Australia’s Rural Women Revealed, recognised and respected
Australia’s Rural Women
Revealed, recognised and respected
Since coming to the agriculture, fisheries and forestry portfolio over eighteen months ago, I have been deeply encouraged by the resilience and optimism of the women who work on our land. Travelling throughout rural and regional Australia, I have had the opportunity to meet many women whose hard work, both on and off the farm, significantly contributes to the development and success of their communities.

The innovation and resourcefulness of women in rural and regional Australia will be crucial to a vibrant future for our agricultural, fisheries, forestry and food industries. Together we will help our primary industries meet the global economic challenges and benefit from new international opportunities.

The Government also wants women in rural and regional Australia to play a central role in helping their communities prepare for climate change. Rural women are hard-working and innovative, yet they are seriously underrepresented on the boards and industry groups that help to influence government policy and in other leadership and management roles.

I am personally committed to ensuring that we do better in this area. Appointments by this government have seen the representation of women on rural Research and Development Corporation boards increase to more than 40 per cent since November 2007, but there is still more work to be done. The Government’s Recognising Women Farmers initiative will support leadership and capacity building activities for rural women.

The RIRDC Rural Women’s Award has recognised and rewarded these exceptional women for the last ten years.

In increasing women’s capacity to contribute to primary industries and rural Australia, the RIRDC Rural Women’s Award is increasing the pool of women ready and able to embrace leadership opportunities.

I warmly congratulate all participants for the excellent contributions they have made to their industries and to the well-being of their communities. Representing a broad range of industries the state and territory winners demonstrate outstanding personal skills and abilities and a commitment to the long-term viability of rural Australia. They are to be commended for taking up the challenge to stretch themselves and their capacity to make a difference to their respective primary industries and rural communities.

By participating in the award, these accomplished women have helped increase the profile of their industries, engendered community pride and boosted the self-belief and confidence of women throughout rural Australia. The RIRDC Rural Women’s Award is a truly valuable achievement. I am confident that this year’s winners will build upon the distinguished record of the last ten years and continue to take a lead role in strengthening their industry and the social fabric of their community. I look forward to working with you in the years to come.
Preface

Rural Australia must make optimum use of its assets if it is to capture the opportunities that lie ahead and manage the changes that confront us. Until we see many more women taking their place in leadership and decision-making roles, we will not be making the best use of our assets. The RIRDC Rural Women’s Award has a vital part to play in recognising women and preparing them for these roles.

This publication celebrates 10 years of the RIRDC Rural Women’s Award. It captures the professional and personal journeys of award recipients since 2000, when the award began. For many recipients, the path has led to great success in business and leadership in their industries and communities and beyond. For others, the vagaries of the economy and the climate have thwarted some of their ambitions. But through all the recipients’ journeys some enduring traits shine through—tenacity and a ‘give it a go’ attitude, a passion for primary industries and rural communities, ingenuity, and a fearlessness about embracing change to ensure a more prosperous future for rural Australia and the coming generations. The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation applauds these women and is proud to recognise them as recipients of the Rural Women’s Award.

The 10th anniversary of the award is a milestone that reflects RIRDC’s commitment to leadership and capacity building for rural industries and communities. RIRDC instigated the award in order to recognise women’s contribution to primary industries and, importantly, to further develop their capacity to contribute by providing the support and resources needed to augment their skills and abilities.

The award is an initiative of RIRDC in partnership with the state and territory agencies responsible for agriculture, primary industries and natural resource management, which manage the award at the state and territory level.

RIRDC is a statutory authority of the Australian Government. Our mission is to maximise knowledge outcomes for industry and government from our investments in research and development.

The award’s primary stakeholders—the Australian Government Departments of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government—provide crucial strategic and financial support.

The award’s national sponsors—the Australian Women’s Weekly, ABC Radio (the original instigator of the ABC Radio Australian Rural Woman of the Year) and Rural Press Ltd—provide crucial media exposure and endorsement.

Since the award’s inception in 2000 close to 150 women, representing every facet of primary industries, have been recognised for their vision, their leadership and their capacity to make a difference to primary industries and rural Australia.

Past recipients have used the award and the associated bursary to develop new markets and value-adding opportunities for an array of produce, from salmon and yabbies to cheese, horticulture, wildflowers and wine, to crocodile skins, alpaca and wool. They have increased the collective bargaining power of producers, and in turn producers’ returns; opened up new conversations and thinking on the viability of peri-urban agriculture; communicated the importance of primary producers to our cities; and challenged paradigms and conventional thinking about climate change.

Recipients contributions to their industries and communities have been recognised through appointments to positions of influence, on ministerial and premiers’ advisory committees and reviews, company and corporation boards, and as chairs and presidents of their industry organisations.

Although the Rural Women’s Award acknowledges past achievement, it is firmly focused on the future, encouraging women to discover and exploit their strengths and supporting their leadership and capacity to contribute to primary industries and rural Australia. Women from all kinds of primary industries—including broadacre farming, intensive livestock operations, cropping, horticulture, fisheries, forestry, natural resource management and related service industries—in each state and territory are selected against three criteria:

- a demonstrated personal commitment to sustainable primary industries and to the role of rural women in their state or territory
- potential to achieve and deliver benefits to primary industries
- providing leadership and sharing skills and knowledge.

The award has evolved over the decade to reflect the changing needs of its recipients, but the leadership and business skills and the financial support have remained constants and central to the award’s ability to increase women’s capacity to contribute to primary industries and rural Australia.

The 2009 RIRDC Rural Women’s Award provides a bursary of $10 000 for each of the seven state and territory winners and the opportunity for all winners and runners-up to attend the Australian Institute of Company Directors course. The bursary provides the financial support to allow recipients to pursue their vision for their industry and in so doing advance their skills and their capacity to contribute to primary industries and rural Australia.

The 2009 award also provides, for the fourth consecutive year, the opportunity for one of the seven state and territory winners to be named the Australian winner and another the Australian runner-up, to represent the award and rural women at the national level.

Dr Peter O’Brien
Managing Director
Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation
Contents

Foreword .......................................................................................................................................................5
Preface ..........................................................................................................................................................6
Contents ........................................................................................................................................................7
Acknowledgments ......................................................................................................................................10

2000 ............................................................................................................................................................11
New South Wales winner: Diana Gibbs........................................................................................................12
New South Wales finalist: Sue McGinn OAM ............................................................................................13
New South Wales finalist: Margaret Taylor ................................................................................................14
Victorian winner: Rowena Doyle ................................................................................................................15
Victorian finalist: Jo Gardner ......................................................................................................................16
Victorian finalist: Alison Brinson ................................................................................................................17
Queensland winner: Annie Pfeffer ............................................................................................................18
Queensland finalist: Kerrie Pain (Richards) .............................................................................................19
Queensland finalist: Janet Campbell ........................................................................................................20
South Australian winner: Carol Schofield AM .........................................................................................21
South Australian finalist: Jaylene Fuge (Gurr) ..........................................................................................22
Western Australian winner: Mary Nenke .................................................................................................23
Western Australian finalist: Anne Jennings ...............................................................................................24
Western Australian winner: Shelley Birch .................................................................................................25
Tasmanian winner: Anne Taylor ................................................................................................................26
Tasmanian finalist: Jane Allwright ............................................................................................................27
Tasmanian finalist: Anne Heazlewood .......................................................................................................28
Northern Territory winner: Sue Wainwright ...........................................................................................29
Northern Territory finalist: Terry Underwood OAM ...............................................................................30

2001 ............................................................................................................................................................31
New South Wales winner: Jon Maree Baker ............................................................................................32
New South Wales finalist: Barbara Nuthall ...............................................................................................33
New South Wales finalist: Linda Duffy ....................................................................................................34
Victorian winner: Sharyn Munnerley .......................................................................................................35
Victorian finalist: Lisa Jarvis .....................................................................................................................36
Queensland winner: Diane Gresham ........................................................................................................37
Queensland finalist: Lillian Lever .............................................................................................................38
South Australian winner: Jeanette Gellard .............................................................................................39
South Australian finalist: Tracy Warland .................................................................................................40
Western Australian winner: Rhonda Tonkin ..........................................................................................41
Western Australian finalist: Janette O’Keefe ...........................................................................................42
Tasmanian winner: Frances Bender ........................................................................................................43
Tasmanian finalist: Jodie Epper ...............................................................................................................44
Northern Territory winner: Carmel Wagstaff ........................................................................................45
Northern Territory finalist: Miriam Golding ............................................................................................46
Northern Territory finalist: Katrina Wright ...............................................................................................47
2002

New South Wales winner: Robbie Setton ........................................................................................................ 50
New South Wales finalist: Sandra Doyle ............................................................................................................. 51
New South Wales finalist: Ruth Quigley ............................................................................................................. 52
Victorian winner: Carol Mathew ....................................................................................................................... 53
Victorian finalist: Joanne Butterworth-Gray ....................................................................................................... 54
Queensland winner: Mary Lankester .................................................................................................................. 55
Queensland finalist: Suzanne Nation .................................................................................................................... 56
South Australian winner: June Gill ..................................................................................................................... 57
South Australian finalist: Susan Berlin ................................................................................................................ 58
South Australian finalist: Carol Johnson ............................................................................................................. 59
Western Australian winner: Angela Whittington ............................................................................................... 60
Western Australian finalist: Tracey Ebert .......................................................................................................... 61
Western Australian finalist: Pamela Williamson .................................................................................................. 62
Tasmanian winner: Jeanette Reader .................................................................................................................. 63
Tasmanian finalist: Christine Mann .................................................................................................................... 64
Northern Territory winner: Kate Hadden ........................................................................................................... 65

Northern Territory finalist: Carol Johnson .......................................................................................................... 59
Northern Territory finalist: Susan Berlin ............................................................................................................ 58
Northern Territory winner: Beverley Wilson ........................................................................................................ 79
Tasmanian winner: Lee Adamson Ringk ............................................................................................................ 78
Northern Territory runner up: Sarah Fea ............................................................................................................ 111
Northern Territory winner: Ann Palmer ........................................................................................................... 110
Tasmanian runner up: Laura Richardson .......................................................................................................... 109
Tasmanian winner: Amanda Way ...................................................................................................................... 108
Northern Territory runner up: Megan Hoskins ................................................................................................ 95
Northern Territory winner: Lee Berryman ........................................................................................................ 93
Northern Territory runner up: Megan Hoskins ................................................................................................ 95
Northern Territory winner: Lee Berryman ........................................................................................................ 93

2003...................................................................................................................................................................... 67

Victorian winner: Anna Aldridge ....................................................................................................................... 70
Victorian runner up: Kaye Scholfield .................................................................................................................... 71
Queensland winner: Desley Vella ....................................................................................................................... 72
Queensland runner up: Teena Mammino ............................................................................................................. 73
South Australian winner: Sharon Starick ............................................................................................................ 74
South Australian runner up: Heather Burdon ....................................................................................................... 75
Western Australian winner: Erica Starling .......................................................................................................... 76
Western Australian runner up: Suzanne Woods ................................................................................................. 77
Tasmanian winner: Lee Adamson Ringk ............................................................................................................ 78
Northern Territory winner: Beverley Wilson ......................................................................................................... 79

New South Wales winner: Milada Safarik .......................................................................................................... 68
New South Wales runner up: Megan Mosely ........................................................................................................ 69
Victorian winner: Marilyn Lanyon ....................................................................................................................... 84
Victorian runner up: Beverley Fisher .................................................................................................................... 85
Queensland winner: Claudine Ward .................................................................................................................... 86
Queensland runner up: Dee Dunham .................................................................................................................... 87
South Australian winner: Jeanette Long ............................................................................................................. 88
South Australian runner up: Laura Fell .................................................................................................................. 89
Western Australian winner: Diana Morrison ....................................................................................................... 90
Western Australian runner up: Wendy Newman ................................................................................................. 91
Tasmanian winner: Diane Rae ............................................................................................................................ 92
Tasmanian runner up: Sandra Gillanders .......................................................................................................... 93
Northern Territory winner: Lee Berryman ........................................................................................................ 94
Northern Territory runner up: Megan Hoskins .................................................................................................. 95

2004...................................................................................................................................................................... 81

New South Wales winner: Rebecca Arnott .......................................................................................................... 82
New South Wales runner up: Lorroir Kirkby ......................................................................................................... 83
Victorian winner: Marilyn Lanyon ....................................................................................................................... 84
Victorian runner up: Beverley Fisher .................................................................................................................... 85
Queensland winner: Claudine Ward .................................................................................................................... 86
Queensland runner up: Dee Dunham .................................................................................................................... 87
South Australian winner: Jeanette Long ............................................................................................................. 88
South Australian runner up: Laura Fell .................................................................................................................. 89
Western Australian winner: Diana Morrison ....................................................................................................... 90
Western Australian runner up: Wendy Newman ................................................................................................. 91
Tasmanian winner: Diane Rae ............................................................................................................................ 92
Tasmanian runner up: Sandra Gillanders .......................................................................................................... 93
Northern Territory winner: Lee Berryman ........................................................................................................ 94
Northern Territory runner up: Megan Hoskins .................................................................................................. 95

New South Wales winner: Jennifer Bradley ....................................................................................................... 98
New South Wales runner up: Kate James (Woodward) .................................................................................... 99
Victorian winner: Sue Markwell .......................................................................................................................... 100
Victorian runner up: Elaine Paton ....................................................................................................................... 101
Queensland winner: Anne Osborne ................................................................................................................... 102
Queensland runner up: Delphine Puxty (Bentley) ............................................................................................ 103
South Australian winner: Lisa Rowntree ........................................................................................................... 104
South Australian runner up: Lyn Doble ............................................................................................................. 105
Western Australian winner: Maureen Dobra ................................................................................................... 106
Western Australian runner up: Deborah Oberon ............................................................................................... 107
Tasmanian winner: Amanda Way ....................................................................................................................... 108
Tasmanian runner up: Laura Richardson ........................................................................................................... 109
Northern Territory winner: Ann Palmer ........................................................................................................... 110
Northern Territory runner up: Sarah Fea ........................................................................................................... 111

2005...................................................................................................................................................................... 97

New South Wales winner: Jennifer Bradley ....................................................................................................... 98
New South Wales runner up: Kate James (Woodward) .................................................................................... 99
Victorian winner: Sue Markwell .......................................................................................................................... 100
Victorian runner up: Elaine Paton ....................................................................................................................... 101
Queensland winner: Anne Osborne ................................................................................................................... 102
Queensland runner up: Delphine Puxty (Bentley) ............................................................................................ 103
South Australian winner: Lisa Rowntree ........................................................................................................... 104
South Australian runner up: Lyn Doble ............................................................................................................. 105
Western Australian winner: Maureen Dobra ................................................................................................... 106
Western Australian runner up: Deborah Oberon ............................................................................................... 107
Tasmanian winner: Amanda Way ....................................................................................................................... 108
Tasmanian runner up: Laura Richardson ........................................................................................................... 109
Northern Territory winner: Ann Palmer ........................................................................................................... 110
Northern Territory runner up: Sarah Fea ........................................................................................................... 111
2006 ..........................................................................................................................................................113
New South Wales winner: Kate Schwager ................................................................................................................. 114
New South Wales runner up: Mary Howard ................................................................................................................ 115
Victorian winner: Yvonne Jennings ................................................................................................................................. 116
Victorian runner up: Cate Bell ........................................................................................................................................ 117
Queensland and Australian winner: Martha Shepherd .................................................................................................... 118
Queensland runner up: Ann Radke .................................................................................................................................. 119
South Australia winner: Heather Ballock ....................................................................................................................... 120
South Australia runner up: Roxanne Prime ..................................................................................................................... 121
Western Australian winner and Australian runner up: Bev Logue ............................................................................. 122
Western Australian runner up: Diana Holly ..................................................................................................................... 123
Tasmanian winner: Heather Chong ............................................................................................................................... 124
Tasmanian runner up: Cheryl McCarric ............................................................................................................................ 125
Northern Territory winner: Janette Hinze ....................................................................................................................... 126
Northern Territory runner up: Pippa Krafiff (Clarke) .................................................................................................... 127

2007 ..........................................................................................................................................................129
New South Wales winner: Eleanor Cook ....................................................................................................................... 130
New South Wales runner up: Fiona Klendinst ............................................................................................................. 131
Victorian and Australian winner: Deborah Bain ........................................................................................................... 132
Victorian runner up: Vera Fleming ................................................................................................................................... 133
Queensland winner: Sonia Maley ..................................................................................................................................... 134
Queensland runner up: Linda Jaques ............................................................................................................................ 135
South Australian winner and Australian runner up: Abi Spehr ................................................................................... 136
South Australian runner up: Natasha Mooney ............................................................................................................... 137
Western Australian winner: Pam Lincoln ........................................................................................................................ 138
Western Australian runner up: Pia Boschetti ................................................................................................................. 139
Tasmanian winner: Rachael Treasure ............................................................................................................................ 140
Tasmanian runner up: Gail Menegon ............................................................................................................................ 141
Northern Territory winner: Tracey Leo .......................................................................................................................... 142
Northern Territory runner up: Tina MacFarlane .......................................................................................................... 143

2008 ..........................................................................................................................................................145
New South Wales winner: Tracey Knowland .................................................................................................................... 146
New South Wales runner up: Louisa Kiely ....................................................................................................................... 147
Victorian winner: Lisa Mahon ......................................................................................................................................... 148
Victorian runner up: Lucy Mayes ..................................................................................................................................... 149
Queensland and Australian winner: Ros Smerdon ......................................................................................................... 150
Queensland runner up: Georgie Somerset ..................................................................................................................... 151
South Australian winner: Domenica Latorre .................................................................................................................... 152
South Australian runner up: Yvonne Smith .................................................................................................................... 153
Western Australian winner and Australian runner up: Maggie Edmonds ................................................................... 154
Western Australian runner up: Audrey Bird .................................................................................................................... 155
Tasmanian winner: Jeanette Fisher ............................................................................................................................... 156
Tasmanian runner up: Amabel Fulton ........................................................................................................................... 157
Northern Territory winner: Norma Higgins .................................................................................................................. 158

2009 ..........................................................................................................................................................159
New South Wales winner: Kim Currie ........................................................................................................................... 160
New South Wales runner up: Gillian Hogendyk ............................................................................................................. 161
Victorian winner: Roma Britnell ..................................................................................................................................... 162
Victorian runner up: Kate Wilson ..................................................................................................................................... 163
Queensland winner: Barb Madden .................................................................................................................................. 164
Queensland runner up: Wendy Agar ................................................................................................................................. 165
South Australian winner: Susi Tegen ............................................................................................................................... 166
South Australian runner up: Ulli Spranz ........................................................................................................................... 167
Western Australian winner: Kirsten Skraba .................................................................................................................... 168
Western Australian runner up: Doris Parker .................................................................................................................... 169
Tasmanian winner: Jane Lovell ....................................................................................................................................... 170
Tasmanian runner up: Jane Huntington .......................................................................................................................... 171
Northern Territory winner: Mischelle Hill ....................................................................................................................... 172
Northern Territory runner up: Moira Lanzarin ............................................................................................................. 173
Acknowledgments

Many people have contributed to the success of the RIRDC Rural Women’s Award since its inception in 2000:

• the award recipients themselves

• the state and territory agencies responsible for agriculture, primary industries and natural resource management—for administering the award at the state and territory level

• the Australian Government Departments of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government—for their valuable strategic and financial support

• the award’s national sponsors—ABC Radio, Rural Press Ltd and the *Australian Women’s Weekly*

• members of the national, state and territory selection committees

• past and present senators and members of parliament

• employees of the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award 2000
Participating in the award ...

Diana Gibbs
Sue McGinn OAM
Margaret Taylor
Rowena Doyle
Jo Gardner
Alison Brinson
Annie Pfeffer
Kerrie Pain (Richards)
Janet Campbell
Carol Schofield AM
Jaylene Fuge (Gurr)
Mary Nenke
Anne Jennings
Shelley Birch
Anne Taylor
Jane Allwright
Anne Heazlewood
Sue Wainwright
Terry Underwood OAM
We're only here for a short visit, so be sure to stop and smell the flowers.

- Community representative on the committee that established Cootamundra HealthOne, a community health centre in Cootamundra, 2007 and 2008
- Director, Forest and Wood Products Research and Development Corporation, 2000 to 2006
- Chair, New South Wales Regional Communities Consultative Council, 2000 to 2007
- Independent member of Governance Committee, New South Wales Water Loss Management Program, since 2006
- Member, New South Wales Climate Change Council, since 2006
- Panel member for Wilkinson Inquiry into Recruitment and Retention of Medical Practitioners in Rural and Regional Australia, 2000 and 2001
- Panel member for Allan Inquiry into Financial Viability of Local Government in New South Wales, 2005 and 2006

RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Diana Gibbs
New South Wales winner

After much planning and researching, we finally launched the Diana Gibbs—Australian Collection label at Mercedes Australian Fashion Week in May 2003.

This project started with a commitment made in 1998 by some wool-growing families from the South West Slopes of New South Wales to stop selling wool as a commodity and start marketing it as a product. The Rural Women’s Award allowed us to develop a business plan for the project—to manufacture high-quality woollen scarves and wraps incorporating unique designs that tell stories of our land, using Indigenous culture as the theme. We engaged specialist factories in Italy to spin and weave Australian merino wool to our exacting standards.

After the launch of the label, we developed outlets around Australia, starting in Sydney and regional New South Wales and gradually extending further. We also sold to a boutique in the United Kingdom and to a department store in Copenhagen—the latter on the strength of having presented two of our wraps to Crown Princess Mary on the occasion of her visit to Australia. Other items from our range have found their way as gifts to Dame Graca Machel, Her Majesty the Queen of Spain, former Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, and all recipients of the New South Wales RIRDC Rural Women’s Award. Via the website, we have also sold our products to Canada, Germany, Thailand and the United Kingdom—and, of course, all around Australia.

August 2006 saw us attend our first trade fair, Life in Style, in Melbourne. This decision has allowed our business to grow rapidly: having up-market tourism, giftware and specialist boutique owners coming to our stand at the fair was much more effective than trying to visit potential outlets individually. The business expanded so much that in February 2008 we launched a second collection, the Diana Gibbs—Natural Collection. The focus of this second collection is still wool, but we have also developed trans-seasonal and summer scarves, using cotton, linen, silk, cashmere—in fact, any fibre that is natural. The plain styles appeal to a different market and allow us to offer a different price point. We continue to expand both collections.

I love showing everyone how beautiful Australian wool can be—soft and luxurious and used to deliver a very special item. We are proud to be a showcase for this traditional Australian industry, and we continue to take our wool into new domains.
It’s better to burn out than rust out.

- Nuffield Scholar, 1998
- First International Forum for Women in Dairy, 2000
- Elected to Dairy Farmers board, 2000
- Elected to Holiday Coast Credit Union board, 2003
- Member of the Order of Australia, 2005
- Masters degree in Business Administration, 2007

Fifteen years on, we run a profitable and growing dairy business. We produce top-quality milk from a high-production purebred Holstein herd. Our focus is marketing elite Holstein genetics through artificial insemination, using the world’s best sires. We accelerate our breeding goals by using embryo transfer techniques to build the female families of our most valuable animals and have sold cattle to enthusiasts in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. Of note is our niche focus on breeding red-and-white Holsteins (they are usually black-and-white), which often attract a premium in the marketplace because they are so rare.

I entered the RIRDC Rural Women’s Award in the hope of winning the bursary and so helping to fund the First International Forum for Women in Dairy, which was held in Sydney in 2000. I had a dream to run a forum that would inspire women to become more involved in our industry, particularly in leadership roles. As a finalist, I did not receive the bursary, but the forum still went ahead. It now has a permanent home as part of World Dairy Expo in the United States and is held each four years. The fourth forum will be held in 2012, and I certainly hope to attend.

The award gave me the profile to successfully stand for election to the board of Dairy Farmers (Australian Cooperative Foods) in 2000. I sat on the board for eight years, until Dairy Farmers was sold to National Foods. I remain the only woman to have sat on the cooperative’s board during its 108 years of existence.
In 2000 my Rural Women’s Award ambition was based on change management in rural communities. This was largely a response to the potential impact of dairy deregulation on rural communities, including my own community in the Bega Valley.

I value the strength and tenacity that lies within individuals in communities. This often unknown resource has the capacity to change lives and communities for the better. My work since the 2000 Award has been based on this belief. I instigated the South Coast Rural Tourism Network which went on to win the South Coast Award for Excellence in Tourism.

I have represented my community on a number of regional boards, including SERTEC (the South East Regional Training and Education Centre) the Bega District Nursing Board, the Sapphire Coast Producers Association, the South Coast Tourism Board and the philanthropic group the Mumbulla Foundation, which disbursed a total of $200 000 to local on-the-ground initiatives over three years. I served on the Bega Chamber of Commerce and Industry Executive for several years and chaired the Bega Business Council to successfully lobby for a Diploma of Education at the University of Wollongong Access Centre in Bega, a new Hospital for the Bega Valley Shire and a By-Pass for Bega. I also project managed International Women’s Day in the Bega Valley Shire and have been a member of the Loom Growers: a group of local women supporting women in Burma and China and Mahbob Rawi-Mahbob’s Promise.

So in 2009 I find myself confronting change and change management in communities on different soil. This year I will project manage the establishment and development of a School of English in Dili, East Timor. In 2007 and 2008 I worked for brief periods with the Mary MacKillop East Timor Institute, based in Dili, in literacy and teaching education and English as a second language.

I returned to permanent part-time teaching in 2008, focusing on learning difficulties and classroom teaching in country New South Wales. I still live in the beautiful Bega Valley, where Bega Cheese goes from strength to strength, providing employment for about 600 local people.

I will be taking leave from school this year, so that I can continue the work begun in East Timor in 2007 and 2008. Coming face to face with people in one of the poorest countries in the world only an hour-and-a-half by plane from Darwin has strengthened my belief that one should ‘never see a need without doing something about it’ and that each of us has the capacity to manage change that will take us and those around us forward. The choice is ours.

Communities supporting communities can happen in so many ways, despite cultural, social, economic, political, geographic and spiritual differences.
My Rural Women’s Award ambition was to write a nationally accredited mohair-classing training module, to teach mohair producers about preparing their fibre for sale. Before that time there was a lack for formal training whereby mohair producers could learn about their fibre and preparing it for sale. Producers would have to wait for comments on a classing sheet in relation to fibre that had been classed months beforehand.

I enjoyed the writing project, which I completed with the help of a registered training provider and is based on national competency standards. The package was released for industry evaluation, including by mohair brokers and buyers, and a final module was completed. The program was run at the University of Melbourne’s Longerenong and Dookie campuses, and the module was later sent to other states for use in regional seminars.

The training package can be a stand-alone accreditation package or can be completed as part of a Diploma in Agriculture. After completing the bursary project, I went on to do the remaining components of the Diploma of Agriculture, graduating in April 2005.

In 2002 the first Australian mohair sire evaluation project was run on our property, using our breeding does. This project required an even group of does that were artificially inseminated using semen from 11 different sires from mohair studs across the country. The resultant progeny were evaluated over the first three shearings. It was a privilege to work with mohair-specific researchers, and I learnt a great deal during the two years of the project. Recording and evaluating progeny from sires is important for genetic improvement and, after being involved with this project, I developed practical ways of achieving this on the farm.

Unfortunately, 2002 was our worst year of the drought, and our water source for stock, the Wimmera River, became too saline for use. So began the first of what is now six years of water carting. With failed crops and large bills for buying and transporting water and hay, we were fortunate to be able to focus on a non-agriculture related craft industry. The angora goat is an excellent dual-income animal, there being much demand for both the fibre and the meat. Our animals are heavily selected for superior fibre production, and those not meeting the standard are moved into the meat trade and provide a further income in mohair hides. Mohair-hide soft toys, dolls’ wigging and Christmas stockings (which we make and sell), together with mohair blankets, socks, scarves and rugs, helped us maintain our herd numbers in 2002 while we waited for rain.

The tourism industry has also helped us weather what has now been 11 years of drought. We have two self-contained homesteads that allow people to enjoy country life, collect fresh eggs in the morning, and walk among friendly animals. Coming for short or long stays, our guests leave the property with a greater knowledge of life on the land and, of course, the mohair industry. Coaches also bring people to spend an hour or two watching animals being shorn and the orphaned kids being bottle fed and to visit our on-farm shop.

In 2007 I was encouraged to apply to the Federal Government for an Australian Tourism Development Program grant. This funding was for ‘exceptional circumstances’ drought-declared areas, encouraging tourism businesses to diversify from mainstream tourism markets. I applied for the funding to complete a partially built function centre, which we had delayed finishing because of the drought. The application was successful, and the function centre is almost completed; it will be used for weddings and conferences and to cater for the many coaches that visit. I have encouraged surrounding farms to open their properties to visitors, since I believe they all have a story to tell. Agri-tourism is an undervalued resource that can provide additional income and promote our country areas.

It would be remiss of me not to mention my proudest achievements during the past 10 years—two beautiful sons, John and Thomas. I am grateful to a supportive family in my husband, Glenn, and parents, Bob and June Liddy, and attribute the success of the property to the family as a whole and our unwavering belief in the direction we have taken.
At present I am working as the community development officer for Horsham Rural City Council. The position continues on from my work as manager for regional sustainable development with the Wimmera Catchment Management Authority.

At the time I participated in the Rural Women’s Award my involvement in primary industries was as a grower and exporter of herbs. Gardner Herbs still operates as a sideline, but I found greener pastures. In addition to my work with Horsham Rural City Council, I am establishing a carbon-trading consultancy, focusing on options for on-farm sequestration through agro-forestry, and I have established a nursery that has now diversified into natives and currently produces about 10,000 seedlings a year. We also operate a guesthouse on the property. Additionally, I enjoyed two years as manager of a trust fund–owned mixed farm of 800-odd hectares that supports cropping, wool and prime lambs.

My involvement with the award encouraged me to take up new pursuits, although my connection with the vision I had back then has changed slightly. After the award I became involved in the Victorian Government’s Entrepreneurship Panel, the board of the Rural Finance Corporation’s Young Farmers Loan Scheme, the board of the Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, and the Wimmera Development Association.

Much as I have enjoyed and relished the challenge of my various roles in the public arena, I am more committed than ever to my vision of encouraging young people into rural and regional areas and into sustainable agriculture. The sustainability of agriculture is very much dependent on the resilience of our rural communities. But, with full-time work, a consultancy and a number of enterprises on the side, a 20-month-old baby and another baby due any day, life is busy and I can’t squeeze much more in.
Every day is a new opportunity.

Ten years on, did I achieve this goal? Yes and no. Definitely not in the way I dreamed about when I penned my application for the inaugural Rural Women’s Award. We continued to practise IPM on our farm. I started a group for local greenhouse growers, so that they could meet regularly on farms to learn and share experiences of pest and disease management. My interests broadened to include a focus on safe and effective use of chemicals. I also represented the Victorian Farmers Federation on the state and national ChemCert boards and represented ChemCert Australia on the community consultative committee of the Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicines Authority.

During the next few years I participated in a number of leadership and group-facilitation courses and sat on several rural industry committees. My interests were changing—from being a farmer to being a networker, a committee junkie and a facilitator. Along the way, I supported and facilitated the development of skills in other rural women. WinHort Yarra Ranges began in 2002. This group of local women, of which I am the coordinator, has successfully raised the profile of local women in horticultural businesses, and many of the women are now on industry and government committees.

It was time to use my new-found capacity-building skills professionally. In 2003 I began off-farm work, one day a week, as the industry development officer for the national raspberry industry. This is now a three-days-a-week position, focusing on facilitating the uptake of best management practices (including IPM), improving communication in a geographically diverse industry, and assessing the genetic material from the raspberry breeding program. My role is both fulfilling and challenging. I enjoy being part of a small but rapidly expanding industry, acquiring skills as varied as website development, evaluating plant and fruit quality (new cultivars must have good flavour), running training activities and being a tour guide.

Our son is now an important part of our flower growing business. In recent years he has also become active on industry committees. I can share with him some of the insights I have gained. It is exciting to see young people participating in decision making in their industry and ensuring that agriculture and horticulture have a strong future in Australia.HELPING THE RASPBERRY INDUSTRY INTRODUCE A STATUTORY LEVY FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

• Helping the raspberry industry introduce a statutory levy for research and development

In 2000 my award ambition was to learn more about integrated pest management, or IPM—using good bugs to control pest bugs—in greenhouse horticultural crops. I aimed to initially use my new knowledge on our own flower farm, and then I would help other farmers reduce their reliance on chemical controls in managing pest problems.
There have been many changes since I won the Rural Women’s Award with the ambition of promoting monounsaturated sunflower oil. The industry is moving forward positively, and I have been involved in a variety of industry and community projects.

In the past eight years my involvement within the industry has been varied. I was president of the Australian Sunflower Association and assisted in merging the association with the Canola Association and a number of other oilseed associations to form the Australian Oilseeds Federation. I was also involved in developing the Better Oilseeds project, which has assisted the entire industry in dealing with a number of difficulties that have limited the production of sunflowers.

At present I am one of two representatives of the sunflower industry tasked with promoting the development of the inaugural Australian Summer Grains Conference in 2010. The aim is to bring together five individual summer crop conferences.

Five years ago I was invited to join the board of the Pittsworth and District Hospital Friendly Society Ltd, and in November 2006 I was elected chairman of the board. We are undertaking a $4 million development and upgrade to the facility to facilitate dementia-specific care. My role has been to introduce governance procedures that will assist in the accreditation of the facility as well as the overall organisation.

In August 2007 I joined the Condamine Alliance (a natural resource management body), and in late 2008 I became acting chairman of the alliance after the retirement of the chairman. In 2007 I also received a Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries scholarship to participate in the Australian Rural Leadership Program. This was an outstanding program, and I feel privileged to have participated.

I continue to work with industry and my community, using the skills that I have been blessed with for the benefit of all.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Kerrie Pain (Richards)
Queensland finalist

The world is full of many colours, but you have the mind to choose what the colour shall be.

Originally from a wool- and beef-producing property outside Richmond in western Queensland, I saw the opportunity to value-add and develop my own fabric—a soft, easy-care merino wool jersey for everyday wear. My company, Merino Country, processes its own fabrics and manufactures a wide variety of garments, selling them under the brand names Merino Country, Bare Belly Joe and Wundies through mail order, direct sales, wholesale and government contracts.

My original Rural Women’s Award ambition was to further develop markets for merino wool fabrics and garments and to have better integration of the supply chain. I have achieved this with the opening of a specialty retail outlet in Paddington, Brisbane, and by increasing our database of direct sales customers around Australia and overseas to about 12,000. We were awarded the contract to supply merino wool thermals to Victoria Police in 2003 and won the contract again in 2008, to supply garments until 2013—a great achievement for a small Queensland company.

Not only have we been producing merino wool garments for everyday use in work, travel and play: we have also been instrumental in educating the general public and promoting user-friendly, easy-care Merino wool gear to Australia through ‘wool parades’ at the major royal shows and many regional field days, local shows and trade fairs. Our Wundies (woollen undies) have helped change the image of wool meaning thick, heavy, itchy jumpers to being a great product to keep the wearer comfortable in all climates, especially the hot, steamy tropics.

I have also been involved in the Australian Wool Fashion Awards, both as a judge and as a sponsor, to encourage up-and-coming designers to use Australian merino wool in their work. This has involved mentoring students from all areas of Australia, helping them gain insights into taking a design concept from idea to reality. This has been a steep learning curve not only for the students but also for me and my staff, and has given me a better understanding of what is not being taught in our fashion design colleges.

It has also highlighted the need for greater integration between industry and education facilities.

The future for Merino Country is bright. We are working with suppliers in the defence and emergency services sectors to further develop markets for our products in the workplace and are investigating overseas markets (in particular, Canada and the United States) with a view to setting up franchise systems for selling our products. This will help us increase our turnover and achieve greater economies of scale in processing the raw product; it will also enable woolgrowers to work with us directly and become involved in having their wool processed right through to garments. Further, they will also receive direct feedback from consumers.

My involvement with the Rural Women’s Award has been a positive experience: I have developed some great relationships with other participants, who are forward-thinking and inspirational. This exposure to a network of amazing women living in rural and regional Australia has helped me keep in contact with primary industries in general and maintain enduring friendships and business relationships.
In 1995 I was a participant in the RIRDC-funded Farmwide project, which was designed to introduce internet communications, software and hardware to primary producers throughout rural, regional and remote Australia. Following on from Farmwide, I developed a web-based pilot training project dealing with the software and communication tools available for business activity statements for the Australian Taxation Office. The aim for the tools was to help rural and remote Australians when the Goods and Services Tax was introduced.

My Rural Women’s Award project involved developing a web-based training program on direct export marketing for primary producers. At about the same time my husband and I bought and set about transforming an overstocked and seriously drought-affected property on the Darling Downs. We wanted to turn it into a sustainable cropping operation that consistently produced good yields of high-quality grains, cereal and lucerne through zero tillage and good water management practices.

We have since switched from grains on the Darling Downs to macadamias on the Sunshine Coast, and we are now into our seventh harvest. In my opinion, the skills and experience required for primary production are easily transferable between industries because the important attributes essentially remain the same; that is, attention to detail in production management, crop hygiene, sustainable practices, harvesting methods and quality control always pays off.

With macadamia prices at an all-time low, the macadamia farm is very much a secondary income stream.

I have taken on a full-time position as copyright coordinator at the University of the Sunshine Coast. The position is very demanding but also very rewarding because it brings me into contact with such a variety of students and teachers.
Don’t run through life so fast that you forget not only where you are going but where you have been, for life is a journey to be savoured each step of the way.

(—Anon)
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award  
Jaylene Fuge (Gurr)  
South Australian finalist

My life has changed dramatically since I participated in the Rural Women’s Award: I have moved from being single and child-free to having the responsibilities of being a partner and parent and working full time.

In 2001 I resigned from my position as development officer for the South Australian Dairy Farmers Association to begin my journey into philanthropy. I took up a position as events coordinator for the Multiple Sclerosis Society, managing and planning the annual fund-raising events. Two highlights were organising a black-tie ball for 300 guests, which raised about $20 000, and a musical that generated a further $87 000 for the society. The job was a wonderful challenge and experience. Two years later I moved to the Royal Society for the Blind to work as special events coordinator. At the end of 2005 I decided to take a break from charity and philanthropic work.

In recent years I have worked predominantly as an employment consultant and job-seeker service consultant. In 2007 I took up the position of case manager with Employers Mutual Ltd. This position involves managing the case load of Workcover recipients; liaising daily with employers, doctors, lawyers and health professionals; assessing workers’ liability to Workcover; and providing to team members advice on relevant legislation.

One of the challenges I set myself a few years ago was to run in a half marathon. I found this an amazing experience, physically and mentally. It helped me with personal growth and goal-setting, and it gave me that wonderful sense of achievement that comes from completing something so demanding physically. I have continued with a daily exercise routine because I have a strong belief in the importance of work–life balance.
Winning the inaugural Rural Women’s Award for Western Australia was a major punctuation mark in my life. It afforded me the opportunity to visit the Boston Seafood Show and spend time with our US importer, with whom we are currently working to introduce value-added aquaculture products. The award also helped highlight the important role we, as women, are playing in diversifying rural and regional Australia and our ability to embrace change. Winning made me more visible and helped open many new and exciting doors.

Since 2000 our business, Cambinata Yabbies, has faced the normal challenges of rural industries dependent on the weather. To improve market access, we have added gourmet pickled yabbies and abalone to our product range, further diversifying our broad-acre farming business. In 2006 we obtained a grant from the Commonwealth Food Processing in Regional Australia Program to help with construction of a state-of-the-art export kitchen complex for value-adding to aquaculture products. In late 2008 we finally received accreditation from the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, and we have just despatched our first shipment to India. A new product range of gourmet foods, Family Inspirations, is currently being labelled.

In 2003 we launched our annual Cambinata Extravaganza, aimed at linking the city to the country and profiling the region. The event, held in our unique ‘shearing shed’ complete with baby grand piano, begins with a mini-expo, where producers and artists showcase their products; this is followed by a multi-course feast created by a top chef using regional foods such as yabbies, abalone, saltwater trout, lamb and beef accompanied by local wines. The guests include local food lovers, plus a large contingent of city folk and a sprinkling of overseas visitors. In 2008 Postcards WA filmed the event.

Over 130 people camped overnight in a nearby paddock, enjoying a cooked breakfast next morning.

The award has led to many exciting opportunities, including being on state and national committees and boards. It has been fabulous to be able to influence outcomes for regional Australia, gathering opinions and information from my networks across regional Australia. Highlights have been being appointed to the Regional Women’s Advisory Council in 2006, being a participant in the Rural Stream at the 2020 Summit, and participating in the National Rural Women’s Summit. It was amazing being made an ‘Australian Export Hero in 2007’, receiving the 2007 Governor’s Award for Regional Western Australia at the 2007 Western Australian Citizens’ Awards, and being chosen in 2008 to feature on Qantas as one of four ‘Australian Woman Entrepreneurs’.

Finally, without my wonderful husband, Michael, and our large family, their spouses and children, all this would be meaningless and unachievable. Maintaining balance in my life and valuing others and their part in the team has been imperative. On 15 February 2009 Michael and I celebrated 40 years of marriage, and a friend wrote, ‘We just loved your family, and it makes me wish I had been brave enough to have six children. We were so impressed with your reception area and the whole commercial organisation’.
In 2000 when I participated in the Rural Women’s Award my husband, Les, and I were farming—initially dairying and then growing hay and prime lambs—in the south-west of Western Australia. While our children were in primary school I enrolled in a Human Services degree at Edith Cowan University, at its Bunbury campus. I have been working in rural community development ever since, both for government and for community groups and as a self-employed consultant.

Working in my own consultancy was great, giving me the freedom to operate from the farm. On any day I’d be working at the computer, then I’d receive a phone call from Les—who gave men mobiles?—and next thing I’d be running after sheep. One time, I looked up and there was our border collie sitting on the back of the ute laughing at me … I’m sure.

My award ambition was based on expanding my skills in rural community development. I have continued along this path, being involved in many community development projects in both voluntary and paid capacities. Whilst doing this I have also completed a master's degree, and I am now working on my PhD in Community Development and Education.

My greatest achievement has been seeing my daughters continue the type of work I have always been interested in. Beccy works in social work and community development and Debra in natural resource management. My granddaughters and grandsons also have this holistic feeling for the land and their community. As I remarked at our last Rural Women's Award reunion, a friend once told me, 'Our daughters leap from their mother's shoulders'. Watch out, world, as they do!

---

Washing one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral. ——Freire

My involvement in rural women’s affairs continues. I spent three years on the State Planning Group for WA FarmBis and two years on the State Advisory Committee for the Rural Financial Counselling Service. These were wonderful experiences and expanded my networks throughout Western Australia, as well as my knowledge of things rural. Until December 2008 I was on the Faculty Board of our local campus of Edith Cowan University, as well as being on the Research and Higher Degrees Committee. I was also on the Advisory Board of Sophia College of Counselling, a registered training organisation. My ambition is to sit on other advisory groups and boards in the future as I find these positions very interesting and rewarding. It will be interesting to find out what opportunities there are for women on boards when you are based in the remote North-West.

Awarded a full-time scholarship, funded by Worsley Alumina through Edith Cowan University, to undertake PhD studies, 2006

Presented papers at conferences in Dunedin, New Zealand, and Darwin, Northern Territory, 2008

Invited speaker at the Riverland, South Australia, Zonta Business Women’s Awards, 2008

Rural Representative- WA FarmBis Planning Group 2005 – 2008

Industry Representative- WA Rural Financial Counselling Service Advisory Committee

Presented papers at conferences in Dunedin, New Zealand, and Darwin, Northern Territory, 2008

Invited speaker at the Riverland, South Australia, Zonta Business Women’s Awards, 2008

Rural Representative- WA FarmBis Planning Group 2005 – 2008

Industry Representative- WA Rural Financial Counselling Service Advisory Committee

•

•

•

•
In 2000 I represented The Leibe Group Women’s Committee as a finalist in the RIRDC Rural Women’s Award.

The Leibe Group is a Western Australian Northern Wheatbelt Research and Development group that was founded in 1997. The Leibe Women’s Committee was established in 1998 and I was a founding member of this committee for five years.

Currently I have an active role in our farm business administration, am President of our Coorow Townscape Committee and am contracted by the Co-operative Bulk Handling Group to facilitate on-farming training in the practicalities of Quality Assurance accreditation in the Western Australian Grains Industry.

Our adoption and enthusiasm of Quality Assurance enabled ‘Catalina Farms’ to win the 2005 Co-operative Bulk Handling Groups Better Farm Integrated Quality Excellence Award for Western Australian grain growers.

The Leibe Group is now a leading and well respected Agricultural Research & Development Group which boasts 200 farm businesses as its members and currently has a team of 5 full time staff working for the group and approximately 20 volunteer positions.

The Women’s Committee continues to hold annual field days with consistent attendances in excess of 100 people.

The award was a wonderful opportunity for me to network and up skill to enhance the contribution I could make to the industry and the community groups I was involved with.

I am a partner with my husband in a farming enterprise, ‘Catalina Farms’ 300 kilometres north of Perth. I have lived in our small town of Coorow for 28 years and I enjoy my life in small rural communities and have a positive outlook for the agricultural industry.
Contact between irrigation pipes and overhead power lines is a ‘shocking’ thing, one that has touched me several times in the past 37 years. The double fatality of two vibrant 21-year-old farm workers in January 2007 was the last straw. The rate of seven deaths in seven years within a 20-kilometre radius of a northern Tasmanian town could not continue. It was obvious something needed to be done to ensure that no more lives were lost.

The skills, knowledge and networks I have gained since winning the 2000 Rural Women’s Award empowered me to call a meeting with the intention of forming a ‘grass-roots’ not-for-profit group. The group was launched at Agfest 2007 and is now known as Proactive Agricultural Safety & Support, or PASS. I am the inaugural chair of the management committee.

PASS offers to Tasmanian farmers information about farm safety awareness, skills and knowledge through on-farm practical workshops, seminars and forums and regular communication through our newsletter and website, www.pass.org.au. Electrical safety was our first project.

My interest in farm safety and injury prevention was sparked by two strong images from my first year of working as a physiotherapist in a regional hospital: the first was a farmer’s desperation to get back to work even when he had debilitating back problems; the second concerned the disastrous and life-altering injuries sustained by young men, in particular from motorbike accidents. I thought that, if farmers had some knowledge of and skills in safe manual handling techniques and some basic ergonomic information, many injuries could be prevented.

Later I married a farmer and began working with him in our mixed enterprise. Although I definitely did not want any of my family to acquire an injury, I did want them to gain the skills needed to successfully and safely operate a viable farming business.

In 1997 my husband commented that he was worried about the manual handling techniques of a new employee, who had previously worked as a shearer. He asked if I would teach this young man the correct techniques. I was concerned that the young man would not ‘take it from the boss’s wife’, so we invited several neighbouring farmers and their wives to a workshop focusing on preventing back injuries. I was astounded how little they knew, especially those who had recently graduated from agricultural college.

Thus was born the concept of on-farm safety training. Together with my neighbour, who is a qualified nurse, and a Workplace Standards Tasmania inspector, we delivered a number of workshops to farmers and their employees at various farms in the district, providing information and practical skills to meet their obligations under the new occupational health and safety legislation, as well as first aid and safe manual handling practices.

Winning the award enabled me to establish my business, Wise Work, and to extend my farm safety efforts and deliver workshops statewide, including to industries such as aquaculture, health care and mining.

I have since augmented my skills as a ‘manual handling trainer’ by attending courses with a view to becoming an accredited manutention trainer, in both industrial loads and health care, as well as participating in further training in France. I have also begun a Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety, which I hope to convert to a master’s degree when I complete a research project entitled ‘Farmers acquiring injury prevention and sustainable manual task skills’.

---

Goddard Sapin – Jaloustre scholarship to study in France, 2004
Tasmanian chair, Occupational Health Physiotherapy Australia Group of the Australian Physiotherapy Association, 2003 to 2007
National chair, Australian Association of Manutention Practitioners, 2005 to 2007
Inaugural chair, Proactive Agricultural Safety & Support.

Prevention is better than cure
Do it now, and then it is done.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Jane Allwright
Tasmanian finalist 2000

I continued to work the farm with my husband, Chris, for the five years following my involvement in the Rural Women’s Award. Like so many others, we lived through drought and floods. We expanded our property, developing more cropping ground and putting in new water storage dams to drought-proof the land.

I was fortunate to work for the Department of Primary Industries and Water as a negotiator for the Private Forest Reserve Program; this allowed me to gain training in negotiation and facilitation. I also spent five years on the board of Australian Women in Agriculture, the fifth year as president; this was a steep learning curve, but it was one of the best times for my own personal development.

In addition to Australian Women in Agriculture I continued with my support of Tasmanian Women in Agriculture, to help others make the most of their opportunities. We re-assessed the needs of the organisation and the support received from the Department of Primary Industries and Water to further develop the network in the state and through our connections with other organisations overseas. This included a visit to Nebraska and Oregon in 2001: an exchange program has since been organised. There is also an exchange program with Agricultural Women in Ireland.

In January 2006 my husband was diagnosed with cancer. This was a devastating time for us as a family. He had various treatments during the following eight months, but he lost his battle in September of that year. That left me with three children, aged 10, 12 and 14, and a 1200-hectare property to run. During the second year of drought after Chris’s death, after much debate and consideration, I made the decision to put the property on the market.

At present I am working in administration at a local private school, which I am enjoying—especially the contact with many different people and, of course, the children. We live on a hectare of ground on the Derwent River, 20 minutes’ drive from the centre of Hobart. Oh, how different! Son Jotham has just turned 17, started an apprenticeship as a diesel mechanic, and gained his driving licence and a car all within a week. Daughters Hannah and Evie are in high school and can catch a bus a short walk from our home. The girls and I are leaving for a six-week trip to America and Europe in May 2009—long service leave, I call it.

Tasmania continues to struggle with drought, and I feel for all my fellow farmers as they do what they can to survive. I will always consider myself a farmer, and the skills farming has given me and my children will hold us all in good stead for whatever else we may do in our lives.
With my husband and my son I am a partner in a family farm business based at Whitemore in northern Tasmania. The business consists of a diverse cropping program—poppies, peas, cereals and small-seed production, including ryegrass and clovers—and a livestock enterprise involving Border Leicester and English Leicester sheep studs along with prime lambs and trade cattle. We are members of the Super Borders program, which is the brand name for high-performing Border Leicesters that have been bred in registered flocks to a specific quality standard; the English Leicester stud is one of the oldest continually maintained British-breed flocks in Australia.

About 30 years ago we diversified into a small-seed cleaning and processing business. Heazlewood Seeds now processes a wide range of seeds, such as pasture seeds, cereal, canola, peas and other vegetable seeds, as well as specialised and high-value crop seeds.

The output of our businesses has doubled in the past five years, largely as a result of networking and word of mouth. We have increased farm production by buying more land and adding an irrigation scheme along with making use of a whole-farm plan. We now employ nine casuals during the summer. The contract seed cleaning and processing operation has also grown: we now have 90 silos for storing seed on the farm and, among other things, send buckwheat to restaurants in Singapore and canola to Paraguay and Uruguay.

One of my big commitments is informing the broader community about primary industries and its continued importance to Australia. The 1870s barn we transformed into a reception and function centre has been expanded, and we now cater for domestic and international tours, farmers’ seminars and even weddings.

I take the lead in promoting and marketing our businesses.

I am still a member of Tasmanian Women in Agriculture but am no longer involved in National Partners in Grain. These days I take a little time off for myself, and I am enjoying being involved in a book club.

Are we going OK?
In 1995, after I had spent 10 years as a single parent battling to put three children through boarding school and university, using proceeds from my stud and commercial cattle operation in Queensland, a dear family friend returned to Australia and suggested we join forces in a new enterprise growing peanuts and corn under irrigation. This integrated well with my established breeding and fattening operation, but in a short time the ‘writing was on the wall’ when problems with available water for irrigation in southern Queensland and northern New South Wales emerged. After much discussion, research, investigation and soul-searching, we decided to marry, sell everything and move to a station we had bought outside Katherine in the Northern Territory, where we had discovered a huge, reliable underground water source suitable for irrigation and grazing.

The cropping enterprise grew rapidly, and I continued to breed my cattle and develop a computer-aided recording and analysis system for tracking the genetics and performance of the various lines and crosses that were most suitable for the climate, pasture, and markets. For this program I was fortunate to win the Rural Women’s Award, and the bursary allowed me to travel to China to explore the genetic requirements for breeding cattle that were most suitable for an export market from Australia to central and northern China.

The very night the award was to be presented, my husband called to say the station had to be divided and sold because of his partner’s immediate withdrawal of finance. Devastated, I struggled through the presentation and returned home to the news that even my beloved cow herd of 25 years would have to be sold. We moved to 8 hectares in Darwin’s hinterland to ‘lick our wounds’ and regroup.

Relying on my business training and background, I took a short-term position that involved restructuring a small not-for-profit organisation that had come upon hard times. Playgroup Northern Territory was for families with children under school age; it offered structured play programs and social interaction for children and the opportunity for their parents to meet and form mutually supportive outlets and share parenting activities. During this period I used my award bursary to travel to China, and this helped to re-establish some of my lost confidence and alleviate my sense of failure.

As I continued to develop new programs at work—concentrating more and more on rural and remote families with no services at all—I was invited back into the political side of cattle breeding and was able to satisfy my love of cattle and of the bush, where many of the families we assisted lived and worked. Understanding the isolation remote families experience, I was encouraged to stay with Playgroup and to help develop opportunities through new technologies for families with little or no access to services for special needs—such as children with physical and developmental disabilities, mothers suffering stress or post-natal depression, farmers with depression as a result of drought and economic pressures, and families simply needing assistance for general health, education or social reasons.

With the support of the wonderful women I have met as a consequence of participating in the award, my confidence gradually returned and I became more active in identifying the needs of rural families and Indigenous communities. I was elected chair of the Bazadas Cattle Breed Society for four years and travelled to France in 2007 to speak at the International Cattle Breeders Conference in Bordeaux. I also attended the International Rural Women’s Conference in Spain in 2004 and was invited to speak at the International Play Association Conference in East Berlin. I was to speak at the Mountain Agriculture Conference in Nepal in 2006 but withdrew from this when fighting broke out in the area.

In January 2009 I travelled to Alaska for the third time to continue my efforts in support of the introduction of some Northern Territory resource programs developed for isolated families in Australia, whose needs are remarkably similar to those of people isolated by distance and climate in the icy regions of the Arctic. One of our programs is working very well for the Inuit people of the native village of Barrow, just 240 kilometres from the North Pole; it was –60°C when I visited.

Although my life changed dramatically around the time I received my award, in essence it was the award and the support and opportunities it presented that enabled me to find new depths, new insights and a new direction and to use my experience and expertise positively and constructively. For that I will be forever grateful.
In the past decade my challenges, and those for rural Australia, have multiplied. My family and I recently bought an adjoining property, Inverway, considerably increasing our acreage, cattle numbers and dependence on the live export trade. Most of my time is now divided between our three Northern Territory properties—Riveren and Inverway in the Victoria River district and Midway in the Douglas–Daly region—where I work as required beside my husband, our children, their spouses and their young families. The challenge of survival given the escalating costs of production has never been greater.

We face age-old concerns of seasonal variability, market instability and problems with food safety while all around the broad debates on climate change and carbon emissions trading gain momentum.

welcome the associated responsibility and opportunity to contribute to this important work.

My roles as ambassador and advocate for the bush and its people remain at the forefront of my writing and public speaking projects. My autobiography, In The Middle of Nowhere, is currently in its 18th reprint.

The Rural Women’s Award has cast light on many courageous women who are hard-working, innovative and, above all, survivors. I am honoured to stand beside them to celebrate this prestigious anniversary.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award 2001
Participating in the award ...

Jon-Maree Baker
Barbara Nuthall
Linda Duffy
Sharyn Munnerley-Jose
Lisa Jarvis
Diane Gresham
Lillian Lever
Janette Gellard
Tracy Warland
Rhonda Tonkin
Janette O’Keefe
Frances Bender
Jodie Epper
Carmel Wagstaff
Miriam Golding
Katrina Wright
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award

Jon Maree Baker
New South Wales winner

My involvement with the Australian cotton industry from 1995 to 2007 led me to develop greatly as an individual, there being tremendous support and networks for learning and mentors. During that time of growth in irrigated agricultural industries, the roles filled by women opened up and changed markedly, and I and others saw a need for recognition of women's roles and value by making personal development and leadership opportunities formally available.

At a meeting of interested people the idea of a women's network to help disseminate practical and broad-based information was canvassed. It crystallised into WinCott—Women's Industry Network Cotton. The profile of the network allowed for publicity and recognition of the diverse roles played by women in the industry and facilitated sharing of information on a level that afforded understanding and learning opportunities.

The Rural Women's Award bursary allowed me to develop my project to run three separate learning programs. After this, the industry's direction moved towards young people, with a full leadership program encompassing a wide range of industry participants.

Winning the award meant I had many opportunities to be a guest speaker, and I achieved much more than I ever thought possible. In fact, the award experience has changed my life and given me a sense of purpose in seeking greater opportunities for women in the cotton industry. Although I do not have a hands-on role in the industry now, I can see the changes made through WinCott, and I feel that my winning the award had an impact on many women besides me.

I continue to work in agriculture, in our own farming enterprise, which now consists of irrigated pasture, Australian stockhorses, Santa Gertrudis cattle and Border Collies. These days my primary focus is my children and the farm.

Persistence paves the way to success.
My family owns and operates a 1200-hectare farm outside Young, in the south-west of New South Wales. Our main activities are sheep and oilseed and cereal production. But my passion and our latest venture is duck farming, and we now have 15 000 breeders.

We recently returned from a fact-finding tour of Norway, Scotland, England and Ireland, visiting turkey and chicken farms. We covered a lot of ground and learnt a great deal about different management and production techniques.

One of the highlights for me in the past few years was visiting St Jude’s School in Tanzania, which was set up by Gemma Sisia, from Guyra in northern New South Wales. Visiting the school and working with the children was a humbling and rewarding experience.

My original enterprise was producing geese, but fertility problems exacerbated by drought made continuation of the venture virtually impossible. We sought expert advice overseas, the latest advances in research occurring in Denmark, but the company we were dealing with went into liquidation. A veterinary surgeon colleague took an interest in the project and decided to artificially inseminate our breeding geese, with no success. So, after four years of drought and much frustration, and with a failing sense of humour, we decided to quit geese and change to ducks.

We now produce 5000 ducks weekly for Pepe’s, one of Australia’s largest duck processors. Although the move into ducks was a steep learning curve, the effort seems to have paid off. Pepe’s would like us to triple our production, but we are operating at maximum capacity with the facilities we currently have.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Linda Duffy
New South Wales finalist

It’s not what you get in life, it’s what you give.

My journey so far has led me from my family’s farm on the banks of the Edward River at Deniliquin in south-west New South Wales to a variety of places across this vast country—from Melbourne to Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley, to Hay in the far west of New South Wales, to Orange and then Mudgee in the central west of New South Wales as a rural financial counsellor, and gaining along the way a Degree in Accountancy, a Masters in Sustainability and some study towards a Law Degree. I also established my own consultancy business Duffyco in 2006 and I now find myself back in Melbourne working with the Sustainability Fund based in Sustainability Victoria.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition involved mentoring between generations of older and younger rural people. It led to me receiving a Churchill Fellowship in 2003, to travel to the United States and the United Kingdom in the following year to investigate mechanisms for sustainability in rural communities.

My focus remains human resources: people are crucial to the long-term viability of rural industries, and it is vital to harness the skills and experience of past and future generations if we are to have vibrant communities and industries.

Sustainability Victoria aims to show the way to using our resources more efficiently and reducing our impact on the environment, and my work with the Sustainability Fund involves looking after environmental projects across Victoria and liaising with local councils, community groups, and NGO’s. The importance of vibrant and diverse communities to support a sustainable future has increased in focus and momentum, and having the opportunity to assess and manage projects working in this area is rewarding as well as challenging.
I remain director of the Australian Calf Rearing Research Centre, which provides research information and resources for calf rearers worldwide and was the first such organisation in Australia. As far back as 20 years ago my aim was to create a centre that would reform the ailing calf-rearing industry and supply to rearers the latest methodologies and technologies so that they could achieve success.

In 2001 I used the Rural Women's Award funds to research, write and publish The ABC of Calf Rearing. The book was a resounding success, selling 4000 copies within three days of its release, and has since been picked up by Blooming Books and been translated into many other languages. I have also provided advice and services to a number of high-profile clients, among them Nobel Prize winner Sir Gustav Nossal.

In my view, the overwhelming response the research centre received from the public and the media was responsible for significant reform in the industry and a boom in calf rearing, which resulted in profitable business ventures, value-adding opportunities, superior dairy heifers and an awareness in the cattle industry that calves are in fact a valuable resource. Unfortunately, because of the high cost of both grain and calves, the centre is not operational at present: I felt it was unethical to continue it and to keep providing information and advice when calf rearing in the current economic climate is neither viable nor sustainable.

The award did, however, draw attention to an industry no one had serviced for well over a decade, and the outcome has been major advances in research and learning and state-of-the-art facilities. For me, the award was a catalyst for new opportunities and exposure, for improving my public speaking skills, and for giving me the confidence to take on new challenges, opportunities and training.

These days I live in Townsville, managing property investments and serviced apartments and preparing for a major back operation. One of my stand-out achievements has been being part of a pilot program for young criminal offenders, helping to support their integration back into society and to minimise their risk of reoffending. The pilot has been so successful it has now ‘gone national’. And the opportunity to be part of this pilot—believe it or not—was the result of a chance meeting with someone in the audience of one of my award public-speaking engagements.
When I was young I told my grandfather I would return to the family farm one day. He laughed and said I was a city girl. Well, I did return, and the adventure of learning what it is to be ‘on the land’ has rounded this city girl out.

Since 2001, when I became involved in the Rural Women’s Award, the most influential thing for me has been the fact that the vision I presented was taken seriously. That gave me great confidence that I was on the right track. And I am still on that track. I have shortened that mouthful Kyah Valley Niche Agriculture and Sustainable Culture Demonstration Farm to Kyah Valley, but the central values of my vision remain the same.

Kyah Valley is developing well, and I have been growing garlic as a main crop for three years, really enjoying developing a product to niche-market sale. Garlic is a labour-intensive crop to grow organically, and selling through farmers’ markets, direct to the public and at local restaurants and fine food outlets means I reach an appreciative market. I hope to expand the Kyah Valley range of products in time. Cut flowers, vegetables and herbs add diversity to the produce offered.

I have just returned from working part time in a community development role, and I am passionate about pursuing projects that involve developing community micro-enterprises and exploring ways of people working together. Community food-growing projects are crucial, I believe, as are opportunities for people to work together and share time.

One project I have been involved with is the annual Deans Marsh Sheepdog Trials: last year I documented the event. The sport involves an amazing display of skill by handlers and their dogs, and the characters of both are so entertaining. When I came to editing the documentary I was amazed at the ‘new’ technology—a few late nights whipped up not a bad piece of work! It made me realise the importance of making sure that we as communities document the events that celebrate who we are and our stories. Watching an event later provides a wonderful further opportunity for sharing and reflecting.

A friend invited a young Japanese woman to stay in our area as part of the Willing Workers on Organic Farms program. I enjoyed meeting her and learning about the differences in approaches, and the commonalities. One particular weeding tool was highly efficient and had an action that was different from the garlic-weeding one—most welcome. Gardens are great places to get to know people.

I am fortunate to live in a vibrant community. I have loved making the transition and feel blessed to share a family farm. I thank the award for the opportunity to be in the company of such inspiring and pioneering women.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Diane Gresham
Queensland winner

After winning the Rural Women’s Award I completed the development of the dairy industry site, Dairyinfo.biz. The skills and knowledge I acquired during this process were invaluable, but technology constantly changes and during 2008 I totally redeveloped the site.

My award ambition was to develop for dairy farmers a comprehensive information tool that would offer an extension to their business, giving them access to the array of information available within the industry. This goal is ongoing, and the format and content of websites constantly need interesting change in order to remain relevant to the target audience.

My journey during the past eight years has also taken some sidetracks as a result of my award experience. I became involved with a number of women’s networks and further developed my leadership and organisational skills. Meeting and speaking with women in the dairy industry and other industries raised questions for me about access to technology and the farmers’ ability to use the technology. I became very keen to help meet the practical needs of farmers and help them improve their computer management skills—something that meshed perfectly with my award vision of helping farmers develop their skills and knowledge and so strategically position their businesses in a rapidly changing operating environment.

During 2004 I began to develop a mobile computer training program for the northern dairy industry. From 2005 to 2008 the program was delivered across a wide geographical area, from Kempsey in northern New South Wales to the Atherton Tablelands in Far North Queensland, using a mobile computer training room with 11 laptop computers. The project was funded by Dairy Australia; it received wide cross-industry support, involved a number of industry stakeholders, and trained more than 320 dairy producers in a range of telecommunications and business management skills.

I have found myself in a number of bizarre and challenging situations when trying to make the technology workshops proceed smoothly, but flexibility and resilience always win the day.

At the representational level, in 2006 I was elected to the board of Subtropical Dairy, which is Dairy Australia’s regional development program for the northern dairy industry. This role has led to a number of industry committees and coordination roles.

My continued involvement in the wider dairy industry has been coupled with juggling family and dairy farm commitments. Our three boys are growing rapidly; the eldest has just started high school. Our dairy herd numbers are set to increase again, although the difficulties posed by drought, flood and fluctuating commodity prices have caused us to seriously consider leaving the industry. But such experiences, if not pleasant, always provide scope for personal and business growth—something that offers opportunity as long as you keep your eyes open.

• Director, Subtropical Dairy regional development program
• Chair, Northern Young Dairy Network

Enthusiasm is excitement with inspiration, motivation, and a pinch of creativity.

——Bo Bennett
To be average scares the hell out of me.

Dream the unbelievable. Everything is possible.
My involvement in the Rural Women’s Award stemmed from my interest in continuous learning and the career opportunities the agricultural sector had offered me. My original Award ambition was to raise awareness among young people of the employment and business opportunities available in the primary industries sector, to attract young women and men into primary industries, and to raise the sector’s profile in the wider community.

Participating in the award process was extremely beneficial for my own personal development. It provided an opportunity for me to reflect on my involvement in the primary industries sector and focus on what I believed to be important about my work, my business and the community I live in.

Just days before the 2001 award ceremony I gave birth to our third child, Rachael. I recall that many of my early presentations at seminars and conferences, arising from my award win, involved Rachael sleeping at my feet in her bassinet or being cuddled by an obliging audience member as I rambled on at the podium. This set the scene for Rachael, who at age 7 is now a seasoned meeting and conference attender.

Since receiving the award I have switched my career focus from agribusiness to natural resource management. This happened in 2002 when I began work with the Department of Environment and Heritage as the commercial operations manager on Kangaroo Island, a role that offered some real challenges in managing visitors in protected areas and trying to balance commercial and conservation objectives.

I am currently employed as general manager with the Kangaroo Island Natural Resources Management Board, where I have worked since October 2005. I have found this role particularly rewarding because its focus is the protection, conservation and sustainable use of our natural resources. In the past 18 months I have overseen the development of a regional natural resources management plan for Kangaroo Island. What has also been enjoyable about the position is that I have been able to work closely with the farming community, who are the stewards of our soil and water resources and, in many cases, our biodiversity resources as well.

In the past few years I have become increasingly interested in the role of women on boards and have been participating in a Women on Boards network. This has afforded some wonderful opportunities to meet women in leadership roles in a range of sectors. I am enthralled and inspired by the stories of these women; they are achieving amazing things.

You are never too old to set another goal or dream another dream.

— CS Lewis
After participating in the Rural Women’s Award I successfully developed seahorse-breeding program protocols and marketed and sold seahorses both locally and overseas. But the business as it was had started to become static, and I felt I was static. I needed a new direction. My children were adults with their own careers, and I felt I had reached a personal ‘use-by date’.

Although I did not find the time or, more importantly, the resources to make my dream a reality, I did not give up hope: the motivation was still as strong as it ever was. So, in January 2007 I moved from Port Lincoln to Adelaide and opened the Seahorse Farm Educational Viewing Facility. The location is perfect, my business operating in the Heritage and Museum Precinct of Port Adelaide. The building needed a major fit-out and was not big enough to accommodate a large-scale breeding program and an educational viewing area, so I decided to ‘downsize’ and run a small-scale breeding program with the primary focus being marine education.

I have long dreamed of inspiring and educating both adults and children, to improve their knowledge of and attitudes to our oceans and waterways. We are now dedicated to conservation of the aquatic environment though living displays, education, research and the fostering of environmental responsibility.

South Australia does not have a public viewing aquarium, and it is my ambition to change that. My new facility is the first step. It is essential that our children see the unique and diverse life that exists in our oceans. Our children are the decision makers of the future, and we need to ensure that they have the requisite knowledge and skills, so that when the time comes they can make the right decisions and know what is at risk.

Since opening on 10 February 2007 we have inspired and educated 50,000 people. I am still working seven days a week, but I have a new use-by date.
I think I have the best career in the country—growing beautiful native wildflowers and meeting new people from around the world, day in, day out.

I am one of Australia’s leading wildflower growers and exporters. At our farm, the Western Wildflower Farm, outside Moora in the central midlands of Western Australia, we grow close to 400 different wildflower varieties. Our business is the only vertically integrated commercial wildflower operation in Western Australia and is one of the region’s main employers. The ‘Everlastings’ wildflowers featured at the Kings Park ceremony in Perth to unveil the Bali Bombing Memorial came from our farm.

My Rural Women’s Award project involved an overseas study tour to explore value-adding and export opportunities for the industry. The resultant new opportunities were, however, severely hampered by quality assurance problems, the uncertainty surrounding the global economy, and a fickle gift market. Nevertheless, the knowledge I gained and the networks I forged as a result of the tour have been extremely valuable in developing my understanding of the demands and constraints of the market.

Our business wholesales to every state in Australia and exports to Holland, Germany, Italy, the United States, Japan, Singapore and Israel.

Know your product and act with integrity.

Years of debilitating drought have played havoc with Australia’s wildflower industry, but in the face of intense pressures our business remains a solid regional employer that continues to generate strong export income. One of the highlights for me in recent years was being selected as one of a group of 20 to tour Japan with leading members of the fruit, flower and vegetable industries from all over Australia.

Tourism is a growing market for us. The wildflower season extends from July to November, and we are ideally situated—three hours from both Perth and Geraldton—so our farm is a timely lunch stop. Twenty-four coach lines visit us, as do many caravanners and other tourists. Our gift shop showcases the work of local artists and now employs local women who manufacture products on site. We also employ overseas students who are multilingual, which enriches the experience of visitors who speak no English.

I have enjoyed my 35 years in the flower industry, and when I retire I propose to write a history of flower exporting from Western Australia. I have copies of the documentation for our first shipment to Holland, in 1972, and have experienced the trials and tribulations of a growing industry since then. My business has been flooded and burnt to the ground, yet has survived. It has been, and continues to be, a wonderful adventure.
I am a veterinarian by profession and was a partner in our family piggery at Tarin Rock, near Lake Grace in the Upper Great Southern region of Western Australia. We no longer have the piggery, and my veterinary practice has closed as a result of the drought. Circumstances required us to move forward, and I have strengthened my resolve to pursue my vision of providing viable and reliable veterinary services to the rural and remote sector. This has taken many forms—some totally unexpected—as a direct result of my involvement with the Rural Women’s Award.

Our piggery was an accredited quality-assured supplier and minimal-disease operation; we deployed preventive medicine techniques and early intervention protocols that I used both in my practice and when providing on-farm support services for my clients. My veterinary practice serviced an area of 500 square kilometres, from Wagin to Hyden and Wickepin to Pingrup. It was physically hard to service this large area when demand was high, and the farmer’s cost of travelling was often factored into the pre-treatment discussion. The result was that I developed a model of support that allowed for a service that was more cost-effective and socially and physically achievable for practitioner and farmer alike. I could achieve this only to some degree, and unfortunately circumstances intervened and I was forced to discontinue my service.

It is this set of circumstances that continues to motivate me to pursue my vision. With the experience of my practice and the drought, I work to increase awareness and to push for rural veterinary services to be supported and developed, particularly in remote areas. Back in 2001 my vision was to develop an interactive information portal that incorporates the locally available services and brings specialist services to areas where traditionally none have been available.

Participating in the award gave me the opportunity to expand my vision and bring it to the national level and beyond. Many doors opened. Among other things, I was offered the position of Western Australian representative on the second Rural Women’s Advisory Council. I served in this capacity for three years, until September 2005. Since then my personal and career opportunities have been many and varied but have served to encourage me to persist with my vision.

At present I am developing an integrated veterinary consultancy that encompasses both conventional and holistic perspectives and uses the internet portal model. I am also researching women’s impact in the veterinary profession, especially in rural and remote areas, with a view to writing a book. I hope to tell the stories of past and contemporary female vets and their perspectives on the profession and life as a vet.

I propose to use the skills and experiences I have gained in a more focused, local way through my consultancy and to build a network of support for the portal, as well as for the book. Participation in the award gave me much more than that, though—self-confidence, support, networks, opportunities, skills, and a belief that my vision was valued.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Frances Bender
Tasmanian winner
2001

• Raising three fantastic children to parenthood
• Centenary Medal, 2002 for service to Australian society and rural industries
• Board member, Tasmanian Aquaculture and Fisheries Institute (TAFI)
• Board member, Food Industry Council of Tasmania (FICT)
• Helping to create and run a flourishing enterprise and surviving the process

When I think back I am stunned at where our business and my life are now. In 2001 Huon Aquaculture Company was a contract salmon-farming company employing 80 people in southern Tasmania. The business model was very simple; we concentrated mainly on growing the very best salmon for others to market under their own brands. My Rural Women’s Award ambition was to investigate potential export opportunities for us to market directly to Japan.

These days we are a fully vertically integrated company. We control the entire process—hatchery, sea farming, primary processing, smoking, value-adding, and marketing under the Huon brand. We are recognised as the premium brand of salmon and export to Japan, Hong Kong, China, Singapore, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the United States, France, and the home of salmon, Norway. We now employ 400 people in four states of Australia, and our turnover is now well above $100 million.

In 2008 we embarked on a national and international rebranding and repackaging project that entailed development of new products and packaging using amazing regional photographic imagery. We also manage a national advertising program, which began with a spectacular launch on the shores of Sydney Harbour and featured world-class chefs. It was there that we unveiled our book, Huon Connoisseur’s Guide to Salmon.

We have sponsored and employed the very best international staff who have chosen to relocate their families to rural Tasmania to help grow and manage our business. We constantly innovate and undertake research to underpin our product and brand. Our marine farm production statistics lead the world, both in growth and in environmental management.

On a personal note, I am still married, my children are now 27, 25 and 17, and I am moving on to the next stage of parenthood—being supportive when needed and trying not to embarrass my family too much as I re-find myself! I still undertake some public speaking engagements and am quite often the media spokesperson for our company and our industry association. My passion for my rural community has not waned.

In 2008 we bought a smoking and value-adding business based in the Adelaide Hills. This business, with 100 people employed, had been owned by our largest exclusive customer, and the acquisition gave us immediate access to the premium smoked salmon market in Australia. In 2006 we bought the primary processing factory, which had previously been working under contract, and installed world-leading machinery. In 2008 we built a state-of-the-art, fully recirculating freshwater hatchery—an investment of about $8 million to allow us to control our product from egg to customer.

• If you don’t ask you don’t get.
• Life is not a dress rehearsal.

In 2003 we bought a smoking and value-adding business based in the Adelaide Hills. This business, with 100 people employed, had been owned by our largest exclusive customer, and the acquisition gave us immediate access to the premium smoked salmon market in Australia. In 2006 we bought the primary processing factory, which had previously been working under contract, and installed world-leading machinery. In 2008 we built a state-of-the-art, fully recirculating freshwater hatchery—an investment of about $8 million to allow us to control our product from egg to customer.
Until recently I was the executive officer of the Tasmanian Landcare Association, which represents the interests of the community landcare movement in Tasmania. It is a not-for-profit community organisation made up of volunteer landcarers across the state and its role is to support, promote and provide networking opportunities and strategic direction for the community landcare movement.

My skills lie in communicating with people—in particular, translating government policies and programs into everyday language. I am experienced at working with the media and meet regularly with government ministers and senior bureaucrats.

My Rural Women’s Award vision was for all users of natural resources in Tasmania to have clear-thinking, rational discussions about management of those resources. The landcare ethos is the platform, and my position allowed me to facilitate this. Applying for the award was one of the hardest things I have done: it was like having to prove that a ‘city girl’ could make the grade in the rural world. Despite this, participating in the award gave me a much-improved ability to deal with the agricultural sector and with government. I also gained new insights into myself.

I have since held positions of leadership and have mentored my staff and other people in the organisations I have worked in. The positions I have held have been very public ones and I have tried to maintain my integrity at all times. The award gave me the confidence to lead in the way that best suits me and to tackle challenges I previously would have shied away from.

I am just about to enter a whole new world with a new set of challenges—the world of motherhood, my first baby being due any day now.
In 2001 I was recognised in the Northern Territory as a champion of employees and won the Rural Women’s Award. An enormous honour, the award gave me a means of promoting careers in Australian agriculture—specifically, the northern beef cattle industry. I was passionate about the industry and the lifestyle it offered. I loved the harsh beauty of the land, and I recognised and admired the special qualities of the people who lived and worked there. Armed with a vision of lifting the image of rural workers and promoting their professionalism, I set out to build a network of like-minded people involved in the industry, to develop ideas for promoting and supporting the industry and identifying concerns.

I was worried by the fact that during the preceding 27 years I had seen a move—or more latterly a flood—away from a career in the northern beef industry. Parents, career advisors and others tended to promote it as a bad career choice. I also noted that people in the industry itself talked down such a career choice, sending a strong negative message. Many good people were chased away by this negativity.

Throughout my years of living on remote cattle stations in Western Australia and the Northern Territory I met many remarkable people across many ages and cultures. Each inspired me to grow and develop. I am sure I would never have become as tolerant as I am today had I not had the good fortune to mix and live with these people. I saw much change over the years—some positive and some not so. But the most rewarding thing was watching many employees develop and expand, embracing and learning to love life in these remote locations.

I strove to learn as much as possible about the land, the industry, the people in it, the history, the flora and fauna. I worked to improve education access and employment opportunities for people in the bush and was equally energetic about the recognition of lifelong learning in adults. I was involved in various organisations lobbying for improved conditions for people in remote areas.

After winning the award I moved to Brisbane. I am now employed with the Queensland Department of Emergency Services, in the Ethical Standards Unit. Once again, I am in the company of sincere, compassionate, professional people.

The award helped me promote my vision of arresting the exodus of people from the bush. I hope I made a difference, no matter how small. Now that I live in the city, I note, sadly, that there is still much to be done to increase awareness among city folk of the professionalism and commitment that exists among their rural counterparts.

I hold in my heart a deep love of the bush, and I will always be passionate about the continued viability of that way of life and about training and lifelong learning for rural people of all ages and backgrounds.
After 25 years of farming in the Northern Territory, moving south has taken some adjustment and posed many challenges. There’s been much grief and loss associated with relinquishing my dream of owning a successful and profitable family farm.

My husband, Ian, and I operated an 8000-tree mango farm outside Katherine, along with a central packhouse facility, Katherine Gorgeous Mangoes, which picked and packed for the Katherine region’s growers. I was also active in rural women’s organisations, including being on the board of Australian Women in Agriculture and helping organise the 1st Women in Horticulture National Conference, in Hobart.

Since our family’s sea-change to Sydney in 2005, I have kept myself busy, learning how to live differently and how to let go of taking responsibility for everything and everyone around me. I’ve discovered yoga, meditation and daily walks to the beach, which have helped me relax and begin to enjoy the world around me.

Keen to find new meaning in my life, I did postgraduate studies in counselling and psychotherapy, and I now work as the discharge therapist at a rehab centre, offering treatment and support for clients and their families who are suffering from drug and alcohol addictions, along with anxiety and depression.

I have also been privileged to work at Stewart House School, near Curl Curl Beach, being part of a team providing respite and health care for disadvantaged children. The programs focus on personal development and Aboriginal perspectives, which fits well with my past teaching experience in remote Australia.

Adjusting to living on the northern beaches of Sydney has not always been easy, and I dream of returning to the bush some day. Mad Mim (that’s me) plans on making a difference wherever she finds herself each day.
The spice trade was once the stuff of legends, but growing exotic spices and selling them on the international market became a reality for me and proved a great and profitable alternative horticultural industry.

I have spent more than 10 years deeply involved in the industry in the Northern Territory, and my farm, Barramond Tropical Fruits and Exotic Spice Farm, has played an integral role in the development of the industry’s quality assurance and food safety standards. Since participating in the Rural Women’s Award I have written a book that describes how to grow spices for profit and culinary pleasure; it is aimed at people with small farms plus off-farm income.

I have now achieved many of the goals I set out to achieve through the Award. I finished my diploma studies at Northern Territory University, and at present I am continuing my studies in New York State. In 2005 in the United States I ran a college course for urban dwellers and gourmet cooks, teaching them how to grow and cultivate bonsai spice trees. It was very exciting and successful, expanding the possibilities for people with little or no available land.

Americans seem to like the medicinal spices because people are seeking alternative therapies; in Australia, in contrast, there is far greater acceptance of the exotic spices used in the cooking of other countries.

Participating in the award opened up opportunities for me and forced me to set much higher goals. Do one thing every day towards your goal and at the end of the week you have progress; at the end of the month you have more; and at the end of the year you have achievement.

Spices constitute an important group of agricultural commodities; they are virtually indispensable, and opportunities abound for this alternative industry.

How to find help and labour at little or no cost was one of my big problems, but it became a problem solved. My farm became a member of an organisation called WWOOF—Willing Workers on Organic Farms. Overseas students were very interested in staying and working on an exotic spice farm. Four or five students stayed weekly, and energy and enthusiasm levels were high. I highly recommend this organisation to other farms: when the students are about, the farm is a hive of activity. Everything is humming. I understand why in the old days farmers had lots of children.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award 2002
Participating in the award ...

Robbie Sefton
Sandra Doyle
Ruth Quigley
Carol Mathew
Joanne Butterworth-Gray
Mary Lankester
Suzanne Nation
June Gill
Susan Berlin
Carol Johnson
Angela Whittington
Tracey Ebert
Pamela Williamson
Jeanette Reader
Christine Mann
Kate Hadden
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Robbie Sefton
New South Wales winner

As a farmer and a communicator, I am passionate about building vibrant, sustainable rural communities and committed to creating diverse opportunities for rural Australians.

With my husband, I am a business partner in a 2900-hectare property producing fine wool, crops, cattle and prime lambs in northern New South Wales. I am also director of Sefton & Associates, a national communication and marketing consultancy based in Tamworth.

I want to change the conversation about rural Australia and encourage young people to return to the country once they’ve gained education and experience, to create successful businesses and caring communities. With this as my long-term goal, my focus in the past few years has been on developing and implementing programs and communication campaigns for clients seeking to engage with rural communities and build the confidence and capacity of rural Australians.

Creating Rural Leaders is a leadership program Sefton & Associates developed and designed specifically for emerging leaders in rural and regional industries, businesses and communities. It is our flagship program, and we tailor it to suit the needs of our individual clients and their stakeholders. Feedback to date from participants has been very positive, and we are currently evaluating the long-term outcomes of the courses.

Another program making a difference in regional communities is our Hunters and Gatherers project. Receipt of the Rural Women’s Award bursary in 2002 allowed me to pilot this innovative program, which I have since further developed. We maintain a unique network of communication ‘hunters and gatherers’, creating a two-way flow of communication between the bush and leaders in industry, politics and business. From some 20 locations in rural Australia we receive regular information on the social, political, industry, business and media mood. These reports help us identify the local ‘influencers’ and the current issues, which in turn determine the direction and focus of policy decisions and our communication strategy.

The Hunters and Gatherers project leads to more effective communication between policy makers and constituents in rural, regional and remote Australia. And with more effective communication comes the opportunity for improved service delivery and better uptake of offered programs that are more likely to achieve their aim of improving the welfare of rural, regional and remote Australians.

In addition to these two programs, Sefton & Associates continues to work with a variety of national clients from government departments, research and development corporations and large businesses to develop and implement communication strategies designed to reach audiences living and working in rural, regional and remote Australia.

Do not go where the path may lead; go where there is no path and leave a trail.

——Ralph Waldo Emerson

• Advisory group member, Regional Women’s Advisory Council, since June 2006
• Retired board member, Australian Rural Leadership Foundation, July 2007
• Retired board member, Australian Wool Services (The Woolmark Company)—amalgamated into Australian Wool Innovation, November 2007
• Board member, Australia Day Council (New South Wales)
At the time I participated in the Rural Women's Award my husband and I were running a Boer goat stud on the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales. Our main interest in the enterprise was the goat-meat market, and we were successful in producing high-quality meat goats that were prized by a number of exclusive restaurants in Canberra and Sydney.

But years of drought put an end to what seemed to be a very promising niche market. In 2004 we were forced to sell off our breeding herd and find a new way of using our land. We kept our full-blood Boer does and a couple of our best full-blood bucks, and we now breed a few does once a year, for sale mainly to new breeders starting out in business. This is proving quite successful, although it is a relatively small enterprise.

We have turned most of our farming enterprise over to alpacas: they eat far less than goats. Our ambition is to 'fine-up' the quality of our wool while targeting mainly the cottage industry. We have been researching carding machines that can handle more bulk than we are able to process by hand. Our efforts have been somewhat frustrated by the fact that a machine in our price range does not produce the results we want. Nevertheless, we keep investigating.

Participating in the award with some truly wonderful women helped me look ahead and move into alternative farming enterprises. Being city born and bred, I often thought I was not cut out to handle the drought, and I admired women who could smile through the hard times. Reflecting on those women has given me the strength to keep going, to seek alternatives, and to eventually decide on an alternative farming enterprise.
I am a partner in a mixed-farming business producing cotton, wheat, olives and beef cattle outside Trangie, in north-western New South Wales.

My main farm responsibilities are administration and marketing, and my alternative farm enterprise is my olive grove, which produces olive oils and soaps under the brand Woodbine Grove Olive Oil but is very much a sideline these days. Tough seasons and poor returns have seen me return to work in my former occupation, as a nurse. I have been out of the profession for 20 years but, having done the first-line emergency care course, I’ve slotted right back in.

I also run a small web-based design business that is slowly growing. I teamed up with fellow Rural Women’s Award recipient Kate Schwager, from Wee Waa, to operate Webteam Australia, which provides web services such as domain registration, website hosting and web design services. Much of our development effort focuses on promoting rural centres and towns, and promoting the bush to the broader web audience. Kate and I work well together, and we complement each other’s talents—hers in sales and mine in management.

When I entered the award I believed—and I still do—the internet could provide a useful and cheap communication tool for rural industries and regional communities. I specifically developed the ozcotton.net website to encourage the sharing of ideas and information.

My involvement in the award led to new learning opportunities. It built my confidence in public speaking and in marketing support and taught me to be unafraid of trying new ideas and to take advantage of every opportunity. A stand-out example was being part of Austrade’s New Export Development Program, which has opened up huge opportunities for exporting olive oil to China.

Part of my award ambition involved encouraging other rural women to become interested in using the internet. One of my clients was in fact Kate Schwager, who went on to become 2006 Rural Women’s Award New South Wales winner for her project on marketing rural towns and their industries on the web.
I began an alpaca stud in 1995. I was an escapee from the city and knew very little about farming, and this meant I had to learn a great deal very quickly. I started with four alpacas and the goal of learning about genetic gain and breeding towards fine, heavy-cutting fleeces. I have always loved research and development, so this has been my main focus in the alpaca industry.

I was appointed industry representative to the RIRDC Rare Natural Animal Fibres Advisory Committee in 1996, and I am now the committee chairperson. The funding I received as part of the Rural Women’s Award has been invaluable in supporting the industry, particularly in establishing the starting profile of the foundation stock and the subsequent development of a genetic evaluation program. I practised what I preached, and my stud was the first stud in Victoria to receive a five-star rating in this program. We have also researched animal reproduction, embryo transfer and artificial insemination.

I spent six years as a director of the Australian Alpaca Cooperative. The cooperative has continued to grow and is now a major company, exporting in its own right to overseas markets as well as supplying the domestic market. Two trips to Peru have been a highlight of my participation in the industry. I have learnt much about alpaca fleece, processing, and the remarkable breeding achievements of the ancient Incan people.

Sadly, in 2008 I realised it was time for me to retire. After much angst, I have dispersed my herd. This was very successful commercially, and I still have people contacting me about ‘my girls and boys’, but I do miss them. I am, however, very pleased I took the leap of faith into farming and stud breeding.

Another important consideration has been value-adding to Australian alpaca fibre. The bursary meant I was able to travel to New Zealand, Japan, the United Kingdom and Italy to learn about the markets for products and about processing of the fibre. Again, RIRDC research has been at the forefront in gaining information on processing.

Don’t spend time on wishful thinking, give it a go.
I became chief executive officer for the Victorian Wine Industry Association in April 2006, with the task of representing and promoting the interests of the wine industry across Victoria.

Since that time I have been able to implement some major structural changes to the association, including a complete rewrite of the constitution so that the 21 wine regions in Victoria are now represented on a council, which allows every region to influence policy development. This organisational change took about 18 months to effect, but the impact has been enormous in terms of empowering people and giving each region equity and a sense of individual ownership of statewide outcomes.

My Rural Women's Award ambition concerned the realisation of Gippsland's potential as a sustainable agribusiness centre offering employment and business opportunities for rural women and using as its basis a regional food brand for raw and value-added products.

My experience and expertise have been in marketing and promotion and in value-adding with regional produce. I have owned and operated, in partnership with my husband, a fruit and berry farm to which we value-added by developing an epicurean centre complete with restaurant and accommodation. I have been chair of the Gippsland Food and Wine Tourism Group and deputy chair of Destination Gippsland, along with providing input into the Gippsland Agribusiness Board and the Victorian Food Tourism Reference Group.

The award’s leadership program taught me much about myself—most importantly, that I need to take time to assimilate in order to understand myself and others. Understanding myself better has helped me listen better, communicate and engage with people, and help them share in a vision and collectively move forward.

Listen to others, they have so much to offer.

Chair, Gippsland Food and Wine Tourism Group
Deputy chair, Destination Gippsland
Above all, raising half a dozen children, five of them daughters, into adults I respect and admire
This year my husband, Tony, received from Rio Tinto an offer to become the corporation’s fire rescue officer. The offer was too good to refuse, so we moved further north, to Weipa, on Cape York Peninsula. I look forward to a change and a break from the frenetic pace of the past few years.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition was to develop a business for myself and a regional tourism and primary industry venture through wines made from tropical fruit. The idea was to use the second-grade fruit that was being discarded because it had minor blemishes and abrasions. Paradise Tropical Fruit Wines, complete with cellar door, was very successful, both as a viable enterprise and as a tourism venture for the region.

But Paradise Wines was directly in the path of Cyclone Larry, which devastated Mission Beach in 2006 and wiped out the winery. The dishwasher for glasses and the water tanks were the only things left standing. The cyclone left us with no tourism industry, no crop to make wine from, and a substantial debt. In the years following Larry I have spent a huge amount of time ‘on the road’, travelling to shows, expos and field days, marketing and selling my wines.

Among the highlights of my experience are being named Australia’s Most Professional Winemaker for 2007 by the Tasmanian Wine Awards and paying off my business loan. At a personal level, I learnt a great deal about winemaking, business and budgeting, marketing and selling. My business was also the catalyst for other tropical fruit ventures and was instrumental in the establishment of the Association for Tropical Northern Queensland Wineries.

The award brought me many opportunities and many new networks, along with new skills and training. For all this, I am very grateful.
My journey began in 1999, when I bought my family’s property and returned home. Since then I have overcome many obstacles, confronted a number of difficulties, and enjoyed the rewards of my work. The first challenge was diversifying from the family beef cattle and grain operation and establishing a vineyard, followed by a winery, cellar door and an olive grove.

With whispers of a grape glut predicted to hit the market in 2004, I had to ‘think outside the square’ in order to avoid this looming problem. So in 2000 we began the necessary research into creating an innovative wine infused with herbs. This solution allowed us to add value to our traditional wines, creating a new niche-market product that has been the catalyst for our subsequent expansion.

For me, 2002 was a year of accomplishments. I was selected as a Rural Women’s Award finalist for my infused wine project and the completion of building my winery. I was also chosen to participate in the third World Congress for Rural Women, held in Spain; this I followed with a Queensland Department of Primary Industries study tour of Spain and France. I was also awarded the Micro Business Award for Agriculture in Queensland and was appointed to Queensland’s Biosafety Advisory Council and various other boards. A big year and very fulfilling for me as a businesswoman.

In 2003 I was chosen to participate in the inaugural year of the Industry Partnership Corporate Governance for Rural Women Program. My industry partner was the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation, and as part of the program I did the Australian Institute of Company Directors course. The years that followed were filled with hard work, excitement and recognition as my range of traditional and infused wines grew. I have taken many trips to Hong Kong, Korea, Japan and China to attend international trade shows and to meet clients.

Among my highlights have been accompanying the Queensland Premier and the Toowoomba Regional Council Mayor on trade missions to Asia, having our wines served at international dinners, a personal visit to my winery by the Queensland Consul-General for Shanghai and Beijing, and being selected by the Australian Business Corporation to attend the Beijing Olympics. Unfortunately, by this time the hectic pace of work had taken its toll, and illness prevented me going to the Olympics and going on other trade missions with government officials.

In 2009, though, with renewed vigour, I look forward to the coming decade—living out my dreams, networking with like-minded people who believe in themselves and are prepared to step outside their comfort zones and think creatively, and producing new and innovative products.
Each of us is a unique and amazing being, possessed of special gifts and talents. We are all here to use our lives, use our gifts, to serve our industry in some way. We can take inspiration in the greatness of others, but we each have our own greatness that cries out to be expressed. Today, take a moment to reflect on and be inspired by the greatness that is you.

The Rural Women’s Award gave me the opportunity to take up the challenge and write a much-needed book that would support women and men in the seafood industry, drawing on strategies developed primarily during my 35 years of working in the industry.

My involvement in the wild-catch fishing industry extended from grass-roots practical effort to executive and leadership positions. I was founding chair of South Australian Women in Fishing and helped create the first national voice for seafood women through the industry network Women Industry Network Seafood Community, of which I became national president, along with being a member of the Rural Women’s Advisory Group.

I developed a guide to help women and men understand the professionals and the system they must deal with daily. The book, Equilibrium, became a reality in 2003, and 1000 copies were printed and distributed Australia-wide. It has been welcomed for its practical insights into ‘the system’, both public and private. I believe it helped shape strategies and remove barriers and continues to do so today. I was able to travel and promote the book throughout Australia, supported by industry and community groups.

Alas, in 2005 I was diagnosed with kidney disease, and I have since had to back away from work and commitments. But in my mind I know there are many capable men and women who can continue to lead and be ambassadors for the seafood industry, and I know I have played a small role in their emergence.

As I reflect in 2009, I am no longer working in primary production, yet you do wonder and never forget where you came from and, as we all understand, that can be a mixed blessing. To be sure, it has its joys, both large and small, frequent and rare. It also has its frustrations and disappointments. Being a woman working in the seafood industry is not easy. For many it can be a lifelong responsibility and, I am sure for most of us, a lifelong worry too.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Susan Berlin
South Australian finalist

The concept of Island Pure was born out of a desire to have control over our enterprise’s entire production chain, ultimately allowing us to control our profitability. In 1992 my husband and I, along with senior partners, got the business on its feet. In 2002 we bought out our partners and rebranded and doubled the size of the business, resulting in a small regional enterprise that has weathered drought and a rocky financial climate with ease.

Island Pure, located on Kangaroo Island, produces sheep-milk products for wholesale and retail and is open to visitors. We run our 260 hectares under a grazing system for sheep, and we add value by grazing sheep we have bred specifically for their milking capabilities. We harvest the milk in a purpose-built dairy and process the milk into cheese and yoghurt. We then package on site and market throughout Australia. Taking 30 000 visitors on interpretive tours each year has a big positive impact on the marketing of the products and on our cash flow.

My participation in the Rural Women’s Award occurred at about the time I won the South Australian Telstra Women in Business Award 2001 and received the Premier’s Young Leader Award in the food industry and a Centenary Medal for contributions to small business.

Having researched the proposal I put forward for the award, I pursued other avenues of funding for my research, eventually obtaining an Advancing Australian Agriculture Innovations grant. Today our business benefits from the innovations I was able to introduce and has itself been recognised through the Premier’s Food Awards and the South Australian Great Regional Awards.

As a result of my association with the food industry and value-adding, I was asked to sit on a number of boards, among them Agriculture Kangaroo Island and Good Food Kangaroo Island, on both of which boards I spent a time as chair. I sat on the Premier’s Food Council as a voice for small regional food businesses; this was an industry-led council that shaped government food policy in South Australia. I was also a member of an advisory board to the South Australian Tourism Association.

We have two beautiful, individual children, who are now my main focus outside the business.

• Centenary Medal, 2003—for contributions to small business
• Board member, Agriculture Kangaroo Island and Good Food Kangaroo Island
• Member, Premier’s Food Council
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Carol Johnson
South Australian finalist

I was known in my region as the first and only female manager of the Millicent saleyards complex, which I managed for 13 years. Under my leadership the saleyards achieved a number of milestones, including accreditation for quality assurance under the terms of National Saleyards Quality Assurance Ltd, accreditation for Saudi livestock export preparations procedures, and accreditation for the European Union. We also embarked on a major expansion program to add to the complex a bull-selling ring and nine buyers’ cattle-delivery pens. During my tenure the throughput of cattle at the saleyards greatly increased, and the stock that went through the yards consistently commanded the highest prices in South Australia.

My Rural Women's Award ambition was to motivate other women to become involved in the livestock industry and to lift the image of saleyards as a venue for livestock exchange. I hope that through my years at the Millicent saleyards complex I achieved this to some degree. The Livestock Transport Association of South Australia honoured me with an award for Notable Achievement for Excellence in Saleyard Management and Service.

Believe in yourself and go for it.

After 13 years in the job, and given the efficiencies I had achieved and the downturn in cattle numbers as a result of drought, I was able to make myself and the job redundant. I now work for the timber industry, as Occupational Health and Safety Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator and Human Resource Officer with the company LV Dohnt—a mouthful of a title but a job I am enjoying immensely.
Since winning the 2002 Rural Women’s Award my life journey has changed immeasurably, although still within the foundation of proudly being a woman building a successful career in a regional area of Australia. Winning the award has fundamentally shaped my life and career because it has given me access to the south-west as my base.

Back in 2002 the award offered me a wonderful opportunity to review in detail the plum-fruit industry. The summer harvest of 2003 saw us for the first time move on from being just growers to exporting directly into China. In the six years since then the market for Western Australian plums has plummeted as a consequence of the largely unforeseen growth in Chilean exports to China. New freight containers with long-life capability now mean that Chilean fruit is regularly landed in Asia at less than Australian production costs. Australia’s signing of a free trade agreement with China will, however, have a huge positive impact on Australia’s fruit industry and could mean the eventual return of the Chinese market.

We sold out of farming, and I took up a full-time career as chief executive officer of Imaging the South, a company that provides diagnostic imaging services to rural and remote areas of Australia, using world-class technologies to achieve the highest quality radiological reporting and consultancy.

My role is to understand and oversee everything that goes on every day and in every facet of the business and, more importantly, to know when to step in and take over. The role is varied, to say the least—18 locations spread across Western Australia, 70 staff, 20 ‘tele’-radiologists spread all over the world, a highly sophisticated IT infrastructure, industrial relations change, finance and budgeting, operations, commercial contract negotiations with private providers and government, and general lobbying at all levels of government. Our primary clinical sites are in Bunbury, Busselton and Mandurah, three of the fastest growing regions in Australia.

We are a working model of an enterprise that has overcome major hurdles in operating solely from rural and remote locations. We have created a business that focuses on quality and technology, delivering state-of-the-art services that are at the leading edge of our industry worldwide. We have now applied the Imaging the South model to the UK-based Global Diagnostics operation, which is fast becoming a major player in the UK and European market.

For me, it has been wonderful to have the opportunity to work at the helm of a larger business through a period of enormous change. The pinnacle of my career with Imaging the South was in 2008: I was awarded the prestigious Telstra Business Women’s Hudson Corporation and Private Award for Western Australia, 2008.
Farming on the south coast of Western Australia has its challenges and triumphs. My husband and I farm coarse grains and sheep near Ravensthorpe. Seasonally, we have had a roller coaster ride, having annual crop yields of historic highs and historic lows. We look forward to consecutive years of less excitement.

I became a finalist in the Rural Women’s Award as a result of my involvement as chair of the Fitzgerald Biosphere Marketing Association, which was established to develop a recognised brand for the region and encourage the community to responsibly produce market-edge products and services. We were successful in developing and establishing a brand for the region. The challenge then became securing the necessary quantity and quality of agricultural produce to market the brand. As it turned out, our extensive trials proved that the region was not positioned in such a way that the brand would offer a good enough return for the growers. Tourism, rather than agricultural produce, was the better avenue for promoting the brand, so we chose to disseminate our findings to the region’s two main grower and tourism groups for further direction and implementation.

Balancing and using my time well is the next challenge. I continue to work on the farm, managing our grain marketing program and ‘odd-jobbing’ while our children are at school five hours’ drive away. I credit the award with giving me the confidence to start a facilitation business, allowing me to work on some very interesting projects that have resulted in rewarding outcomes for our region. A new project, still in its infancy, continues to linger. Sharing it with the award recipients this year at the reunion and with my inspirational women friends at home may just give it the ‘legs’ it needs.
After I participated in the Rural Women's Award the continued downturn in agriculture and a lack of funds left me with a huge deficit—too big to finance my award ambition of farming saltwater fish.

I stumbled across soap-making and since then have researched, trialled and established a niche market for hand-crafted olive oil–based soaps, creams and candles. Many of the soaps and creams have been developed for problem skins. The candles are practical, and I simply make them for fun. At present I am looking at ways of extracting oils from flowers and plants, so that I can use the oils in my products. I now have three wholesale outlets, and the entire production is a ‘one-woman’ operation. I have some important decisions to make concerning production and marketing.

Two years ago I also embarked on a new project, prompted by my neighbour’s diagnosis of breast cancer. We organised a large fundraiser, and I produced pink body butter and hand-dyed pink and blue socks. I now do a range of hand-dyed socks in a variety of outrageous colours, the profits going to the Cancer Council. I am also a consultant to UnderCoverWear, an Australian direct-marketing clothing and lingerie company. This year we held a fundraiser for the National Breast Cancer Fund and held the top party in Australia for November and December.

Where to next? The fish farm is never far from my mind, and we have streamlined some of our thinking. In 2008 my husband bought me a very old pre-loved excavator, which is part of the plan. While waiting to get into that I have been slowly developing some more value-adding projects with chooks. Some of the older varieties are being lost, and our first purebred stock are now a reality, with the first saleable animals ready to leave home.

On the recreational side, I still have the honour of being the first and only female executive on the board of the local pistol club, although now the membership is at least one-quarter female. The local quilting group I started years ago is still going strong—these days without me. Last year I also celebrated 21 years as a square dance caller for our local group, and I wrote and published a book to commemorate the event.

My small business, which operates from a cottage in Hyden, will celebrate 25 years in December 2009. One part of the business has always been aimed at nurturing the other parts. Despite the passing years, I have always tried to keep this and my enthusiasm to the forefront. I believe that participating in the award strengthened my desire to help women achieve their potential.
My husband, Phil, and I continue to operate a mixed cropping and livestock enterprise in the small farming community of Toiberry in northern Tasmania. We own 400 hectares ourselves, and we lease the neighbouring farm. These days we are more involved in the cattle side of the enterprise and less involved in cropping, which means fewer peas, poppies and high-value seed crops. Cattle have become our main activity, and we forward-contract to the local feedlot market.

The award experience also changed our family dynamics and my involvement in the farm: I no longer do as much manual work, choosing instead to support the farm by doing the office work and book-keeping and through generating off-farm income. Additionally, the award helped open up new conversations within the family: whereas in the past I would have left a lot of the decision making to my husband, now all important decisions are talked about as a group and we now have a farm succession plan, so we all have a clear picture of our future.

Do it now or else it won’t get done!

My Rural Women’s Award ambition was to seek new opportunities for farming families through expansion into new industries and new value-adding opportunities and markets. My award project involved investigation of and trial work on production and processing of Asian vegetables as a new opportunity and industry for farming families in Tasmania.

Farming will always be a challenge. I don’t think conditions have improved very much for farmers: we seem to still be fighting battles we started 10 years ago, we always seem to ‘cop’ second best, our returns continue to go down while our input costs keep going up, and our margins just keep getting tighter.

To make ends meet I have returned to the workforce part time, working with special-needs children at the local primary school. The job is very challenging but also very rewarding. I would never have contemplated taking on this job had it not been for the award and the exposure to knowledge and networks it offered.
For the past three years I have been working to build up my aerial photography business, but just when I think things are going well it all seems to come to a halt. In 2006 and 2007 I spent well over 200 hours taking aerial photos in Tasmania, New South Wales and Queensland for a forestry company and then spent many hours incorporating the photos in a mapping program, to allow them to be used for management and planning decisions. In 2008 the amount of aerial photography the company required fell to nothing as a result of a change in management, and so other Tasmanian forestry businesses have become my main clients.

I have also taken aerial photos for a farm-mapping business based in Smithton in north-west Tasmania. This has, however, had its difficulties, not least of them being waiting for cloud-free days in an area characterised by very challenging weather conditions. Cloud seems to cover the area for 363 days a year, which does not make for the clearest of photos.

One simply cannot take aerial photos while flying above 1500 metres if there are clouds at 1000 metres, and I have come to the conclusion that I would like to develop a scenic aerial photography business. There is a market for this product, but trying to break into it is another challenge, there being a number of well-known professional photographers in the business. When the real estate boom was happening there was demand for aerial photos of farming properties, but now real estate agents are reluctant to spend that extra dollar, and most Tasmanian agents fail to recognise the benefits of aerial photos.

In the last few years I have registered a business name, Clearview Mapping, and started to develop a web page. I have also spent a large amount of time building a house on the family farm, which I hope will give me access to satellite broadband so I can keep up to date with technology. Dial-up internet in the bush is a trial I am still enduring.

I continue to juggle aerial photography, mapping, land surveying, volunteering for the Agfest field days and helping out on the family farm—never doing the same thing for very long. Among all this is my expertise in global positioning systems, expertise I share with the agricultural community. My ambition is to develop more markets and spend more time marketing my business. I now have a well-developed product, but I need more markets in order to offset the limitations the weather conditions create for aerial photography in Tasmania.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Kate Hadden
Northern Territory winner 2002

I won the 2002 Rural Women’s Award on the 14th anniversary of my working in natural resource management. Now, seven years on, the pace of change and the need for adaptation seem exponential. We are no longer talking local or national: we talk global. It is hard to know what we, as communities, can do. But, all in all, the most important thing is that natural resource management is about people and should always be about people and their livelihoods.

Although the concerns that captured us in 2002 might have changed, the need for resilient and sustainable rural communities has not, no matter what the challenges. The award allowed me to travel to Nunavut, in Canada, where the Inuit are recognised as successfully building a sustainable system for advancing socio-economic development through natural resource use. My discussions with Inuit representatives and the Canadian government gave me valuable insights into governance and processes and a new set of tools to try back home. Seven years on, I am still using insights given to me by the Inuit people.

My work with the Tiwi Land Council and landowners remains centred around the Tiwi people ‘getting a life’ away from the very destructive welfare cycle and using the most valuable assets the Tiwi Islands have to offer—people and natural resources.

The Tiwi Land Council now employs 12 land and marine rangers, their wages being paid through industry investment on the islands. The rangers’ work proves that development and conservation can co-exist and can in fact support each other. Natural resource–based industry is now an important employer on the Tiwi Islands, in both direct and contract employment. The rangers work with developers and their Tiwi colleagues to ensure that cultural and natural heritage values are maintained. A new college managed by the Tiwi Education Board delivers high-quality teaching with direction from Tiwi elders. The expansion of job opportunities on the islands through careful natural resource use and protection has meant that students at the college now have a reason to go to school.

The next seven years will no doubt throw up a new set of challenges, but if our rural communities stay resilient we can meet them. I am looking forward to seeing how far we can go.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award 2003
Participating in the award ...

Milada Safarik
Megan Mosely
Anna Aldridge
Kaye Scholfield
Desley Vella
Teena Mammino
Sharon Starick
Heather Burdon
Erica Starling
Suzanne Woods
Lee Adamson Ringk
Beverley Wilson
My journey since receiving the Rural Women’s Award has been one of trials and tribulations but most importantly of self-discovery. My achievements in the aquaculture industry were exciting, and the recognition I received through the award was most beneficial. My award ambition resulted in the world’s first cultivation, at the Aquabait facility, of the marine tube worm Diopatra aciculata for the recreational bait industry and engendered a desire to continue and succeed.

I went on to complete my thesis on this species of marine invertebrate, focusing on intraspecific density effects on growth—very important for ecological reasons as well as from the aquaculture viewpoint. This led me to publish my first research paper in the journal Scientia Marina: I put together the paper using my contribution at the 8th World Polychaete Conference in Madrid in 2004. I have since published a second paper with a colleague; it deals with aspects of jaw growth in this species of polychaete and the evolutionary importance of this.

This led to the next chapter of my journey, which evolved in ways quite other than I would have expected. Unfortunately, for unforeseen reasons Aquabait did not hold my future and I was forced to re-examine my priorities. But my passion for the project kept me nearby for some time, working alongside my father while I was being led down a more personal career pathway.

One of the many career options I had tried had been teaching, and this became my new passion: I began teaching aquaculture to mature students at TAFE. (Whilst still at Aquabait I had on several occasions supported local high school students for work experience and tours.) Eventually I moved back to Sydney, and my love of animals led me into the veterinary field, where I dabbled in veterinary nursing and grooming.

I have since had the opportunity of being exposed to the world of stem cell research. I have completed a course on stem cell isolation and participated in an International Society of Stem Cell Research annual meeting in Australia, looking at the foremost scientific developments. This has resulted in me assisting with research trials for adipose-derived stem cell lines for autologous transfer for therapeutics such as arthritic symptoms in canines and improved recovery after cruciate ligament surgery. Although I am interested in this field and would like to continue my research one day, my immediate aim is to become a high school teacher of biology and chemistry.

- Master of Scientific Studies, Newcastle University, 2004
- Two scientific papers published
- Participant, human embryonic stem cell training workshop, Australian Stem Cell Centre, Melbourne, 2006
I live with my husband, Andrew, and family near Cobar, in the Western Division of New South Wales, where we run two properties, Etiwanda and Manuka Stations, together comprising close to 26,000 hectares.

The properties are managed holistically; we work to balance the social, environmental and economic outcomes both for now and for future generations; we make profits and environmental improvements through carefully considering, testing and monitoring our decisions. For our family, profit is not solely defined in dollars and cents: it has the wider definition of family togetherness, a sense of achievement and purpose, and the creation of ecological and intellectual wealth. My vision continues to be to see primary industries and their people better balance profitability, the environment and their lifestyle by embracing holistic management.

In the last six years we have made important environmental improvements to our land, successfully reversing the degradation and finding effective ways of regenerating the landscape. We are working on restoring and rejuvenating the water, mineral and carbon cycles by increasing ground cover with predominantly deep-rooted native perennial grasses. Since setting these priorities, changing the enterprise mix and looking at the system as a whole, we have noticed dramatic changes in our pastoral enterprise and can see that we are having a positive impact on our environment as a ‘whole’ by using holistic management the animals’ habits to improve the land we care for.

In November 2007 we travelled to the United States to attend the Holistic Management International Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to be among and learn from holistic management practitioners who have been working this way for up to 20 years in arid parts of the United States and elsewhere.

During the past decade we have been developing and expanding our knowledge of holistic management and new ways of approaching environmental problems. We have attended a holistic management course, a ‘Grazing for Profit’ course, and field days on conservation farming and minimum tillage. We have continued with the Grazing for Profit process, moving through to board level in the last two years, attending quarterly meetings to further advance our knowledge and to learn from other farmers.

In 1999 we made the decision to switch enterprises from a merino wool producing enterprise to a red meat producing enterprise. Making the choice to feed the world instead of clothe it! Today our operation runs white dorper fleece-shedding meat sheep, meat goats and cattle.

The decision to change was due to our exposure to holistic management thinking and decision making; we have never regretted it and have never looked back!

The best way to predict the future is to create it.

——Peter Drucker

During the past decade we have been developing and expanding our knowledge of holistic management and new ways of approaching environmental problems. We have attended a holistic management course, a ‘Grazing for Profit’ course, and field days on conservation farming and minimum tillage. We have continued with the Grazing for Profit process, moving through to board level in the last two years, attending quarterly meetings to further advance our knowledge and to learn from other farmers.

In 1999 we made the decision to switch enterprises from a merino wool producing enterprise to a red meat producing enterprise. Making the choice to feed the world instead of clothe it! Today our operation runs white dorper fleece-shedding meat sheep, meat goats and cattle.

The decision to change was due to our exposure to holistic management thinking and decision making; we have never regretted it and have never looked back!
Carpe diem. Seize the day.


It was the needs of the YVWGA which prompted me to apply for the RIRDC Rural Women’s Award. Through an extensive tour of New Zealand’s wine-growing regions, I was able to bring back fresh approaches to viticulture, winemaking and marketing. This in turn facilitated my role in establishing the YVWGA’s marketing arm: the Yarra Valley Wine Network. I was able to introduce a number of initiatives for the Network, notably a strategic marketing plan for the sustainability of Yarra Valley wines in the international arena. I count that as my greatest achievement during my 10 years of consulting, coupled with the rewards that come from working with producers to take their product to market.

The Rural Women’s Award directly funded my designing and writing the Yarra Valley Wine Network website www.wineyarravalley.com which united the winemakers together under the brand Yarra Valley.

Eighteen months ago, I took on a part time role as media and direct marketing manager for the Wingara Wine Group- which owns Australian wine brands Deakin Estate and Katnook Estate. Wingara is owned by the Freixenet Group of Spain, makers of Cordon Negro, the highest selling sparkling wine in the world. It is proving a fantastic experience and learning process for me—working with Australian wines, owned by a leading Spanish family company. My role focuses on direct marketing, developing e-commerce and online public relations as well as media relations. I have continued my consulting business in direct marketing and media relations for wine, food and tourism industries.
The idea of promoting learning for rural communities’ sustainability was what led me to participate in the Rural Women’s Award in 2003, but at that time my interest was wool. The common links between my interests then and now are rural people and communities, agriculture, sustainability and education.

Our community, with like-minded people from RMIT University, engaged in a range of activities, including hosting hundreds of international students in the 1990s, which in turn led to the establishment of an RMIT University campus in Hamilton, a rural community three-and-a-half hours’ drive west of Melbourne. Historically, the region had prospered ‘on the sheep’s back’, both economically and socially, but in the past few years the dominance of the wool industry has diminished and new industries—such as temperate-climate cropping, blue-gum forestry and sand mining—have made a strong impression on the local community.

The thing that does not change, though, is the importance of human capital in regional centres—to take advantage of changing opportunities and to increase the adaptability, resilience and sustainability of rural communities. Just as important, or perhaps more so, is the need for a strong and informed rural voice in influencing responses to some of the most important challenges Australia faces. Since being involved with the award, my interest in advancing these themes has grown. I gained my doctorate in 2005 and since then have been working in whatever capacity I can to promote the development of human capacity and the voice of rural people through my work as Manager of Partnerships and Projects at RMIT University in Hamilton and through my community activities. I also have an active role with our family farm, which itself reflects many of the changes taking place in rural Australia as it moves from a wholly merino operation to one focusing more on prime lamb, cropping, and so on.

I have learnt there are many ways a rural woman can have an influence. I made a conscious choice to support change, often behind the scenes. At present I am, a member of several committees, as well as the Glenelg Southern Grampians Local Learning Employment Network. In addition, one of my most gratifying tasks has been to be the inaugural chair of the Southern Grampians Youth Network. In 2008 we received a Victorian Strengthening Communities grant to pilot rural youth strategies—local solutions to local problems. This work is exciting because it covers a wide range of areas, geographically and organisationally.

I am also fortunate to be involved in a range of research areas—from natural resource and agricultural research, based on the Potter Farmland Plan of the 1980s, to youth, education and rural technology. Working with like-minded people is immensely satisfying.

One of the most exciting projects came about when we noticed the same people were always being invited to be on committees while new people were coming to town and not being ‘included’. I gathered together a network of women who are community leaders. Using an email tree, we invited other women to a gathering. We have held two such gatherings so far: at the first function 70 women booked in; 90 booked in for the second, half of them being new to the area. We designed this network to be sustainable, flexible, inclusive and with a built-in succession plan. And fun!

Being involved with the award has raised my profile and given me credibility, confidence and a voice. This has allowed me to make a commitment to my local community and to other local ruraly based women who seek to make a difference.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Desley Vella
Queensland winner

When one door shuts, another opens.

The concept for the ‘Cane-Cutter Barracks—a cultural ecotourism venture’ was to establish an on-farm tourism venture and use some of the returns to fund environmental rehabilitation works. The project was underpinned primarily by a personal and community need for economic and environmental sustainability in the local sugar industry.

Opportunities for achieving my project objectives, to a level far beyond expectations, arose after I received the Rural Women’s Award. In 2004 I was appointed a member of the Far North Queensland Regional Advisory Group as part of the Sugar Industry Reform Program (2004 to 2008). The role of this group was to develop a regional response to the challenges facing the sugar industry and to identify solutions that were sustainable. A regional strategic plan championing change, innovation, value-adding and diversification was prepared. Subsequently, over $19 million was secured in the region for projects ranging from low-GI (glycaemic index) sugar to an environmental audit of the sugar industry, environmentally sustainable waste-water management for the sugar mills, ethanol technology, mill rationalisation, green power and women in sugar. I was grateful for the opportunity to serve on the Regional Advisory Group and be in a position to guide and reform the local sugar industry.

Our town needed a bank. In late 2005 community members asked me to chair a committee to investigate the feasibility of establishing a community bank in the local town. I gladly accepted this role because I saw it as a chance to support my community in taking ownership of the local economy, assisting local businesses, creating local jobs and generating funding for community projects.

Late 2005 and 2006 were very challenging—for me personally and for the community, with the establishment of the Babinda Community Bank®, the founding of the Russell Landcare and Catchment Group, and dealing with the aftermath of Cyclone Larry, which hit in March 2006. My community was a disaster area: more than 80 per cent of buildings, both in town and on farms, were damaged and crops were destroyed. It took two years to rebuild and longer for farms to recover production.

Nevertheless, our Community Bank®, a publicly listed company, opened its doors for business in June 2006. Community members bought $600 000 worth of shares to finance the business. Within 18 months we had reached profitability, paid a dividend to local community shareholders, and funded over $20 000 in community projects.

The Russell Landcare and Catchment Group, of which I was a founding member and president (2007–08), was incorporated only three weeks before Cyclone Larry devastated the region. In its two years of operation over $120 000 in funding has been spent on rehabilitation works, revegetation plantings, cultural activities and community planting days. In late 2008 the Russell catchment was allocated a further $100 000 as part of the Reef Rescue Package Systems Repair Component for projects in the catchment to improve water quality and reduce run-off to the Great Barrier Reef.

In June 2008 I was elected inaugural Queensland director on the Strategic Advisory Board of the Bendigo and Adelaide Bank Community Bank®. Having completed the Australian Institute of Company Directors course has greatly assisted me in this role.

The award has opened many doors. The knowledge I gained from the Australian Institute of Company Directors course has been invaluable, as have been the networks established with women, rural industries, natural resource agencies, government and the banking sector. Although I initially set out to establish an individual on-farm venture, I was able to use the skills learnt, opportunities gained and contacts made to achieve my goals at the regional and broader scales.

Overall, the years since I won the award have been overwhelmingly positive, and I look forward to further opportunities to contribute to agriculture and rural communities.
I am a macadamia and sugar cane grower in the Childers district, in the Wide Bay – Burnett region of Queensland. I am married to Anthony, a third-generation cane grower, and we have three children. In 1996, in the face of a sugar cane price collapse, we diversified into Mammino Gourmet Ice-Cream, value-adding to the macadamias we grow in Childers to create one of the largest ranges of macadamia ice-creams in Australia.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition was to complete the Ice-Cream Essentials course at Gilbert Chandler University in Melbourne and then use my new skills to expand our ice-cream range and market our product throughout Queensland. We have also expanded our range to incorporate dairy-free sorbets.

Since I participated in the award we have won numerous other awards, among them a Queensland Tourism Award for retailing, the Queensland Primary Industries Award for Product Marketing, and gold at the Royal Queensland Dairy Produce Awards for seven ice-creams in our gourmet range. I was also named Bundaberg Business Manager of the Year in 2004.

My aim continues to be to expand the business domestically and, in the long term, overseas and to create alternative value-adding business and employment opportunities in the region. Mammino Gourmet Ice-Cream is now stocked in over 60 outlets throughout Queensland, and the business grows daily. We also have an on-farm retail outlet that is open to the public every day, and we have a vending vehicle that we use to retail our products at major events such as the Woodford Folk Festival and the National Country Music Muster.

The award gave me a high profile in the rural, tourism and manufacturing sectors and many opportunities to be a guest speaker and to encourage and help others to turn their ideas into reality. It also opened up opportunities I did not know existed, and in 2007 we secured from the federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry a grant that helped us expand our factory and to design and have made pre-printed packaging to streamline operations. I have met many interesting and talented people, and this has opened up marketing opportunities for us. We currently employ four staff, but we expect this will increase.
Today my husband, Matthew, and I manage a farming business consisting of a 165-sow piggery and 1000 hectares of cereal and grain legumes on properties located between Mannum and Cambrai in South Australia.

Life has changed substantially for me, personally and in business, since I received the Rural Women’s Award. At that time my vision was for agriculture in Australia to be dynamic and prosperous and for natural resources—land, water, vegetation and habitat—to be managed sustainably. This would be supported by an active and committed community, and the importance of the ‘human resource’ would be acknowledged. In this way future generations would be able to benefit from rural Australia, economically, environmentally and socially. My vision is still valid today.

In 2004 our third daughter was born, and my involvement in managing natural resources became more intense with my appointment to the Community Advisory Committee for the Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council. My role changed from one of working in my region to help people change their farming practices to one of seeking greater influence on decision making at the state and national levels.

All this was happening at a time when my husband and I were moving our business away from its focus on egg and pork production to producing a quality pork product for the fresh meat market in Australia and activating a succession plan in order to set up Matthew’s parents for retirement.

Being involved with the award helped me improve my knowledge of change-management processes, with a particular focus on the management of natural resources. Through my project I was able to develop a greater understanding of the diversity and complexity of natural resource management concerns in the Murray–Darling Basin and some of the economic and social implications of responding to these concerns.

As a result of this new knowledge and my improved self-confidence I have become more involved in natural resource management and the pig industry at various levels. At present I am, among other things, a director of Land and Water Australia and the National Rural Advisory Council, a member of the South Australian Pig Industry Development Board, deputy presiding member of the South Australian Natural Resource Management Council, and chair of the South Australian Farmers Federation Natural Resources Committee. This has allowed me to continue my involvement in decision making at the regional, state, Murray–Darling Basin and national levels as well as develop a network of friends and colleagues throughout Australia.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Heather Burdon
South Australian runner up

After our fabulous Rural Women’s Award reunion in 2005 and a two-and-a-half-year stint selling heavy vehicle insurance, I decided that was not the career path for me. Although I found working again in the transport industry rewarding and stimulating, the fact that I seemed to be ‘on call’ 24 hours a day, seven days a week left me feeling I had stepped back in time to the days of operating our livestock transport business, which was definitely not what I wanted.

I have worked in the livestock transport industry for more than 35 years, operating with my husband a successful livestock carrying business, Argyle Transport Pty Ltd. I have also been active in numerous industry associations. Additionally, I was instrumental in developing Truckcare, the quality management system for livestock transporters, and was for a number of years the Truckcare promotions officer for the Australian Livestock Transporters Association.

I continue to enjoy looking after the administration of our diversified farming properties, where we crop, grow lucerne hay and clover for seed, and run ewes, lambs and cattle.

During the past 12 months both our daughters have married, and we have been blessed with the birth of our first grandchild, Toby, whom I adore and love spending time with. The past year has also seen many hours spent redecorating our beach house. This has been rewarding and enjoyable, and it has reinforced my love of photography, which I hope to turn into an income-producing venture. I am currently putting together seascape collages for sale in a local beach store, a project I hope to expand.

I do not miss having a full-time job and am greatly enjoying some ‘me time’ in an effort to improve my health and fitness. I love fresh air and gardening and spending quality time with family and friends. This new-found freedom also affords me the opportunity to travel around Australia with my husband, following the fortunes of our thoroughbred horses, which is great fun and very social.

My latest challenge is to learn more about the stock market and the trade in shares; while the market is so low I intend to invest. Wish me well, but then life is a gamble, isn’t it?

- Australian Livestock Transporter of the Year, 1999
- South Australian Road Transport Industry Woman of the Year, 1999
- Australian Trucking Association National Trucking Woman of the Year, 2000
- Australian Centenary Medal for contribution to the transport industry
Since I won the 2003 Rural Women’s Award and published my *Australian Tuna Handling Manual: a practical guide for industry change* has been my constant companion.

I was owner and operator of Indian Ocean Fresh Australia, a fish packing, wholesaling and distribution operation that processed for some 16 vessels fishing the southern and western tuna and billfish fishery. But poor exchange rates, high fuel costs and stagnant markets led to a decrease in the number of vessels my business was handling. Finally, in November 2007 we packed our last tuna and swordfish in Geraldton from the sole remaining vessel in operation. (Most vessels either transferred to other fisheries or were sold for other purposes.) This decline happened over a period, and I was fortunate in not having to retrench any staff. I had a creative group of women working with me, and they moved on to other fields, such as ‘going back to school’ and motherhood.

Personally, the timing was convenient: my two boys were very young and I was able to juggle my way through their early school years. I also managed to complete a Master’s degree in Business Administration and was happy to achieve my goal before turning 40, completing my final assignment at 10.00 pm the night before the big day.

In 2006 and 2007 I started to take on some work for my parents’ fishing company, which was also suffering from the rapid changes in wild fishing in terms of both profitability and security of access. I intended to just help out where I could, but I ended up taking on a project that had been simmering away in the background since 1999. This involved setting up, at the Abrolhos Islands, a new aquaculture operation for the farming of tuna and other marine fish. The process of moving from wild fishing to fish farming entailed a fundamental shift in my thinking.

2007 was a challenging year for me. I had been looking forward to taking a year off, having packed tuna and swordfish for 13 years, but in January I found myself preparing to take on 50 000 baby mulloway at short notice. These fish arrived in late February, and I ended up conducting a pilot trial in Geraldton harbour—with no experienced staff and no idea of how to take care of my new ‘babies’. It was a steep learning curve, but I have now assembled a great team of people and resources to draw on for my new venture. It has been an expensive education and a rollercoaster ride. Fortunately, I was already aware that, just when you think you know all the things that can go wrong, another curve ball is thrown from left field. I survived the year, though, and we are about to start commercial harvesting on the pilot farm.

The award has given me exposure to a network of other women in rural and regional Australia, and I always enjoy hearing their stories and learning how creative they are in adapting to change. The Australian Institute of Company Directors course has served me well, and I am looking forward to doing a refresher in 2009, time permitting. I have been elected to the board of the recently incorporated Seafood Cooperative Research Centre and enjoy working with a diverse and professional team. I continue my involvement in management committees associated with the fishing industry. I am also working towards obtaining better support services for children who have type 1 diabetes and live in Western Australia: my eldest son has had this disease since he was 4 years old, and both sufferers and their families in regional communities do not have adequate access to the specialised teams based in Perth.
As grain growers on a small-ish property outside Calingiri in south-west Western Australia, we saw value-adding to raw material as a crucial step on the path to purchasing more land and increasing our productivity. Our strategy was to produce speciality flours and we began with soft wheat flour. Emdavale Farm Flour became a fully fledged business in 2000.

Our first client was a large Western Australian biscuit manufacturer; a number of independent supermarkets and speciality food stores followed, and volumes greatly increased with the listing of our products with one of Australia’s largest supermarket chains. The business is administered from the farm at Calingiri, and a food broker in Perth manages the supermarket visits and ordering. Processing is done on a contract basis in Perth, and our retail packaging is also outsourced.

Having been a secondary school teacher, I had only a limited knowledge of marketing, but I did know how to learn, and learn we did. We took every opportunity to gain a better understanding of our products, and marketing ourselves as well as our products has become a way of life. By 2002 I was fully employed as marketing manager, accounts manager, product development officer and general dogsbody at Emdavale Farm Flour. I had also given birth to our fifth child and was still responsible for bookkeeping for the main farm business, so life was pretty full.

For the next five years we continued working on the business, developing a loyal base of Western Australian customers. Our constant challenge was to increase volume in order to achieve economies of scale. Freight to the eastern states was prohibitive, so we were unable to develop commercial or retail markets outside Western Australia; further, the larger supermarket chains adopted a policy of reducing suppliers and offering more ‘home brand’ products, so supplying the retail market became increasingly difficult. Our largest commercial customer had been bought out by a national company, and it chose the national supplier for its flour, so the viability of our business was diminishing. In 2007 we decided to wind it up.

Our farm business has taken a different direction, and we are now part-owners of an export hay-processing company. I have taken on a number of regional leadership roles, including being president of Western Australian Women in Agriculture, chair of Heartlands WA (a fledgling marketing group for the Wheat Belt region) and board member of Heartlands Country and Goomalling and District Community Financial Services (Bendigo Bank). The knowledge I gained through the award experience, and the networks, have given me a strong foundation from which to move on to the next challenge life presents.
Since I won the Rural Women’s Award in 2003 we have carried out an extensive and thorough breeding program at our recently acquired property. We developed a micro-business plan to determine the size our property needed to be, then we bought Killiecrankie, a 25-hectare holding with a boundary fence and a small spring-fed dam as the only improvements. Since then, we have added a house and sheds, divided the property into cell-grazing areas, excluded habitat areas, and improved reserve connectivity. To this we have added a diverse range of intensive horticulture and stock. We have also expanded as a family and now boast three busy young children.

Originally Killiecrankie was established to grow Tasmanian wildflowers for commercial cut-flower sales; this has been slow to develop, not only because of family demands but also because of the intensive capital outlay needed and the poor environmental conditions. Killiecrankie has been in drought since we bought it, but we continue to develop infrastructure at times when planting has stalled.

The award bursary allowed me to travel to New Zealand with a 4-month-old in tow. We confirmed that our business goal was feasible using the Kiwis’ exceptional abilities in intensive horticulture. The trip also broadened our minds to other possibilities and, although diversification seems a huge amount on our plate, the business plan we recently developed has helped us recognise financial and marketing constraints as well as opportunities.

The award gave me many opportunities, but it has also been a cause for sad reflection on the opportunities missed. In particular, I wish I had budgeted for maintaining the networks I established during the bursary’s life. Despite this, though, I remain confident that the long-term goals of our business are beyond the ‘hobby farm’ label and are realistic for developing a rural enterprise that reflects our ethical and quality standards while supporting our wish for balance between work and family.

The support of the rural community we live in is invaluable, as have been the opportunities industry bodies provide in the form of subsidies and grants: without these, our goals of a sustainable rural enterprise would not be close to realisation.
I no longer work in the rural sector adding value to a wild harvest of feral pigs. Instead, I am a numeracy teacher for the Northern Territory Open Education Centre, and my work takes me to some of the most isolated and beautiful parts of the territory.

I worked in the Northern Territory pastoral industry for over 30 years, most recently focusing on feral pig production and processing. My Rural Women’s Award ambition was to establish a viable and accredited harvested pig meat industry in the territory, but circumstances such as high grain prices, competition and alternative meat imports meant I was unable to secure viable markets and users for the pig meat.

In my role as numeracy teacher I work in Rapid Creek but travel regularly to small communities throughout the Northern Territory. Along with the other members of the numeracy team, I develop and deliver mathematics programs to the remote-community teachers. These programs are tailored to provide substantial and sustainable numeracy outcomes for Indigenous secondary students. Additionally, in collaboration with the remote-community teachers, I deliver lessons to the students using IDL (interactive distance learning) technologies. I have been working at the Open Education Centre since 2005, when my youngest son, Eric, completed his primary school education through Katherine School of the Air.

One highlight of my work is visiting the communities and working with dedicated teachers and enthusiastic students, of which there are many. My favourite school is Laramba, about 200 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs, but Jilkminggan, Barunga, Alekarenge, Alcoota and Mulga Bore are also special.

Another highlight is working in a small-team environment. During 2008 my colleague, Josie Roberts, and I presented a workshop at the Mathematical Teachers Association Northern Territory Conference in Alice Springs and at the Australasian Association of Distance Education Schools Australian Conference in Darwin.

The award and the accompanying leadership courses have had a wonderful and lasting impact on my ability to perform my everyday tasks to the highest standard and my confidence to take on new challenges and experiences.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award 2004
Participating in the award...

Rebecca Amott
Lorroi Kirkby
Marilyn Lanyon
Beverley Fisher
Claudine Ward
Dee Dunham
Jeanette Long
Laura Fell
Diana Morrison
Wendy Newman
Diane Rae
Sandra Gillanders
Lee Berryman
Megan Hoskins
In January 2008 I began my own business, Precision Operations, specialising in food and agribusiness marketing. It is proving a most rewarding experience, and my learning curve continues to be exponential. This initiative followed four years working as national brand manager for the Australian Agricultural Company and, before that, various roles in the beef supply chain, in Australia and abroad. As brand manager I was responsible for strategic marketing of the company's premier 1824 brand of beef. Earlier on, I had been the first female beef cattle officer to be appointed by New South Wales Agriculture.

My interest in branded food products—in particular, beef—stemmed from the two years I spent working for a beef producers' cooperative in the Hunter Valley. The group was part of a broader supply-chain alliance aimed at producing and value-adding to premium beef 52 weeks of the year.

Five years with New South Wales Agriculture, as its first female Beef Cattle Officer (or 'Beefette'), gave me a broad understanding of the Australian beef industry and meat quality. I did stints at Casino, Moree, Albury, Cooma and Wagga Wagga and so was exposed to many different production systems in varying environments. I was fortunate to spend five years abroad, too, working, studying and travelling. Among the highlights were gaining a Master’s degree in the United Kingdom and Canada, my thesis topic being the management of the Calgary Stampede. I also worked on a feedlot in Colorado and spent two years in Zimbabwe, working for the Zimbabwe Farmers Union and Zimbabwe Animal Breeders and running a commercial herd.

My vision for my industry is to be part of a true beef industry supply-chain alliance, where all players work towards the common goal of increasing red meat consumption through branded product of consistent quantity and quality.

Winning the Rural Women's Award gave me the opportunity to investigate the branded-beef market in the retail and food services sectors in the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan and to gain a better understanding of branded beef and the opportunities for Australian product. The most obvious and immediate outcome of my trip was the development and promotion of a speciality red meat section featuring branded beef in Coles supermarkets—a collaborative effort between Coles and Meat and Livestock Australia.

The award has allowed me to gain a much broader understanding of Australia's major trading partners and their branded-beef products, along with the challenges and opportunities facing the Australian red meat industry. It has given me credibility and recognition in my industry, opened up networks, and brought access to industry and government leaders. Many doors have opened; this includes attending and speaking at various events and functions. My public speaking has improved as a result, as has my self-esteem.

I cannot recommend the award highly enough, and I will continue to encourage as many women as I can to apply.
I was raised on a 10 000-hectare sheep station north of Bourke in north-western New South Wales, and it was there I realised how crucial it was that Australian agriculture engage in sustainable practices. As a qualified veterinarian and an accredited international export embryo transfer veterinarian, I am one of a handful of females working in the field of artificial breeding technologies in the sheep industry.

I am a dedicated dorper breeder and, in partnership with my husband, Justin, own the Amarula Dorper Stud at Gravesend in northern New South Wales. My vision of seeing agriculture embrace the dorper as a profitable and sustainable meat sheep alternative has become a reality. The exposure resulting from participating in the Rural Women’s Award gave me the opportunity to promote dorpers to a wider audience, and the agricultural community has now discovered the economic benefits this animal offers.

In recent years demand has outstripped supply, so we have intensified our embryo transfer program in order to increase the number of lambs born each year.

One of my award ambitions was to become a dorper judge, and ultimately an inspector, and to travel to South Africa to further my training and education. We have now completed three dorper courses—a junior course at Narromine and the first and final senior courses in South Africa—and are now selling Amarula dorpers into South America, India and Asia.

Participation in the award gave me a unique opportunity to promote the dorper industry and the importance of rural women; it also extended my skills and expanded my contacts in agriculture. Further, I have had the opportunity to attend and speak at numerous conferences: the Western Division Young Farmers Conference in Broken Hill in 2004 was a defining moment for the development of my confidence and public-speaking skills.

I have big ambitions for myself and for the dorper industry. The dorper’s popularity is increasing in other countries, and I can see that the breed is going to become one of the largest worldwide. My ambitions are to increase the level and sophistication of artificial breeding facilities on farms and to become one of the world’s best-known dorper breeders and exporters. Not a bad goal to aim for.
Take small steps and think big.

My brother and I grew up on our family farm in the Mallee of northern Victoria. I have always had the 'love of the land' in my heart and after I met the 'love of my life', Ian, we married and bought a property near Boort in north-central Victoria. At the end of the 1970s we moved onto our irrigation property and started growing tomatoes for processing factories, in partnership with Ian’s brother and wife. We did this for almost 30 years. Life was busy for me, as a farmers’ wife, raising our five children, attending to our employees, and driving trucks to the silos at harvest time. Our children are now grown up and we are blessed with five grandchildren to spoil.

With 160 hectares of red and green tomatoes, I loved playing around with recipes. A dear Italian friend said, ‘You should make what Mum used to make’—just a handful of ‘this and that’. It took about five seasons of fine-tuning before it was just as his mother made. Over the years and after extensive market research, it became obvious that the thinly sliced and pickled green tomatoes finished in extra virgin olive oil and with oregano and garlic was a product not found anywhere other than Italy.

Growing tomatoes was viable at the beginning, but good prices and contracts became difficult to secure, so a family decision was made to start up a new business. Simply Tomatoes began in 2002. We used our skills not only to grow tomatoes: we also became the processor and marketer. We are proud of the fact that our products are produced ‘from seed to packet’ and processed by hand in the commercial kitchen on our property. Our small business now employs 16 part-time casual staff from the area, producing specialty products that are sold through 350 outlets around Australia and in many countries elsewhere.

Our latest international venture is with a franchised gourmet retail store in Kuwait. Our first order was placed and after two months a replenishment order has been despatched. Dean & Deluca is the first of many stores throughout the Middle East, and we have worked closely with the buyer for many months: our aim is ‘to grow together’. During my recent visit to Kuwait to meet with the procurement team, I was invited to become their Australian agent sourcing unique artesian products for their glamorous stores. This is an exciting new phase in our export program.

After revisiting Dubai this year to exhibit at the Gulfood 09 Trade Fair, we now have a distributor who is going to service the chefs in the five and six star hotels, including the Royal Palace.

The biggest help to me has been my belief in my product and encouragement from family and friends, who say, ‘You can do it’. It has sometimes been tough starting a new business, particularly because we have been continuously in drought since we began. But not once have I regretted starting Simply Tomatoes: I have received so much help from fellow manufacturers, as well as financial support from the federal, state and local governments. Help is out there. Just seek it out and ask.

As the recipient of a Rural Women’s Award, I have enjoyed being a guest speaker, sharing my story and encouraging listeners to believe in themselves, as I do now. The bursary gave me the opportunity to travel overseas to learn about marketing, and what I learnt has contributed to our business growth. The award also assisted my personal development in business management, especially through attending the Australian Institute of Company Directors course and the encouragement to attend workshops. These activities also gave me many networking opportunities.

Simply Tomatoes has received numerous national awards—being recognised for its business, packaging and product. This could not have been achieved without the support of many, particularly our wonderful employees.

We are proudly ‘Australian owned, grown and manufactured, from the tomato seed to the finished product, by the Lanyon family’.
When my husband and I took over the family orchard outside Cobram in 2000 the future looked bright, but within 12 months we were confronted with declining markets, frost damage and drought, problems that have persisted ever since. We decided that if we were to survive we would have to diversify and value-add.

I researched our options and contacted other citrus growers. With the support of another family, we started a small juice company, Riverview Juices, which became the first juice company to make fresh blood orange juice in Victoria. The company began by selling juice in the local region, including to the local supermarkets and at farmers’ markets. Several other growers joined us and we established a board of directors; the business has since grown to become an interstate concern.

There were, however, some differences of opinion, and my husband and I resigned from Riverview Juices to pursue our own enterprise. The business we have formed, Tranquil Hills Fruit Growers, runs a successful farm tour business and valued-adds in a number of areas. We now sell fresh juice plus frozen zest and peel to chefs. We also make a speciality marmalade, biscuits and citrus salt, which is a blend of dried peel, herbs and spices.

My involvement in the Rural Women’s Award resulted in good media exposure for our farm, which has featured on Wine Me, Dine Me, Discover Down Under and Coxy’s Big Break. And as my confidence has grown I have been game enough to tackle more and more challenges.

I recently ran a nationwide Marmalade Challenge, and I approached Charles Woolley from Across Australia to judge the competition. He was delighted and enjoyed tasting all the contestants’ marmalades ‘on air’. I have also spoken ‘live to air’ to the nation: I don’t think I could have done that without the help and confidence I received from the award.

What does not kill you makes you stronger.

Runner-up, Australian Women’s Weekly Legend of the Land, 2005

What does not kill you makes you stronger.

Runner-up, Australian Women’s Weekly Legend of the Land, 2005
If you think you are beaten, you are; if you think you dare not, you don’t; if you’d like to win but think you can’t, it’s almost certain you won’t; if you think you’ll lose, you’ve lost. For out in the world you’ll find success begins with a fellow’s will: it’s all in the state of mind.

If you think you’re outclassed, you are. You’ve got to think high to rise. You’ve got to think highly of yourself before you can ever win a prize. Life’s battles don’t always go to the stronger and faster man, but sooner or later the man who wins is the man who thinks he can.

Since winning the 2004 Rural Women’s Award and finishing my book on women in the Gulf fishery—Do You Go Out on the Boat, Too, Luv?—I have been experiencing a series of highs and lows, seemingly in line with the highs and lows of the fishing industry.

In 2008 I returned to shore, this time with an important project to manage. For several years we had been talking about a major refit for the Turtle, and it was now or never, so all the men steamed away on the other boats. Talk about move the furniture! Around the fishing industry in Karumba bets were placed on whether the Turtle would ever be put back together and make the start of the 2009 season or whether we would all go mad beforehand. As it turned out, the Turtle steamed out of port the day before the season opened—bright, shiny and new. I wish we had known the rain was not going to stop.

While the refit progressed I spent six months teaching at the local judo club—something I don’t get to do often while fishing. I enjoyed the interaction, especially with the team I took away to competition, who were so proud of the medals they brought home.

The Rural Women’s Award has given me an opportunity to add my voice to those trying to advance the views of the fishing industry. Additionally, participating in the Australian Institute of Company Directors course encouraged me to continue to grow and learn new skills. I hope this will continue into the future.
In 2004 I was the principal of Coolabine Goat Cheese Farmstead, one of only two farmsteads producing goat-milk cheese in Queensland. I have always been passionate about my goats and my cheese and about instilling in the general community an appreciation of rural produce and rural people.

Coolabine won a number of prestigious awards, among them Maker of the Best Cheese at the 2003 Sydney Royal Easter Show and Grand Champion Cheese at the 2002 Brisbane Royal Show. I was also named the Grand Champion Nubian Goat Breeder at Brisbane Royal Show for five consecutive years.

The Rural Women’s Award bursary was a huge boost for me: it allowed for some vital equipment upgrades in the cheesery and, more importantly, it enabled me to introduce the ‘Farmstead Experience’. A one-day workshop open to the general community, the Farmstead Experience, was designed to impart skills in the art of cheese-making and an awareness and appreciation of the importance of Australian agriculture and farmers.

Unfortunately, family illness led to the closure of Coolabine Goat Cheese Farmstead about 18 months ago. My granddaughter was diagnosed with leukaemia and, with the disease and its treatment all-consuming and the farm a family affair, we had no choice but to close. It was devastating having to say goodbye to my beloved goats and to close the cheesery. We have ahead of us another hard year of treatment, including a bone marrow transplant, but we remain hopeful of a bright future for my granddaughter.

At present I am writing a book about my life—not an autobiography as such but a book that shares some past experiences, some fascinating stories and tales of engaging people. Who knows what the future holds? It might not be the end of my goats and my cheese-making after all.
Winning the RIRDC Rural Women’s Award in 2004 was a turning point in my life: it enabled me to participate in a mentoring process that helped me overcome some personal barriers and develop my confidence to set what I had thought were unattainable goals. One of these was to be on a board in the agricultural industry. After being appointed to several state government board positions, my most significant achievement in this regard is my recent appointment to the board of the Grains Research and Development Corporation.

Since winning the award I have focused on building our consultancy business, working alongside my husband, Bill. This has involved developing business plans for farmers as they recover from drought, as well as management of several projects. I have developed my facilitation skills through training and now facilitate succession planning for farm families and strategic plans for agribusiness and community organisations. More recently, I have received training in facilitating the delivery of a coaching course. Developing coaching skills in rural Australia is vital if individuals are to adapt to change in the difficult environment we live in.

Bill and I continue to farm—wheat, barley, lentils, lambs and wine grapes. Like many others, we are finding this challenging in the current financial and climatic conditions. I continue developing the skills of rural women in my role as national project manager for Partners in Grain and as South Australian board representative for Australian Women in Agriculture.

In 2005 I became the inaugural chair of the Ag Excellence Alliance, an organisation that develops links between grower groups and natural resource management boards in South Australia. It has been rewarding to work with a team committed to developing an organisation from the ground up.

In 2007 Bill and I formed Australian Bee Services Pty Ltd with one of our former employees and a long-time business associate. We are developing a pollination service for broad-acre agriculture and horticulture across Australia.

You can achieve anything if you put your mind to it.
Fifteen years ago my husband and I bought a poultry farm in the McLaren Vale region, south of Adelaide, achieving a long-held ambition to become farmers. We raised meat chickens for 13 years, and two years ago we made the transition to rearing turkeys. We now grow under contract for the Aldinga Turkeys brand of Inghams Enterprises, raising the birds from day-old poults to marketable age.

My interest in the long-term direction of the chicken meat industry led me to take up state and national industry leadership positions. I became particularly interested in maintaining Australia’s quarantine standards, on-farm biosecurity, animal health and welfare, and the international trade environment. To support my leadership roles, I studied for the Graduate Certificate in Management through Adelaide Institute of TAFE and then went on to do the University of South Australia’s Master of Business Administration degree, which I completed in 2004.

In parallel with my studies, I set about developing opportunities for Australian businesses to trade in the Middle East, and in 2002 I led a small delegation to Baghdad, being the first Australian woman to go there on private business in recent decades. I have since led delegations to other Middle Eastern countries, as well as parts of South East Asia and the Caribbean.

Receiving the Rural Women’s Award bursary and participating in the Australian Institute of Company Directors course gave me extremely important training, as well as the confidence to take on other board positions. I have been chair of the South Australian FarmBiz State Planning Group, a member of an advisory board for the University of South Australia, and a member of the South Australian Farmers Federation Rural Sustainability Taskforce.

Recently I have been focusing on broader aspects of Australia’s farming fabric and infrastructure. I became a director of Animal Health Australia and gained much satisfaction from the way that organisation’s planning and work over many years helped Australia identify, contain and then eradicate equine influenza.

I have also developed an interest in distributed power generation, and with colleagues I established Environmental Energy Australia, where I have the role of executive chair. The company is currently in the final pre-construction phase of establishing a 130-megawatt peaking power station, which will be located in a regional centre in order to facilitate continuity of the electricity supply.

Additionally, I was recently accepted into the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation’s Course 15 and through this embarked on another fascinating journey of personal growth, meeting and working with other equally committed people who share a passion for rural Australia.

The award has been pivotal in giving me the confidence to take on the many challenges and opportunities that have presented themselves to me and the belief that I can achieve the goals I set. It heralded for me a period of unprecedented personal learning and growth.
In early 2000 a state and federal government project to cap the free-flowing artesian bores in the Gascoyne region was implemented with huge success. It not only allowed stock watering systems to be revolutionised but also opened the doors for diversification in an area previously known only for the production of sheep and cattle. The Gascoyne now boasts both corn and sandalwood grown under irrigation and perennial grasses feed-lotting cattle in a formerly arid region. The wasteful open bore drains are now part of history.

My small effort to create change had its beginnings with access to this bore water. Some species of ornamental fish seemed to thrive in the warm, saline water and, with the support of the Rural Women’s Award bursary and considerable research, a new business made its way into the bush. My award ambition involved two fact-finding missions—one to New South Wales and Queensland and the other to Singapore—combined with extensive trial work on the farm, to resolve some of the difficulties associated with the production of ornamental fish in saline artesian water.

The potential of ornamental fish as a new industry for the Gascoyne region has now been proved, with very satisfying results, and the business supplies aquarium fish to both Western Australian and eastern states markets.

On a personal front, our family partnership has grown to include two daughters-in-law and farming interests in the mid-west. My husband and I have taken a step back and moved off the home property.

The award created an amazing number of opportunities in some of the most unlikely areas, and after four years it still opens doors for me.
When I moved back to Western Australia’s Wheat Belt in 2000, after an absence of 20 years, I was struck by the innovation, energy and community pride, especially among women. I met so many wonderful women involved in so many interesting small businesses, often acting in isolation, with little support and with few resources, and with sheer passion motivating them. I was also struck by our region’s vulnerability because of its dependence on broad-acre agriculture. The increasing impact of the global economy, combined with land management problems—including water, salt and more recently prolonged drought—were forcing this industry to redefine itself. Diversification became something that interested me enormously.

At the same time, I joined the inaugural committee of the Heartlands Regional Branding Group, established to market the region’s diversity and support those involved in value-adding and diversification, especially in terms of creating a strong network for mutual support and assisting with branding and broader marketing. From 2001 to 2007 I chaired this group; it was so exciting to see these businesses grow, some of them becoming international exporters. The commitment and tenacity of these people never ceases to amaze me.

As the recipient of a Rural Women’s Award bursary, I was able to travel to Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales to examine other regional branding initiatives. I learnt some valuable lessons, including to promise only what you can deliver and to work with others so that you can deliver. I also learnt clever branding tips such as that the sum of the whole is worth more than the parts, yet the parts must have minimum standards in quality and service, and telling the story of the region, product or service needs to be done in an authentic yet creative way.

It has been an awesome experience to see the Heartlands Regional Branding Group grow and be so successful, to the extent that the model is now being used to support other industry sectors in the region—tourism, the arts, motor sports, business services, and so on. From little things big things grow. Well-supported, positive and focused networks are powerful mechanisms for growth and change.

I have been fortunate to sit on numerous advisory bodies at the state and federal levels as an advocate for the diversity and opportunity found in the regions and the economic and social infrastructure required for making things happen. Participating in the award gave me an invaluable opportunity to meet other wonderful women and men involved in innovation and promoting rural Australia, its people and its businesses.

In turn, these experiences have provided rich case studies to bring to my consulting business, which specialises in individual, organisational and community capacity building. I have been able to combine knowledge and experience from a diverse career in human resources and rural development to design and implement action learning programs for people who live in rural Australia and are committed to growing better lives, businesses, industries and communities. How lucky am I?

---

Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever does.

— Margaret Mead
In March 2001, after visiting Tasmania for a holiday, my partner and I decided to give up life in Queensland's Sunshine Coast hinterland and move to the island state for good.

With the help of a New Industries Development Grant, Grandvewe Cheeses, Tasmania's only organic sheep dairy and cheesery, was born. Our first pregnant flock arrived on the farm in August 2002 and milking of our first 40 ewes began in November that year. The first milking took three-and-a-half hours, and we produced 2.5 litres of milk. Fortunately, things improved after that. The very first year we made yogurt and hard cheeses and sold them in the retail market in Hobart only.

August 2006 saw the arrival of Australia's only privately owned Awassi sheep. We discovered a flock on the mainland and negotiated the purchase of 45 sheep. Apart from East Frieslands, this breed is the only other milking breed in Australia; the breeding stock are wholly owned by a Middle Eastern syndicate and were unavailable to ordinary Australian farmers until Grandvewe's 'find'. The result is we can now cross-breed and work towards creating a unique Australian milking breed.

In September 2006 I returned to Europe under a federally funded scholarship to further study sheep cheeses. In June 2007 I went to Europe again, to study more complex sheep cheeses with Europe's best boutique manufacturers.

Live your life in such a way that when your feet hit the floor in the morning, Satan shudders and says, ‘Oh no! She’s awake!’
Early in 2004 I moved from a successful career in accounting and business management to my own business consultancy and people-development organisation. I had my own model for serving customers through values-driven service and outcomes-focused programs.

As managing director of the Business Savvy Group, I am proud to have designed and delivered the highly successful Business Savvy program to almost 200 Tasmanian small business owners, a project worth $470,000 and supported by the Australian Government through AusIndustry.

I am also principal consultant with and owner of Inner Development and Business Solutions Consulting Australia. Through our consulting services we have delivered funding of over $1 million to our Tasmanian clients, provided strategic direction for many businesses, offered coaching and mentoring to several hundred business owners, and aided in market development for a number of industries.

Our people-development portfolio continues to grow, having a wide array of clients from micro- and small businesses, the corporate sector and all tiers of government. We have trained over 2000 people since the business began in 2004.

‘Helping people help themselves’ remains our focus, ensuring that we help people ‘turn their dreams into reality’ and provide solutions and results for our clients.

As a role model for women in business—in particular, demonstrating that you can achieve whatever you want if you have the desire and vision—I aim to empower women of all ages and in any location to have the future they want. Regional Tasmania offers many opportunities for women to have the perfect work–life balance.

There are no mistakes, only learning opportunities. Take the time to reflect and learn from your experiences: they will richly reward you.

Also remember, ‘No one can make you feel inferior without your consent’.

——Eleanor Roosevelt
My life has changed greatly since being a recipient of the Rural Women’s Award in 2004. We sold our farm in September 2007, moved to a 2-hectare property closer to Darwin, and made the momentous decision to retire.

Everything on earth has a purpose—and that includes you! Your purpose in life provides you with an inner drive that, once you tap into it, can give you immense fulfilment and unlimited joy.

——Anthony Robbins

Participation in the Rural Women’s Award development activities and undertaking the Award project provided me with a unique opportunity to assess our plans and business goals at an early stage of development. Following completion of my Award project on the viability of bamboo shoot production in the Northern Territory, which showed that production was marginal, we decided to pick bamboo shoots only when the Northern Territory season was well ahead of Queensland and New South Wales production. This decision was further revised in the following season, when we ceased cutting shoots altogether and allowed our bamboos to thicken into windbreaks, which while not income producing in themselves have a positive impact on farm production and final income. Although no longer growing bamboo, our ‘love affair’ with bamboo has continued and I firmly believe that bamboo has much to offer as a sustainable product with many uses; though possibly not with Australia’s current mindset.

Our farm outside Darwin grew mangoes as the principal crop; bamboo for fresh shoot production was the secondary crop. The farm was also pivotal to bamboo research, being part of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research’s project on improving and maintaining the productivity of bamboo for quality timber and shoots in Australia and the Philippines. Until we sold our farm I continued my involvement in the Northern Territory Women in Primary Industry group, the Northern Territory Minister for Primary Industries Horticulture Advisory Group, and mango industry networks and industry bodies. I was the only female member of the board of the Northern Territory Mango Industry Association and the founding member of Northern Territory Women in Primary Industry. While these formal involvements ceased with the sale of the farm, I remain in contact with the Women in Primary Industry group members.

As a retiree, I am now involved in rural activities at the community level—for example, pottery, qigong, dance and craft groups. I have also begun a distance diploma in ceramics from the Australian National University School of Art, providing both a challenge to and an update of my skills and knowledge.

The RIRDC Rural Women’s Award provides invaluable opportunities for rural women to develop business and leadership skills towards increasing their participation and contributions within their businesses, industries and communities generally. The contribution of the award to the achievements of recipients continues long after the formal development and opportunities cease.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Megan Hoskins
Northern Territory runner up

Five years ago I switched career paths, from being an entomology research and extension officer with the Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development at Katherine Research Station to working on Victoria River Research Station, a cattle station at Kidman Springs, south-west of Katherine.

Kidman Springs is in the Victoria River district, which is one of the main cattle-producing regions of the Northern Territory. The Research Station, covering 31 000 hectares, is managed and funded by the Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development, and the research effort focuses on native pasture, grazing and beef cattle herd management.

My commitment has always been to biological farming. I am convinced that sustainable farming practices must be embraced by all primary producers if rural industries are to survive and prosper.

Participating in the Rural Women’s Award gave me the resources to improve my knowledge of the principles behind successful biological farming and the tools and techniques available to farm in this way. I attended two important workshops: Nutri Tech Solutions was a four-part seminar series covering the management of minerals, microbes, plants and pests; the Soil Food Web Interaction and Benefits to Plant Production program provided detailed theoretical instruction on and practical skills in soil biology, soil chemistry and molecular biology.

Although I learnt a great deal about soil and plant health, translating that knowledge to the industry proved far more challenging, largely because of the fact that, although there is strong industry support for biological farming, there are many interpretations of what the term means and how best to put it into practice. Despite some challenges though, trial work with a small number of committed growers has proved very promising. Notably, one mango grower has delivered higher yields, better fruit quality, less chemical use and other interesting benefits.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award 2005
Participating in the award ...

Jennifer Bradley
Kate James (Woodward)
Sue Markwell
Elaine Paton
Anne Osborne
Delphine Pufty (Bentley)
Lisa Rowntree
Lyn Dohle
Maureen Dobra
Deborah Oberon
Amanda Way
Laura Richardson
Ann Palmer
Sarah Fea
Make everything I do count.

I work alongside my husband and two children, running a 1400-hectare cropping and prime lamb production enterprise and Border Leicester stud in the Central West of New South Wales.

Since 2001 I have served as a board director for the Tooraweenah Prime Lamb Marketing Cooperative, and I currently chair the board. This cooperative is one of the largest producer marketing groups in the state and has been in operation since 1995. Among other things, as director, I organised and ran numerous field days, prepared a quarterly newsletter for members and coordinated media reports. The cooperative is unique in the lamb industry, with a membership of 90 producers marketing some 55 000 lambs over the hook to processors in four states.

The knowledge I have accrued and the contacts I have made and developed in the lamb industry since winning the award have been invaluable. I have become more involved and taken on new positions in my industry. My self-confidence has grown, and this has allowed me to express my opinions on matters concerning the lamb industry and lamb producers.

I am committed to developing better marketing options and transparent feedback to our producers, who produce a world-class product. The past five years have been difficult for producers, but I remain excited about the industry’s prospects: I believe that lean meat yield on carcasses and genetic gain will deliver the biggest benefits to both processors and producers in the near future.
In early 2004 I was responsible for all aspects of the establishment of a specialty cheese factory based in Muswellbrook, in the Upper Hunter region of New South Wales. Hunter Belle Cheese produces high-quality hand-made cheeses and yogurts from the milk of Brown Swiss cows. Along with my cheese-maker role, I was responsible for production, finance, marketing and administration of a small business that has five staff members.

Hunter Belle Cheese has had considerable success, winning six gold medals for its soft and hard cheeses in Australian Specialist Cheesemakers Association shows and the Fromage du Monde award in the first five years of operation. Furthermore, I facilitated the first school-based traineeship in cheese-making—Food Processing (Dairy)—for one of my junior employees, who went on to manage the factory in 2008 so that I could take time off for the birth of my first child, Stirling.

As any mother would know, motherhood is the most joyous and demanding job there is. When interviewed about balancing her career and motherhood, I heard our Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, say ‘Women can have it all, but not all at the same time’. This rang true with me: I realised I was ready to take a break from my business career and enjoy precious time with my son while he is young. Fortunately, I was able to sell the business at the end of 2008 and it will continue in 2009.

Over the years I have continued to help my husband run our Wallawong Murray Grey Stud. This includes many aspects of stud cattle management on two properties and an annual on-property bull and female sale. We are planning to move into full-time primary industry within the next three years because we want to raise our family on a farm and practise more sustainable agriculture than is possible from a distance. I have also become very interested in permaculture and am committed to reducing our impact on the environment.

Since participating in the Rural Women’s Award I have become involved in a number of rural organisations in New South Wales, including being appointed a member of the New South Wales Dairy Industry Conference and Ag Start and being a director of the New South Wales Rural Assistance Authority. Through these organisations I can contribute to policy making for the benefit of people in agriculture and regional areas. Recently I have also become a director of the local credit union, Hunter Mutual Limited.

Without a doubt, the award has given me the self-confidence and the profile to take on industry positions and to better use my talents and skills for the benefit of the agricultural sector, the environment and my local community.

- Member, New South Wales Dairy Industry Conference and Ag Start
- Director, New South Wales Rural Assistance Authority and Hunter Mutual Limited

RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Kate James (Woodward)
New South Wales runner up
The latest chapter in my career began in 2001, when I returned to Gisborne, Victoria to manage Tremon Stud, one of Victoria’s most respected thoroughbred horse studs. The stud had earned itself a reputation for quality care and world-class facilities, providing for the breeding and caring of horses, from foaling mares to yearlings and racehorses. But it was keen to move forward, build on its successes, and determine its future direction. I became the first female manager of the stud.

The stud branched out from its base of breeding and agistment to a more comprehensive range of services, including a specialised horse after-care and recovery agistment and an artificial insemination clinic for standardbreds and performance horses. The development of specialist facilities to treat horses with specific illnesses and injuries opened a new market, between the level of care offered by veterinarians for acute patients and general agistment services for horses with minor problems.

The Rural Women’s Award bursary enabled me to travel to Australian and New Zealand veterinary hospitals and clinics to learn about the latest advances in rehabilitation for horses; this involved traditional, complementary and integrated approaches to care. The result of the tour was that I was able to expand by 300 per cent the range of illnesses and injuries Tremon Stud can treat, and the list of horses that have returned to racing or performance continues to grow. Many of the horses have gone on to successful careers, and several have won prestigious races.

The award also enabled me to meet many vets and researchers I would not normally have been able to make contact with. The knowledge I gained is invaluable. I have been able to use it, and the confidence I gained, to expand Tremon’s student work-placement program and mentoring program for female students.

- Finalist, Wakefield Club Women in Racing Award
- Keynote speaker, graduation ceremony for Melbourne University Glenormiston students
- Member, Women In Primary Industry Advisory Panel
- Member, NMIT Equine Degree Curriculum Committee

RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Sue Markwell
Victorian winner

2005
It all began when I went to the second Women on Farms gathering, at Sea Lake in the Victorian Mallee. I hadn’t been to the first gathering, but at the second I met women whose experiences resonated with mine as a member of an extended farming family doing it tough, who loved the land but was frustrated by the lifestyle and the stereotype of ‘the farmer’ always being a bloke. I went to the gathering as a farmer’s wife and returned home a farmer.

Since April 1991 my journey has followed the road of community development, particularly for women in agriculture and rural communities. I was convenor of the 1993 Tallangatta Women on Farms gathering. At the same time I joined the steering committee that formed what is now Australian Women in Agriculture. I also became inaugural chair of the Upper Murray AgCare Rural Counselling Service management committee.

In 1995 the coordinator of the Tallangatta Community Education Centre asked me to develop and present a program for rural women’s leadership training. This highly successful three-day event, Step Out and Make a Difference, was a trigger for a number of women to step out and take on leadership roles in their community or industry. It was always one of my ambitions to ‘write the manual’ for others to be able to run a similar event or series of classes.

For the next 10 years I continued to farm with my husband and to be involved in community development. My activities extended to state leadership of the rural counselling groups and continuing development of Australian Women in Agriculture through its committee and as newsletter editor for five years.

In 1991 I had also learnt that it is OK to be ‘political’. I joined the Victorian Rural Women’s Network Reference Group, and this led to a whole new world of understanding the political processes of providing advice to government and policy development. This in turn led to further opportunities, among them the Victoria Women’s Council (1996–97), the National Forum on Women in Agriculture and Resource Management (1997), the Victorian Advisory Team on Women in Agriculture and Resource Management (1997 to 2002), the Women in Rural Communities Advisory Group (2002 to 2005) and the first, second and third International Conferences for Women in Agriculture (in Melbourne, Washington DC and Madrid respectively).

Participating in the Rural Women’s Award enabled me to attend and graduate from the Alpine Valleys Community Leadership Program. I’m still writing the Step Out and Make a Difference manual. It hasn’t progressed far because I have been busy doing my leadership training, serving my community as chair of the Tallangatta Community Education Centre management committee, and being president of Australian Women in Agriculture. In this last role I attended the National Rural Women’s Summit in 2008, and I represent Australian Women in Agriculture on the National Rural Women’s Coalition. I attended the Prime Minister’s 2020 Summit, the National Rural Women’s Summit and spoke at the 2008 launch in Lae of the Papua New Guinea Women in Agriculture Development Foundation.

The need for accessible, affordable and appropriate training in good governance, political processes, community development and leadership will always exist while there are women living and working in rural communities. And if these women are to be able to step out and make a difference in agricultural Australia with confidence in their skills and knowledge, there will always be a need for initiatives such as the RIRDC Rural Women’s Award.

• Centenary Medal, for services to women through community-building initiatives
• Who’s Who of Australian Women, 2009
My Rural Women’s Award project focused on gaining a greater understanding of the key consumer demand barriers for the Australian native produce (or fledgling ‘bushfood’) industry, from the perspective of both raw produce and value-adding. Not surprisingly, the primary barriers to demand were revealed as a lack of information—about the products themselves, how to use them, and how to even find the information—as well as shortcomings in the availability, consistency and quality of the products and produce.

Since winning the award I have been fortunate in the opportunities that have become available to me to continue to help my industry, expand my network and augment my skills. I was honoured to be able to assist in the establishment, over about two years, of the peak Australian representative body for our industry, the Australian Native Food Industry Limited, or ANFIL, and then serve as one of the founding directors for a further two years. This involved drawing on my specialist corporate governance–related knowledge, skills and experiences from a completely different industry to guide and educate a group of talented people, to enable them to make informed decisions that would affect the long-term strategic direction of ANFIL. These people were generous in sharing their own experiences, which further expanded my knowledge of different aspects of the industry. During this time, I also continued to pursue my other full-time professional career in the financial services industry, which involved mentoring and facilitating the development of women and men, both young and more mature.

In mid-2007 I chose to step outside my comfort zone to explore new opportunities. I took up part-time employment in the utilities sector. Here, I was able to apply my professional experience and knowledge in a completely new industry, which has itself broadened my horizons and given me additional confidence that my skills are not industry specific.

My ‘spare time’ has also been put to good use. I have attended various short courses covering a range of areas (food handling, export, liquor licensing, web design, and marketing) in order to extend my small business knowledge and skills, as well as participated in strategic planning initiatives in my local community and taking on external directorships. Ever conscious of the need to continue to ‘practice’, I have used my professional skills to help my partner expand his international software engineering service and consultancy business.

My original business, Boofanugs, has been transformed from a small value-adding enterprise into different entities, each of which has a distinct target market. Although Boofanugs still makes its gourmet products, it no longer distributes them; nor does it deal in the raw produce market. Instead, I now manage the Australian Produce Company, which is a specialist Australian native providore with clients throughout Australia and internationally. Through this entity I am able to continue to promote my chosen industry and offer solutions for customers and producers. In addition to this, I manage the Naturally Australian Company, which promotes various wonderful value-added products from throughout regional Australia, including the Boofanugs range.

There is still some way to go before my vision—that Australian native produce and products become part of our Australian cultural identity—becomes a reality. Nevertheless, with important developments and advances occurring almost daily in the industry, a growing interest in our products and, more importantly, the consistent entry into our industry of younger generations eager to learn, that reality is becoming ever more likely.
Born on a small farm in England, I grew up in Western Australia, in and near the hills surrounding Perth. My extended family has strong pastoral links, and this initially inspired my interest in rangelands. My childhood dream was to run a property: I have in part fulfilled this through my career.

My most recent role has been as General Manager—Corporate Development with one of Australia’s largest vertically integrated beef and cattle companies, the North Australian Pastoral Company. This role brought with it five main areas of responsibility: continuous improvement, compliance with legal and other requirements, human resource management, internal communication, and external and public relations. I developed and implemented management systems to ensure the continued environmental integrity and quality of beef and cattle produced by the company and helped the company gain ISO 14001 certification for environmental management.

With the support of the Rural Women’s Award bursary I travelled to the United Kingdom to study the extent to which agriculture contributes to rural communities’ development by being responsive to consumer needs and developing efficient, effective and sustainable supply systems. I also discovered there are considerable differences in how foreign trade in beef affects producers’ and consumers’ behaviour in both Australian and British markets.

I am dedicated to the adoption of innovation and technology in rural industries and, in turn, to managing the social impacts of change. I have a strong commitment to the involvement of young people in rural planning, as well as the development of training avenues for all generations involved in rural industries. I have held the position of secretary and remain a director of the Future Farmers Network, a not-for-profit organisation that aims to keep young people in rural industries abreast of career and business opportunities and in touch with one another. I also have a strong interest in practical ways of sustainable living for both rural and urban people.

Before becoming General Manager—Corporate Development with the North Australian Pastoral Company, I was Property and Environmental Planner with the company, Land Management Extension Officer with the Department of Natural Resources, and Co-ordinated Natural Resource Monitoring Officer with the South West Strategy, the last two positions based in Charleville, Queensland. I have a Bachelor of Science degree in natural resource management from the University of Western Australia.

At present I am on maternity leave, caring for our first child, Alice.
The past should be a springboard, not a hammock.

My husband, Jim, and I have been involved in olive growing for 12 years. We were the first people in our area to recognise the great potential for diversity in our region and to plant olives. Our region, the Limestone Coast, is now renowned as one of the great olive-producing regions of Australia. Our farm-management business has also grown considerably: three new farms have come into our care, one of them owned by an Indonesian family who are passionate about Australia’s clean, green environment and about producing nourishing food.

Early last year Jim and I decided to plunge further into the olive industry (and debt) and plant another 80 000 trees in a high-density format on our Longridge property. As I write this, we have finally reached the planting stage, and our farm has all manner of equipment and people busily at work helping us make our dream come true.

I am still enthusiastically involved in the state and national olive associations. I am now in my seventh year as Olives South Australia president and my fifth year representing South Australian growers on the board of the Australian Olive Association.

My goal was, and still is, to market olive oil to the world. Back in 2006 we formed a steering committee to look at joint marketing ventures and find out how such a venture might help South Australian growers. Out of this, a group called Encounter Olive Australia was formed; it continues to thrive. This year the Olives South Australia committee and I are looking at ways of helping growers in the bulk oil sector. Various strategies have been discussed, and we are making good progress with our ideas. At the national level, I was chair of the National Restructure Committee and am pleased to report that we successfully achieved our goal of creating a much more unified structure for the Australian Olive Association and the state branches.

In order to achieve my goal of seeing Australia recognised domestically and internationally as a producer of high-quality extra virgin olive oil and olive products, I realised we needed to have all olive growers ‘singing from the same song sheet’ and financially contributing to projects. In 2008 we employed a consultant to help Olives South Australia introduce a voluntary contribution scheme under the Primary Industries Funding Scheme Act. This involved putting together a presentation, consulting nearly all the olive growers in the state, meeting major olive processors, and responding to concerns raised. The Voluntary Contribution Regulations were gazetted in February 2009, and the new system will be in operation for the 2009 olive season. I will shortly sit down with my committee to formulate five-year and one-year plans to help us achieve the goal of ‘marketing olive oil to the world’.

The Australian Olive Association is doing fantastic work on behalf of all olive growers in relation to some inferior imported oil and our reputation as quality producers overseas. We have developed a national code of practice and launched a new industry brand, Australian Extra Virgin.

Coping with the demands of our olive grove, our farm-management business and the various committees and boards I am on at the same time as raising four enchanting children has been challenging. I am fortunate to have an excellent husband and a wonderful mother, who has helped out over the years with child care and daughter care (me) when needed. Our eldest son, Tom, is now at Adelaide University studying mechatronic engineering; Harrison is in year 11; Lachlan is in year 8; and our daughter, Taylor, is in year 5. Life continues to be chaotic, funny and interesting, and I wouldn’t have it any other way.

Winning the Rural Women’s Award gave me confidence, reason and encouragement to get out there and find markets, promote our great product, and educate people about the virtues of extra virgin olive oil. I have been a speaker at many events—even at a doctors convention in Adelaide, where I was able to talk about all the health benefits of extra virgin olive oil. Encouragingly, most of the doctors were already aware of how beneficial it is. But there is still so much to do, and I look forward to seeing my industry go from strength to strength.
I grew up on a sheep and cattle property in the Western District of Victoria. One of three girls with a mother who was actively involved in all aspects of farming operations, I have been involved in farming from the time I was old enough to open and shut a gate. So began a lifelong passion for agriculture.

In my final year at school I studied Environmental Science, which began to awaken me to the importance of agriculture being sustainable. After completing my studies—a Bachelor of Agricultural Science (Hons) at Melbourne University—I was fortunate to start work on Kangaroo Island, as the island’s first soils officer and first female extension officer. I am now the senior soil and land management consultant with Rural Solutions SA and with my partner, David, run a sheep and cropping property on the island.

Since 2005 I have completed my Rural Women’s Award project on ‘life balance’, which allowed me and a group of island women to investigate the supports and the skills required to determine life’s priorities and to reach a better balance between the many facets of our lives. The group is still going strong and has involved many new people since its inception.

Life has also been ‘exciting’ since 2005: I have travelled to Peru, India and Bhutan and worked hard to ensure that Kangaroo Island was drought declared in 2007. Along with this work came the running of workshops and field days to support landholders and heavy involvement with the Department of Primary Industries and Resources South Australia (PIRSA) response—from livestock assessment and coordinating fodder requirements to mental health support—to the devastating bushfires of December 2007, which burnt out almost 20 per cent of the island. I am still involved in numerous industry organisations, such as the Agricultural Bureau, Agriculture Kangaroo Island (the peak primary producer body on the island) and natural resource management committees. I have also taken a role on the island’s hospital board in order to extend my community activities.

The award and the networks that resulted continue to have an amazing impact on my life and have certainly broadened my views and aspirations.
My story is rather unusual in that, instead of my daughters inheriting my business, my husband and I and our eldest son inherited theirs.

My husband and I have been in the vegetable industry most of our lives. Initially we owned a business that sold hardware, irrigation products, chemicals and tractors to growers. After we had had four children we decided to grow vegetables ourselves. Our business expanded to the point where we were renting several properties, so in 1980 we decided to consolidate and buy one property. We found suitable land and water 5 kilometres from the town of Gingin, north of Perth. The soil was heavier than we had been used to, which was what we wanted, and the quality of the water was extremely good. This would be our Shangri-la. We were very naive, though, and soon experienced difficult growing conditions. A new business venture came along, so we left Gingin for three years.

We returned in 1987 and started a new life. Gourmet vegetables had started to appear and become trendy. Different-coloured carrots, beets, turnips and radishes were grown. Then came colourful and strange-looking lettuces. Initially the lettuces were for decoration on the side of a plate, but as cafés and al fresco restaurants became popular so did these lettuces, and the demand for mixed salads increased.

In 1996 one of my daughters started to cut lettuce leaves for a customer of mine. The demand for the leaves exceeded expectations and she persuaded her sister to join her and form The Loose Leaf Lettuce Company. After two years of building their business and reputation the girls decided to go on a world trip, and we inherited the business from them.

The business has grown from producing 200 kilograms a week, in 1996, to 17 tonnes a week. We service our customers twice a day five days a week and then again on Sundays. Sometimes only a few hours elapse between harvesting, delivering to a customer and being on a consumer’s plate. We have been innovative, too, purchasing and building machinery specifically for our food processing and our farming practices. At present, we employ 42 people, 35 of them being from our local community and 7 are international backpackers. Of the 42 people, 11 are employed part-time, 7 are casual and the remainder are full-time. Our ages range from 17 years to 72 years. My business was one of the first vegetables growers, in Western Australia, to achieve an environmental accreditation.

With the Rural Women’s Award bursary I was able to visit other salad growers and processors in New Zealand, France and Holland, to learn about their growing circumstances and the difficulties they faced, such as shortages of water and labour.

The award has also given me the opportunity to promote the fresh vegetables of Western Australian and also that of our nation. It has also given me a voice to encourage others to ‘just have a go’. Winning the award has brought recognition to our community of Gingin and to the vegetable industry in general. We are not just market gardeners: we are vegetable farmers!

Additionally, my peers have come to recognise the knowledge and the qualities I possess, to the point that I am now president of VegetablesWA, the peak body for vegetable growers in Western Australia.

I have been amazed at myself and the reception I have had after speaking to and meeting people from all walks of life. ‘To be told that I ‘inspire’ is incredible. I love my job, and I want to portray it as I see it. Achieving a lifestyle!
In 1996 I began a hobby natural skin care business because I was becoming increasingly concerned about the many chemicals used in skin care products and the multinationals’ exploitation of women’s fears and insecurities in relation to ageing. My vision had been to create a sustainable manufacturing and export business that would use the region’s locally grown produce and provide employment opportunities in the south-west town I lived in. In 2003 I engaged in the business full time and began the research needed to achieve organic certification for my products. In 2004 Elemental Skin Care was the second skin care range in Australia to achieve internationally accredited organic certification and the first Western Australian range. During the business’s most successful period, I was employing five dynamic, committed women who were all on salary-reward packages that gave them shares in the company. Participating in the Rural Women’s Award brought me much-needed publicity and was integral to my securing a number of overseas contracts.

Over the years I learnt much about the ‘tyranny of distance’ and the importance of timing when striving for market success. The release of Elemental Skin Care into the Western Australian market took place at a time when the market was not ready for the prices that needed to be charged for an organic skin care product. East coast ranges were becoming very successful, but Elemental was too undercapitalised to break into that market. Although we managed to gain access to some of the Asian markets, we faced the same problem we did in Western Australia: the price was too high and the lack of consumer understanding of 'certified organic' was hampering our marketing.

In time, the term ‘organic’ became a very successful marketing tool in Western Australia, leading to the release of a number of skin care ranges that were described as ‘organic’ but did not have certification—and not necessarily any organic content. Lack of legislation to prevent this misleading marketing meant that products of this kind could be released into the health-food shop market much more cheaply, exacerbating the problem for ranges such as Elemental.

In late 2007 we switched to what was a more successful marketing strategy, releasing a practitioner’s range for beauty therapists and completely withdrawing from the health-food shop market. By this time, however, my enthusiasm for my Elemental journey was waning; burn-out was getting me down. The beginning of the economic downturn in Asian markets in 2008 led to the loss of two contracts, at which point I decided to sell the company.

I have since relocated to an ‘ecovillage’ in the Currumbin Valley in Queensland. With two other women I run a cafe based on traditional and slow-food cooking methods. We are in the process of establishing an organic food cooperative and developing networks throughout the valley in order to use as much locally grown produce as we can in our cafe and through the cooperative. We use our passion for the food we cook to educate people about nutrition, organics, sustainability and the true value of food, which is that it brings us together as family, friends and community.
I am a principal of Clearwater Fisheries, a fish-production operation that focuses mainly on the southern rock lobster. Over the years I have been active in my industry and my local community and have held the position of Tasmanian Director of the Women’s Industry Network Seafood Community.

I also coordinated the Tasmanian rock lobster industry at the Wooden Boat Festival, the 20th Anniversary Rock Lobster Dinner. More recently, I set up my own direct marketing business, Lobsters Direct, which couriered fresh lobster, courtesy of Australia Post, to any centre in the country. But 2008 proved a disastrous year: I was forced to close down Lobsters Direct, and we are only now getting back on track.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition was to see the Tasmanian rock lobster industry expand and diversify into new markets and become a viable, sustainable industry. My award activity involved further research into marketing and product commercialisation, along with two study tours to tap into the expertise of others involved in the industry. My study tours—to Sydney to attend the Seafood Directions Conference and then on to Western Australia and New Zealand—were wonderful. The big lesson for me was that no matter what industry you are in the difficulties and challenges are the same. ‘Thinking outside the square’ and finding innovative ways of marketing are what make the difference.

If I were asked what was the main thing the award has given me—in addition to discovering a wonderful group of women who participated in the Australian Institute of Company Directors course—I would sum it up in one word: confidence. The award has given me confidence to forge ahead and, despite the hurdles, to keep going and not be afraid of failure.
At the time I participated in the Rural Women’s Award I had been voted state president of Rural Youth Tasmania and had a number of aims for that organisation, including ensuring that its membership remained stable and that it continued to be a vibrant organisation leading the way for other rural youth groups around Australia. This was reflected in my award project, which involved exploring the strategies other rural youth–based organisations overseas—namely, Young Farmers in the United Kingdom and Macra ne Ferme in Ireland—employed to attract and keep young people in agriculture and maintain strong, energetic organisations.

The award enabled me to take a short study tour, which gave me better insights into programs run by these like-minded organisations and that could be adopted in Tasmania. The project led in part to some initiatives within Rural Youth Tasmania and partnering with Tasmanian Women in Agriculture on a number of proposals, such as the Super Drivers on Rural Roads program and the signing of an agreement with Tasmania Together to strengthen rural communities.

Overall, the award afforded me a fabulous opportunity and assisted in my own development and that of an organisation that has had a major influence on me. Since handing over the role of state president I have remained involved with Rural Youth, but as time goes by my participation is diminishing.

My main interests now concern being a director and company secretary of the Deloraine and Districts Community Bank, the Chudleigh Agricultural and Horticultural Society, and local netball and basketball associations. I enjoy being involved in my community and believe that the more you put into your community the more you will have returned to you.
I have worked in the Northern Territory crocodile industry for the past two decades, being involved in all aspects of crocodile farming, from hatchlings to feeding and nutrition, breeding and production, and the marketing of skins.

Don’t not do it because you don’t know if you can. Just try.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition was to see my industry recognised internationally as one that is efficient and sustainable and a major supplier of crocodile skins on the world market. Australia’s crocodile industry is still in the development stage and is very small in comparison with our overseas counterparts in South Africa and Thailand.

Winning the award allowed me to extend my knowledge of the domestic industry and its practices and of world markets for crocodile products and worldwide production methods. Although I am confident that there are new export market opportunities out there for crocodile products and by-products, my research has led me to conclude that identifying and securing those markets and establishing relationships with potential new customers will take much more time and effort.

Three years ago I resigned from my position as manager of Crocodile Farms NT in order to establish a consultancy, including working with Indigenous crocodile enterprises. My efforts led me to conclude that the Northern Territory industry was too small to sustain a viable consultancy, so I took up a position with Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife, working in the area of permits and concessions in the business operations unit. I have recently taken a position on the Natural Resource Management Board, which is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments. I am responsible for managing grants and funding for sustainable enterprises.

I have found it very interesting working on both sides of the crocodile industry in the Northern Territory—that is, in industry and now within government. This has given me a much broader understanding of the business and the importance of working together and communicating to secure a bright future for the industry.
Since 2005 our lives have been very exciting in many ways. In my Rural Women’s Award application I noted that, although working for the Northern Territory Agriculture Department was rewarding, the culture of the organisation was not receptive to the idea of biological farming being extended to industry, even though some industry members were already embracing the principles and needed greater guidance. I was making progress in increasing their awareness, but in the interest of my clients and my own personal situation (with two young children) I felt it was best to start my own consultancy business. Thus Bare Essential Agricultural Resource Management, or BEAR Biologics, born.

My journey has involved learning more and more about our soils and production systems and about the people I have had the pleasure of working with. Having been exposed to the principles of holistic management whilst on a cattle station in the Kimberley in 2002, I was eager to do the course. I finally managed to do so with Clair O’Brien and her family on their property Coodardie, at Mataranka, south of Katherine. With the practical elements of the course being observable right there working on their property, my lessons were far more profound. We began our ‘Kan Do’ project during this time, and the learning journey since then has been immense.

The aim of Kan Do is to show the principles of holistic management by an easily replicated demonstration site model that can be of varying sizes, depending on the stock and the management team’s situation. Biological diversity is observed, measured and recorded both above the soil (visual assessment, photo library and journalling) and below (soil food web analysis). This way we can quantify what effect the management system is having on the soil, pastures and herd health. In 2007 the Kan Do team began working with the Lachlan catchment in New South Wales and, encouragingly, thanks to lots of negotiating and networking, plus some federal funding, 10 sites have been born. Our goal is for the project to extend nationally.

The core of the holistic training for me was the Decision Making Process Module, and I was keen to give other women in business an opportunity to be exposed to a life-changing experience—for that is what it is. With the aid of a Federal Women in Agriculture grant, the Northern Territory Agricultural Association, and holistic management educator Helen Lewis of Inside Outside Management, I was able to facilitate the running a several decision-making workshops for women in agriculture and supporting industries in the Northern Territory.

I have also been familiarising myself with the subject of carbon emissions and carbon credits because I want to help people involved in agriculture receive economic rewards for good management of soil health. In 2007 I attended Dr Christine Jones’ workshop in Western Australia at which the first ‘dollars for soil carbon stored’ project was launched, and I hope to add that aspect to all our Kan Do sites.

I am now about to embark on another journey of self-discovery: we have chosen to sell up, leave the Northern Territory and travel throughout Australia while I home-school the children. We will be looking for a new place to live, whilst enjoying the many learning experiences our great country can provide.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
2006
Participating in the award ...

Kate Schwager
Mary Howard
Yvonne Jennings
Cate Bell
Martha Shepherd
Ann Radke
Heather Baldock
Roxanne Prime
Bev Logue
Di Holly
Heather Chong
Cheryl McCartie
Janette Hintze
Pippa Krafft (Clarke)
If there is no light at the end of the tunnel you have to go down there and turn the bloody thing on.

—Sara Henderson

My award ambition was to take the Rural Towns Package to communities across New South Wales, as a means of promoting the importance of agriculture to rural communities and attracting tourists and, with them, much-needed revenue for rural areas. The package is essentially an easy-to-use web development program that builds small town websites in a user-friendly way and at minimal cost. My objective was that the websites would be established by rural women, who have an intimate knowledge of their communities, the towns, the businesses and the people, while offering them an alternative income source.

To date, eight rural town websites have been established as a result of the package—Cobar, Narrabri, Moree, Trangie, St George, Hughenden, Mungindi and Wee Waa—and other towns are interested. The websites have proved extremely successful for the towns involved: Wee Waa and Narrabri both have recorded 45 to 55 advertisers and have gained good revenue results, and all sites have generated revenue over and above the costs involved.

The Rural Towns Package has been the catalyst for a number of good outcomes. It has provided the opportunity for a new business venture and an alternative income stream for a number of rural women. It has brought the communities involved together by promoting the towns to a larger and previously unknown audience. It has initiated networks and conversations between people inside and outside the communities. And it has brought new investment and tourism into the towns and the broader regional community.

Personally, the award led to a dramatic improvement in my public speaking, mentoring and teaching, and leadership skills. It has also brought me credibility as a leader in the wider community and the cotton industry, as well as improving the financial prospects of my business.

We have been able to diversify the package to include website hosting, development and design, email hosting and domain registration under the umbrella of Webteam Australia. We are the Australian arm of a wider community of website developers, using the prize-winning HTTP Suite, a content-management system provided by UK-based Ligante Ltd. Businesses, networks and rural towns can all use the same system. Our team members are located in rural New South Wales, Norway, the United Kingdom, Ireland and India.

The next stage is the launch of the Southern Cross Communities site, which is scheduled to take place in 2009. This site will for the first time link the towns and communities involved to other towns in cyberspace. It will become a showcase for rural towns, with the objective of promoting the large variety of agricultural industries in Australia.

• Diploma in Rural Business Management, Tocal College
• Finalist, Business Enterprise Awards for New South Wales, 2006 and 2007
• Silver Award for design of the www.narrabri.net website

I am the marketing person for Webteam Australia, a website development business owned by fellow Rural Women’s Award recipient Ruth Quigley, from Trangie. After eight years as the publicity officer and secretary of Wincott and three years as president of the local chamber of commerce, I relinquished the reins to concentrate on the Webteam business.

The Rural Women’s Award recipient is Kate Schwager from Narrabri in New South Wales.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Mary Howard
New South Wales runner up

I can make a difference if I honestly try.

In March 2006 I was accepted as a director with the Hawkesbury–Nepean Catchment Management Authority. Initially, this meant lots of reading and evaluating and learning, but the appointment has allowed me to continue my prior involvement in total catchment management. I am passionate in my belief that the sustainability and productivity of aquatic ecosystems depend on good management of entire catchments.

Networking and promotion of wild-harvest fisheries in New South Wales led me to become accepted as a director (New South Wales representative) of the Australian Women's Industry Network Seafood Community, which has further expanded my knowledge and skills. There is much to be done in New South Wales to network the seafood industry, and time continues to pose a challenge for me.

In 2007 I submitted an abstract to enter the Australian Water Association's Enviro 08 conference and exhibition. My abstract, entitled 'Aquatic ecosystem productivity is reliant on water managers and sustainable cities', was accepted as a poster presentation, but after I had completed my paper the organisers invited me to speak at the conference. This experience again increased my understanding of catchment management, the evaluation of wild-harvest fishing, and the impacts on those fisheries of land-based development. I have since been invited to speak at several functions and look forward to talking to members of the Country Women's Association in 2009.

I am a subcommittee representative with the Western Sydney – South Creek Regional Irrigation Business Partnerships, which is a group associated with the Cooperative Research Centre for Irrigation Futures, based at the University of Western Sydney. The Hawkesbury–Nepean catchment supplies water for the city of Sydney and its suburbs, and South Creek is one of the most polluted waterways in the Hawkesbury River system.

The 2008–09 prawn-harvesting season in the Hawkesbury started late but has been very productive and is expected to produce harvest figures not seen for several decades. Additionally, rain in the catchment below drinking-water dams has been very promising in the past 18 months, and my time at work has increased as a result.

I am also chair of a committee devoted to developing housing for the aged and disabled in my local village, Wisemans Ferry. After eight years we have finally started to make progress, and we hope land will soon become available and the concept of building a house for the elderly and disabled in the area will become a reality.

- Advanced Certificate in Aquaculture Production, 1998
- Australian Science Network Aboriginal cultural awareness training, 2007
- Water Recycling for Agriculture and Horticulture Applications course, 2007
- Speakers Bank program, Speak Up!
My Rural Women’s Award ambition—SOAR (Step Out, Aspire and Reflect) with Support—is a women’s leadership program that recognises not only the incredible potential of rural women but also the reality of the demanding environment they operate in. The SOAR with Support project benefits our local rural women by offering them the opportunity to grow, learn and lead through the delivery of the SOAR program, which provides a systematic yet flexible support network. The project allows women who are not actively involved in their community to develop personally as well as give something back to their community. It offers leadership training and experiences in a supportive, encouraging and non-threatening environment locally, regionally and in capital cities. On completion of the SOAR program participants will have advanced their knowledge of community development practices, local services and supports and will have rural leadership opportunities and greater overall self-awareness, capacity and confidence, as well as expanded personal support networks.

The award bursary enabled me to travel to Canada in 2006 to attend the Rural Development Conference, where I learnt of many innovative and creative community development practices. In 2007 I also travelled on a community development study tour through South Africa and on to the fourth International Women in Agriculture Conference. In 2008 a partnership between Australian Women in Agriculture and Swan Hill Business and Professional Women obtained a grant from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. A project management group, made up of women from the two organisations plus the Mallee Sports Assembly, the Country Women’s Association, the Koori community, the Victorian Community Engagement Officer (Women, Drought and Climate Change), Local Logic Place and Swan Hill Rural City Council has devised a great program and is working to bring it to completion in 2009, when we will have a week-long festival of women’s leadership. The program began with a two-day SOFT (Shaping Our Futures Together) retreat run by the New South Wales Rural Women’s Network. We have 18 wonderful women of diverse backgrounds, cultures and ages participating in the program and another three women per participant supporting them.

The award gave me standing in a conservative rural community where women are seen as supporters, not leaders. This was the beginning of the development of a public profile that helped me do well when I was a candidate for the local government elections.

The combination of the award, sitting on the Women in Primary Industries Advisory Panel, and becoming a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors gave me a sound knowledge base and the confidence to stand up publicly and say that not only is it OK for women to fill leadership roles but that there are also many able women to fulfil this role. When I do yet another guest speaker ‘gig’, I say I am beyond pussy-footing around this subject; I also deliver a deadline on when we will have more women in leadership roles.

Now that I have been elected to a second term as a local government councillor, with overwhelming community support, I have further opportunities to ensure that we have greater representation of women in local government and in senior management. What was that Hilary Clinton misquote? Something along the lines of ‘There is a special place in hell for women who do not take other women with them’. I want and need other women working with me so I can do my best and so we can do our best.
I have been involved in the fishing industry for the past 30 years, working as a deckhand, boat builder, accounts clerk, process worker, export manager, and logistics and human resources manager. From 1985 my business grew from being a husband-and-wife outfit to a medium-sized operation specialising in carp products for both the domestic and the export markets and employing up to 18 staff.

May your dreams and reality never be too far apart.

My commitment to a sustainable future for the fishing industry and to the role of rural women is evident in the positions I have held—among them as board member of the Women’s Industry Network Seafood Community, Consolidated Fishermen Pty Ltd, the Fisheries Co-Management Council and Seafood Industry Victoria. The fishing industry has become a leader in adopting and implementing food safety regulations, and I have undergone training and am an accredited associate food safety auditor.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition involved further study of food safety and practical experience in order to achieve full accreditation as a food safety auditor, which would allow me to move beyond the seafood industry to other agricultural sectors. In 20005 my ambition was achieved and I became accredited as a Principal Auditor Food Safety Scheme.

Since I participated in the Award my life has changed greatly. The drought has had a dramatic effect on my business: where once we were exporting European carp for human consumption to the European Union and Israel at the rate of about 30 tonnes of processed product a week, today the business employs only one other person and the business is mainly involved in working with the Department of Primary Industries and the Catchment Management Authority on the movement of fish from the waterways as they dry up.

I now work with a third-party auditing company full time, working in the areas of HACCP (hazard analysis and critical control point) plans and auditing fish, meat and poultry. This has been one of life’s learning curves for me as I travel around Victoria and see the way the drought has changed so many people’s lives and the impact of the lack of water on the vast, changing landscapes.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Martha Shepherd
Queensland and Australian winner

My Galeru story began in 1997, when my partner, David Haviland, and I purchased a 4.5-hectare bare pasture block in the Sunshine Coast hinterland. Our intention was to combine environmental regeneration with a high-value niche enterprise based on the fruit of native Australian rainforest trees, which we planted as an orchard.

By 2003 we had enough fruit to begin marketing a range of value-added gourmet bakery products and fruit sauces, with the unique flavours of our primary crops—two rainforest lillypilly species, Syzygium leuhmannii and S. fibrosum—which we trademarked as rainberries and raincherries.

Initially we sold our products online and via local farmers’ markets and had a tremendous response. What we did not expect, though, was the number of other people who, having seen our value-added products, were also interested in growing these native trees.

It was obvious there was an opportunity for a larger business, but I could not envisage a model whereby a group of small growers could combine—unless we bought their fruit and took on the risks and financial obligations of processing, packaging and marketing the product.

The Rural Women’s Award bursary enabled me to research a new collaborative business structure, the value-chain business model, for its application to small, high-value niche products such as ours. With expert mentoring, I studied other agribusiness value chains, met with prospective grower partners, and developed a financial and legal structure for a small group of growers to join us and so create a larger business entity. In September 2006 we formed Galeru Pty Ltd.

With added skills and expertise, as well as greater economies of scale, Galeru has been able to engage a marketing agent, achieve full HACCP certification and develop a new range of shelf-stable products that are sold to the high-end food service market both domestically and internationally.

The award gave me the opportunity to learn a great deal about value chains, which, I believe, hold the key for many farm businesses—particularly in peri-urban regions where subdivision has created many small blocks of valuable farm land that are not viable for traditional crops and business models. It also gave me new opportunities to research agri-food innovation for peri-urban regions and I’ve been invited to present my paper Peri-Urban Innovation: Features of sustainable agricultural enterprises for Southeast Queensland at the upcoming International Society for Systems Sciences Conference.

The award prepared me to secure an In-Market Experience Scholarship to investigate new processing technologies and market opportunities for our native fruit. As a guest speaker at numerous events, guest lecturer on value chain management and agri-business at the University of the Sunshine Coast and University of Queensland-Gatton I have greatly enjoyed sharing this story and its learnings, and I have developed many new relationships that I will carry with me always.
To strive tirelessly for the conservation of Australia’s native flora and to thus leave the world a better place.
To accomplish great things, we must not only plan but also believe.

Sustainable agriculture and viable, vibrant rural communities are two of my passions, and I am fortunate that my lifestyle allows me to be involved in both, providing the opportunity to meet many people, stretch my horizons, and make valuable contributions.

With my husband, I have been a broad-acre dryland farmer for over 30 years, although the recent run of severe drought years has added extra challenges and new meaning to ‘dryland’ farming.

Winning the Rural Women’s Award has opened many doors for me and offered many opportunities; more importantly, it has given me the confidence to contribute at a higher level. My award project of running six forums on genetically modified crops, with five highly qualified speakers presenting independent information on various aspects of genetic modification, gave my confidence a further boost.

I joined the South Australian Advisory Board of Agriculture in 2006, moved onto the executive in 2007, and am now also treasurer. Board membership allows for involvement in meetings at various levels, representation of my region, the opportunity to prepare submissions to government, provision of guidance on various agriculture-based projects, influencing policy making, and networking with people throughout the state.

During 2008 I renewed my links with the South Australian Community Builders Program, standing in on occasions for the state facilitator at the introductory retreats. My other community development and tourism involvement is voluntary, and I have been involved in numerous projects and events over many years. One of the more recent projects was the establishment of a local visitor information outlet: I am a member of the management team and the trainer of over 70 volunteers who staff the venue seven days a week.

My many and varied interests have resulted in my being asked to be guest speaker at functions in my region, usually to speak about leadership and my particular journey but also about encouraging volunteerism in rural areas.

The severity of the current drought and its effects on all sectors of our community compelled me to convene a crisis meeting of local people representing various demographics and with links to different organisations. A drought counsellor and a mental health worker accepted my invitation to take part. From this original meeting others followed, working groups were formed, and actions identified and acted on, all of which helped support individuals, businesses and the community as a whole.

Although I have always lived with a ‘can do’ attitude, my Rural Women's Award has certainly nurtured that attitude, increased my confidence and skills, introduced me to some wonderful friends and networks, and allowed me to extend my contribution to agriculture and my region’s rural communities.

Member, South Australian Partners in Grain Reference Group and the South Australian Genetically Modified Crops Advisory Committee
South Australian convener, Producers Forum
Branch secretary, South Australian Farmers Federation
I am an artist, and my visual research during the past five years has revolved around representing women in a rural setting. My exhibition ‘Feminisation of the Bush’ was shown in a number of venues, including at the Cleve field days. Works have been included in a touring art exhibition and published in reviews and art magazines.

I have been a partner in a rural enterprise for the past 26 years and have served my local community as president of the Wharminda Branch of the Country Women’s Association and with numerous school, church and charitable organisations; more recently, I have been on the Western Board of Country Arts SA.

Four years of drought in the past five years have seen our local communities lose financial, social and personal resources. Dryland farmers are naturally resilient, but this has tested even the hardiest. One of the greatest disappointments has been to see entire generations lose heart and take up a life that no longer includes agriculture. This is particularly concerning because of the relatively high average age of farmers in Australia.

We recently had 45 millimetres of rain, so, although it came at a time that is useless for our cropping program, once again optimism and hope for the future are rising. As the older people are fond of saying, ‘It always rains after a dry spell’.

Like the members of so many farming families, I was employed off the farm during 2008, working as a youth development coordinator with the local health service. This has been a good outlet for my energies during this trying time.

I have enjoyed the extended network that participation in the Rural Women’s Award has afforded me and the insights into the diverse nature of agriculture in Australia. It is encouraging to see rural women continuing to contribute so much to our communities. Now, as always, it seems to fall to the women to maintain the social fabric and heart of the country. Change is being forced on us all, and we need to continue to move forward and evolve if we are to have a meaningful and viable future.

—Confucius

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step

Advocating for rural women through the arts
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Bev Logue
Western Australian winner and Australian runner up

My story began with 80 tonnes of unsaleable canola and the emerging awareness of carbon management.

Always look for the silver lining.

The property we share-farm, Riverside Sanctuary, is an eco-tourism farmstay; the owners, the Porter family, operate the farmstay and we, the Logues, farm 8000 hectares of wheat, lupins and canola. Investigation of the farm’s carbon footprint led to the prospect of using canola seed grown on the property for our own fuel.

My brother-in-law set up a ‘backyard’ biodiesel processor using the canola we were unable to sell, and soon my husband, Phil, had developed a dedicated biodiesel processor in the old shearing shed. The benefits for our cash flow, the environment and our machinery meant we were targeting 100 per cent biodiesel to replace fossil diesel within three years. The main impediment was the lack of crushing facilities in our northern Wheat Belt area. The crusher processes the seed into oil and meal, and the oil is converted into fuel in a process called ‘transesterification’.

So the idea was born to form a cooperative of about 50 farmers to make 3 million litres of biodiesel from 8000 tonnes of canola. The benefits would be local employment, using the meal from the seed as stockfeed, and independence of international fuel prices. At the time Hurricane Katrina struck this was very topical. We look on biodiesel as a ‘seed in, fuel out—year in, year out’ scenario and argue that the cost of the seed is to be taken over the long term.

Development of the business plan was supported by my Rural Women’s Award bursary and the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Food. The department also set up its own small seed crusher and biodiesel processor. The support we received from the department, local ABC Radio and Western Australian politicians was fantastic. At the federal level, however, an already complicated system for biodiesel fuel excise was exacerbated by the passing of the fuel tax credits legislation in July 2006. This is still affecting the regional development of smaller biodiesel facilities throughout Australia.

But our plan for a northern crushing facility in the mid-west of Western Australia was mostly affected by the 2006 drought. Our production of canola fell from 1500 tonnes in 2005 to 7.47 tonnes in 2006 and next to nothing in 2007. With confidence in canola production at an all-time low, our goal of self-sufficiency was not to be achieved. The benefits of the award continue, though, with the knowledge that, like others before us, we have demonstrated that local fuel production can be a reality. We salute those who continue to grow, process and use their own crop.

The award has given me many opportunities to be a guest speaker and to encourage others and help them understand the processes, both physical and administrative, involved in biodiesel production.
Life is too short to spend in a box. Don’t be afraid to step out of your comfort zone, try to do something new. You’ll never know what you can achieve for yourself or others unless you give it a go.

I am a typical rural woman, passionate about most things rural, having lived my whole life on the land. I married a fourth-generation Western Australian farmer, and we have three children, 3500 sheep, six dogs, two cats, four horses and an array of rescued wildlife. Like many people involved in agriculture, we’ve experienced pressures in the past decade, particularly the difficulties confronting the grain and wool sectors and the detrimental effects of this on our small rural communities.

I’ve always believed that diversification and alternative industries could aid the sustainability of both farms and the broader community. Fear of failure, lack of support from others and lacking the courage to ‘step outside the box’ are often the biggest hurdles. I chose to jump some of these hurdles and hope that over the years I have encouraged others to do the same.

Twenty years ago being fourth dog in the yard wasn’t enough for me. I wanted to explore and try new things, add value to our very traditional farm business, and maybe help others do the same thing. I started dabbling in small alternative rural enterprises, with mixed success. First, I planted 1.2 hectares of native flowers, by hand with a garden trowel, and we proceeded to have two of our driest years on record; as a result, few plants survived. Next came ‘techno colour’ free-range pigs, which were good for several years but the market wanted boring, solid colours, such as large whites, and lots of them. Then 10 years ago my husband caught the diversification bug. We had three emerging farmers on our hands and only 1600 hectares, which wasn’t enough to employ and feed us all. So until recently we ran a successful aquaculture business using underground salt water to grow barramundi, a venture that provided an income additional to that from our wool and grain enterprises.

It has been through these endeavours that outside opportunities and experiences have arisen, enabling me to gain numerous new skills and meet supportive and like-minded people. Participating in the Rural Women’s Award was one of those experiences. All have contributed to giving me the confidence and support to initiate the Hidden Treasures of the Great South, a project that has brought together seven shires and 14 rural communities to form a promotional and development tourism partnership. Through the partnership our communities are slowly but surely seeing themselves in a different light, which is bringing back a sense of pride, confidence, enthusiasm and self-esteem. Tourism is just one industry that is compatible with primary industries, and it has the potential to create new and diverse opportunities for our communities. I will continue to encourage others to step outside the box and experience something new whenever the opportunity presents itself.
My business started in 1999, when we moved to Tasmania from Singapore and started planting apricot trees. Since then our own orchard has expanded and we now manage other trees—in total, about 150,000 trees. In the season we employ 250 to 300 people for picking and packing; this number is expected to grow to about 400 when all the trees are in full production.

I am Chief Executive Officer of QEW Orchards, a 50,000-tree apricot orchard that produces over 1000 tonnes of fresh apricots each year for the domestic and international markets, and until recently I was Chair of Summerfruit Australia, the peak industry body for growers of summer fruits in Australia. I have also been involved with a number of industry organisations, among them the Rivers and Water Supply Commission, the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research Advisory Board, and the Women in Horticulture Export Working Group.

Seasonal labour is recognised as problematic. The labour shortage is the biggest threat to horticulture’s prosperity. There are many new plantings of trees in Tasmania—mostly cherries—and for the stone fruit, tourism and retail sectors a major shortage of labour is forecast for the future.

The Rural Women’s Award bursary enabled me to travel to other countries to see how they deal with the labour problem and how they import short-term labour to cover the shortfalls. The award also meant that people in the state and national governments knew I was interested in this area, and I was invited to comment on the trial scheme that has been introduced.

The award has also given me many opportunities to be a guest speaker—a wonderful chance to encourage and help others turn their ideas into reality. It has been an amazing journey for me: the award has helped me grow both personally and professionally. I heartily recommend to everyone that they take the time to be involved: the personal insights and the rewards are amazing.
Since 1996, when I moved with my husband, Theo, to Tasmania from New Zealand, our family dairy farming business has grown from contract milking and share-farming to owning our own farm. We expanded our business by increasing the cow numbers, buying land, and taking on another share-farming job. Because we supply raw milk, our business growth has depended on the growth of our own skills and our understanding of the external factors that influence our bottom line as well as the changes we need to make to keep the business productive and profitable. Hence the idea of once-a-day milking for the entire season.

Our focus has always been sustainable farming practices, with a pasture-based system and a whole-farm approach that embraces innovation to improve our systems and the management of our valuable natural resources. We also need a flexible workplace in order to meet our family’s needs and those of our employees.

The opportunities presented to me since 2006 to encourage and help others have been very rewarding: when visitors come to the farm I am happy to tell them about what we do and why and about the pitfalls and successes. Continuing with my goal of once-a-day milking has allowed us to analyse the business and continue to modify the things we do to ensure we have a pleasant workplace and home for us and our employees.

Participating in the Rural Women’s Award has helped me engage with many rural women and their families and to learn about and understand what affects people in all areas of agriculture and in rural Australia generally. I have been able to develop my skills and confidence, to improve our business and to help our employees further their careers in the dairy industry. I have a strong belief in the sustainability of dairy farming and, understanding the importance of research, extension and development to our industry, I continue to be involved in projects and activities that benefit dairy farmers and families in rural communities.
I am a pioneer of the Northern Territory cut flower industry, having been one of the original group of growers selected to trial heliconias and gingers as a commercial cut flower some 20 years ago. I was instrumental in establishing the Northern Territory Horticultural Association’s Cut Flower Group, which I became president of in 1999, and I have been its spokesperson for a good many years.

The Northern Territory cut flower industry is still relatively new, having been introduced as a commercial proposition by the Department of Primary Industry in the mid-1980s. The industry is dominated by two species, the heliconias, which originated in Central America, and the gingers, from South East Asia.

My Rural Women’s Award Project involved a study tour to the 4th International Symposium on the Zingiberaceae Family, held in Singapore, to meet with experts in the field and commercial growers from around the world, to learn of the latest advances in breeding and production, and to identify new varieties for importation into the Northern Territory. The conference proved extremely valuable: I met numerous delegates involved in the collection and cultivation of gingers; I also discovered a new variety of ginger flower, a Costus spicatus flower of yellow colour, called the Indian head ginger, that had not previously been available in Australia and that I subsequently imported and planted out. As part of my project I also visited flower markets along Australia’s eastern seaboard.

Our flower farm is progressing well, and I have found the contacts I made during my trip to the Singapore symposium extremely useful. I have expanded our production into a completely new variety of gingers and am delighted with the result. The discussions I had about this ginger were reinforced during my market visits, when I realised that very few of these flowers were in the market but they were highly sought after. Another new variety, which I imported from Hawaii, has established well and we are bulking it up for increased production.

The Australian Institute of Company Directors Course has been of great value to me, helping me understand more about the responsibilities of working on committees. In this context, I have just been re-elected president of the Northern Territory Horticultural Association.

What you do will come back to you threefold.
Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move
—Ulysses—Alfred Lord Tennyson

With a strong belief that long-term success of rural businesses lies in strong economic management closely affiliated with environmental and social responsibility, I recently opened my own agribusiness consultancy, Northern Pastoral Operations, specialising in national livestock identification scheme (NLIS) support and training for the cattle industry, business administration services, and natural resource management planning for pastoral businesses.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition was to study business and change management and further investigate the successes of businesses in other industries. This included potentially participating in the Macquarie University Graduate School of Management’s Leading Change Program and travelling to Alice Springs and East Gippsland to study the environmental management systems adopted by those regions’ beef groups.

I was able to attend the Australian Institute of Company Directors course courtesy of RIRDC, and have found that experience to be a great asset in my business administration work, our off-farm investment strategy (which is currently on hold due to global influences) and my involvement with the Future Farmers Network as member and Northern Territory Director.

Over the last couple of years I have also been the Katherine Show Cattle Section Coordinator and Treasurer for Campdrafting for Kids (a not-for-profit organisation raising money for charities such as Katherine School of the Air Special Needs area, 65 Roses and Dr Helen Phillips cottages). I am currently completing further postgraduate study, but my most important recent achievement is the arrival of our baby daughter, now 9 months old. I have a new-found respect for mothers.

My experience in the Northern Territory pastoral industry over the past 10 years, encompassing both the economic and environmental aspects of production has further strengthened my belief that the long-term success of rural businesses lies in strong economic management closely affiliated with environmental and social responsibility. My personal vision is for vibrant, successful rural communities in regional Australia, particularly in the Northern Territory.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award 2007
Participating in the award ...

Eleanor Cook
Fiona Kliendeinst
Deborah Bain
Vera Fleming
Sonya Maley
Linda Jaques
Abi Spehr
Natasha Mooney
Pam Lincoln
Pia Boschetti
Rachael Treasure
Gail Menegon
Tracey Leo
Tina MacFarlane
Aim high, and if you fall short you still end up in front.

I am a partner with my husband in an organic beef cattle operation and a strong community advocate for the Coolah district in north western NSW and for regional communities.

We were successful in securing $1.5 million worth of community development funds which has contributed towards community developments such as the main street beautification, a gallery, and fitness centre. I believe that rural towns and agriculture are intrinsically connected, with towns providing vital services and infrastructure to rural industries along with flow on employment opportunities, and at the same time nurturing a social environment for the community.

My Award ambition was to embark on the discovery of community trusts. I wanted to seek out a model for community managed trust so small rural communities can receive bequeaths and tax free donated funds from individuals, families and businesses given to their community of choice. These funds would alleviate the enormous pressure of fundraising efforts for a community’s diverse range of needs. The trust would contribute to the long term survival of some rural communities and boost agricultural districts.

Trust models used elsewhere have provided communities with a successful investment strategy and an opportunity to attract investment from outside the region, into rural industries and their communities.

The Award gave me numerous opportunities to be a guest speaker encouraging others to turn their ideas into reality. I have grown in many ways especially in improved confidence. I have been accepted into the ARLP (Australian Rural Leadership Program Course 15). The program will contribute further to my personal development, to my competence and to my maturity as a leader... The ARLP networking and strong connections between other leaders will I believe become a valuable resource.
My passion for the wool industry goes back to my childhood growing up on a merino farm at Emmaville, near Glen Innes, on the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales. I am now a wool producer, and I work full time with my husband, Paul, and three children on the family’s superfine wool property at nearby Uralla. The quality of our sheep’s wool has attracted national recognition.

I hold a Bachelor of Agricultural Economics degree from the University of New England, and I have had corporate experience at Solutions Marketing and Research Group, the Biological Wool Harvesting Company and ABRI Breed Plan. My frustration at the lack of availability of wool garments and woollen materials resulted in my becoming involved in the Australian Wool Fashion Awards and working with the Sheep Cooperative Research Centre and CSIRO, trialling wools for quality performance.

I have started up a small business selling made-to-measure woollen garments created from 100 per cent Australian wool and produced by local women, who themselves produce the wool. My latest project is a woollen clothing fashion line, Luv2wearwool. Recently I travelled to Italy to attend Milan’s Fashion and Apparel Show, where all the international mills showcase their runs. I also took the opportunity to visit a number of wool-processing mills and fashion houses. The trip was an amazing opportunity to meet the best in the wool-processing business and to learn about their demands of us as wool producers.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition is to grow my business, to expand into larger premises and to employ more rural women. Within five years I plan to have a fully operational studio, with five full-time seamstresses, two cutting and finishing staff, and a public showroom full of beautiful wool and wool-blend materials and garments. My longer term ambition is to have a fully vertically integrated operation, complete with scouring and processing mill, dyeing, spinning, weaving and finishing facilities, and a full-time staff of over 150 women designing, sewing and promoting Australian wool to the world.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Deborah Bain
Victorian and Australian winner

FarmDay erupted into my life in 2006. I was a wool and lamb producer from western Victoria, a mother of three and a recently retired pharmacist, and the idea of renewing links between urban and rural families was truly a new direction for my family. The FarmDay pilot project in Victoria had been such a success that I was urged to make the project a national one.

Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it.

Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now.

—Goethe

The vision behind FarmDay is to foster among urban Australians a greater understanding of farming through a farming family sharing their life with a city family for a day of fun, friendship and understanding. In this way the city family would gain an insight into how the modern farmer operates and how farming affects our daily lives.

I lacked the money, skills and networks to take FarmDay national, but then someone told me about the Rural Women’s Award. With my mind focused on the financial benefit of the bursary, I applied for the award. (Little did I envisage the learning curve I was about to experience!)

The bursary and the Australian Institute of Company Directors course were instrumental in enabling me to manage the complex task of setting up the new business and taking it national.

Winning the Australian Rural Women’s Award was exciting and enormously valuable. It gave me a new platform from which to speak about FarmDay and allowed me to engage with networks that had previously been unknown or unavailable to me. The skills I acquired during the year were put to good use: I met and discussed ideas with local communities, state and federal politicians, corporate business people, rural women’s groups, the media, farming groups and farmers around Australia. The results of having won the two awards were visible in the overwhelming success of the first National FarmDay, in May 2007, and the event’s even greater success in 2008.

I have kept my local community informed about my experiences through regular engagements at community groups such as Lions, Probus, Rotary and Zonta; I have also been a guest speaker at many events around the country—exhilarating, educational and exhausting!

Through these experiences I have seen myself grow in knowledge, confidence and self-fulfilment. The financial reward is important, of course, but it is insignificant alongside the opportunity for personal growth and the opportunity to give back to one’s local community and, in the case of FarmDay, the larger agricultural community.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Vera Fleming
Victorian runner up 2007

I am the manager–director of our company. I keep tabs on the operations manager, my husband. I consult the strategist and the corporate memory, my mother. And I am held accountable to my shareholders, my three girls.

My husband and I are fruit growers in Victoria’s Goulburn Valley, where we grow a variety of fruits, such as cherries, apricots, apples and pears. Four years ago we decided we needed to do something more to stay viable and so looked into a number of options for our business. We investigated buying more property and getting bigger, which we decided not to do because we would still be competing for market share with fellow fruit growers. We contemplated setting up a pack house, which again we decided not to do: this would involve a huge financial commitment. We thought about selling up. And we looked at value-adding.

We decided we would sub-contract the packing and marketing of our fruit and would explore value-adding. There has been minimal value-adding in our region, and we saw huge potential to offer gourmet fruit products to both the locals and the tourist trade.

We now have a small cellar door from which we sell a variety of gourmet products, such as natural fruit juices, fruit wine, fruit liqueur, jams and the most delectable product—my caramel- and chocolate-coated apples. I have spent more than three years working to perfect these apples and have tried to take out a patent on the technique because I am keen to commercialise the process.

Being involved in the Rural Women’s Award gave me contacts and networks I can call on. I am fortunate to know a fellow award recipient who lives close to my region, and I have found her a great sounding board. Her knowledge and support have been very valuable, and I know that if I just give her a call she will restore my confidence in what I am doing. Living and working in a rural area can be isolating, and even more so when you are doing something different such as value-adding.

The business is slowly growing and I keep taking over more and more floor space in my husband’s shed. We have a registered kitchen and have all the relevant licences. The business is attracting local groups as well as buses from metropolitan areas.

- Bronze medal, apricot wine, 2005 and 2006
- Gold medal, white-fleshed nectarine wine, 2006
- Bronze medal, cherry liqueur, 2006
- Victorian Government Leadership Bursary, 2002
My life as an alternative farmer growing Asian food crops and living in Far North Queensland took a major change in direction when I began to research the possibilities of value-adding to the sugar cane crop through using alternative technologies. In 2005 I founded Resis Australia Pty Ltd to commercialise a range of new functional health-food products from the sugar cane plant; this was made possible through a unique milling system called ‘cane separation’.

Cane separation differs from traditional milling in that it allows access to clean, separated streams of fibre, juice and waxes, all of which have significant potential for the growing functional foods industry. I used the Rural Women’s Award bursary to travel to the birthplace of this technology in the United States and conduct a series of interviews with the previous developers of the technology and associated food-processing companies that had participated in overseas projects in the past. The study tour also incorporated a comprehensive assessment of technical improvements, constraints to commercialisation and many other aspects relevant to introducing and commercialising the technology in Australia.

Information from the study tour allowed me to identify knowledge gaps and initiate a number of well-focused research projects, strategic alliances and commercial interests—for example, a collaborative research program with James Cook University on applied membrane technologies and functional fibres; securing strategic investment and collaboration under a heads of agreement with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries to underpin exploration of the functional health benefits of natural sugar cane products; participating interest from some of Queensland’s largest food companies; and securing of government funding for early commercialisation through the AusIndustry Commercial Ready Plus Program.

The first commercial factory is expected to be operational by the 2009 sugar cane crushing season, with an integrated supply chain ensuring financial benefits flow across all sectors.

The award has been of tremendous personal benefit and has given me the opportunity to communicate my message to a far broader audience than was previously possible. It has greatly assisted in increasing my profile in the sugar cane industry as a woman leading innovation. I have also gained confidence in myself through this exposure and as a result have overcome some longstanding barriers in relation to leadership. Finally, the networks gained through my association with the award and past award recipients have led to collaborative efforts to improve the outlook for regional Queensland through value-adding for natural health and nutrition.
Never give up. It doesn’t matter what is thrown up at you there is always a light at the end of the tunnel.

Thirty years ago my husband and I left Tanzania in East Africa, looking to Australia as the last frontier. And it has taken as long as that for us to finally reap some rewards from our business. We pioneered the Australian coffee industry in 1978, in Mareeba in northern Queensland. We planted 120,000 arabica coffee trees, and after five years the first commercial harvest was ready to be mechanically picked by the world’s first coffee harvester, which my husband, Nat, designed. Then along came the ‘recession we had to have’ in 1986, with interest rates at 22 per cent, and we were put into liquidation, losing everything—our house, our plantation and our factories.

‘Never give up’ sprang to mind. We borrowed more money, bought another block of land, cleared and contoured it, and planted 50,000 coffee trees. The fifth year after planting, 1996, the plantation was looking good. But the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries insisted on spraying for a papaya fruit fly. No research had been done on the effects of the combination of chemicals used, and the result was the destruction of 50,000 coffee trees. Our entire livelihood was gone again.

But we never give up. Another 25,000 coffee trees, planted on new ground, are now producing wonderful multi-award winning coffee: in the past three years we have won 10 medals, gold, silver and bronze. Jaques Australian Coffee is successfully trading online at: www.jaquescoffee.com We even had an order from Davis Station in Antarctica.

Our new coffee nursery now has 50,000 coffee seedlings ready for planting out in 2009. Demand has been outstripping supply and we need to expand. Our coffee is sold in major supermarkets in northern Queensland, and our online shop is exceeding expectations. We have also valued-added by creating a tourist destination that includes a cafe set in beautiful tropical gardens (which I won first prize for as the best commercial garden in the district in early 2008).

Part of the tour of the plantation involves a 12-minute film in an air-conditioned theatre, showing the family story and the coffee process. Then visitors place their pin on our world map: we had 60,000 visitors last year. After that there is a guided tour of the coffee harvester, a taste of the red coffee cherry in season, and then a safari around the plantation in The Bean Machine, taking in the wet and dry processing units. We have just installed $300,000 worth of state-of-the-art equipment custom built for us in Costa Rica.

The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation was impressed by my project of growing caffeine-free coffee; this resulted in an offer of funding that enabled me to travel to South America, do further research and meet numerous contacts. There is still work to be done to increase the yields of the caffeine-free trees, and to date there is no commercial plantation. But the coffee tastes just like the real deal.

Participating in the Rural Women’s Award has encouraged me to achieve and afforded me recognition I would not otherwise have received.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Abi Spehr
South Australian winner and Australian runner up

My move from the city to South Australia’s Limestone Coast to marry was a journey that opened my eyes to the cultural, business and transitional hurdles involved with family farming and succession. The relationship between mother and daughter-in-law particularly interested me. I have a very good relationship with my mother-in-law, but it was a work in progress back then.

The lack of quantitative and qualitative research data on relationships between mothers and daughters-in-law became the inspiration for my Rural Women’s Award project—to write and publish a book on the subject, using the provisional title Working Her Out. My activity involved a fact-finding tour of rural and regional South Australia, interviewing women involved in family farm businesses about their relationships, preparing a book for publication, and developing and facilitating an education program based on my findings. Rural industry in Australia will also benefit from previously unavailable research results.

I believe that sustainable and prosperous agriculture is not just dependent on economic factors but is intrinsically tied to environmental and social factors. I also believe that family relationships, along with succession planning, are crucial to the long-term stability and sustainability of family farm businesses. My project has opened up the potential for conversations within the family farm unit and provided government departments and community groups with a research document that will facilitate understanding of the pressures facing family farms.

With the support of the award I have developed wonderful networks and friendships and honed my public speaking and facilitation techniques. I also presented a paper at the 2008 Monash Social Science Conference in Prato, Italy, as a result of which an international project or paper was proposed, with representatives from India, New Zealand, Canada and Germany. My paper is also being used by Partners in Grain and others for workshop programs and policy development.

I hope the soon-to-be-published book will act as a catalyst for improving family farm dynamics and the viability of farm businesses.

Dance like nobody’s watching; love like you’ve never been hurt. Sing like nobody’s listening; live like it’s heaven on earth.

—Mark Twain

• Presenter, ‘Working her out’ research paper, Monash International Social Science Conference, Prato, Italy, 2008
• Board member, South Australian Rural Financial Counselling Service
• Invited participant,
I have been involved in the South Australian wine industry for the past 15 years and during that time have seen the fortunes of the industry and its people dramatically change as a result of having to cope with severe water shortages, an oversupply of grapes and softer export markets.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition was about producing an alternative wine product in order to use the large amount of uncontracted grapes available in the Australian wine industry. The sparkling grape juice I envisaged would help turn around the fortunes of growers and the industry by offering a new beverage and in effect creating a new market for our grapes. But the outlook has changed since 2007: with a very different climate, I decided not to pursue the project, although I still have a shed full of the samples I made.

I have instead concentrated on my business, called Natasha Mooney Wine Architect, which I started in 2007. I offer winemaking and associated services to the wine industry, both in Australia and internationally. I really enjoy this work, and since 2007 I have consulted in South Africa, Chile and Portugal, an amazing but busy experience. I have embraced the chance to travel and work, but my children understandably have different ideas, so I am now concentrating more on work in Australia.

I now work for a number of clients in the Barossa, Adelaide Hills and McLaren Vale regions. I am expanding my business slowly and relishing the process. At present I am looking for a mentor, to help me keep up with the growth in my business.

Always remember that a hearse does not have a luggage rack.
Tread lightly on the earth.

In 1993 my husband, Murray Gomm, and I made what is now known as a sea-change, swapping our comfortable inner city life for the challenges of living on the land near the beautiful town of Albany. Our venture into the world of viticulture has brought us many rewards, most of them not monetary.

A few years after establishing ourselves on the outskirts of Albany, we planted our 3.3-hectare vineyard with the intention of becoming the region’s first organic wine producer—a feat we have achieved despite the difficulties of growing grapes in a cool climate. We also became very involved with the community and have thrived on the sense of connection one gains in a country town.

My passion for food—particularly locally grown fruit and vegetables—which stems from my work as the region’s community dietitian during the 1990s, was the driving force behind my desire to establish a farmers’ market in Albany. Along with a couple of other local women, who were also keen advocates for local food, and a swag of people involved with the then recently formed Great Southern Region Marketing Association, I spent many months planning the development of the Albany Farmers’ Market before its inauguration in April 2002. Since that time the market has gone from strength to strength under the management of the farmers and producers themselves. In early 2008 it was named Australia’s best farmers’ market by Vogue Entertaining & Travel magazine.

Receiving the Rural Women’s Award bursary allowed me to embark on a new series of markets, to bring the joy of the farmers’ market phenomenon to the smaller towns of the region. The strategy of establishing a series of authentic farmers’ markets rotating through various towns under the name ROSS—Regional, Organic or Sustainable and Seasonal—was not only a way of helping more producers and farmers benefit from selling direct but also a way of promoting community and agricultural sustainability.

ROSS was launched in January 2008, after months of planning and hard work by a dedicated management committee that I led using skills and knowledge I gained as a result of participating in the Australian Institute of Company Directors course. With the advent of winter, though, and the effects of drought, the ROSS market was put into recess in June 2008, until the availability of seasonal fresh produce increased. Several keen producers who were unaffected by weather, seasonality and other factors decided, however, not to wait until the recess was over and established their own seafood-focused market, which opened in July 2008 in Albany.

The award has enabled me to ‘have a good shot’ at replicating the success and sharing the benefits of farmers’ markets with smaller communities in the region. The fact that the ROSS project did not come to fruition as envisaged has been a great learning experience for me—especially since it made me truly aware of the realities of agriculture in a world in which climate change is having an effect.
I manage a pearl farm at the Abrolhos Islands, near Geraldton in Western Australia: this is believed to be the most southerly place in the world to commercially cultivate black pearls.

Although my farm is dedicated to the production of black pearls, we have recently successfully trialled the production of high quality larger-than-average Akoya pearls. The Japanese produced Akoya pearls is in serious decline as a consequence of pollution and disease, so the implications for the Australian pearl industry are huge and feedback from export markets is very encouraging.

My RIRDC Rural Women’s Award ambition was to produce Akoya pearls of a grade that has not been seen in the Japanese market for several years. I want to further explore the techniques used for Akoya production in Japan and the opportunities for both Akoya and black pearls in the Japanese and European markets.

In 2007 our company along with another pearling company received a grant from the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation to assist in our Akoya program, focusing on the impact of environmental conditions on pearls production. The results from our research will be available in a publication and will assist many aquaculture projects in our region.

I have met many fabulous women as a result of participating in the award and it has given me greater confidence in myself and greater enthusiasm to take on new opportunities. One of the award outcomes for me was attending the National Rural Women’s Summit in 2008 in Canberra and exhibiting my pearls and jewellery to a national audience.

We have now opened a gallery themed store in my town of Geraldton. Our shop is called ‘Latitude Gallery’ and we are primarily there to promote our locally grown pearls from the Abrolhos Islands, but have now expanded our product range to include pearls from Broome, Australian Diamonds and Opals and a collection of artwork from renowned Western Australian artists. Our jewellery is made up of a collection of designs by jewellers who we encourage to have the freedom to create their own wonderful masterpieces. The key to our gallery’s success is employing people who have been in the jewellery trade for over 20 years, but still offer a contemporary outlook and honest personal customer service, this leaves me to concentrate on the task of growing my pearls and developing other markets.

Some of our unique marketing lines include: ‘have you got your girl a pearl’ and ‘see Pia-the girl who grows the pearl’.

One particular goal of mine was to provide an original creative product with an affordable price to cover a wide range of budgets, thereby using a variety of metals from silver to gold to platinum. I now stock my product in five other outlets throughout Western Australia.
I am a southern Tasmanian sheep farmer, a breeder and trainer of working dogs, a published author, and the mother of two children. For the past eight years I have facilitated working dog education schools in Tasmania, and during the winter months I work part time as a handler of truffle sniffer dogs.

My novels, *Jillaroo*, *The Stockman* and *The Rouseabout* deal with topics pertinent to contemporary agriculture—such as succession planning, rural youth, and life on the land generally—and to date have sold over 100,000 copies. Through my writing I aim to inspire young people to choose a career in agriculture and to educate city-based readers about modern life in farming families.

My vision is to improve the way women and men, livestock and working dogs interact, so that stockwork is more efficient, economical and enjoyable for people in agriculture. My Rural Women’s Award ambition was to create a book and DVD on working dogs and women who work them, to be titled *Wise Women and Hot Dogs*—natural dogmanship. The project was to be based on my own journey with my husband, John, to finding a happy working relationship with livestock and dogs. The aim was to empower and educate people—particularly women in the livestock industry—to improve their dog- and livestock-handling skills for the benefit of their farm businesses and families.

The book has become a reality: the e-book *Wise Women and Hot Dogs* was officially launched at Agfest—Tasmania’s premier field day event—and downloadable dog training video clips are in the final stages of preparation.

One exciting piece of news is that my lifelong dream has become a reality: at last I have a flash ute, a Holden V8—not exactly environmentally friendly but you’ve got to keep working hard, playing hard and reaching for your dreams. Speaking of working hard, I’m on another tight publication deadline of October for my next book, *The Cattleman’s Daughter*. 

---

**RIRDC Rural Women’s Award**

**Rachael Treasure**

**Tasmanian winner**

**2007**

- Author, *Jillaroo, The Stockman, Rouseabout and Wise Women and Hot Dogs*
- Facilitator, working dog education
- Handler, truffle sniffer dogs
My husband, Lyndon, and I have bred and raced standardbred horses for 20 years. The increase in prize money for all forms of racing in Tasmania, and the strong support of government and Tote Tasmania, saw us buy more mares to increase the number of our standardbred brood mares to eight. Our aim is to produce yearlings for the sale held in Launceston each January.

The best sermons are lived, not preached.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition was born out of a desire to gain skills and obtain valuable information about the nutrition and presentation of yearlings for sale and the harness-racing industry in general. We sold two colts at the inaugural sale in 2007, and this year we sold four colts for an average of $9000 each.

Sadly, our stud master and dear friend lost his battle with leukaemia in December 2007. It was during his illness that Lyndon and I discussed our future in relation to the standardbred breeding industry and the breeding of our own mares. In December 2008 I did a course in artificial insemination of horses and stallion handling at Glenormiston College, with the initial intention of inseminating our own mares.

The loss of the biggest standardbred stud service in Tasmania and the added concern of several breeders prompted Lyndon and me to decide to further our involvement and register as a stud. This breeding season we are standing from the United States the fastest standardbred stallion to come to Tasmania, Jr Mint, collecting his semen for use at stud and for transport elsewhere in Australia. We have 100 mares on our property to be artificially inseminated to stallions standing in Australia and New Zealand. We also offer ‘foaling down’ services.

Participating in the award has opened many doors for me and gave me the opportunity to encourage others to at least consider a career in agriculture and to always follow their dreams. It also gave me the confidence to expand our standardbred enterprise—it is now the largest standardbred stud in Tasmania—and to share my experience and knowledge with others involved in harness racing.
When I am told that something can’t be done or something is too hard or complex, my instant response is to find a way. This is a personality trait I have built on in a positive way, and the [Rural Women’s] Award has supported my personal development and given me the confidence to keep working on things that are considered too hard.

Winning the award has brought with it many opportunities to be a guest speaker and to speak of our industry’s challenges. It has also given me the confidence to talk publicly on sensitive topics such as Indigenous employment and the difficulties faced by marginalised minority groups in our region—for example, many immigrants from non–English speaking backgrounds, who are now such an important part of our rural economy.

At present I am concentrating on ways of helping the people of non–English speaking background in our community gain access to help and support, so that they can adapt to the changes in government and community expectations. The award has given me the confidence to stick at hard and sometimes sensitive issues. These days, when I am told something is too hard or too complex to deal with, I just smile and stick at it.

I have lived and worked in Darwin River, 70 kilometres south-west of Darwin, for more than 20 years, and I have seen many changes in regional Australia. Urban encroachment and the mining boom have changed the dynamics of our rural communities, and the subsequent changes in community expectations have been one of the biggest challenges faced by many rural businesses.

Among the consequences of change has been the decline in the number of workers available to horticultural industries in our region. The problem of labour shortages has been something close to my heart, and my Rural Women’s Award project focused on it. Years ago, local rural people would look forward to participating in the annual crop harvest, but those days are gone.

For my project, I looked at capturing all the reasons for this, as well as profiling rural industries’ labour needs. We have been able to develop strategies to redress labour shortages and contribute comprehensive data to the development of the Pacific Seasonal Labour Scheme.

The award bursary allowed me to work closely with industry people in remote regions, find out about their industry’s labour needs and contribute to building practical solutions. Getting important data out of rural people is like extracting a tooth—it’s painful but necessary—and the bursary supported me in doing this.
I have been involved in the pastoral industry in the Northern Territory for most of my professional life—from being a jillaroo mustering cattle and mending fences to now being equal partner in a commercial cattle operation.

My husband and I are partners in Stylo Station, a Brahman cattle operation consisting of both stud and commercial cattle outside Mataranka. The station covers 100 square kilometres, and we have committed about 1000 hectares to improved pastures and small paddocks, to provide for regular rotation, single-sire mating and more efficient management of the stud.

Our ambition is to run large numbers of cattle naturally and to promote our stud cattle as capable of working in a commercial situation while maintaining their fertility. We are taking a holistic approach: we rotate the cattle at a high stocking rate through the smaller, improved paddocks, which also reduced weeds, improves the soil structure, naturally fertilises the soil, and improves the strength and natural self-seeding capacity of the pasture.

We are pushing on towards our goal of being entirely holistic and at the same time commercially viable, despite the fact that our large land area and the extremely porous nature of our soils make this very challenging.

We have been running artificial insemination programs on the property since 2004, concentrating on genetics that achieve maximum weight gain for our northern conditions while maintaining optimal structural soundness and temperament. The joining and AI programs happen during the wet season, which has posed some difficulties. Nevertheless, thanks to our holistic management practices, we are achieving markedly increased conception rates.

I travelled to the United States in 2005 to investigate the Brahman genetics on offer there. The trip was amazing—all the more so because it was my first venture outside Australia.

In 2006 we joined Breedplan, which gave us an extra tool to help us achieve our breeding objectives. In May 2006 we exhibited a bull and a heifer at the Beef 2006 Expo in Rockhampton, travelling 6000 kilometres. We wanted to see if our cattle could hold their own against the best in the country, and we came home with a third-place ribbon, much to the delight of my daughter Skye, who, now aged 14, does all the showing. In 2007 we also held our first multi-vendor bull sale in the Kimberley in northern Western Australia.

Cattle aside, I have been heavily involved in outback education and have been president of the Katherine branch of the Isolated Children and Parents Association. With Skye now at boarding school in Toowoomba, though, my days of home schooling through the Katherine School of the Air are over.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award 2008
Participating in the award ...

Ros Smerdon
Tracey Knowland
Louisa Kiely
Lisa Mahon
Lucy Mayes
Ros Smerdon
Georgie Somerset
Domenica Latorre
Yvonne Smith
Maggie Edmonds
Audrey Bird
Jeanette Fisher
Amabel Fulton
Norma Higgins
Our entry into primary production began in 2004, when my husband, Stuart, and I realised a long-held dream and began construction of a wholesale production nursery on our farm in the Byron Bay hinterland. With two large contract orders to grow advanced trees, I worked on the farm and in the nursery for two years while Stuart continued to work off the farm, managing a nearby nursery. Weekends were devoted to potting thousands of trees with the help of our three children, our low-tech set-up consisting of a bench in the shade of some old avocado trees. At the same time I took on the role of secretary of the local branch of the New South Wales Nursery and Garden Industry Association to gain a better knowledge of the industry. To help fund the building of the nursery beds, I began another small business, an online store importing and selling antique maps and prints.

In 2007 drought caused us to fast-track the completion of a substantial water-recycling dam in order to secure our nursery’s water supply. I was successful in applying for a Community Water Grant, which helped defray the cost of the 15-month project.

In 2008 the nursery expanded with new beds, staff facilities and a potting shed. We added more growing beds. With the support of the award bursary I applied for plant breeders’ rights for our first two tree selections: both gained ‘accepted’ status with Intellectual Property Australia, and marketing rights were sold to two separate promoters of Australian flora with potential ongoing royalty income. These were the first in our class-Australian Civic Tree Selections (ACTS) range launched in 2009: the realization of our vision to produce beautiful and sustainable compact Australian tree alternatives for the landscape industry.

My Bursary allowed me to attend the National Nursery and Garden Industry Conference in Adelaide, where I was introduced to major players in the industry. The bursary also supported a study tour of major advanced tree production nurseries in Victoria, including our main contract clients, to investigate tree growing methods, trellising, water treatment and much more—a great learning experience and a fine opportunity to market our product and exchange knowledge with industry members. Public speaking opportunities have allowed me to share my passion for my industry, promote the environmental and aesthetic benefits of appropriate tree planting in our urban landscape and affirm the important role greenlife plays in the future of society.

As a coordinator of Bangalow Business Women’s group I enjoy being part of a small team committed to bringing local women together: to overcome isolation and build capacity through social and business networking, public speaking and sharing skills and knowledge, in a friendly encouraging and nurturing social environment. And I in turn have gained skills and made friendships.

I continue to lobby for broader support of primary producers confronted with the impacts of climate change, believing there should be a focus on mitigation to lessen these impacts and assistance for diversifying farm-based activities. The consequences of climate change hit home in October 2008, when our own nursery was struck by a severe hail storm and the locality was subsequently declared a natural disaster area. Even more heartbreaking was the devastation for neighbouring fruit growers prompted my submission to the Senate Enquiry into the Role of Government in Assisting Australian Farmers Adapt to the Impacts of Climate Change.

Winning the award has boosted my confidence, broadened my horizons and provided inspiration and hope for the future, helping me to help my business survive and grow through challenging times. Meeting other award recipients has been a joy. It is a privilege to live in a country where the value and role of women in society are so positively supported.
All-consuming for me in the past three years have been climate change and sustainable farming. When I entered agriculture as a woolgrower 10 years ago, I studied sustainable farming practices as part of the Advanced Diploma of Farm Management at the University of Sydney (Orange), and my husband and son joined me in learning the holistic management approach to grazing. I experimented with various ways of rebuilding the depleted soils on our ‘renovator’s dream’ property, Uamby, which had been farmed hard for 182 years.

My breakthrough came through the Central West Catchment Management Authority when they chose us as one of the 10 most innovative farm families in the catchment, and I received 20 days’ training in a range of skills to do with innovative farm planning. We realised that soil carbon could be the primary indicator of progress towards soil health, reduced salinisation, water management, biodiversity, reduced erosion and climate change mitigation. The best win–win solution available.

The United Nations, NASA and the Australian Greenhouse Office agree: there is already enough carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to push the globe through the 2°C increase in temperature that will cause large-scale climate instability. The only known way to remove the CO2 is photosynthesis by trees and plants. No other current solution can do it. Clean coal, nuclear power, solar and wind power, these can only limit future emissions. And forests—even if we planted enough today—cannot reach ‘critical mass’ in less than 15 to 20 years. The Stern Report stated that we have just 10 years in which to act. The only solution that can reach critical mass in time lies with our agricultural soils.

In 2006 I co-founded the Carbon Coalition against Global Warming, to lobby government for Australian landholders’ right to trade on the emissions offset market the credits they can earn by sequestering carbon in their soils. Coalition members have since travelled widely to speak on the subject and have brought it into the national arena. We have staged two very successful Carbon Farming Conferences and have had a number of meetings with policy makers and influential overseas experts.

Our aim is to bring scientists, farmers and the city together on this important journey. We are all in the climate change boat, and we all need to find solutions together.

I recently returned from the United States, where we addressed a UN Food and Agriculture Organization Soil Carbon Consultation Meeting, resulting in a communiqué that calls for soil carbon to be included as an official Kyoto offset. We can help to change Kyoto, and there is now an international soil carbon movement to effect the change.
My partner and I began Bromley Organics in 1998. We specialise in growing certified organic herbs, and our aim is to produce the best quality available. Bromley Organics produces six dried herb crops and is one of the largest producers of dried, processed stinging nettle in Australia. In 2006 our enterprise won the Most Outstanding Dedication and Innovation in Production Management Grower Award from Southern Light Herbs, against a field of 80 other commercial certified organic herb farmers.

Our original business model was low capital investment and labour-intensive production methods, which suited our farm when we started. As we have continued to grow and develop, though, we have had to innovate and mechanise our processes.

The Rural Women’s Award bursary allowed me to travel to New Zealand and within Australia to investigate herb harvesting equipment for the small to media sized operations. As a result of our research we identified the best machine for an enterprise the size of ours. The new harvester stressed the plants less, allowing quicker regeneration times; it produced a cleaner cut with less contamination; and it reduced our harvesting time enormously. With the new machine we were able to double our volumes, so we had to expand our drying capacity to match our new harvesting method.

I am passionate about my industry and feel privileged to have been able to help others through the bursary. The publicity has resulted in contacts with other farmers and an expanded network. At two recent field days we had a very positive response to the new equipment, and other growers are now looking at buying it.

The years of drought have made it harder for primary industries and rural communities and I have recently become involved in FRRR-Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal. This organisation is making a positive contribution to assist communities achieve their goals.

Since receiving the award I have grown in many respects, most importantly in confidence and knowing I can take on anything and have a go. I understand business risk better, and this has opened my eyes to potential business opportunities. The added confidence combined with public speaking training and opportunities have allowed me to get my message across better and share information with other Australian herb growers.
A move to rural Victoria in 2003, a community leadership program, and a career change to economic development in local government opened my eyes to something that has always been close to my heart—young people developing to their full potential and its relevance in the rural context. In particular, the problem that seemed to be facing rural communities and economies was the difficulty engaging young people in careers in agribusiness and supporting industries—indeed, keeping them in the bush full stop. Young people’s perspective has always been of deep interest to me, and it seemed that the answer lay not in incentive schemes or trying somehow to convince or lock young people into staying in rural communities but in inspiring, motivating, developing and harnessing their energies, skills and passions, including their love of the bush.

I have been very active in my community and have produced two DVDs in the past 18 months, documenting community projects in which I have participated, one involving a unique community engagement process and the other remediation of a contaminated site. I have also been a member of an advisory working group for a broad-based community initiative, The Food Project, aimed at education, advocacy and consumer awareness of the origins of their food.

At a recent Victorian conference of combined rural community leadership programs, sponsored by the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation, I found that the subject of young people had been completely left off the agenda, an important oversight given the difficulty of retaining young people in rural communities. There are many short-term, often industry-specific, leadership programs for young people, but I felt there was a need for an initiative designed and led by young people and a high-level networking opportunity such as that provided by the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation. I put a proposal to this effect to the foundation and was nominated for the Rural Women’s Award.

I was delighted to receive the runner-up award for Victoria, to meet the other award recipients, and to receive such fabulous training to augment my leadership potential through the Australian Institute of Company Directors course. So far, I have not been in a position to pursue my idea of developing a youth leadership program and ideas-sharing web forum, but I have had the opportunity to contribute to a RIRDC audit of leadership programs for young people. I have also been invited to share my story and my thoughts on living out one’s ambitions and purpose at various leadership forums.

A move to Queensland lies ahead as my family explores further possibilities for living with purpose and passion from a wellness, community, economic, youth and sustainable development perspective.

---

Things turn out the best for those who make the best out of the way things turn out.

———Anon
In 2002, after the birth of our second child, I began working on the farm while my husband was away working on the orchard-pruning business. By 2004 farm-gate returns were at an all-time low for both pineapples and avocados. As part-owner of our grower-owned cooperative, Nature’s Fruit Company, I started asking questions about the organisation’s strategic direction; by September 2004 I had been asked to become a director of the company, and in 2005 I became chairperson. At this time I was also a member of the management committee for the Australian Custard Apple Growers Association and President of the Jadefruit Custard Apple Marketing Group.

Production of avocados has increased rapidly in the last few years, to the extent that supply is now outstripping domestic demand in some production windows. It became apparent that in order to maximise returns to growers we must not only develop the export and domestic markets for whole fresh avocado but also create value-adding opportunities for this healthy and nutritious fruit. Many value-added products can be made from avocado—among them salad oil, bulk food-grade oil, cosmetic oil and pet food additives.

In order to capitalise on this big opportunity in the food service sector we needed a new product to revolutionise the market. In 2007 we began trials using various technologies with the aim of developing a fresh-cut product with a refrigerated shelf life of 10 to 14 days and a shelf life after opening of two to three days. In conjunction with the trials, we used existing oil-pressing technologies to begin a commercial avocado value-adding product line. We started our Nature’s Fruit Company value-added product line with the release in November 2007 of our cold-pressed Nature’s Reserve avocado oil.

Receiving the Rural Women’s Award bursary allowed me to travel to South Africa to compare the avocado industry there with that in Australia. Of particular interest was the value-adding operation of Westfalia Estates, a recognised leader in value-added products in the avocado industry. This experience gave me valuable insights into the opportunities and pitfalls associated with avocado processing and also allowed me to develop business relationships that could be helpful in the future.

The award presented me with a huge personal development opportunity. It has also given our value-adding venture credibility and exposure to business partners that might not otherwise have been available. But the most valuable experience for me has been the growth in my confidence in my abilities, my knowledge, and the experience I have to offer. The people I have met and the friends I have made as a result of participating in the award process have been invaluable, not only as a part of my business but also for my personal growth. The value of a strong network of like-minded, positive, creative and ambitious people should not be underestimated.
Always look on the bright side of life.

I am a beef producer from Kingaroy in southern Queensland, and I have extensive networks and involvement with rural women and agricultural portfolios. I was a founding member of the Queensland Rural Women’s Network; I have held the agricultural portfolio on the National Council of Women in Queensland and Australia; and I am present a board member on the National Rural Advisory Council and the National Foundation for Australian Women.

My life has been characterised by a series of roles that have involved marketing rural and regional Australia—from my first career move out of school, which involved operating the farm tourism enterprise for my family, to regional development and a marketing consultancy promoting rural Australia. We also had a cooperatively marketed branded beef product that I managed, and I have held a variety of voluntary positions, usually with the aim of marketing ‘the bush’ and what it represents.

I know we need to communicate to children clear messages about the food, fibre, foliage and shelter we produce. Industry, the community and plenty of rural women are constantly working to convey accurate messages about rural and regional Australia to the wider community. I liken these to a library and the published books therein. My project is about having a library that arranges the information in an accessible and cohesive manner.

So, if you wanted to know how your meat, potatoes and carrots were produced, you could find out through Bush Links; similarly, if you are visiting a region you could see where regional produce is available, what events are on in the area, and what opportunities are available to you. Although I have not yet developed the portal, I still ‘have the dream’; in the meantime I continue to produce beef with my family and to contribute to a range of organisations and boards.

The Rural Women’s Award represents a wonderful opportunity to link with others, develop your plans, and take time to improve your skills. Not only do we have a highly productive and profitable sector: we are also amazingly innovative and very capable of adapting.
I live in Berri, in the Riverland, and for the past 10 years have been a lecturer with TAFE SA, coordinating, designing and delivering technology, management and business training programs tailored to the needs of the rural sector and rural women.

I have more than 18 years’ experience in horticultural and agribusiness management and more than 14 years’ experience with community bodies at the local, state and national levels, working with the rural counselling program, TAFE SA and other training bodies. I currently sit on the Regional Advisory Board to the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission and the National Association of Rural Counselling Services; I am also a member of the Rural Financial Counselling Service SA and the Riverland Multicultural Forum.

I specialise in working with the culturally and linguistically diverse population in the Riverland, and I have undertaken a number of research projects aimed at raising awareness of workforce development factors and helping women join the workforce and gain positions on regional boards. I am acutely concerned by the shortage of people and skills gripping rural and regional communities, the culturally and linguistically diverse being the group most affected. Rural women continually demonstrate their resourcefulness and resilience in establishing small businesses and generating income that is crucial to the sustainability of families and farms.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition is to explore educational programs and practices that will benefit rural women—particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds—their communities and agriculture generally. I plan to use the bursary to research successful rural business training models, both in Australia and in Europe, to analyse training systems, methodologies and resources and to identify the most successful relationships between training and sustainable business practices.

I hope my research will also be used to develop a training model that supports women in training and passing on their knowledge to others in the community and results in training programs that best meet the needs of rural women and in turn contributes to the future profitability of their businesses and agriculture.
For the past 20 years I have been involved in horticulture in South Australia, as an onion grower and industry advocate. I was the first female chair of the Australian Onion Industry Association (now Onions Australia), and I am a member of the industry advisory committee to Horticulture Australia. I am deeply committed to the sustainability of agriculture and its soils and water and have been involved in the South Australian Soil Conservation Council. At present I am a member of the River Murray Advisory Committee.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition was to go on a study tour of onion-growing enterprises that use drip irrigation in the San Joaquin Valley of California. In my view, the benefits of drip irrigation compared with flood irrigation are enormous, with anywhere between a 30 and 70 per cent water saving through efficiencies from direct application, reduced evaporation and wind effects.

I am keen to examine the practicalities of, and the problems with and barriers to, the effective use of drip irrigation, in the hope of introducing the practice to large-scale broad-acre production of onions in my region and beyond. An assurance of the most efficient water use is not only crucial to my business and our industry; it will also contribute to certainty of water supply for businesses and communities along the Murray River.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Maggie Edmonds
Western Australian winner
and Australian runner up

- Opening Maggie’s Place
- Board Member, Heartlands Country
- President, Moore River Olive Association
- Secretary, Gingin Chamber of Commerce
- Marketing a new product—Get Stuffed Ginger Spread
- Holding my life together

Keep on keeping on. In other words, consistency of effort is the single most important attribute to cultivate in a small business environment.

I have been involved in a range of farming activities for the past 25 years—from export flower and horticulture to farming olives and passionfruit, as my husband and I do at present. All aspects of our farming ventures have offered potential ways of moving the business forward, not only for us but also for others. In addition to the day-to-day farm work, my contribution has often involved bringing like-minded people together into various groups and networks.

Part of my pledge on receiving the Rural Women’s Award was to set up a retail outlet championing small producers. This I have done: Maggie’s Place @ Edgecombe Bros was set up in October 2008. I completed a Curtin University of Technology Growth Program in 2008, also as a result of the award, and in 2009 I visited Cape Province in South Africa to study farmstalls, the tradition of promoting small producers, and the farmstalls’ diverse contributions to the local food tapestry.

2008, the year of my award, was busy. Not only have I continued with my farm work and marketing our value-added products: I have also been lucky enough to talk to many groups across the country, from Port Hedland to Esperance and across to Melbourne.

I set up the first local protea growers association in Western Australia with a group of growers and went on to become president of the International Protea Association, responsible for bringing the 6th Biennial Protea Association Conference to Perth. I also established GROGs, the Gingin Regional Olive Growers Association, and organised Western Australia’s first three olive festivals, and I have recently completed a term on the board of the Australian Olive Association.

Additionally, I have been involved in the establishment of farmers’ markets—the Wanneroo farmers’ markets and more recently the Gingin ones.

Our small farm enterprise has taken us into—and now through—many hard times. It is the initiative I developed during these difficulties that has encouraged me to offer assistance to other small producers.
Better to have tried and failed than never to have tried.

My Rural Women's Award ambition focused on exploring the possibilities of giving members of our grower group, the Facey Group, more value for their membership. I wanted to explore what values were important for our members over and above financial rewards. Although I have not specifically continued with this project, I am still involved with the group.

The Facey Group is a broad-acre grower group managed and directed by growers. Our office and members are situated in and around the small Wheat Belt town of Wickepin, which is 250 kilometres south-east of Perth. I have been involved since the group's inception in 2001, being the inaugural secretary and moving up through the ranks to the position of president. Many rewards spring from the collective sharing of ideas and putting them into action through strategic planning. The personal satisfaction of working as a member of a team towards the common goal of strengthening one's local rural community is something I value highly—especially when it involves primary industries.

The primary industries environment is an exciting but challenging sector in which to work and derive an income. The rewards seem just enough to keep us hanging in there from year to year. Our farm business consists of over 3500 hectares, of which half is leased land mostly used for cropping; we also have a merino sheep enterprise. The leased land gives us economies of scale but also added risk should the season go against us. We now have our eldest son working with us, and I am keen to stay up to date with farming information and techniques.

I enjoy talking with like-minded people—people who are motivated and positive about the future of our industry. Although I am physically involved in our farming business I do have the need to extend myself beyond that for professional and social fulfilment. As a result, I am involved with several not-for-profit organisations with an interest in broad-acre farming: the Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Group with the Avon Catchment Council, the Western Australian No-Tillage Farming Association, and the Facey Group. The skills I have gained through the Facey Group have been invaluable, including staff and personnel management, strategic planning and implementation, group dynamics, project management, working with corporations through sponsorship agreements, public speaking (still working on this!) and fine-tuning the work–community–family balance.

Thanks to participation in the award, I can now add to my learning experiences the Australian Institute of Company Directors course. It has given me an insight into good organisational management and structure, as well as the skills for appropriate and proactive governance. These skills will lead to me enjoying even more my involvement with relevant industry bodies and ensure that I have a positive influence on an industry I love.
In 1997, after many years working with sheep, beef cattle and goats, my husband and I bought our own farm. We decided that rearing calves would make good use of our combined skills in paediatric nursing and stock handling. Raising 1000 calves a year was, however, not as simple as we had imagined. The very high mortality rate our calves suffered in the first 12 months spurred me to learn more about calf rearing. Initially, local dairy farmers were a source of information, but I soon realised there was more up to date information overseas, particularly in the United States.

Winning a Rural Women's Bursary in 2001 enabled me to take a public speaking course, a negotiating course and a leadership and management course at the Australian Institute of Management. These courses helped me overcome my shyness, increased my self-esteem and improved my ability to communicate. This gave me the confidence to join with a friend and convene a group of calf rearers, which ultimately became the Professional Calf Rearers Association of Australia. I was elected President of the association, which aims to extend skills and knowledge by providing educational opportunities to dairy farmers and calf rearers in the form of regional field days and an annual conference.

I won the coveted Jack Green Churchill Fellowship in 2002; this allowed me to travel to six countries to examine alternative methods of raising calves. I subsequently extended my knowledge of cattle by working as manager of the intensive grazing systems at Struan Research Centre in South Australia and as a stockyard designer before we sold our farm and moved to Tasmania.

The move to Tasmania gave me the opportunity to draw together my skills and establish an on-farm consulting business, HEIFERMAX, designed to help dairy farmers with the care of replacement heifers. Winning the Rural Women's Award gave me the chance to return to the United States, re-establish the contacts I had made, and further develop my heifer management and educational skills.

Through my business and the Professional Calf Rearers Association I will continue to encourage dairy farmers to embrace modern management techniques and up-to-date information based on sound research. This will help the dairy industry adapt to external forces such as changing market demands, economic and social pressures, and altered animal welfare expectations. The majority of calf rearers are rural women and, by improving the industry, I hope to in turn increase the skills and confidence of these women.

Life doesn’t come with a guarantee.

Winning a Rural Women's Bursary in 2001 enabled me to take a public speaking course, a negotiating course and a leadership and management course at the Australian Institute of Management. These courses helped me overcome my shyness, increased my self-esteem and improved my ability to communicate. This gave me the confidence to join with a friend and convene a group of calf rearers, which ultimately became the Professional Calf Rearers Association of Australia. I was elected President of the association, which aims to extend skills and knowledge by providing educational opportunities to dairy farmers and calf rearers in the form of regional field days and an annual conference.

I won the coveted Jack Green Churchill Fellowship in 2002; this allowed me to travel to six countries to examine alternative methods of raising calves. I subsequently extended my knowledge of cattle by working as manager of the intensive grazing systems at Struan Research Centre in South Australia and as a stockyard designer before we sold our farm and moved to Tasmania.

The move to Tasmania gave me the opportunity to draw together my skills and establish an on-farm consulting business, HEIFERMAX, designed to help dairy farmers with the care of replacement heifers. Winning the Rural Women's Award gave me the chance to return to the United States, re-establish the contacts I had made, and further develop my heifer management and educational skills.

Through my business and the Professional Calf Rearers Association I will continue to encourage dairy farmers to embrace modern management techniques and up-to-date information based on sound research. This will help the dairy industry adapt to external forces such as changing market demands, economic and social pressures, and altered animal welfare expectations. The majority of calf rearers are rural women and, by improving the industry, I hope to in turn increase the skills and confidence of these women.

Recipient, Jack Green Churchill Fellowship, 2002
• President, Professional Calf Rearers Association of Australia
• Establishment of HEIFERMAX, an on-farm consulting business

RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Jeanette Fisher
Tasmanian winner
2008
I am co-founder of and senior partner in Rural Development Services. My interest lies in understanding people and the organisational aspects of the rural sector and in working with people and organisations to foster sustainable industry development throughout regional Australia. I was the first student of rural sociology in the School of Agricultural Science at the University of Tasmania, and this paved the way for the creation of a dedicated focus on rural social research, which in turn led to the development of the Rural Social Research Group at the university.

Rural Development Services has been in operation for eight years; it provides services such as industry research and development, rural social research, sustainable business development and people development to the dairy, grains, meat, horticulture, aquaculture, wild fisheries and wool sectors, both in Tasmania and nationally. I also sit on the Federal Government’s Regional Women’s Advisory Council, a national council that offers to the Deputy Prime Minister advice on concerns in rural and regional Australia. Additionally, I am a member of the national Women in Horticultural Advisory Group.

My personal vision for agriculture is the creation of an exciting, innovative, productive and rewarding rural sector that combines prosperity with caring for its people and its environment. My Rural Women’s Award ambition involved the development of a successful business case for forming a national network of female training brokers. The network would provide to local family farm businesses opportunities to obtain personal support and assistance to help them achieve their goals; it would also offer a mechanism for funding providers and trainers to channel their products and services directly to their target audience.

The training brokerage concept, developed as part of a RIRDC Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building project, identified the potential for using grass-roots networks to highlight producers’ needs for funding and training and to then match customised training and funding opportunities to meet the needs of specific producers.

A pilot project using women as training brokers is now being rolled out through a joint venture involving Rural Development Services with sponsorship from Horticulture Australia, and it will be exciting to track the project’s progress and outcomes.
In 2006 a diagnosis of poor health meant I could take a year off work on full pay. I had thought I would take the opportunity to give up full-time work altogether, but the price of mangoes and the increasing costs of production meant I was unable to, so I now work part time off the farm.

Time. It is amazing what one can do when one has a bit of ‘spare time’. With assistance from FarmBiz funding, a group of local women got together with the idea of doing some training. Because I had the time and the skills, I wrote an application to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for funding under the Food Processing in Rural Areas Program. The application was successful, and we set about establishing a commercial kitchen that everyone can use to add value to their non-saleable produce. I was the driving force and one of the main cooks. The committee raised thousands of dollars and has created a range of products that are sold in local outlets and at community events.

The Rural Women’s Award bursary enabled me to set up a weekly ‘farmers-style’ market that provides an outlet for the products made in the kitchen and for local produce. I am concerned about the increasing number of abandoned orchards in the district, the declining returns for the remaining orchardists, and the amount of waste product that is dumped. The kitchen and the market offer to local producers an alternative that could improve their profitability.

My project is not yet complete: being obliged to undergo the full development consent process in order to use a local park and the lack of infrastructure have created a major delay and obstacle.

On a more positive note, though, the award has created many opportunities for me to be a guest speaker throughout the Northern Territory and to participate in some national forums. National television appearances have allowed me to raise the profile of the mango industry and the problems faced by mango growers. The Australian Institute of Company Directors course gave me essential knowledge, which I use as deputy chair of the Primary Industries Training Advisory Council and on the boards operating the kitchen and market projects. The award has brought publicity and credibility for these projects, something vital for their success.

All my non-saleable mangoes are now in the freezer waiting for the market to begin, so that in the commercial kitchen I can create a range of products to sell to you when you visit Katherine.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award 2009
Participating in the award ...

Kim Currie
Gillian Hogendyk
Roma Britnell
Kate Wilson
Barb Madden
Wendy Agar
Susi Tegen
Ulli Spranz
Kirsten Skraha
Doris Parker
Jane Lovell
Jane Huntingon
Mischelle Hill
Moira Lanzarin
I have spent the past 25 years working with regional producers to develop innovative ways of promoting, linking and supporting the rural sector through food and wine tourism. My career has included being a farmer and restaurateur, 10 years as a regional food and wine consultant, being the Food and Wine Development Officer for Central Ranges, catering for numerous festivals—including the Huntington Music Festival—being proprietor of the Rylstone Food Store and, more recently being executive officer for the Brand Orange project, which was established to promote the Orange region, in the Central West of New South Wales.

In 2005 I was awarded the inaugural Vogue Entertaining & Travel Audi Maggie Beer Award for Outstanding Contribution to Australian Food. Under Brand Orange, I have facilitated the establishment of Slow Food Orange; this includes the Glenroi Community Kitchen project, which provides weekly meals and cooking lessons for people in Orange’s public housing estate area, and Slow Summer, a new 10-day festival celebrating the Orange region.

I am deeply committed to primary producers and rural communities, and during the past 25 years I have devoted much effort to the belief that communities can build on a layering of relationships between farmers and consumers. The farmers’ markets I established in the Central West are a prime example of this. There is now a circuit of four farmers’ markets—at Cowra, Mudgee, Bathurst and Orange—with a template of co-management with community groups and the adoption of a national farmers’ market charter. I was also instrumental in establishing the Australian Farmers’ Market Network, hosted the first national conference of network members, and was the New South Wales representative on the network.

The farmers’ markets have returned a number of benefits, among them a valuable income stream for hundreds of farm families, bringing farmers into direct contact with consumers, helping develop new products and niche markets, and developing relationships within farming communities.

My vision is to assist in achieving dynamic regional communities by successfully integrating local produce, people and experiences, profitably and sustainably. I want to take the farmers’ market experience as a connector for farmers and rural communities to the next level. The markets have confirmed that there is huge consumer support for farmers and for quality fresh produce. The thousands of markets in Europe, many of them in the town centres, enrich communities and provide important social interaction while reinforcing the role and importance of farmers. I would like to travel to Europe to gain a greater knowledge of how farm produce is sold, distributed, consumed and celebrated. Such a study tour would extend my knowledge and allow me to further develop my professional skills and frame of reference for sustainable long-term agri-tourism systems, for my region and as an example to others.
I live on a corporately owned irrigation and dryland cropping property outside Warren in the Macquarie Valley of New South Wales. The property is owned by Auscott Ltd, is managed by my husband, Chris, as general manager of Auscott’s Macquarie Valley operations, and grows predominantly cotton and wheat. I am a qualified veterinarian, and these days my commitment to primary industries and their sustainability is reflected mainly in my voluntary work.

I have represented the Macquarie Valley on the National Parks and Wildlife Community Advisory Committee, having served on this committee for 11 years. Through the committee I have developed a strong interest in the Macquarie Marshes and in how the irrigation community could be involved in conserving the marshes. With 30 other local landholders, I helped form a unit trust to buy Burrima, a small property in the marshes, and to manage it for conservation outcomes. Burrima is now regularly visited by school, university, research and natural resource management groups for educational purposes. I am deeply concerned about the national water situation and the current enthusiasm for buying water as the sole means of achieving environmental outcomes. Some water purchasing is needed in order to redress over-allocation in some river systems, but there has been too much emphasis on this as the only solution. In my view, over time this approach will negatively affect the rural communities that depend on irrigated agriculture, without producing any real environmental benefits.

Having bought Burrima, my group, the Macquarie Marshes Environmental Trust, removed cattle from the land and set about revegetating it. The response has been spectacular: reed beds are regenerating rapidly, native plants are choking out invasive weeds, and biodiversity is increasing. Our work has shown what environmental gains can be achieved through improved land and water management. I would like to see a larger proportion of the funds currently earmarked for water purchasing being used to fund on-ground projects such as ours. In this way rural communities can be sustained and can be part of the solution.

My ideas arose from my membership of and support for Australian Wildlife Conservancy and Bush Heritage Australia. These two companies buy and manage land of high conservation significance. A third group, the Nature Conservation Trust, uses its own funds to buy properties, place binding covenants on them, and then resell them at a reduced price.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition is to tour a number of wetlands in the Murray–Darling Basin, focusing on those that are managed for conservation by non-government or community organisations and exploring the costs, benefits, problems and solutions that have been encountered with a view to applying what I learn to the Macquarie Marshes and more widely in the basin.
I have been dairy farming for the past 10 years, during which time I have been active in the industry at both the farmgate level and in leadership and decision making. Ten years ago my husband and I began share-farming; we bought our first small dairy farm three years after that; and today we own three dairy farms, employing managers on two and running the third ourselves.

We both became active in our local branch of United Dairyfarmers of Victoria. I went on to become President of the district council and a Deputy Central Councillor, and I now represent my industry as Chair of WestVic Dairy, the western Victorian industry development body that aims to advance the dairy industry in the region. I am committed to improving the setting for dairy farmers and the image of the dairy industry. This commitment has evolved from my discovery of a great industry that has given me opportunities I was unable to find elsewhere.

Despite contributing enormously to the economy, the dairy industry suffers from a poor self-image. The complexity of the businesses dairy farmers operate and the many pressing concerns they confront—from drought to genetically modified food to climate change and carbon trading—mean farmers must always keep abreast of the changing environment and its impact on the sustainability of their industry. In many cases it would seem this has not happened.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition is to find the best way into the future for the Australian dairy industry, so that it can secure profits from the milk the farmers produce. Traditionally, this has occurred through cooperatives and companies but, with only one cooperative remaining in Australia, the industry is moving into uncharted waters. I want to expand my knowledge, explore future marketing options—cooperatives and beyond—and develop an awareness campaign that highlights to farmers the changed environment and starts them asking questions and taking control of their future.
For the past 15 years I have been a broad-acre agronomist at the forefront of advising growers on sustainable agricultural practices. During that time I have moved from being a commercial sales agronomist to a fully independent consultant. I am also a partner with my husband in a 5000-hectare broad-acre cropping operation.

My main roles as a consultant are developing farm plans based on profitability and sustainability, providing to clients advice on crop rotation and variety selection, assisting with fertiliser and nutrition decisions, and providing crop nutrition and herbicide advice, disease and pest identification services, and gross margin analysis. In the wider agricultural community, I am now a member of the Birchip Cropping Group’s advisory committee and have done consultancy work for and delivered group training workshops to the group.

My vision is for growers to consistently achieve good yields through better understanding the interaction between soil, water and the crops they grow, so that broad-acre farming becomes more profitable, viable and sustainable. I believe that by increasing the soil biota and microbes we can increase the health of the soil, increase organic carbon, and so improve the general health of the soil. Despite rainfall being the main limiting factor, through better understanding their crops’ nutritional requirements and water use efficiency and tailoring their inputs to particular soil types, growers are continuing to produce remarkable crops.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition is to embark on a study tour of the United States and Canada, to gain a greater understanding of soil biology. I am particularly interested in the work of Dr Dwayne Beck at the Dakota Lakes Research Farm. I hope to use the knowledge and ideas I gain as a result for the benefit of my clients, the Birchip Cropping Group, and the region’s growers.
I am co-owner and Chief Finance Officer of Smithfield Feedlot, a 20,000 head intensive beef-production enterprise located in south-east Queensland. I am also Chief Finance Officer for Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council, and a recent graduate of the Australian Rural Leadership Program. Committed to primary industries, my community and the role of rural women, I have established a number of community groups and activities with the aim of improving the liveability of my region, as well as enhancing the dynamic of the community in which I choose to live. These include:

- “Submission Sisters”, a group of women dedicated to obtaining funding for community projects.
- The Proston Peace Festival – promoting a peace code throughout the entire community.
- A range of activities to bring cosmopolitan flair to small rural communities such as the Mirko Grillini Italian cooking classes, silversmithing and photography workshops.

My project - The Beef Industry Indigenous Alliance (BIIA) will create national partnerships between Indigenous beef producers and key supply-chain sectors through the development of a commercially sustainable cattle-feeding and training business model. I plan to conduct a pilot program between the Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council and my own business, Smithfield Feedlot, forming industry partnerships and providing on-site training throughout the beef supply chain.

Cherbourg cattle will be brought to Smithfield Feedlot for fattening. Indigenous workers will observe the feedlot processes and undergo on-site training. They will then follow the progression of the cattle through the abattoir to the supermarket to gain an understanding of the complete supply chain.

The Beef Industry Indigenous Alliance I believe will deliver a number of benefits. Among the benefits to the beef industry will be development of appropriate beef production systems to better suit supply chain sectors, improved biosecurity and livestock traceability through better management of Indigenous people's cattle and land, and an improvement to the beef industry's social image. Among the benefits to the Indigenous beef producers will be building the capacity of the people through imparting skills and fostering a culture of ownership and purpose, a greater appreciation of indigenous resources by the beef industry and the building relationships and sharing knowledge and resources with mainstream primary industries.

If the pilot is successful, I hope it will be adopted and extended throughout the beef industry, linking Indigenous beef producers across northern Australia with all aspects of the beef industry, from breeding and backgrounding to feedlotting, abattoirs, supermarkets, and the live export trade.
RIRDC Rural Women’s Award
Wendy Agar
Queensland runner up

My family own and operate Myendetta Station, an 18,000 hectare property thirty kilometres south west of Charleville. Myendetta Station is a sheep and cattle property that has been in my husband Richard’s family since 1890, and is now run as a productive rural enterprise that incorporates sheep and cattle breeding in conjunction with a rural tourism.

I am an active participant in a number of rural organizations including Agforce and the Queensland Rural Women’s Network. I was also a delegate to the Queensland government’s Rural Women’s Symposium in Roma last year.

I am passionate about learning and education, and promoting and marketing the bush. I have undergone a steep learning curve in the last seven years, including training in holistic management, business management and personal development to build my business skills and decision making. I have also completed a number of short tourism courses, and in 2003 in response to drought, Myendetta Station, through the Outback Queensland Tourism Association, commenced a tourism operation. With a focus on providing a unique, quality outback experience, the tour business was recognised in 2006, when it was the winner of the business innovations and alternative enterprises Mulga Award.

In 2003 I developed a startup gourmet food business in partnership with a friend. Boozy Fruits, a range of quality dessert sauces with a dash of alcohol, were produced and marketed from the outback. While I am no longer part of this business, I watch proudly as it goes from strength to strength.

My vision for the grazing industry is one of knowledgeable, resourceful and passionate families running their businesses in a profitable and sustainable manner. They will be active community members and involved in networks that support their social, emotional and educational needs. I believe on going education is the key to achieving this.

My Award project’s aim was to develop a series of educational webinars and teleconferences for other women on the land who have experienced the harsh realities of our changing climate. The webinars will not only provide valuable information and discussion with informed speakers, but will also provide a network for women coping with climate change and isolation to share their experiences. The webinars will cover topics such as communication, depression, succession planning and life planning, will be facilitated by myself but will feature expert speakers, and will aim to reach more than 200 women over the series.

Since completing the award process I have been able to establish a strategic partnership with KLR Marketing and will commence my first series of webinars in April, 2009. I have also become a director of a rural training business, Toolbox Training. Both directors have teaching backgrounds and we believe we have developed an innovative and sustainable model for the delivery of information and skills to rural people. These new developments are very exciting, and they have all happened because I have gone through the RIRDC awards process.

Have a clear vision, take action, and the pathway to achieving it will appear.

• Myendetta Station Principal
• Myendetta Homestead Tourism, Director
• 2003 – 2006 Boozy Fruits Dessert Sauces, Partner
• Winner, SWQ Mulga Awards, Business innovations & Alternative Enterprises, 2006
• Graduate, RCS holistic management courses
• Qld Rural Women’s symposium delegate 2008
My partner and I are livestock and crop farmers from the Limestone Coast, on South Australia’s Eyre Peninsula. I am Managing Director of FREE Eyre, a primary producer–owned company that identifies, incubates and commercialises new business opportunities for the peninsula. I have been committed to sustainable thriving rural communities and primary industries for the past 20 years.

My interest in growing rural communities was brought to the fore in my role as Chief Executive Officer of the Limestone Coast Division of General Practice which I held for 8 years. The organisation focused on the sustainability of medical services in rural communities which included recruitment, retention and training of doctors and community medical projects which addressed health issues. I am currently a Director on the Adelaide Western General Practice Network.

FREE Eyre was the outcome of several years of drought, unreliable prices for commodities, widespread fires, and was born out of a belief that the time was right for the region’s farmers to take control of their future by having a stronger influence over the supply chain, by building alliances and partnerships, and by being proactive in adding value to the region’s primary produce.

I believe that groups of farmers and doctors alike are able to achieve the economies of scale that bring bargaining power, better research and development and innovation, there are opportunities through FREE Eyre for farmers to work together more efficiently and effectively. I believe those farmer groups than can not only work together towards a given goal, but those that can ensure consistency of supply and quality along with food safety will be the ones that are able to not only change to meet demand but also drive change.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition is to research and speak with representatives of ventures similar to FREE Eyre in Europe, the United States and Canada which have proven successful and have also experienced setbacks in developing their business ventures. In addition research will include partnerships built in setting the foundation and managing relationships in such a way that they are able to grow and succeed.

My vision for primary industries is one of vibrancy and growth. I believe with several developing countries as our neighbours and with the growing demand for food, it will become increasingly important for Australia to be competitive and to look at structures that meet either scale or niche commodity markets.

I am keen to investigate a number of disciplines including the structure and foundation of agricultural and other companies, trusts and co-operatives; their governance principles; their linkages with government, business and the community; and the role of women in cooperative models.

I believe the research will not only benefit the Eyre Peninsula but greater rural Australia.
I am a pioneer of biological and organic farming in South Australia. I have lived and worked at Paris Creek in the Adelaide Hills for the past 20 years, and my husband and I are the principals of B-d Farm Paris Creek and Paris Creek Cheese Pty Ltd.

We bought our original dairy farm in 1986; it consisted of 67 hectares and 40 cows. Today the Paris Creek businesses support a biodynamic dairy-farming property, a milk processing plant and cheese manufacturing. We have 38 employees, process 2.9 million litres of milk a year, and sold more than $5 million of product in 2008.

I was one of the founding members of the Biodynamic and Organic Agricultural Bureau, a farmer organisation established to facilitate networking and the exchange of ideas and experiences, and I am currently chair of Biodynamic Agriculture Australia Ltd, a 1400-member not-for-profit organisation recognised as the most successful biodynamic organisation in the world. My passion is to educate others in biodynamic and organic farming principles. I hold monthly meetings with farmers to study biodynamic farming and open my property for farm tours by primary, high school and university students.

My Rural Women's Award ambition is to continue to expand the work I am involved in, educating others through regular meetings to promote biodynamic and organic farming principles and making the courses and workshops available not only to farmers but also to a variety of interested people at low cost and in various geographic locations.

I plan to travel to Europe to exchange information with rural women's groups there and to discuss environmental considerations.
I have worked in natural resource management for the past seven years, having graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in natural resource management from the University of Western Australia. A member of the Boyup Brook community for the past five years, I live with my husband on his family’s farm, which produces merino wool, prime lambs, wine grapes and boutique wines under the label Wild Orchid Wines.

At present I coordinate the BestFarms Environmental Management Systems project, which is run by the Blackwood Basin Group, a not-for-profit community landcare organisation. The project has won a number of national awards and has expanded from southwest Western Australia into northern New South Wales and southern Queensland.

I am also active in my community and in the viticulture industry at Boyup Brook. For the past three years I have been secretary of the Blackwood Valley Wine Industry Association and in that role have helped run a series of environmental workshops for producers and developed environmental goals the association is working towards.

My vision is to see better environmental practices and management fostered and adopted in viticulture as common practice in order to ensure future environmental and economic sustainability. Although best-practice guidelines, production efficiencies and recommended environmental practices have been developed and in part adopted, many smaller producers do not have the resources to implement broad-scale changes, and a more targeted and realistic approach to environmental management is needed.

If producers adopt better environmental management practices—including improved water and energy use and input efficiencies—they will be better equipped to promote and sell their produce in this time of surplus. I plan to visit producers and companies who are successfully implementing environmental practices and see how the changes they have made can be translated to others. I also plan to attend conferences and workshops that focus on the latest research and technology, to update my knowledge, and subsequently to attend regional industry meetings and workshops so I can share my knowledge with the broader industry.

It’s not just the opportunities that get thrown at you in life, it’s what you do with them that counts.
Along with my husband and family, I have been managing Peedamulla Station in the Pilbara for the past 10 years. The station was bought for my community back in 1975; at its peak it ran 15,000 sheep and 1500 cattle. But drought, lack of money and the fall in wool prices brought trouble to the community; my husband and I took over the running of the station in 1981 and began the huge task of the community's debts, building up the cattle herd and restoring the station to being a viable concern. I also work as a customer service officer for the Department of Child Protection at Onslow, fostering children and providing a safe haven for many out on Peedamulla Station.

My life story is one of how an Aboriginal woman can quietly have an impact on the sustainability of the Pilbara pastoral industry by combining cultural heritage and wisdom, organisational ability and maternal instinct to become a role model for future generations of Aboriginal pastoralists. My vision is to move the next generation on from their dependence on the welfare system, alcohol and drugs, to instil in them a passion for the land and the stock, and to help them gain the skills to run a top-performing cattle station.

My Rural Women's Award ambition is to write a book (with the support of a biographer) documenting my life story and in doing so exposing the next generation to the wisdom of their elders and providing leadership and encouragement, to steer them on a path of higher expectations. I am keen to receive training in leadership, to help me engage the young people in culture and to voice the wisdom of Aboriginal women in teaching the younger women to believe in themselves and their future.
I am managing director of Tasmanian Quality Assured Inc., a not-for-profit association established to help primary producers come to terms with the requirements of quality assurance. The association aims to provide information and services related to quality assurance and to develop a marketing advantage for quality-assured products. In my position as managing director I have worked with many producers, industry organisations, state and federal government agencies and regulators in delivering training, developing systems, auditing, public relations, team management and communication.

In my view, I have played an important part in advancing the debate on quality and environmental assurance and food safety systems throughout the supply chain. I initiated the first On Farm Food Safety and Quality Assurance Conference in 1997. The conference rapidly developed into the premier event for food safety and quality assurance for primary production, particularly horticulture; the fifth conference was held in August 2007. I have also made many presentations, published widely on the themes of quality assurance and food safety for primary industries, and contributed to or been responsible for the development of a number of food safety and environmental codes and industry quality systems.

In 2005 I developed FarmSAT, a farm self-assessment tool, for the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, as part of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Industry Pathways to EMS (environmental management systems) program. FarmSAT is designed to raise producers’ awareness of environmental concerns and well as recognising the sound environmental practices already in use. It has now been delivered to almost 600 Tasmanian primary producers.

My vision for primary industries involves sustainable, united, proactive and resilient enterprises embracing the opportunities and challenges of changing market requirements and environmental conditions. My Rural Women’s Award ambition is to develop an environmental assurance framework that promotes the uptake of environmentally sustainable practices but respects the commercial realities of primary production and takes account of the inevitability of climate change. Primary producers are becoming increasingly irritated by the multitude of quality assurance systems they must comply with, and producers and retailers are united in their call for a single environmental assurance system. The success of one environmental assurance framework will depend on the major national retailers delivering a market advantage for producers who participate in environmental assurance programs.

I plan to put the award bursary funds towards developing my leadership, facilitation and negotiation skills, so that I can effectively communicate and unite industry behind a single environmental assurance framework. The framework I envisage would be developed through a series of meetings and workshops with primary producers, retailers, producer representative organisations, and state agency representatives.

Graduated from Melbourne University with first class Honours degree, majoring in Plant Pathology.
Awarded Australian Organisation for Quality Tasmanian Quality Award – 1998 (Young Achiever) and 2000.
Organiser of five national food safety, quality and environmental assurance conferences.
Recipient of Tsunehi Fujii Fellowship Trust Study Tour of Japan March 2000.
Member of Federal Minister’s Working Group on Safety and Quality System Equivalence.
Development and launch (September 2000) of TQA Quality Mark.
Member Senator Troeth’s EMS Steering Committee - overseeing and promoting uptake of EMS on farm.
Member of DAFF GlobalGAP Working Group.
Member of HAL Horticulture for Tomorrow Technical Steering Committee.
Chief Editor and National Coordinator of Guidelines for Environmental Assurance in Australian Horticulture.
Member of Technical Reference Group for Food Safety Auditor Competency Standards.
Recipient of “Outstanding individual or organisation working in a non-industry institution” HACCP award 2008.
Selected to participate in Australian Rural Leadership Foundation Course 16 (commencing 2009).
Current President of Tasmanian Arabian Riders and Breeders.
Owner, trainer and rider of Australian National Champion Arabian Stallion (exhibited by an amateur owner) 2009.
My husband and I are the principals in the family farm business The Two Metre Tall Company. The business is based at our property Charlemont in the Derwent Valley in southern Tasmania. We came to farming via the wine industry and have successfully transferred our knowledge and expertise in the winery to a grain-growing and brewery business. We value-add to our grains by making naturally fermented and handmade real ale on the farm.

Real ale is made from grain and hops grown on the farm, plus ingredients we obtain directly from other Tasmanian producers. The diversification into real ales has significantly drought-proofed our farm and made our business much more robust than it would have been had we been relying on commodity markets for the sale of grain alone.

My vision is to see beer manufacturing using much larger proportions of Australian-grown and -processed malt, as well as a greater selection of grain varieties for an increased flavour spectrum. At present, specialty malted grain is largely imported for use in the boutique brewing industry because malting has virtually ceased to exist. The micro-brewing industry in this country needs Australian-grown specialty malts. And, with micro-breweries and premium beers being the only beer industry sectors showing growth, I believe the time is ripe to expand and improve our malted grain industry.

My Rural Women's Award ambition is to travel to England to research the well-established malt barley industry there. I want to study relationships as they already exist between contracted grain growers and the specialist floor malting companies. I also want to tap into their experience in connection with the relationship between grain variety and beer quality.

The next production project for my business is the development of a traditional floor malting plant, thus closing the gap on external processing of the agricultural input and adding to my business's sustainability.

I believe my study tour—resulting in bringing back new knowledge from the established malt barley industry—will be extremely valuable, not only for the expansion of my business but also for the future development of this niche industry nationally.
My husband and I have been involved in the family mango plantation for a number of years and in 2002 effectively took over the farm's ownership and management on a leasing basis. Fully involved in the working of the farm, I have managed the packing shed for the past seven seasons, taken responsibility for all quality food safety management programs, developed a detailed training program for seasonal staff, and streamlined the packing process to achieve a 15 per cent increase in productivity. I am currently studying for a Master's degree in environmental and business management at Newcastle University. Our business is a member of the Northern Territory Horticultural Association, the Northern Territory Food Group and the Northern Territory Mango Industry Association.

I am acutely concerned about the increasing pressure on primary industries' continued sustainability and viability—urban development, globalisation, population growth, the impact of larger corporations on smaller producers, the demands of shareholders for record profits, and so on. Since taking the reins at the family plantation I have witnessed at first hand the increasing pressure of mounting costs, seasonal staff shortages, and the difficulty of remaining profitable in primary industry today.

My Rural Women's Award ambition is to gain essential knowledge of and contacts in the main food-producing regions in Australia, to promote Australian-grown and -made branding, and to establish an Australian-made and -grown direct-from-farm food outlet to ensure higher returns for producers. Through this, I hope to raise public awareness of and a desire for Australian-made and -grown products, improve the sustainability of rural communities, and create from the profits a fund for research into a sustainable rural Australia.
I come from modern pioneering stock and am currently a director of family-run Coodardie Brahman. We operate two cattle properties, Coodardie and Numul Station in the Mataranka region of the Northern Territory. We run approximately 3,000 head of brahman cattle and I co-direct the business, selling and promoting Coodardie stud cattle across the north.

I strive to educate the people on the land as well as those in urban centres about land management practices that are economically and environmentally sustainable.

An active member of Australian Women in Agriculture, I was a keynote speaker at the 2000 National Conference in Darwin. I have also represented Northern Australia on the Deputy Prime Minister’s Inaugural Regional Women’s Advisory Council. Additionally, I represented the Northern Territory at the World Congress of Young Farmers in Paris in 2003 and was appointed to the first Federal Council of Young Farmers in 2006.

My vision is for a strong, resilient Australia that embraces our differences and draws strength and unity from these; an Australia where both rural and urban, Indigenous and non-Indigenous walk and work together in creating a truly environmentally, economically and socially sustainable society. Rural Australia is facing increasingly difficult times, and this requires new skills and greater adaptability to handle change.

Holistic management is a decision-making framework that provides real tools to help individuals make better decisions, ones that will simultaneously lead to a more environmentally, economically and socially sustainable land, business and community.

My Rural Women’s Award ambition is to become a certified educator in holistic management for northern Australia. I hope to be accepted into the Holistic Management International’s Certified Educator Program, to receive training, to travel to the International Holistic Management Institute in Albuquerque in the United States to meet with practitioners of holistic management, and to return to Australia with greater knowledge and exposure, and to share my new learning through the local learning community with northern Australia.
This publication celebrates 10 years of the RIRDC Rural Women’s Award. It captures the professional and personal journeys of award recipients since 2000, when the award began.

For many recipients, the path of time and endeavour has led to great success in business and leadership in their industries and communities and beyond. For others, the vagaries of the economy and climate have led to the loss of dreams, thwarted ambitions, business closures. However, through all the recipients’ journeys some enduring traits shine through—tenacity and a ‘give it a go’ attitude, a passion and an uncompromising belief in primary industries and rural communities, ingenuity, and a fearlessness about embracing change to ensure a more prosperous future for rural Australia and the coming generations.

The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation applauds these women and is proud to recognise them as recipients of the Rural Women’s Award.

The 10th anniversary of the award is a milestone that reflects RIRDC’s commitment to leadership and capacity building for rural industries and communities. RIRDC instigated the award in order to recognise women’s contribution to primary industries and, importantly, to further develop women’s capacity to contribute by providing the support and resources needed to augment their skills and abilities.

The award is an initiative of RIRDC in partnership with the state and territory agencies responsible for agriculture, primary industries and natural resource management, which manage the award at the state and territory level.