

ISSUE
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VICTORIAN RURAL WOMEN'S NETWORK MAGAZINE

NETWORK CONNECT



POWER
OF
CONNECTION

VICTORIAN
RURAL
WOMEN'S
NETWORK

AGRICULTURE VICTORIA



In this issue



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AGRICULTURE VICTORIA



Minister's foreword

I'm a proud regional woman — and the second female Minister for Agriculture in Victoria. It's exciting to be part of a community of rural women connecting, innovating and leading the way for generations to come.

The second edition of the Victorian Rural Women's Network's *Network Connect* magazine celebrates the strength of rural women — the strength they develop through connecting with each other and the incredible strength they give their businesses and communities thanks to their innovation, resilience and leadership.

I'm really pleased to lead the Victorian Rural Women's Network (the Network), which gives country women the resources and empowerment to invest in themselves and lead with confidence.

The Network's \$500,000 Leadership and Mentoring Program offers funded places on a range of leadership programs for women in the agriculture sector and caters for rural women at all stages of their leadership journey, from emerging to experienced leaders.

I've had the pleasure of meeting beneficiaries of the program and it's clear how much of a difference it has made to their careers and the leadership they show in their own communities, too.

I was also lucky enough to attend a Country Cuppas event alongside some outstanding rural women — we were among over 600 from across the state gathering to celebrate International Day of Rural Women at over 30 events; all initiated by the Network.

It was inspiring to meet so many business and community leaders, young farmers and disability and gender equality advocates — and take a moment to recognise and celebrate



It's why we've insisted on — and surpassed — our target of 50 per cent female representation on government boards, which is a key driver in organisations truly representing those they serve.

And it's why we have the Victorian Rural Women's Network, building women's leadership skills and giving them a seat at the table with government, so we can deliver better outcomes for them now and in the future.

I can't encourage you enough to find out more about the initiatives the Network supports and get involved in programs that will boost your leadership.

I also encourage you to connect with other regional and rural women and have your say on current consultations at the government's Engage website (engage.vic.gov.au). It's so important that the voices of rural and regional women are heard loud and clear when it comes to ideas and plans that will help shape the future of Victoria.

I look forward to another year of connecting and collaborating with women right across the state as the Network continues to grow from strength to strength.

Enjoy the second edition of *Network Connect*.

Jaclyn Symes MP
 Minister for Agriculture
 Minister for Regional Development
 Minister for Resources

the vital contribution rural women make to our state — including the \$14.9 billion agriculture sector.

Of course, we also discussed the importance of continuing to support rural women to lead and succeed given that they remain under-represented in leadership roles and positions at the highest levels of decision making.

But this is changing. More and more women are being elected to local councils. Regional Members of Parliament (MPs) are now more likely to be women. Fifty-five per cent of MPs in regional Victoria are women, compared to just 41 per cent of overall MPs across Victoria.

And our government is committed to creating better futures for women and girls across all of Victoria.

It's why we're delivering Australia's first Gender Equality Bill, which will make organisations in the Victorian Public Sector, universities and local government plan and report on gender equality in the workplace and consider how their services affect people of different genders.

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ACCESSIBILITY: This magazine is also available in PDF and Word formats at the Victorian Rural Women's Network website: extensionaus.com.au/VRWNetwork

Leading ladies

The Victorian Rural Women's Leadership and Mentoring Program is a 'life-changing' personal development program that opens doors to new networks and opportunities.



The Victorian Rural Women's Leadership and Mentoring Program (the Program) offers funded places for rural Victorian women connected to the agriculture sector on a range of leadership courses through four partners — Victorian Office for Women, Regional Leadership, The Observership Program and Leadership Victoria.

Whether you are new to leadership, seeking first-time board experience or an experienced professional wanting to reach the next level of your career, the Program caters for all stages of the leadership journey.

In the first year of the Program (2019), 13 rural women from across Victoria participated in eight leadership courses, including three who completed The Observership Program, which offers emerging leaders an introduction to boards.

By 2020, the \$500,000 Program aims to have placed at least 27 rural Victorian women connected to agriculture on leadership programs, many of which are delivered in regional areas.

Vanessa McGrath, a farmer and sustainability engineer, who completed the Williamson Leadership Program for senior leaders, encourages other rural women to apply for the Program. "The year-long course has been life-changing and surpassed all of my expectations," says Vanessa.

"The other students in the course appreciated my rural perspective, as they often had not thought about how issues impact rural communities differently. I feel like the Program has set me up with a leadership network for life," she says.

The Program welcomes Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse applicants. Applications for the Women's Leadership Program (Leadership Victoria) and Alpine Valleys Community Leadership Program (Regional Leadership) open in early 2020. Other funded programs for 2020 have now closed. Applications for 2021 programs will be advertised from mid-2020.

Find out what leadership program is best for you at the Victorian Rural Women's Network website: extensionaus.com.au/VRWNetwork/home



Image (from L-R): Leanne Mulcahy, Caroline Thomson, Minister for Agriculture Jaclyn Symes MP, Jessica Purbrick-Herbst, Victorian Rural Women's Network Empowered Women Convenor, Mary-Anne Thomas MP, Member for Macedon

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE VICTORIAN RURAL WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND MENTORING PROGRAM 2019 ALUMNI

Louise Ackland, Northern Mallee Leaders (Regional Leadership)

Melissa Ferguson, Gippsland Community Leadership Program (Regional Leadership)

Kerry McGahy, Rivers and Ranges Community Leadership Program (Regional Leadership)

Jessica Drake, The Observership Program (Observer, Agribusiness Yarra Valley Board)

Zara Durnan, The Observership Program (Observer, East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority Board)

Caroline Thomson, The Observership Program (Observer, Victorian Farmers Federation Board)

Vanessa McGrath, Williamson Leadership Program (Leadership Victoria)

Katherine Brown, Women's Leadership Program (Leadership Victoria)

Lee Sandwith, Women's Leadership Program (Leadership Victoria)

Natalie Ajay, Women's Board Leadership Program, Mastering Board Skills (Victorian Office for Women)

Leanne Mulcahy, Women's Board Leadership Program, Mastering Board Skills (Victorian Office for Women)

Sevilla Furness-Holland, Women's Board Leadership Program, Strengthening Board Skills (Victorian Office for Women)

Helen Symes, Women's Board Leadership Program, Strengthening Board Skills (Victorian Office for Women)

MEET SIX OF THE PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS



MELISSA FERGUSON
Chief Executive Officer,
Gippsland Farmer Relief

Program: Gippsland Community Leadership Program (Regional Leadership)

Commitment: 10 months

What I got out of the program: "As Chief Executive Officer of Gippsland Farmer Relief, the program provided me with insights into industries and issues relevant to my region. I also enjoyed meeting and connecting with other leaders from my region. It was a true honour to participate."



LEE SANDWITH
Managing Director, creative and marketing business, Trio Agency

Program: Women's Leadership Program (Leadership Victoria)

Commitment: 3-day residential

What I got out of the program: "A sense of galvanisation that I am on the right path in my career, particularly with my conviction to elevate and lift regional businesses. I gained access to a powerful and active network of women who I continue to reach out to and a sense that they have my back."

Image credit Natalie Ajay: Georgie James



KERRY MCGAHY
Beef Farmer and Emotional Health Practitioner

Program: Rivers and Ranges Community Leadership Program (Regional Leadership)

Commitment: 10 months

What I got out of the program: "I am more confident to just get in and have a go, to ask questions, introduce myself and to recognise my strengths. If you're thinking about it, make the commitment and just do it, who knows where it will take you."



NATALIE AJAY
Executive Officer,
Winemakers of Rutherglen

Program: Women's Board Leadership Program, Mastering Board Skills (Victorian Office for Women)

Commitment: 4 days,

1-hour pre-course webinar, (20-30 hours pre-program reading)

What I got out of the program: "Some of the most valuable skills I've developed on this course are understanding the responsibilities of an executive and a board director. In particular, fiduciary duties, good governance, risk management and financial prudence have been big topics for me to take back to my own boardroom and use to better my local community."



CAROLINE THOMSON
Banker and Accountant,
Senior Manager, ANZ

Program: The Observership Program, Observer, Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) Board

Commitment: 1 year

What I got out of the program: "It has been an invaluable experience that has opened up networks. I have gained hands-on board experience with the VFF and skills through training with the Australian Institute of Company Directors. We covered a wide range of topics from leadership to ethics. My contribution to the VFF over the last 12 months felt valued and I am a more confident leader."



HELEN SYMES
Non-Executive Director,
Coliban Water and CVGT Australia

Program: Women's Board Leadership Program, Strengthening Board Skills (Victorian Office for Women)

Commitment: 5 days (40-60 hours reading time), 20 x 5-hour meetings

What I got out of the program: "Workload can come in peaks and troughs on a board so it's essential to remain available. You need to know your 'X factor' — know your skills and area and you can add value. You can't be everything nor good at everything. Be really good at several things."

Painting a bright future

A vast 'outdoor art gallery' is breathing new life into rural communities.



Jen Matthews' grandfather settled as a wheat farmer near Rupanyup 90 years ago and her family's fortunes have been linked to the town's grain silo ever since.

The towering landmark is part of a scenic art trail punctuating a 200-kilometre tourist drive through the Wimmera Mallee region. The trail is one of many silo and mural art trails dotted across the state. Jen, who runs The Wimmera Grain Store, continues to farm in the area producing pulses and wheat. She says the creative initiative has brought an air of optimism and opportunity to Rupanyup and other towns on the trail.

"Now, we have dozens of tourists coming to our town every day to see the silo and then discovering all the other things there are to see," says Jen.

Initiated in Brim in 2015, the art trail includes enormous murals on decommissioned silos in the north-west of Victoria, including Sheep Hills, Rosebery, Lascelles and Patchewollock with more to come. A recent inclusion in Nullawil was supported by the State Government's Pick My Project community grants program while another, depicting a girl on a swing, was recently completed in Sea Lake.

Rupanyup's silo depicts the work of Russian street artist Julia Volchkova, the first female invited to contribute to the trail. Following the theme of capturing each town's people and heritage, Julia's work shows the tenacious faces of a local girl and boy involved in community sports. Together, the silos and other complementary regional artworks, create the state's largest outdoor gallery.

State Government tourism figures from 2018 estimate almost 600 people visited the silos each month, bringing around \$25,000 into local towns. Wimmera Mallee Tourism's Lauren McBriarty says most visitors are travelling retirees, families on school holidays and visitors from nearby regional centres.

A new free Wimmera Mallee Tourism app, part of a digital innovation project, will improve visitor experiences and help identify tourist numbers, spending and activities more accurately. The project also reminds visitors and locals that the area is forward-thinking and technology-focused, according to Yarriambiack Shire Councillor Helen Ballentine.



When Helen, a farmer and long-time Hopetoun resident, joined the council's economic interest group 14 years ago, she recognised tourism could broaden the region's economy and bolster towns during tough times. "I could see that even if there was a trickle of money or a back-up economy, it would stimulate and sustain small businesses," she says.

Now Hopetoun has a new lease of life thanks to increased tourism — and Helen is grateful that GrainCorp, who owns many of the silos, allowed them to be painted. Helen believes the silo art trail in her region should give local businesses the confidence to plan and expand, knowing there will be more visitors bringing in money from outside the region.

"People have started to be really enterprising. The butcher has turned his shop into a butcher/café — he opened up the wall into next door. There are four B&Bs now. The café closed and reopened under new management — they bought a house and decided to run that as a B&B and filled a gap by offering pet-friendly accommodation," she says.

Both Helen and Jen see these changes as the beginning. Jen is lobbying bus companies to add the trail to their tours and Helen sees potential in tourism businesses offering bird watching and cycling. "There is so much to see and do here that is hidden," says Helen.



siloarttrail.com

apps.apple.com/au/app/wimmera-mallee-tourism/id1476998099

graincorp.com.au

Images: (Page 4) The beautiful GrainCorp silos at Sea Lake, painted by artists DRAPL and The Zookeeper, image supplied by Shane Roberts; (Page 5) Top: Rupanyup silo by artist Julia Volchkova, image supplied by Wimmera Mallee Tourism; Above: Farmer Jen Matthews with her produce



Food for thought

Ann Rowe is passionate about the bush food industry and its potential to benefit more Australians.

When Ann Rowe moved to Swan Hill seven years ago, she brought with her a love of cooking, a growing interest in bush foods and a developing awareness of her own Aboriginal Victorian history.

Since then she has begun cultivating bush tomatoes, saltbush and wattles and plans to eventually devote half her 140-acre farm to their production. Attending a masterclass run by award-winning Indigenous chef Clayton Donovan only inspired her further. "When I did Clayton's class, I took my daughter with me and I realised it would be great for students in Swan Hill to learn more, so we brought him up to both our secondary schools and also got him to run a public class," says Ann.

Bush foods are now showcased on many award-winning restaurants' menus, but it is Clayton Donovan's use of native foods in all styles of modern cuisine from Asian food to Italian dishes that inspires Ann. She sees an industry on the verge of exploding. "Demand for native foods is huge; what is difficult is buying seedlings so we're starting to germinate the seeds ourselves," she says.

Ann, who is a bookkeeper and accountant, has joined the peak national body Australian Native Food and Botanicals and has also liaised with Agriculture Victoria's Aboriginal Landholder Information Service, which is working to support Aboriginal Victorian landholders' participation in the industry.

Indigenous representation in the supply chain — from growers to farm managers and exporters — is less than one per cent, according to 2018-2019 research.

Ann's dream is that native foods become mainstream and, from that, a deeper understanding develops about how Aboriginal Victorian People managed the land, cultivated food and lived within a challenging climate during the past 40,000 years.

Image: Ann Rowe tends her plants

Flower power

Danielle White shares her tips on turning a rundown weekender into an innovative agritourism business.



Collaborating with other flower producers in the Kyneton and Daylesford regions, rather than competing against them, has allowed Danielle White's events-focused business to blossom.

Crofters Fold, the 12-hectare property Danielle and her partner Ash (pictured left) bought in 2012, now produces thousands of roses and peonies for Melbourne's floral designers and wedding and event planners.

The couple grow pinot noir grapes to produce their own label of sparkling wine. They have also refurbished the property's original farmhouse to allow guests to enjoy their produce — while admiring the resident highland cattle and black-faced sheep.

“We are finally there; this is the first year of being at the vision we had when we arrived. For us, it's ‘bubbles and blooms’,” says Danielle, of the seven-year journey.

“We are finally there; this is the first year of being at the vision we had when we arrived. For us, it's 'bubbles and blooms'.”

From the outset, the couple collaborated with other growers. “Before we'd even harvested our first rose, we had met other growers and together formed Consortium Botanicus, a voluntary group of flower farmers who believe collaboration sows good seeds for small business,” says

Danielle. Among the benefits of the business model, it means if one grower is short of yellow roses for an order, another grower can provide them.

Danielle and Ash work particularly closely with two growers of annuals. “We sell direct in buckets by colourways [combinations of colours] and offer our customers an easy one-stop pickup point, rather than travelling between farms,” says Danielle.

Images pages 6-8: Leon Schoots



Roses and peonies thrive in Crofters Fold's granitic soil and chilly winters and Danielle, who is a sixth-generation farmer, says it has been crucial to work with the local climate and soil type.

Other aspiring flower farmers now seek Danielle's advice and she recommends they do due diligence to assess if there is a market for their proposed product. A business plan that includes realistic numbers, aims and outcomes is also essential. "Sometimes doing a business plan tells you it's best kept as a hobby," she explains.

Danielle and Ash, who are both in their early 50s, wanted something

to keep them busy and active — and provide an income. "We've always made sure the business paid us an hourly rate for every hour spent working. In the early days it might only have been \$5 an hour but we paid it."

Danielle has also embraced social media marketing but she stresses the importance of focusing on people who want to buy from you. "We realised early on it didn't make much difference if people in England liked our produce," she says.

Still, she is delighted a wider movement is blooming, both in the rise of artisanal producers and growers and, generally, in "flower power".

"Flowers aren't just a pretty, frivolous something; they are part of the agricultural landscape," she says.



The Victorian Government is supporting the artisanal sector with a Small-Scale and Craft grants program. Find out more at agriculture.vic.gov.au/artisanag

DANIELLE'S SEVEN TIPS FOR SUCCESS

1. Grow to your specific climate and soil type rather than growing what you love.
2. Identify other regional growers you could connect with.
3. Look at your skill set — what is it suited for; what skills do you need?
4. Identify what the local market needs or if it is saturated with certain produce.
5. Establish a business plan with realistic numbers, aims and outcomes.
6. Flowers can be a good value-add to existing farming.
7. Develop alternative income streams for quiet times — like accommodation, a gift shop, cookery classes, workshops, retreats and other products and produce.

Smart moves

Farmer **Bree Whittaker** welcomes all the new technology she can bring to the Gippsland dairy business she manages with her husband and family members.

Bree Whittaker is a keen participant in Agriculture Victoria's Internet of Things (IoT) Trial, an initiative supporting farmers to improve their productivity and competitiveness through innovative technology and data management.

For Bree, the initiative is also about freeing up time. With four young children, four farms to manage, 2300 cows to milk and only 24 hours in a day, time-saving technologies are welcomed. "We do want to be a better business, but we also place a high value on work-life balance," she says.

The four family-owned farms at Denison, which Bree runs with her husband, brother-in-law and sister-in-law, already use plenty of technology. The farm has 1000 of its 1300 hectares irrigated with eight centre-pivot irrigators and one travelling irrigator, which can be operated by mobile phone.

"Instead of having to go out at 5am to start it, or return at 10pm to stop it, you can do it on your phone," explains Bree.

Collectively, the business employs 13 full-time staff and Bree uses technology to help with staff management.

"I use an app called Deputy. It enables me to create rosters so the farm workers know when they are scheduled to milk the cows and also for things like who is feeding the calves. It covers tasks and timesheets," she says.

The IoT Trial, which is being rolled out across dairy, horticulture, sheep and cropping in the regions of Birchip,

Serpentine, Tatura and Maffra, is a great learning opportunity. "We don't know what we don't know yet," says Bree. She hopes to discover what other people are using, particularly across other sectors.

New technologies are constantly coming to market but assessing them is difficult. "We want to know independently from our peers what is the best technology or the best irrigation — not just from the people selling it," she says.

"We do want to be a better business, but we also place a high value on work-life balance."

While profit and efficiency on-farm are important, she hopes long-term for better work-life balance that allows her extended family to be active in their community and in their children's lives. "We have to work smarter," she says.



Find out more about the IoT Trial or go to the Agriculture Victoria website at agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture for more initiatives supporting rural women

Image: Bree Whittaker (below) is embracing new technology on the farm she manages with extended family



Rural women in focus

Snapshot of Victorian rural and regional women.

Total rural and regional population in Victoria:

1,410,079



Total rural and regional Victorian women:

722,576

Total rural and regional Victorian men:

687,506

Work

Of the Victorian rural and regional population, women comprise:

- 23% of Chief Executives or Managing Directors
- 34% of Managers
- 62% of Professionals
- 29% of Farmers (NB: many more work on farm as a secondary occupation)
- 36% of Labourers

Of Victorian rural and regional women:

- 43% provide unpaid care*
- 20% work full-time
- 26% work part-time

Education

In rural and regional Victoria, women account for:

53% of Postgraduate degrees

63% of Bachelor degrees

41% of Tertiary Certificates and Diplomas

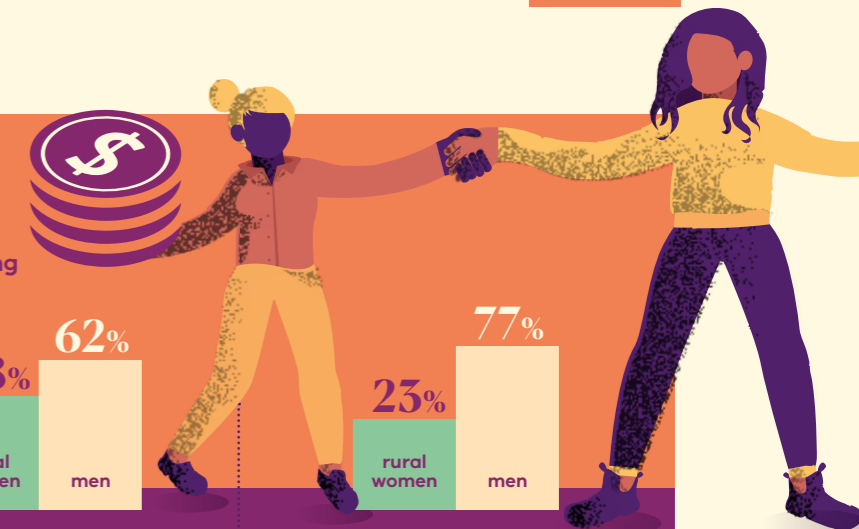
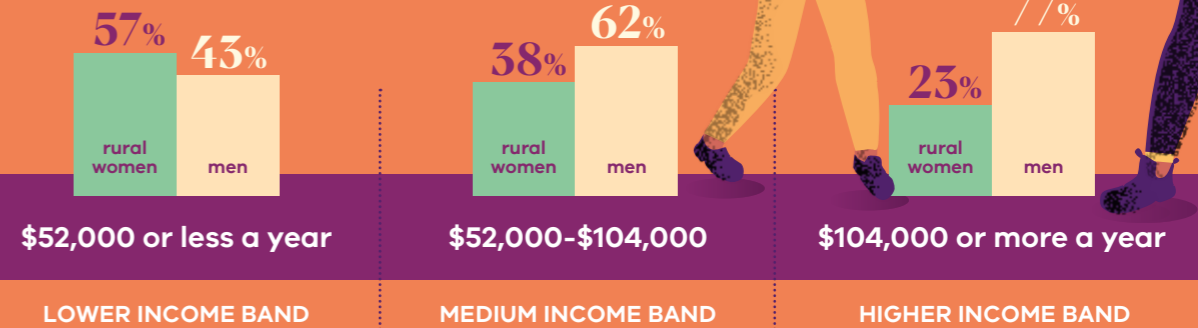
109,284

Between 2006-2016, the number of rural and regional women gaining Bachelor degrees rose from 59,331 to



Salary

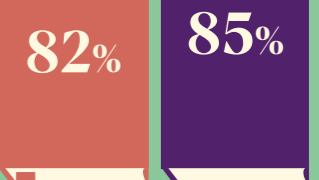
There is a gender pay gap for rural women, with a lower percentage of rural and regional women earning medium to high income.



Wellbeing & interests**



Regional women are slightly less confident they have the skills and education they need to achieve what they want in life than men



In terms of life satisfaction, regional women are:

- MOST SATISFIED** with their standard of living, personal relationships, and how safe they feel
- BUT LEAST SATISFIED** with their health, sense of achievement and future security

Victorian regional women are more interested in climate change than men***

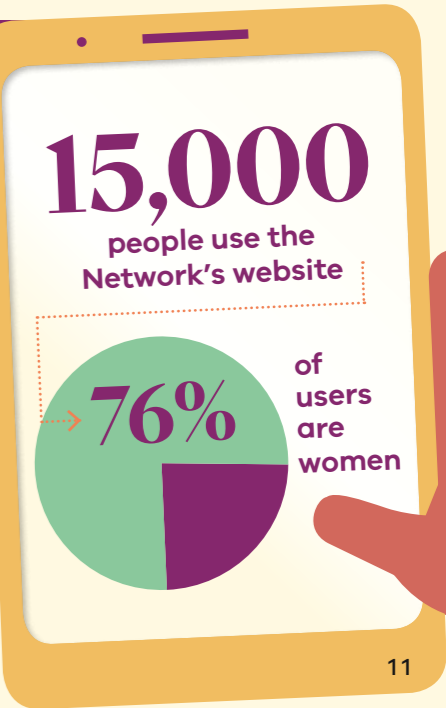
Digital engagement

The Victorian Rural Women's Network (the Network) website has had more than

45,000

page views

Of all the Network's digital media content, posts about **events, people and personal development** programs are most popular



Unless otherwise stated data source is ABS 2016 Census of Population and Housing. *Rural and regional people' are defined as those aged 15 and older and living outside Metropolitan Melbourne. This includes people living in rural and other urban areas within Greater Melbourne.

* Includes unpaid care of children and/or of people with a disability.

** Source 2018 Regional Wellbeing Survey (RWS).

*** Source 2014 RWS.

Facebook, Twitter, Google Analytics (as of October 2019).

Turning the tide

On a local beach, **Colleen Hughson** discovered a concerning environmental issue and created a community movement.

When Colleen Hughson was diagnosed with a benign brain tumour, she took long, meditative walks on the beach near her Warrnambool home. It was during these strolls on the beaches of south-west Victoria that she noticed something concerning. The keen mountain biker, skateboarder and video producer saw plastic debris spread across the sand.

There were plastic sticks from single-use cotton buds, dropped by people into their toilets and carried from the water treatment plant to the beach. Then there were nurdles — small pellets used during plastics manufacturing which can be a health hazard to fish and

birds — washed onto the beach in daily tides. Colleen took a photo of the debris and posted it on social media. She also reported it to authorities.

“The responses I got led me to research the problem further,” she says. “I found out about Surfers Appreciating Natural Environment, [a group of] people revegetating Bells Beach. They inspired me to take personal responsibility for taking action, rather than merely being a standby witness,” she adds.

Colleen suggested a Citizen Science Project — opportunities for people to clean up the beach and document the waste collected. In one square metre space of the beach near her home, she picked up 4500 nurdles.



She subsequently set up the community groups and social media pages, PickUpSticks and Beach Patrol 3280-3284, on Facebook and Instagram. Colleen soon piqued the interest of her followers who helped spread the message. Local schools came on board and adopted the project as an opportunity to audit the rubbish collected and discuss alternatives.

“My focus is on Shelly Beach [Warrnambool],” Colleen explains. “There are now three marine debris groups. PickUpSticks was the initial group we set up. We also launched a community group, Good Will Nurdle Hunting. We pick up around 1000 nurdles a week,” she says.



“Our data proves this is our waste...”

Since forming in 2017, the weekly clean-up group PickUpSticks has completed 239 clean-ups at Shelly Beach, collected 110,000 plastic pieces and 500,000 nurdles. Colleen’s groups have collected more than 20,000 cotton bud sticks and the group, Beach Patrol 3280-3284 was recognised as a finalist in the 2019 Victorian Regional Achievement and Community Awards. The Citizen Science Project has also led to some interesting results.

“Our data proves this is our waste from local households, businesses and recreational fishermen,” Colleen continues. “We’re building a picture on the Australian Marine Debris Initiative database,” she explains.

Colleen says when people are involved in cleaning up beaches, they start to think about their own impact on the environment, especially eliminating unnecessary

plastic use. The popular community movement is leading with new ideas to protect the natural world.

“Our goal is a national ban on plastic cotton buds. The manufacturers can change practice; they make a non-plastic alternative for sale in Europe, because European customers demand it,” she says.



Find out more about Colleen’s groups at facebook.com/nurdles3280



You can read more about the Regional Achievement and Community Awards at awardsaustralia.com/regional-achievement-community-awards/vic

Images: (Page 12) Colleen Hughson collects plastic debris from her local Warrnambool Beach; (Page 13, top) Members of Colleen’s marine debris groups have recorded more than 2000 hours of clean-up volunteering time; (Credit: images pages 12 and 13, top, Rosana Sialong); (Page 13, above) Tooram Joey Scouts beach clean-up at Shelly Beach. Credit: Tyna Lee

Women Against Waste Tribe

Meet the women leading the way to a waste-free world.

Because of my work I had become a bit of a waste management expert,” says Professional Organiser and De-clutter Expert Tania Goranitis. Gippsland-based Tania came to realise her clients wanted better options than landfill for the stuff they no longer needed or wanted. She decided to do something about it.

WHAT IS WOMEN AGAINST WASTE?

In 2017, Tania organised a clothes swap in Bairnsdale, recruiting friends and community members with an interest in helping people and the planet. The event, which has run every six months since, has grown to deliver through five key pillars — Swap, Donate, Recycle, Mend and Learn. The social enterprise has expanded into other regional communities. At events, attendees swap and donate a range of unwanted, yet quality, personal and household items. Attendees are encouraged to recycle ‘hard to recycle’ items such as mobile phones and household batteries, mend clothing and learn from knowledgeable speakers.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Women Against Waste partners with community ambassadors who gather a group of women to organise a local event. Currently, events are being held across Gippsland and in Ballarat with hopes the initiative will spread further. “The aim of the women involved is to ask, ‘What’s in my household that I don’t need anymore and can be shared with others?’” says Tania. Her busy role includes identifying, recruiting and training ambassadors while running the website, social media and event bookings. Through work with other organisations, donations also benefit women overseas.

WHY DO WOMEN GET INVOLVED?

Through her work, Tania understands that many women are decision makers in their households and are concerned about the amount of waste heading for landfill.

“They get involved and are motivated to declutter and organise their homes,” she explains. “They want to share resources locally. They want to know donations are making a difference in their communities. Over time we’ve also found people are relishing the opportunity to connect with like-minded women,” she adds.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Women interested in sharing resources and learning from each other are encouraged to follow the Women Against Waste Facebook and Instagram pages. For more information, see the Women Against Waste website at womenagainstwaste.com.au.

Images: Women gather at a Women Against Waste clothes swap and (below) the group connects women of all ages and backgrounds in a sustainability mission. Credit: Kelly Asmus-Albornoz, Albatross Photography and Design



Q&A with Kate Meade

Radio broadcaster and dancer **Kate Meade** grew up on a farm in western Victoria. Kate talks about rural connection and her favourite podcasts for women.



WHY DID YOU BEGIN YOUR PODCAST, WOMEN OF INFLUENCE?

“I was named in the *Australian Financial Review*’s 100 Women of Influence in 2018 and, when I looked at the list, I realised there were so many amazing women we’ve never heard of. I thought: ‘Everyone has a story; let’s start telling them.’ Macinley Butson, for instance, was 16 when she invented a breast shield to protect the healthy breast from excess radiation while the cancerous one receives radiotherapy. That is incredible.”

WHAT DOES THE PODCAST MEAN TO LISTENERS?

“I had a woman write to me after listening to an interview with Kate Everett, Founder of the charity Dolly’s Dream. Kate’s daughter Dolly was bullied at school and took her own life in 2018.

The woman’s son had been bullied for the last couple of years. After listening to the podcast, she changed her son’s school. Kate Everett said in

the podcast: ‘Do whatever it takes’. Kate is on a mission to make sure it doesn’t happen to another family. I knew at that moment the podcast had the power to have real impact.”

YOUR ‘DAY JOB’ ON ACE RADIO’S 3YB IS NETWORKED AROUND AUSTRALIA. WHAT HAS IT REVEALED ABOUT RURAL WOMEN?

“Women are our silent leaders; they’re just getting on with it. We’re perhaps underestimating the actual work they do. We think of men keeping farms going but women are either doing the books or milking the cows or moving the sheep or earning income off the farm.”

WHAT SURPRISES YOU ABOUT YOUR LISTENERS?

“It is just that everyone is looking for connection. The radio is on in their kitchen, even with the distraction of the digital world. Regional people spend so much time in the car, it’s an honour they choose to listen to us.”

YOU BEGAN A DANCE SCHOOL AT 23 AND THEN ESTABLISHED THE VICTORIAN DANCE FESTIVAL. WHY DID YOU ESTABLISH THE FESTIVAL?

“I came up with the idea of the Victorian Dance Festival — a community event with no competition. The idea was that instead of going to Melbourne, with three kids in a car or maybe a busload, we would bring the instructors to us. The first year 117 dancers turned up. The second year, 1300 turned up. In 2017, 5000 dancers attended.”

YOU SOLD THE FESTIVAL IN 2018. WHY?

“That year I was offered my first radio job and I naively believed I would be able to run the dance festival and be on the radio. My mum always said: ‘Kate you can have everything, but not all at once.’ I believe her now!”

MY TOP 5 PODCAST PICKS:

1. Women of Influence
2. Country Today
3. Conversations – ABC
4. No Filter, Mia Freedman
5. SuperSoul Sessions, Oprah Winfrey

Search for these podcasts and more on the Podcast app on your phone or go to podcasts.apple.com/au/genre/podcasts/id26 and search in the podcasts tab.

Country Cuppas connects rural women

From neighbours to farmers, beekeepers and bankers, hundreds of rural women shared experiences at Country Cuppas events.

More than 600 rural women gathered at 33 events to share knowledge and make lasting connections as part of a new networking initiative — Country Cuppas.

The Victorian Rural Women's Network organised the initiative in the week of International Day of Rural Women (15 October) to acknowledge the huge contribution rural and regional women make to society.

Chocolate-making, tea-tasting, morning and afternoon teas and long lunches were organised by hosts who registered to participate at parks, cafés and community venues across the state.

Minister for Agriculture Jaclyn Symes and Minister for Women Gabrielle Williams joined young farmers, business leaders, full-time mums and community advocates at a

morning tea at Parliament House, Melbourne, hosted by Jessica Purbrick-Herbst, Victorian Rural Women's Network's Empowered Women Convenor.

The events appealed to women of all ages and backgrounds offering the chance to boost personal development and wellbeing.

Farmer Libby Dowling hosted a Country Cuppas gathering in Yarrowonga. "We discussed a range of issues from water to Excel courses and how we use them, organising payment security for grain sold, the latest books and movies and more."

Health professional Sarah Crosthwaite, who hosted a Country Cuppas gathering in Wodonga said: "We had a great day and the feedback was very positive from all, especially from the younger rural women."



Images: (Page 16) Corangamite Rural Women's Network at Gentle Annie Berry Gardens and Café, Pennyroyal, near the Great Ocean Road, (Page 17, clockwise from top left) Young farmers at St Arnaud, western Victoria, Emily Phillips, Chief Executive, Agriculture Victoria, with Marion Dewar, State President of Country Women's Association of Victoria at the Parliament House gathering, Golden Plains Rural Women's Network, chocolate-making in Hepburn Springs and members of the Country Women's Association of Victoria at their board meeting

Stronger together

Explore Victoria's rural women's groups and discover what they can do for you.



CENTRAL VICTORIAN RURAL WOMEN'S NETWORK

WHO WE ARE:

Central Victorian Rural Women's Network inspires and encourages rural women in Central Victoria to make meaningful connections while supporting each other. The original Network was founded in 2008 under the banner, Loddon Bendigo Rural Women's Network. In 2016, the group became Central Victorian Rural Women's Network under the guidance of Community Leadership Loddon Murray Board, which oversees a range of community and leadership programs. The Network has attracted 289 subscribers from areas including Loddon, Greater Bendigo, Central Goldfields, Mount Alexander and Mount Macedon, with hundreds of rural women attending its events.

Image: Rural women have always inspired and supported one another to do great things (generic image)

WHAT WE DO:

- Provide opportunities for rural women to connect locally, regionally and state-wide
- Encourage leadership development
- Provide mutual support and fellowship
- Deliver opportunities for rural women to learn new skills and apply them in their communities

WHY GET INVOLVED?

The Network offers a range of activities and events such as lunches, workshops and training opportunities offering the chance to upskill and expand your network. Past events have included a personal development day for women in the dairy industry and health and wellness talks. Jenny Pendlebury, the Network's Coordinator says: "Women are often very time poor and sometimes that can create isolation or lead to not looking after yourself. The group offers women the opportunity to engage with one another and feel part of a wider network as well as offering free access to training."

Check out more opportunities to connect with rural women in the Directory on Page 21.

Your voice

Are you part of a rural women's group that connects, uplifts and inspires you? Check out these groups from across the state.



CORANGAMITE RURAL WOMEN'S NETWORK

The Corangamite Rural Women's Network (the Network) is a group of volunteer women who enhance community resilience through activities that increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of rural women. The Network covers Ballarat, Geelong, the Bellarine Peninsula, and along the Great Ocean Road to the Otways and Peterborough. Since 2015, when the Network first began hosting events, more than 350 local women have participated. Events are tailored to address the interests and needs of women based on their feedback. Topics have included developing communication skills for farm succession planning, regenerative farming, integrated pest management, livestock and pasture management, soils and climate change and rural health.

[facebook.com/groups/1385082135141750](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1385082135141750)

GOLDEN PLAINS RURAL WOMEN'S NETWORK

Golden Plains Rural Women's Network has been running since the 1990s and organises gatherings, fundraisers and information forums to benefit local women and their families. "I joined the group early in 2018 when I went to speak to members at an Annual General Meeting about the Victorian Rural Women's Network being reformed," says Felicity Bolitho, Communications Convenor, Victorian Rural Women's Network Reference Group. "I love the group because they are irreverent, caring, dedicated, giving their time and efforts to help others. I benefit from being involved because I learn from the women in the group who are wise and knowledgeable, and I am able to see the difference the group makes to the lives of others," says Felicity.

[facebook.com/goldenplainsruralwomensnetwork](https://www.facebook.com/goldenplainsruralwomensnetwork)

EAST GIPPSLAND WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE NETWORK

The group's goals are to build the skills of women in agriculture across East Gippsland through capacity-building activities, such as mentoring, training, field days, and information gathering sessions and to create a network of women farmers. Capacity-building activities include addressing personal and practical skills and taking part in farm visits and exchanges (or inspiration days). Objectives also involve creating a learning space where women are encouraged to participate, inspired to learn, and confident to apply their learnings on farm and beyond.

[facebook.com/groups/115719442464995](https://www.facebook.com/groups/115719442464995)

Tell us about your tribe, their stories and activities at vrwnetwork@agriculture.vic.gov.au

Image: East Gippsland Women In Agriculture Network's inaugural lunch gathering at Nullamunjie Olives, Tongio, near Omeo. Credit: Snowy River Mail

Flying start

Pilot **Heather Ford** credits a network of strong women for lifting her to new heights.

“**M**y mother was a Doctor of Linguistics at Melbourne University and my grandmother managed the family while married to a NASA engineer. I finished the second year of a degree in Materials Aerospace Engineering under sufferance, but then followed my passion — flying. At my country flying school I was the only female student and found it hard to manage the negative behavior of an older instructor going through a tough time and projecting it onto me. I joined the Australian Women Pilots’ Association (AWPA). It was wonderful to have their knowledge and input.

While doing my pilot training, I met another AWPA member who said: ‘There’s always a bed at our place’. I’ve since learnt that was part of the AWPA’s intent; for members everywhere to have a network and a warm welcome. That month’s accommodation saved me because all my funds were committed to flying. I was fortunate to get three AWPA scholarships including one for \$6600 that paid for part of my commercial licence. I found it inspiring to see other women flying in from far and wide to the AWPA conferences, held in a different state each year. It was fun and energising.

“Because women are a minority in aviation it’s easy to feel isolated. We need a support network to lift us up and push us on.”

An experienced commercial pilot in general aviation offered me wise counsel when required. And in an early job in the outback there were some other women pilots, but not many. We had each others’ backs and provided emotional and practical support. During the last of my training in Ballarat, I met an airline pilot’s wife. Though she doesn’t fly, she was great giving advice about politics and demographics and how to work with older men.

I now work with the Royal Flying Doctor Service and I absolutely love it. We land on dirt strips, unsealed runways and ‘goat tracks’ that pass for an airport. Our work has real and immediate outcomes. A recent flight to collect a mother in labour required careful fuel



and equipment calculations to avoid overloading the plane, so the flight nurse and I walked through and offloaded 40 kilograms. I haven’t had a baby born on board yet!

Because women are a minority in aviation it’s easy to feel isolated. We need a support network to lift us up and push us on. Women comprise five per cent of pilot licence holders in Australia. I saw a great difference as an instructor in how the sexes learn and cope. Men are happy to charge in, stuff up and learn from that, whereas women need to figure it out first and think things through more carefully. I feel we need more female mentors and role models to clear the roadblocks or hold our hands at times. I’ve been extremely lucky to have found them, at the times when I needed them.”

Image: Heather Ford prepares for another flight with Royal Flying Doctor Service. Credit: Emma Murray

Useful contacts

Connect and collaborate with rural women, access support and explore opportunities to upskill and lead with this handy directory:

RESOURCING

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Beyond Blue
T: 1300 22 4636
W: beyondblue.org.au

Family Relationships Online
T: 1800 050 321
W: familyrelationships.gov.au

Lifeline Australia
T: 13 11 14
W: lifeline.org.au

National Centre for Farmer Health
T: 03 5551 8533
W: farmerhealth.org.au

Virtual Psychologist
Text: 0488 807 266
W: virtualpsychologist.com.au

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

In an emergency
T: 000

Vic Emergency
W: emergency.vic.gov.au/respond

Disaster Assist
W: disasterassist.gov.au

FINANCIAL

Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) T: 1800 686 175
W: agriculture.gov.au/RFCS
Locate at your nearest RFCS office

Farm Household Allowance
T: 13 23 16 W: humanservices.gov.au

Regional Investment Corporation concessional loans
T: 1800 875 675 W: ric.gov.au

INSPIRING

LEADERSHIP

VICTORIAN RURAL WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP AND MENTORING PROGRAM PARTNERS

Victorian Office for Women, Women Victoria
W: vic.gov.au/about-women-victoria

Regional Leadership
W: rla.org.au

The Observership Program
W: observership.com.au

Leadership Victoria
W: leadershipvictoria.org

OTHER LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR RURAL WOMEN

AgriFutures™ Rural Women’s Award
W: agrifutures.com.au/people-leadership/rural-womens-award

Australian Rural Leadership Foundation
W: rural-leaders.org.au

Enabling Women Leadership Program – for women with disabilities living in Victoria
W: wdv.org.au

Joan Kirner Young and Emerging Leaders Program
W: vic.gov.au/joan-kirner-young-and-emerging-leaders-program

Nuffield Australia Farming Scholarships
W: nuffield.com.au

Victorian Honour Roll of Women
W: vic.gov.au/victorian-honour-roll-women-program

CONNECTING

RURAL AND REGIONAL WOMEN’S ORGANISATIONS

NATIONAL

Australian Meat Business Women
W: amic.org.au/mbw

Australasian Women in Emergencies Network
W: awenetwork.com.au

Australian Women in Agriculture
W: awia.org.au

Country Women’s Association of Australia
W: cwaa.org.au

Dairy Australia
W: dairyaustralia.com.au

National Rural Women’s Coalition
W: nrwc.com.au

Women in Dairy Australia
W: facebook.com/WIDA-Women-in-Dairy-Australia-1418007245120581

Women in Seafood Australasia (WISA)
W: womeninseafood.org.au

VICTORIAN

Australian Local Government Women’s Association (Victorian branch)
W: algwa.com.au

Business and Professional Women Victoria
W: bpw.com.au/victoria

Central Victorian Rural Women’s Network
E: mel@leadlm.org.au

Corangamite Rural Women’s Network
W: landcarevic.org.au/groups/corangamite/rural-womens-network

Country Women’s Association of Victoria
W: cwaofvic.org.au

East Gippsland Women in Agriculture Network
W: egl.n.org.au/blog/east-gippsland-women-in-agriculture-network
W: facebook.com/groups/115719442464995

Encouraging Women in Horticulture
W: ewha.com.au

Girls with Hammers
W: girlswithhammers.com.au

Golden Plains Rural Women’s Network
W: facebook.com/goldenplainsruralwomensnetwork

Local Women Leading Change
W: vlga.org.au/advocacy/womens-policy/local-women-leading-change

Show Some #dairylove
W: facebook.com/groups/1591950161115622

Victorian Women in Agriculture
W: facebook.com/groups/176726392864444

Victorian Women’s Trust
W: vwt.org.au

Women in Local Democracy (WILD)
W: facebook.com/GeelongWILD

Women in Gippsland
W: facebook.com/womeningippsland

Women in Mining Vic
W: ausimm.com/community/women-in-mining-vic

Women in Water Directors Network
W: vicwater.org.au/members/wwdn-mentoring-network

Women on Farms
W: womenonfarms.org

SPECIAL PROJECTS

From Inside the Farm Gate
W: farmerhealth.org.au/inside-farm-gate

Invisible Farmer Project
W: invisiblefarmer.net.au



Check out the Extension Aus digital platform for a range of networks and resources for rural women in agriculture and food and fibre industries.
W: extensionaus.com.au

