my own we all have our own level. And actually some people want to go deep on that. Some people were really happy to just do the sciencey stuff. And again, that's for us is, you know, it's a nice term actually. We're a broad church that can, you can you can be into all sorts of different things and, and uh, and just get what you want out of the event. And yeah, there was a lot of people sort of leaning into that idea of, um, the human condition and, uh, our need for a deeper purpose or a or a, you know, a resonance with other people. I guess, if not a deeper purpose.

**Barry Green:** The the permaculture concept of stability through diversity. And that was really interesting because he was talking about it in, in the spiritual sense. But but he's also very scientific. And he said the, the scientific method is beautiful. And what he's doing is he's, he's actually measuring things that we've sort of we've had this notion that if you can't measure something, it doesn't exist. But but a lot of time, I think, you know, we run the world on KPIs, but we keep copying the wrong I so I guess that's what Dan's trying to do scientifically, which is really, really quite exciting.

**Matthew Evans:** Yeah. And I think what the thing with science is it, it, it measures what it can measure. And what we're discovering is that as we get better, we can measure more stuff. So so what would have appeared to be ridiculous 20 years ago in terms of how plants communicate, for instance, is is now accepted. Science. Whether you say plants can talk or not is still debatable, because that is you know, that's that's a non-scientific term. But um, or whether they can hear or see, but they have the capacity to do things that sort of convey purpose and perhaps, um, some kind of intelligence, you know, communicate and communicate. And we have this ability to measure that now where we didn't 20 years ago. So it used to be, you know, what Steiner did years ago, uh, in the 1920s, you know, some of that stuff we can actually quantify now. Um, so I'm actually a big believer in, you know, ancient wisdom as well as modern science. And I think sometimes the modern science just confirms ancient wisdom. And and, you know, there's a reason why people could grow food for 10,000 years and not always damaged landscapes, um, is because they were relying on stuff that we can now measure. You know, they were doing things the right way, even if they didn't understand that the way the Western construct of biology and microbes and fungal threads. They still understood how the system worked.

**Barry Green:** This idea about follow the science and it becomes follow the money. So that gets fairly complex there. But a lot of the talks were recorded, so they will be online at some point.

**Matthew Evans:** Yeah. We're hoping to put them up. Um, we realized because there's no like PowerPoint presentations, uh, it's all um, audio. So and these were great storytellers. I mean, you heard them. People had incredible tales to tell. So we thought, well, this is the stuff you could listen to while you're washing up or driving a car. So we're going to upload it to YouTube, um, as well. But, um, we're thinking about is there a way to put it up as a, as a pod or a podcast or something.

**Barry Green:** Spotify or something use much less data than video as well?

**Matthew Evans:** Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And it was for us. It was doable. We couldn't have, um, filmed it. But then I went, oh, we can just plug a USB into the into the microphone and capture it all. And it's super great. And again, that's what you couldn't do that 20 years ago, you know.

**Barry Green:** And you were getting the the questions as well as the answers. So it it makes it a more rounded product.

**Matthew Evans:** Yeah. That's what we were hoping is that we captured all the questions because otherwise it seems weird. You know, there's a big pause and then you suddenly hear an answer to something. You haven't heard what the question is.

**Barry Green:** Okay, well, thanks for organizing the event, Matthew, and all those that were involved in it, uh, I thoroughly enjoyed it, as did everybody who was there. And there was people from all walks of life there. Uh, people. What's the website for people wanting to follow up?

**Matthew Evans:** It's, uh, grounded. Australia.com. Oh, so grounded. Uh, one word.

**Barry Green:** Com.au and it's, uh, planned already for 2026. Where's that going to be?

**Matthew Evans:** Yeah, we haven't announced yet, but we're we're pretty close to announcing it'd be in the, um, near Geelong in Victoria, uh, in sort of late April. So, um, an amazing property that we're looking at there. So hopefully announce that in the next month.

**Barry Green:** Very good. Okay. Thanks a lot, Matthew.

**Matthew Evans:** Thanks, Barry.