Prof. Liew: Good afternoon, we are doing our final installment of the Inspire podcast with Professor Heather McLeod-Kilmurray. She is an expert in environmental law an we are so please she is sharing her time with us today. So, what is your area of research and how did you get interested in the area of research that you are working on now.

Prof. McLeod-Kilmurray: So I am an environmental law professor and I have been working in that area for the last 15 years but in the last two or three years, the environmental angle moved us toward food and food production. My colleague Nathalie Chalifour in the programme de common law Français and I started working on a paper on sustainable agriculture from the angle of the environment worrying about how food production causes climate change and of course how climate change impedes food production. So we did a big paper on that and we went to present it down at the Vermont Law School in the United States and there we learned that although in our research in Canada, there was very little in the law written about food, even though there is a lot going on in other fields of academic research, there was very little in law. We went down to the States. They told us about 10 or 15 years ago this sort of exploded down there and that there had been a rapid increase interest and jobs and practices for food lawyers. And so we increased our interest in that area. So now, in the last two years, we have held the second annual food law conference here at the University of Ottawa, we’re editing the first book on food law and policy in Canada, and we are teaching, as far as we know, the only food law course at an English common law faculty in Canada. There is some work going on at Laval and a few in Quebec.

Prof. Liew: That sounds super interesting and it’s something everyone can relate to. We need food everyday, right? Can you tell us a little bit about the challenges of doing research in this area or perhaps something disappointing that you discovered in your work?

Prof. McLeod-Kilmurray: Sure, well the first thing that is a challenge is that the sphere of food law is so vast. As I mentioned Prof. Chalifour and I came out if from the environmental sustainability angle but that is just one piece of it. Of course you have the health angle, and you have the just the usual food marketing, food advertising, food labelling, then food fraud which kind of ties into my torts background, international trade and food law and then in our book we even have some more critical perspectives such as gender and food and obviously the link for Indigenous people to food and the land which is a big and interesting area. So it is so vast. It was very difficult to find experts in Canada in law that could cover all of those angles also to try to get ourselves up to date a little bit on all of this very wide area of practice. But that was also the exciting part; that almost everybody in the faculty has some connection to this area of law on some level or another. So that makes it fun for collaboration and fun for people to get interested.

One of the other exciting things is that there is so much going on certainly at the federal level in policy. So right now, the Trudeau government announced when it was elected that it was going to create a food policy for Canada; that the departments are actively working on that and there should be a draft coming out soon so we were able to get involved in some of those consultations. They are also revising the food guide for Canada which is very much tied into health but which is tied very little into the environment and we are trying to push very hard in that direction. Safe Food for Canadians Act is being revised, the regulations, so there is a lot going on at the federal level which is exciting.

Some of the disappointing things is because it is, as I said, so complicated, it is very hard for the government to please everybody and some of the angles are being underemphasized. We feel that the environmental sustainability angle is slightly being underemphasized and so we’re trying to do what we can to get opinion pieces or articles out and to try to get involved with consultations to push things in that direction.

Prof. Liew: So you talked a little bit about the exciting aspects of it. Maybe you could share with us one new exciting piece of work that you are working on in this area or something that is interesting that you would like perhaps the first year class to know more about.

Prof. McLeod-Kilmurray: So, take the food law course in your upper years is the first thing I have to say. And the new book is very exciting. So we’re working on a chapter on food sustainability and what could happen in Canada but its just the variety of things that are going on in terms of animal rights, food justice, international intergenerational injustice of food production so this summer I presented at an international conference on the impact of international trade rules on food because many of the areas where we are trying to move forward in terms of perhaps more local, more sustainable, more eco-friendly sustainable agriculture, sometimes brushes up against international law. So the exciting thing is that it is another new area to explore but it is daunting because the very highly structured and very powerful system of international trade involved in food seems to have an impact on all of these other goals that we are trying to achieve so that is an interesting puzzle that we need lots of people to help us to put together.

Prof. Liew: Your work sounds so interesting. Just listening to you just triggered for me how you could even talk about my area of research of migration and migrant workers and the production of food. That is super interesting how this topic really spans in an interdisciplinary way.

Prof. McLeod-Kilmurray: Absolutely, one of the chapters on social justice and food in the book has a section on migrant workers and food and we had a wonderful practitioner from Toronto come to the conference to talk all about the plight and great injustices based on law in Canada and its application to migrant food workers for sure.

Prof. Liew: Super interesting. So my final question to you then is, what one piece of advice do you have for first year law students as they start their career here at the University of Ottawa.

Prof. McLeod-Kilmurray: Well, I think this idea that just discovering food law. I graduated from law school, I think in 1994, if I can remember correctly, and it’s only been two or three years ago that I discovered a whole new area. So if in first year or if on the rich array of courses we do offer here (much richer than when I was in law school); but if you don’t find what it is you’re interested in you can make a place for what you want to do. You can find a place in a different course to do an essay on the area you want to research. I had a student one time who was passionate about cruise law, cruise ship law. I almost said to her, is that a thing, and she was adamant that it was and she pursued it in all of her classes, something related to cruise ships and how the law regulates them. And then she went and did a graduate degree, I think, down in Florida on the coast and now is an expert in cruise ship law. So there are so many creative things that might be a little bit outside of the box or that I think food law joins so many boxes so if you have a passion, don’t hesitate to make sure that you get that in your law school career and pursue it.

Prof. Liew: That sounds fantastic. That’s a great piece of advice. Thanks so much for your time.