



30 YEAR ANNIVERSARY EDITION  
network

Issue 1 WINTER 2017



## The day rural women took over Parliament House

It was a scene to behold when 60 rural women converged on Parliament House for the second annual Women in Agriculture Forum on 19 May.

Instead of the usual political debate the house was abuzz with agricultural women's ideas, solutions and inspiring stories. Women from all over the state, including some who had risen at 4am to get there, embraced the chance to meet in the halls of power. Sharing was on the agenda and women revealed their own views, especially on training and skill development for agriculture.

Victoria's first female Agriculture Minister Jaala Pulford opened proceedings in the Legislative Council Chamber.

"This is an important opportunity for rural women and women in rural industries to discuss the role of women in leadership and the role of rural women in our agriculture workforce and to maximise opportunities to drive agribusiness," Minister Pulford said.

"There is enormous value in us getting together from time to time to talk and share ideas in forums like this."

"This time last year we had a great discussion and we had a great day and there was this resounding message in people wanting the Rural Women's Network back."

"We want it to be responsive and a one-stop shop for information to help overcome geographical isolation."



"There is so much to celebrate, lots to be going on with where women are leading the way in business and in innovation, in supporting communities through challenging times and supporting each other," the Minister said.

Participants were inspired by several speakers including Emma Germano (pictured above left) who talked of her journey into vegetable production and marketing through training and development and hospitality roles.

*"I swear that I will not stand in front of a group of other women, or men, and apologise for being chosen as a speaker."*

Emma talked about the challenges which can be part of her day, but stressed that being involved was critical to women taking a lead in agriculture. The recently elected VFF Horticulture Group President said agriculture needed to have a woman's voice and urged women to use mentors to support them in their endeavours.

Laharum native flower producer and exporter Jo Gardner (pictured above right) told of her path from herbs to the shearing shed and then to cut flower growing and marketing. Jo has implemented a major training program for her diverse workforce and said it was important to make time for training commitments. She also talked of the importance of having a support network, taking opportunities and asking hard questions.

Mead Dairy farmer, Di Bowles (pictured page 4), urged women to take up opportunities, be flexibly organised and learn to go with the flow. Di also had some novel, practical advice for women –

learn how to shake hands and always wear comfortable shoes and underwear.

Participants workshopped the topic of skills development and training in agriculture, producing a range of solutions to training gaps and barriers. Solutions included sharing stories, better understanding and responding to training needs, educating employers, mentoring, making the most of technology and innovation, improving communications, getting the timing right and sharing the solutions we already have.

Participants also heard from the former Rural Women's Network's editor Danielle Green MP who is now Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria. Ms Green reminisced about her Network days and stressed the importance of taking the floor and not apologising for being there.

All women in the room then raised their right hands to pledge, "I swear that I will not stand in front of a group of other women, or men, and apologise for being chosen as a speaker."

Ms Green, who is a champion for regional Victoria, told them, "We are always apologising for being in the room, this is our space. We need to stake our claim and stand our ground."

Minister Pulford and Ms Green then presided over an official ballot for the new Rural Women's Network logo, which was chosen by participants from four possible options.



# Welcome back, Victoria's beloved Rural Women's Network

*A message from Victoria's first female Minister for Agriculture, the Hon Jaala Pulford MP*

"What an exciting day it is today to be relaunching the Rural Women's Network.

As Victoria's first female Agriculture Minister I have spoken to a lot of farming women over the past two-and-a-half years and one message from many of them was clear, they wanted to see the Rural Women's Network re-established.

The Network began in 1986 to support women living in rural and often isolated areas, raising their profile and allowing them to connect and share information. And after a four-year hiatus, I am proud to announce that the Rural Women's Network is back. The Network aims to promote women's economic participation, professional development and wellbeing through information, networking, and mentoring opportunities.

The Victorian Government is facilitating the Network but it is effectively 'owned' by all regional and rural women, whether they live on farms or in rural towns and communities. Indeed we have announced an expression of interest process to recruit a number of Victorian women to a volunteer Stakeholder Reference Group to provide advice on the Network's strategic direction and operation. I encourage all of you to consider putting up your hand and to be part of this important group.

I believe the Rural Women's Network will bridge the distance and disconnect for women living in isolated areas, with networking events, mentoring, an e-newsletter and social media outreach. We have seen what people like Di Bowles can do with social media – imagine the opportunities if we are all in there on social media sharing our ideas, connections and activities. The Rural Women's Network is not the only way the Victorian Government is supporting women in agriculture. We are laying the groundwork for sustained gender equality in Victoria through the Gender Equality Strategy.

Of the farm managers that participated in the Regional Wellbeing Survey, 47 per cent of women have tertiary qualifications, while only 22 per cent of men have them. Similarly, ABS statistics show that women farmers hold a higher proportion of tertiary degrees than men. As highlighted in the Victorian Gender Equality



Strategy, while women are now achieving at high levels of education, this has not translated to equal workforce engagement or earnings.

The Victorian Government is committed to changing this trend, through programs such as the Regional Skills Fund, Food Source Victoria and the Young Farmer Scholarship. Gender inequality means Victoria is losing out. By limiting the potential of women, gender inequality acts as a drain on the Victorian economy. However, we have the power to reverse this. I am pleased to report that the current gender representation on boards across the Agriculture Portfolio is 54 per cent female and 46 per cent male.

It is important that we continue to strive for gender equality on our boards and I encourage you all to consider some of the positions that are currently available through the Victorian Government's 'Get on Board' initiative. I am sure there will be plenty more of these sorts of opportunities being shared through the Network in coming months and years.

There is much to celebrate in Victoria's rural and regional sector, where women are leading the way in business and in innovation, and I look forward to even great achievements through initiatives such as the Rural Women's Network.

<http://getonboard.vic.gov.au/>

## Di Bowles them over



My name is Di Bowles and I like to describe myself as a wife, mother, nana and dairy farmer, but not necessarily in that order. I'm someone who constantly seems to find myself in rooms and meetings that I don't think I'm qualified to be in. I've been on a journey for the last 11 years and I'd like to share some of that journey with you.

It started with the floods in 2010/11. We were severely impacted by the flood events – I was rung one day by our then Mayor, Max Fehring, and asked whether I would like to be the 'Anna Bligh' of Mead - the floods happened not that long after the devastating floods in Queensland in 2010. From there I undertook the Loddon Murray Community Leadership Program. I met everyday people who wanted to make a real difference in their communities.

I then went on to complete the Dairy Australia Developing Dairy Leaders Program and the Murray Goulburn Supplier Development Program. I also successfully applied about this time to be a part of North Central Catchment Management Authority's community engagement group and after two years was encouraged to apply for a board position.

This led me to complete the Australian Institute of Company Directors course, an advanced Diploma in Agribusiness Management, and a Diploma in Dairying. I was then asked to become a Basin Community Committee Member for the MDBA. Yes I get to fly to Canberra several times a year and talk about the Basin Plan and its implications, but it's not that glamorous to be honest, and as I said it has a lot of responsibility attached to it.

An opportunity came for me to be sponsored to complete the Rabobank Executive Development Program and I jumped at that. I was getting busy – too busy - so over the past 12 months I've let a

few things go and I am not away from our farm as much.

April 2016 brought the 'dairy crisis' and my life took yet another turn. This could have been a negative one but is one where I managed to find some positives. One night while looking through Twitter and Facebook feeds all I could see was dairy farmers talking negatively and sounding quite depressed and consumers wanting to know what they could do to help farmers.

So I set up the 'Show Some Dairy Love' Facebook page which is now just over 12 months old and has more than 12,000 members.

For me it is the best thing to come out of the interesting times we've had in dairy.

We were successful in getting funding to produce 3000 'cowlanders' (calendars with cows) that are in homes all over Australia. The added bonus from the group's creation has been the support it offers to those farmers who are doing it tough and need mental health support. So yes, I've been on a journey and I don't think I'm finished yet – each experience has built upon the other to get me to the place I am at the moment.

### Di's tips for success

1. When an opportunity comes your way and it seems out of your comfort zone – go for it, you never know where it will lead
2. Give yourself permission to fail and to cry at times – you are not perfect and you are doing the best you can - if you need help – ask – don't battle on alone.
3. Remember what is really important – for me that's my husband, family and farm.
4. Find some good friends and mentors who you can talk to and be open honest and frank.
5. Wear comfy undies and shoes!
6. Learn how to shake hands as a man – shaking hands can be a great way to remind them you are equal
7. Be flexibly organised and learn to go with the flow
8. Know your passion– my favourite hashtags include #lovewhereilive and #insidethefarmgate – And #dairylove!



Follow Di Bowles @blessedspeedy



Like the Show Some #dairylove



## Invisible Farmer – Shining a light on women on the land

By Liza Dale-Hallett, Museums Victoria

Stories of women on the land are being sought in a landmark study. The *Invisible Farmer* project was launched in March and is seeking your help in collecting and sharing the untold stories of farm women in rural Victoria.

The first call-out for submissions to farm women hosted by ABC Rural between March and May this year attracted nearly 200 tributes from across Australia. Most of these were from Victoria. You can read these on the ABC Open website - go to the 'Projects' page and select 'Past'.

The stories collected to date were contributed by men and women, and cover a diversity of enterprises, locations, periods and lived experiences of women's achievements and challenges of life on the land. Here are a few examples:

- Irene Myrtle Lowe (Dookie) was always proud that she had been the first woman in the southern hemisphere to complete a degree in agricultural science in 1918. When she first arrived at Dookie College in 1915 students lined the drive waving flags and singing 'Long Live the Lady Student!'

- Chloe Warden-Flood (Warrnambool) a young ruminant nutritionist loves the dynamic nature of agriculture: "I think agriculture is a dynamic profession, its constantly evolving and changing, so that's the beauty of it. Agriculture, well it's here to stay, because it's fundamentally important to human existence so it's a great industry to be involved in."
- Marilyn Lozada-Fernandez (Yarrawalla,) is one of many migrant workers, whose hard work and passion is a significant contributor to Australian agriculture. She has been acknowledged for her leadership and knowledge in Australian pig husbandry and animal welfare.
- Annette Hasan (Hoddles Creek) has found her strength, resilience and a commitment to innovative environmentally sensitive systems, have helped her during the challenge of her husband's cancer.
- Winsome Anderson (Clyde) wrote a memorial piece to her dairy farm, which was sold to become a new suburb – her story is about the challenge in balancing the ever-widening urban growth with the need to protect rich agricultural land to help feed this growing population.

- Even though Dorothy Houlden (Goornong) spent over 35 years working on a farm, she mostly referred to herself as a farmer's wife. It was not until the 1970s, when she started her own Angora stud, that Dorothy started calling herself a farmer.
- Leila Sweeny McDougall (Tatyoon) (pictured page 5) is a young farmer and fashion designer. She is on a mission to promote agriculture and support farmer health through her own charity Live Rural and the National Centre for Farmer Health, and is the first farmer to hold the title of 'Mrs Australia'.
- The diary of Margaret McCann (Stradbroke), is a document to her persistence and competence as a farmer in the 1890s and 1910s - an inspiration for farm women today.

As the collection of stories continues to grow over the three years of the project, it will create a valuable public collection which will inform education and community programs, research, and public discussions about contemporary issues facing rural Australia. Stories of women on the land are central to extending our understanding of the value of agriculture in our daily lives. They will not just reframe our rural histories; they will also offer an important tool for the future. These stories will help create role models for girls and young women and inspire them to be part of the future of Australian agriculture. We need your help in creating this patchwork of stories across Victoria.

Did you miss the opportunity to post a tribute via ABC Open? Don't worry! You can contribute a story now via the Invisible Farmer website at [invisiblefarmer.net.au](https://invisiblefarmer.net.au) – just go to the Home page and select 'Share a Story'. All you need is about 500 words!

Here are some ideas to get those stories flowing:

- Create your own story circle of friends and family and pass around the 'speaking stick' – and then help each other post stories
- Start a trail of tributes – post a story about a woman you know and then ask that woman to do the same – see how long your trail of tributes can be!
- Honour all the 'mothers' in your life – write about your mother, grandmother, great grandmother or an important mother-figure in your life. And, as Dorothy Houlden says, "a simple thank you...That's all one needs."
- Encourage the men in your life to honour the fabulous women in their lives – sisters, mothers, wives, partners, colleagues,

daughters, aunts, friends and other awesome women.

- Involve your children or students in this history-making process – ask them to write a tribute for sister, mother, aunt, grandmother or an important female in their lives.
- Help your industry organisation to become a Supporting Organisation for Invisible Farmer and profile your industry through the stories of women.
- Ask your local council or shire to promote your region through local stories of women on the land.
- Invite your local historical society and museum to shine a light on the many untold stories in their collections relating to women on the land
- Let us know what works for you and we'll promote it via our website and social media!

Invisible Farmer is the largest ever study of Australian women on the land. This project aims to combine personal stories and academic research to map the diverse, innovative and vital role of women in Australian agriculture. The Invisible Farmer project is a nation-wide partnership between rural communities, academics, government and cultural organisations. It is an initiative of Museums Victoria and funded by an Australian Research Council grant.

**Be part of Invisible Farmer - visit our website: <https://invisiblefarmer.net.au>.**

**Join the conversation – follow Invisible Farmer on social media: @invisfarmer.**

**Watch the Invisible Farmer video at <http://bit.ly/2s83lzL>**



**Irene Lowe – to read her story go to <https://open.abc.net.au/explore/196735>**



## Oceans of opportunity

*Meet Portarlington's Kirsten Abernethy, 2017 Victorian Rural Women's Award winner*

I have been working in wild-catch professional fisheries for more than ten years. From the moment I stepped onto my first boat I knew I was in this job for life. I find it inspiring how fishing families take pride in their unique way of life and have a passion for the environment they work in. I've worked in fisheries around the world, from Cornwall to the Solomon Islands, but Victoria is my home and the small-scale fisheries here are simply incredible.

Sadly, our fisheries are invisible – not many people in Victoria know what we have right on our doorstep: Sardines caught in Williamstown, sea urchins caught in the Bay, prawns caught in Gippsland. We have a beautiful source of local, fresh and healthy seafood, with the highest of sustainability credentials. But if we are not careful, our local fisheries will disappear. Our beautiful wild fisheries belong to the Victorian people because our sea belongs to Victorians. The men and women who go out and catch these fish are the stewards of our pristine coasts and seas. They are our eyes under the water, and I believe fishing families are fundamental to the fabric, history and identity of our coastal communities.

My aspiration is for all Victorians to be proud of, and support our local fisheries and fishing families. I hope to use the Victorian Rural Women's Award to showcase what our fishing industry contributes to Victoria and to women in particular. We need the help of the Victorian people to secure the future of locally produced sustainable seafood, and I believe women in fishing are the key to unlock this support.

I am a proud woman in fishing – working in amongst the Victorian fishing industry, promoting the industry with the peak body Seafood Industry Victoria.

I am a researcher with Deakin University developing a health program for fishing families, and occasionally as a deckhand with my partner!

I work among passionate, motivated, and innovative women in fishing. It's often a surprise to people when I tell them women make up more than half the people working in the seafood industry, because our voices are rarely heard. Women in fishing provide an important and different perspective when given the opportunity. We are good at talking about the pride in our local fishing industry, what small fishing businesses contribute to regional communities, encouraging people to buy local fish and learn more about professional fishing. Yet women in fishing are underutilised, lacking opportunities to network, learn leadership skills and gain confidence. We are in the position now where less than five per cent of the executive decision-maker positions in the seafood industry are held by women and our perspective is not being heard.

The Victorian Rural Women's Award allows me to work with women to develop a platform which will create a stage for women in the industry. We can build the processes to network broadly and resource one another so we can gather the connections, skills, capacity and confidence we need to be resilient and vibrant. This is not a project that is going to be delivered to women, but one designed by women in fishing.

My hope is that with this Award, women in fishing will grow louder, and become the change-makers we need to secure the future of small-scale seafood producers in Victoria.

**The 2018 RIRDC Rural Women's Award applications open on 14 September 2017. See page 14 for further details.**



Follow Kirsten @\_SeaWomen

# Women enjoy ‘a wonderfully rich weekend’ in the west



## **From the West Wimmera ‘Women on Farms Gathering’ Committee**

It almost sounds like an impossible task: Ten women who voluntarily coordinated an event involving 16 venues, 50 workshops and 269 participants across multiple towns. But that is exactly what the West Wimmera ‘Women on Farms Gathering’ (WOFG) Committee achieved earlier this year at Harrow.

### **The March 2017 event aimed to:**

- Continue the WOFG tradition of providing opportunities for rural women to gather and share stories, experiences and attend a range of workshops/tours that celebrate local value
- Collaborate across multiple towns and communities
- Promote local products and services
- Attract more young and local women
- Trial a range of workshops/tours/packages to influence registrations
- Encourage participants to come back to the region.

We believe we succeeded in all our aims.

It was an action-packed March weekend in the small village of Harrow. A famous hat maker, local actors with a horse, and musicians entertained the gathering. There were indigenous insights, farm visits, stories and history, shearing sheds, sheep dogs and scones. There were cakes and canoes, pencils and photos and singing and smiles all around.

### **The numbers:**

- 167 participants on five bus tours across the West Wimmera Shire to Apsley, Edenhope, Goroke, Kaniva and Maryvale
- 49 workshop hosts in Harrow, 33 on tours and 15 marquee speakers
- 36 sponsors and 296 participants , 177 for all three days, 45 single day and 47 casual
- More than 70 participants were local and at least 190 came from across the south-eastern part of Australia, including Gippsland and the northeast of Victoria.

Workshop topics included art and crafts, agriculture, indigenous culture, financial and health planning, and practical skills such as reversing a trailer. The event injected more than \$45,000 into the local economy and the committee plans to donate funds to local community projects across West Wimmera Shire.

With a theme of **Connecting, Celebrating and Collaborating** the committee drew on these principles to ensure the strength of the event:

- Locals connected with women from across south eastern Australia and communities in West Wimmera Shire made new connections
- New partnerships were created between groups and organisations
- There was a celebration of local women, stories, produce and landmarks and of WOFG traditions.

- Women connected past stories with the future leaders and celebrated the benefits of living in the West Wimmera.

Feedback from participants at the gathering consistently rated the event as a success.

*"I give the Edenhope tour 30 out of 10."*

*"Thanks for a lovely weekend break away. Met an enormous amount of outgoing ladies. Recharged my health batteries (in a) stress free weekend."*

*"A really wonderfully rich weekend."*

*"I had a great time - lovely town, lovely locals and visitors all friendly. Wonderful choices for the workshops."*

*"This is my once per year 'respite' weekend. Thank you all for a great happy healing time."*

## About 'Women On Farms'

Since 1990, rural women have been meeting annually in Victoria to discuss ideas, share and learn skills, vocalise concerns about rural issues, offer and seek support, create networks, and just relax for a weekend away from the farm.

While every Gathering has its own unique regional 'flavour' – often encapsulated in the theme chosen by each of the Gathering's organising committees – there are elements which have come to be expected in each year's program.

**Opening ceremony/Gathering welcome:** Since the inaugural Warragul Gathering in 1990, each Gathering has traditionally begun with an official opening ceremony, which usually includes an opening address and a formal acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners of the land.

**Women's stories and keynote/guest speakers:** Often heart-wrenching and frequently funny, the stories told by local women about their lives on farms are a favourite feature of every Gathering.

**Displays:** Presentations and stalls showcasing local stakeholders and service providers are commonly set up in the main 'meeting hall' of each Gathering.

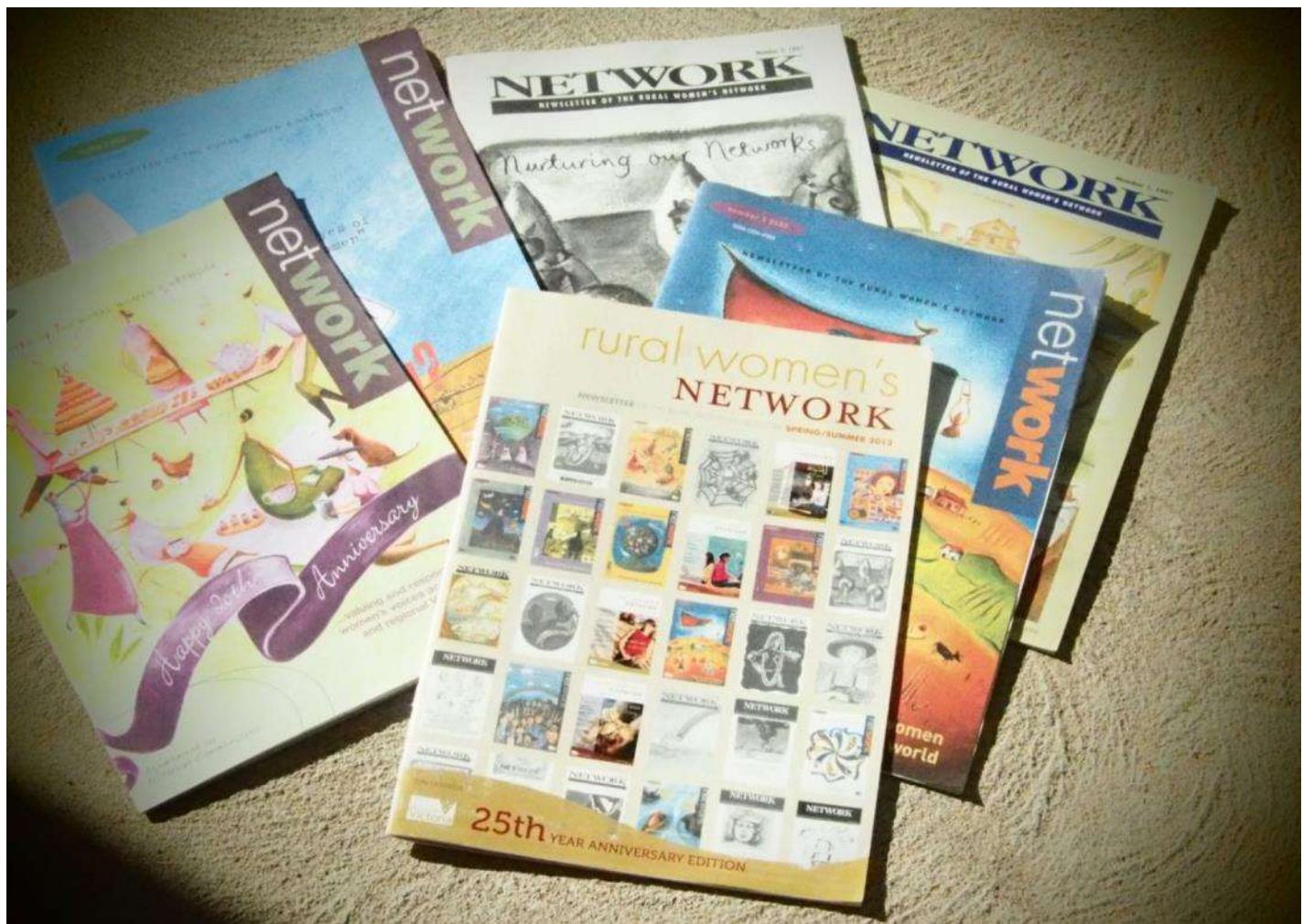
**Workshops:** Workshops are a central element of each Gathering and are spread across the weekend, usually as one- or two-hour sessions that occurs both in the mornings and afternoons.



March. Watch for Facebook updates or email [WOFG2018@gmail.com](mailto:WOFG2018@gmail.com)



The 2018 'Women on Farms Gathering' will be held on the Mornington Peninsula 16-18



## From little things big things did grow with the Network

Today marks the start of the Rural Women's Network – Mark II. The Network is a means to support, promote, inspire, unite, empower, engage and help develop rural and regional women from across Victoria. This will be achieved by providing information about events and opportunities, promoting groups and their activities, producing a newsletter and other social media content, and providing chances for women to enter awards and engage with government to share their ideas and thoughts on a range of issues. It will be a place for women to look, listen, speak and learn and a network for all women (and men).

But before we start, it is appropriate to re-trace the previous Network's step, to set the scene for our exciting future.

The Rural Women's Network may have officially begun in 1986 but this memory from former regional bureaucrat Frank McClelland shows that things were afoot before this.

Frank McClelland, Office of Rural Affairs, recalled.....

*"Sometime in 1983 I was approached by an ABC Rural Reporter (Lynette Wilks). She had been broadcasting a series of interviews on the lives of women on farms and a small group of farm women in Hamilton contacted her to see if more could be done to reach other farm women. Lyn Wilks, Rae Thompson, the Hamilton Group and I designed a daylong seminar for Women in Agriculture which was run on some 50 occasions across rural Victoria during 1984-5....An integral part of the day was small group discussions by the farm women of issues they saw as important to the success of their farms and to their happiness. The spin-offs and consequences of the seminars were many and varied but the flow on from the days outweighed all expectations. As Lyn Wilks said at the time: 'from little things big things grow'."*

Three years later, in 1986, the Victorian Labor Government established the Office of Rural Affairs and its Committee of Cabinet included two members – Joan Kirner and Caroline Hogg – who insisted on a strong focus on the needs of rural women.

At this time the average weekly wage for a woman was just shy of \$340 which was more than \$60 less than a man's. About a third of women worked on farms and some of them were beginning to really make their mark. Mary Salce led a 'Women for Dairying' group and Heather Mitchell became the President of the Farmers and Graziers Association. The Office's first major project was to encourage the involvement of rural women in public life, and two staff members, Jenni Mitchell and Anna Lottkowitz, were appointed to develop the Rural Women's Network (RWN).

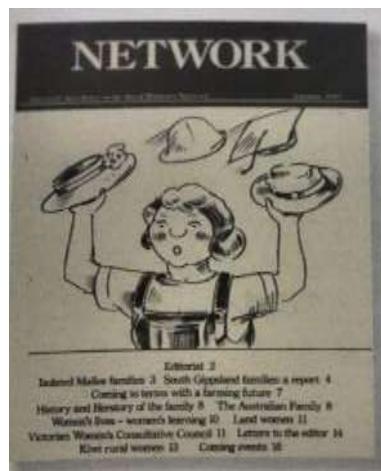
In March 1987 the first *Network* newsletter rolled off the press in a bid to help women "share concerns and develop their own solutions". Locally, the network assisted groups to explore issues and to plan activities. In 1990, the Network began its support of the annual Victorian 'Women on Farms Gathering'. A year later the 'Women in Action' program began to broaden the skills base of women wishing to participate in public life. In 1992 a meeting in Ballarat ultimately led to the formation of the Australian Women in Agriculture and Networks also followed in other states. The Victorian Rural Women's Network continued in a range of departments until 2013 and has been re-launched again in 2017.

The *Network* newsletter began in 1987 with two goals to:

- Link women's groups and individuals into a network towards sharing resources and skills to meet the needs of rural women.
- Enable women in rural Victoria through their own contact and support network, to have a more active and influential role in government decisions which affect their lives and those of their families and communities.

At the time Betty Dennis from Warrnambool told how "the network will act as an outreach so rural women from both town and country may share their skills...the Newsletter will provide rural women with information available and contribute to our understanding of vital aspects of the world economy."

Each edition had a theme, and in the first year these were 'Hearing women's voice in public places'; 'Women's Health'; 'Women's Work and Isolation' and 'changing family structures'. Over the years words including leadership, learning, networking, local and global, safety, community, business, drought, celebration, young and old, work and water all featured in the themes. Today the topics still resonate. Like the seasons, issues



for women seem to run in cycles and change just as much as they stay the same.

The 10<sup>th</sup> year anniversary edition reflected fondly on what the Network had achieved.

Jean Tom from Romsey wrote: "We women are the network,

networking and sharing our lives. This is the success of the Rural Women's Network and *Network* newsletter."

Cathy McGowan, from Wodonga, borrowed some key rural women's movement phrases in her article including "bloom where you are planted" and "step out and make a difference". She would go on to walk this talk years later.

In 2012 the 25<sup>th</sup> edition was also reflective in an interview with the Network's favourite sister, Joan Kirner. "The Rural Women's Network was really set up to connect women who were crucial to their communities and strengthen their sense that they could take leadership positions and be recognised for their work and their ideas," she said. "Women whose voices were first heard through *Network*...they have gone on to leadership roles nationwide and internationally. It's fantastic that it's been going for 25 years." At the time the former Premier also lamented the need to improve health services and support for women subjected to violence and to increase representation of women in all levels of government. Today average incomes are not couched in male and female rates and in relative terms women have achieved greater recognition, acceptance and ability to have a voice. But we are still waiting for another Heather Mitchell to lead the VFF and another Joan Kirner to be a female Premier. Women, who make up about half the population do not generally take up half the seats in government, on most councils or in the board rooms. In a recent list of the most influential Australians of the past decade only 20 per cent, were women. These are good reasons to get the Network back up and running in a race towards real and true gender equality.

\* Go to page 16 to see how you can be part of the conversation through the *network* e-newsletter or social media.



## New generation farmers

By Caitlin Scholfield

It was the hottest October week on record. I was standing in the Waurn Ponds Bunnings, two days before our wedding, picking up some last minute bits and pieces. This was my chance to prove to my almost husband that I could be helpful in bringing together the massive feat that was our DIY wedding, on my family farm near Dunkeld. Most of that 'preparation week' I'd been observing him string up festoon lights and build an entire stage, while I'd been standing in the entrance to the cottage – the only place with decent mobile reception helping out with phone interviews for the Future Farmers Network (FFN) Board positions for the coming year. It was while I was at Bunnings that I got a call from DEDJTR asking if I would accept the position of Chair of the Young Farmer Ministerial Advisory Council (YFMAC). Turns out that first week in October 2015 was a pretty big week for me!

YFMAC was an election promise by Victorian Minister for Agriculture Jaala Pulford. Its membership of 11 represents rural regions and industries across Victoria, as well as a huge amount of experience. Our role is to provide recommendations to the Minister and her team on opportunities and actions to support young farmers and young people in Victorian agriculture.

Once the initial excitement of being offered the position of YFMAC Chair started to wear off; somewhere between the paint aisle in Bunnings and the car park, I was soon facing a crisis of confidence. Did I have enough experience?

What could I bring to the role? Why did they ask me? I've never done anything like this before. The ten or so years in agribusiness after working

on farms since I was a child, being involved in the Scottish Young Farmers Club, gaining a degree in Farm Management, being a Future Farmers Network Board Director, leading a farm tour around Europe and co-founding a networking group for young people in Agriculture based in Melbourne, had suddenly escaped my mind.

Despite the reality of balancing many competing roles including family and community, many women in agriculture confront similar feelings of self-doubt that I experienced when considering leadership roles. Mentoring and networking have been very influential in my career pathway. I define mentoring as an informal but mutually beneficial relationship, where a more experienced person helps to guide a less experienced person. I'm very grateful that I've had the support of some fabulous mentors who have helped me navigate many different situations in my professional life. I came to understand the value of mentoring at a time when I was struggling in a job I wasn't enjoying and looking for a new challenge. Around this time I reached out to my very first mentor – my mum – and she encouraged me to work on my network.

Being based in Melbourne I was keen to find other like-minded young people working in agriculture. With so many agribusiness head offices such as Landmark, *The Weekly Times*, John Deere, rural banks and grain traders being city based, I felt certain I wasn't the only person in this position. Eventually with my good friend Belinda Bassingthwaite, we established a successful network for young people based in Melbourne. Called AgNext, the network brought together young people working in agriculture but also passionate about the industry.

The informal guidance and support of mentors helped us to deliver this initiative.

Today the VFF Young Agribusiness Professionals (YAPs) hold their Metro Muster events in Melbourne, as well as their regional forums. It is great to see these networking opportunities available for young people in the industry, no matter where they are based.

Networking opportunities in any capacity are especially important for rural people who face the many and varied challenges of farming, in conjunction with social isolation. A good example is an online network formed in the midst of the dairy crisis in 2016: the Facebook page and hashtag Show some #dairylove. Instigators Di Bowles and Cath Jenkins created the page as a 'positive and happy place' to share some love for the dairy industry at a time when it was hitting rock bottom. Over a year later the page now has a following of over 12,000.

Each YFMAC member also has a fantastic story and is doing great things in their industry and/or local region. Joining the network that has become the YFMAC has been a rewarding opportunity. The group and their commitment to agriculture constantly inspire me.

The young women on this Council are exceptional. For example Sarah Thomson, currently an Extension Officer with Murray Dairy, started out with no agricultural background but has successfully worked her way up to this position. Stories like hers need to be shared when the industry needs to attract new people: you don't have to grow up on a farm to work in agriculture. YFMAC and Victorian Agricultural Advisory Committee (VAAC) member Prue Milgate ensures both of these groups work in collaboration. She is a farmer, a new mother and has given a huge amount to the industry in different roles over the years. These are just two of the committed YFMAC members and industry advocates. We are so fortunate to have these and many other talented people on our side. Finally, it's great to see the Victorian Rural Women's Network being re-established and events like the Rural Women's forum taking place. Victorian Agriculture has many amazing women, and men involved in a range of industries, in many roles. There are many ways people can find their voice, find a mentor (and be a mentor) and to build valuable networks. What a great opportunity, let's grab it!



Follow [Caitlin Scholfield @CJSchoey](#)



## **Opportunities for women**

### **Women's Board Leadership program**

100 scholarships are being provided to women wanting to improve their board capabilities through courses, workshops, mentoring and networking opportunities. The expanded program will also offer specific components for Aboriginal and culturally diverse women, who are significantly under-represented in leadership positions. Applications to the program close at 5:00pm Friday, 21 July, 2017. For more information about the WBL program, visit [vic.gov.au/women](http://vic.gov.au/women). For more information about the Victorian Women's Register visit [womensregister.vic.gov.au](http://womensregister.vic.gov.au).

### **Governor of Victoria Export Awards**

Applications are now open for businesses from across Victoria's major industry sectors. They are encouraged to apply and have their contribution to our economy recognised. The application period for the GOVEAs runs until 31 July. For more information visit [trade.vic.gov.au/awards](http://trade.vic.gov.au/awards)

### **Foodsource Victoria**

\$18 million in grants is available to support agri-food businesses across regional Victoria to conduct research, develop marketing plans, produce innovative products and build skills to better compete in export markets. Food Source Victoria is funded through the Government's \$500 million Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund, with applications open from 1 July, 2015. For more information visit [www.vic.gov.au/foodsource](http://www.vic.gov.au/foodsource)

### **Young Farmer Scholarships**

Upskill and Invest is an opportunity to invest in you and your career. Up to \$10,000 is available per scholarship: \$5,000 towards study backed by further funds of up to \$5,000 to invest on-farm or in professional development activities, to help put new skills into practice. Each year, 10-15 scholarships will be awarded to young farmers aged 35 or under. The scholarship program is designed to be flexible, to fit with the demands and ambitions of young farmers and farm workers. The new Young Farmer Scholarship round is now open. Visit <http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/food-and-fibre-industries/young-farmers/scholarship-program>

### **Australian Women in Agriculture Board**

AWiA Inc. has four Board positions which are due to fall vacant at its Annual General Meeting in September. Nominations require a short 200 word summary and the applicant must be a financial member to be eligible to apply.

Applications close 5pm Monday 31 July 2017. Details <http://awia.org.au/> For further inquiries, please contact AWiA President Sarah Parker via [president@awia.org.au](mailto:president@awia.org.au)

### **Bringing new product ideas to life**

This workshop has been developed for regional businesses looking to learn how to launch products. It will be held on Thursday, 31 August 2017 10:30am - 4:00pm at Geelong City Hall. Further information please contact Rod Heath on [rod.heath@monash.edu](mailto:rod.heath@monash.edu) or 03 9905 8445.

### **RIRDC Rural Women's Award**

Australia's pre-eminent Award for rural women. Each state and territory winner will receive a \$10,000 financial bursary to implement their Award vision. Each winner also has the opportunity to participate in the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) Company Directors Course and will be supported to develop an individual integrated leadership plan. Nominations for the 2018 Rural Women's Award will open 14 September 2017.

### **Grants Victoria**

A directory of Victorian Government grants and assistance. Here you'll find general information about grants and assistance for individuals, businesses and communities that can help you: fund ideas and initiatives; develop local and national solutions; get assistance in times of hardship; and access further information. <http://www.vic.gov.au/grants.html#>

### **Honour Roll**

Nominations are now open for the 2018 Victorian Honour Roll of Women. Each year, the Victorian Honour Roll celebrates 20 exceptional women who have made a significant and lasting contribution to their communities. If you know a woman who deserves recognition for her contribution, leadership and achievements, please nominate her for the 2018 Victorian Honour Roll of Women. Nominations close 5pm Monday 17 July, 2017. Further information can be found at [www.vic.gov.au/honourrollofwomen](http://www.vic.gov.au/honourrollofwomen).

### **Join the VRW Network Reference Group**

Do you want to help make a difference to Victorian rural and regional women through the VRW Network? We are calling for expressions of interest from women keen to volunteer for our Stakeholder Reference Group to help link, support, promote, inform and develop women. Applications close 28 July 2017. Check out the application on the new RWN Platform <http://extensionaus.com.au/VRWNetwork/>





## Calendar of Events

**Got an event?**

**Please send details to**

**VRWNetwork@gmail.com**

Date	Event	Location	Contact and external link
Wed 5 July	Cups on Cups off – Day 1 (Dairy)	Koroit	Amanda P: 5557 1000 E: amanda@westvicdairy.com.au W: <a href="http://bit.ly/2ttmQU0">bit.ly/2ttmQU0</a>
Wed 12 July	Cups on Cups off – Day 2 (Dairy)	Koroit	Amanda P: 5557 1000 E: amanda@westvicdairy.com.au W: <a href="http://bit.ly/2s7AePF">bit.ly/2s7AePF</a>
Tues 18 July	Standard Mental Health First Aid Course Day 1 10 am-2.30 pm	Moyne Health Services Koroit	P: 5568 0100 W: <a href="http://bit.ly/2rxs4Bo">bit.ly/2rxs4Bo</a>
Tues 18 July	GRDC Grains Research Update 9:00am - 1:00pm	Manangatang Hall Wattle Street Manangatang	Matt McCarthy P: <a href="tel:0354416176">03 5441 6176</a> W: <a href="http://bit.ly/2s7lQa4">bit.ly/2s7lQa4</a>
Tues 18 July	North East Mentor Farm Project 10 am – 1.30 pm	Hick's Farm 4198 Kiewa Valley Hwy Dederang	P: 5833 5312 E: <a href="mailto:admin@murraydairy.com.au">admin@murraydairy.com.au</a> W: <a href="http://bit.ly/2sFdO9w">bit.ly/2sFdO9w</a>
Tues 18 July	'Setting up your season' Workshop (Dairy)	Echuca	P: 5833 5312 E: <a href="mailto:admin@murraydairy.com.au">admin@murraydairy.com.au</a> W: <a href="http://bit.ly/2t7ZWC3">bit.ly/2t7ZWC3</a>
Wed 19 July	Setting up your season Workshop (Dairy)	Wodonga	P: 5833 5312 E: <a href="mailto:admin@murraydairy.com.au">admin@murraydairy.com.au</a> W: <a href="http://bit.ly/2t7ZWC3">bit.ly/2t7ZWC3</a>
Wed 19 July	Financial security for women in business (All enterprises) 9.30 am- 12.30 pm	Hamilton	W: <a href="https://www.sbms.org.au/events/view/1152/Financial_Security_for_Women_in_Business_Hamilton">https://www.sbms.org.au/events/view/1152/Financial_Security_for_Women_in_Business_Hamilton</a>
Thurs 20 July	Setting up your season Workshop (Dairy)	Shepparton	P: 5833 5312 E: <a href="mailto:admin@murraydairy.com.au">admin@murraydairy.com.au</a> W: <a href="http://bit.ly/2t7ZWC3">bit.ly/2t7ZWC3</a>
Thurs 20 July	Small Business Clinic	Martin J Hynes Auditorium Hamilton	W: <a href="http://www.sbms.org.au/events/view/1138/Southern_Grampians_Small_Business_Clinic">www.sbms.org.au/events/view/1138/Southern_Grampians_Small_Business_Clinic</a>
Thurs-Fri 20-21 July	Annual Women in Leadership Symposium	RACV City Club, Melbourne	W: <a href="http://www.wla-symposium.com.au">www.wla-symposium.com.au</a>
Wed 26 July	Annual Agribusiness Gippsland Conference 8.15am-4pm	155 Burnt Store Rd Lardner	E: <a href="mailto:info@agribusinessgippsland.com.au">info@agribusinessgippsland.com.au</a>
Wed 26 July	Standard Mental Health First Aid Course Day 2 10 am – 2.30 pm	Moyne Health Services, Koroit	P: 5568 0100 W: <a href="http://bit.ly/2rxs4Bo">bit.ly/2rxs4Bo</a>
Thurs 27 July	Pop up Horticulture Show	Main St Leongatha	Lillian Brittain P: 5657 3268 E: <a href="mailto:lbrittain@fastmail.fm">lbrittain@fastmail.fm</a> W: <a href="http://www.springissouthgippsland.com">www.springissouthgippsland.com</a>



## Networking for you

Welcome to the Victorian Rural Women's Network. This is a place where rural and regional Victorian women can connect, learn, share and grow together.

### Our aim:

The RWN will promote wellbeing, social and community networks, and reduce the vulnerability of Victoria's rural women through increased skills, knowledge, capacity, productivity, and the inclusivity of more rural women through:

- A digital platform to connect, inform, empower and listen to a diverse range of women
- An opportunity to promote and share the achievements of Victorian women, groups and communities and the chance for more women to take the lead in business, workplaces and community, to be part of the paid workforce and to apply for grants/scholarships and educational opportunities
- A chance for more women to participate in strategic and successful lobbying on issues relevant to them
- A greater understanding and bridging of 'city to country' and regional opportunities.

**Newsletter theme** Three times a year we will produce the *network* e-newsletter and we will be keen for your contributions to each edition. The next edition of *network* will come out on 1 November 2017. The theme for this edition is **Big Sisters – mentoring experiences from the mentor and the mentee**. How did you find each other, what did you do, what difference has it made and what advice would you give to others?

Please send your contributions to [VRWNetwork@gmail.com](mailto:VRWNetwork@gmail.com) by 1 October 2017.

**Digital connections** We have established a new on-line digital platform to keep you informed and connected. It will be a place to access our traditional *network* e-newsletter as well as a place to interact 365 days a year. On months when the *network* e-newsletter is not being produced you will receive an e-update as well as summaries of our social media activity. There will be articles and information on a regular basis and chances for members to share their ideas and comments. It will be a place to feature images and access our calendar of events. Go to: <http://extensionaus.com.au/VRWNetwork/>

**Social media** Every day you have the chance to connect and share information and thoughts with us via our social media handles. **Facebook** - @VRWNetwork; Victorian Rural Women's Network **Twitter** - @VRWNetwork; #RuralwomenVic

### Contacts

Simone Dalton 0408 349 532 email: [simone.dalton@ecodev.vic.gov.au](mailto:simone.dalton@ecodev.vic.gov.au)  
Melanie Addinsall 0459 873 757 email: [melanie.addinsall@ecodev.vic.gov.au](mailto:melanie.addinsall@ecodev.vic.gov.au)