

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4458

Paterson, Ruth

(1959 -)

Born	19590101, Hagley Tasmania Australia
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Occupation	Farmer, Public servant, Social welfare co-ordinator
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Summary

Ruth Paterson was Tasmania's Rural Woman of the Year in 1994. She was the first Australian woman to chair an agricultural field day committee, which she did to extraordinary effect when she organised the Tasmanian AGFEST in the early 1990s. Eleven percent of Tasmania's total population attended in 1994; no other field day in no other state could boast such a massive turn out.

After winning the award, Ruth took up a job with the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, with the aim of encouraging a rural woman's network and advising the government on issues that effect rural women.

Details

A fifth generation farmer, Ruth Paterson was born and bred on a dairy farm at Hagley, in the Tasmanian northern midlands. The youngest of three girls, she was desperate to take on agriculture as a career when she left school, but tradition did not see an 'official' place for women as famers in that era, so she went to Launceston and worked in the insurance industry, until she married a farmer and returned to the land.

She became involved in the Tasmanian Rural Youth Organisation, the members of which take a major roll in the organisation of AGFEST, Tasmania's major agricultural festival. It was then that she realised she had unmet ambition as a spokesperson for agricultural interests in Tasmania. As well as gaining professional satisfaction from working in agriculture, she was passionate about publicly raising issues of importance to farmers.

At the time of her award, she was concerned about the perceived divide between country and city dwellers. 'I think city people still see us as a bunch of whingers who drive their Mercs to town in their tweed suits and their Stetsons,' she said. 'Well, we're a long way off that.' She thought that people of the city needed to understand better the realities of farming that confront most Australians involved in agriculture.

At the same time, she believed that farmers need to change their attitude to the land. 'Ten years ago Landcare was the greenie, radical hobby farmer,' she observed. 'Now, if farmers and mainstream community groups aren't into some form of Landcare, they're not in the race.'

Through her involvement in organisations like the Tasmanian branch of Women in Agriculture, Paterson has seen a gradual shift in attitudes with regard to the involvement of women in the decision making process, not only on farms but at an organisational level. Awards such as the Rural Woman of the Year Award contributed to that change, by helping women to network and to feel confident in their opinions and abilities. 'That's what the Rural Women's movement is about,' she says. 'Just teaching that extra bit of confidence.'

Events

1994 - 1994

Winner – ABC Tasmanian Rural Woman of the Year

Published resources

Book Section

Ruth Paterson, Bowden, Ros, 1995

Resource Section

1994 ABC Rural Woman of the Year State Winners, ABC Radio, 1997,
<http://www.abc.net.au/rural/rwoty/previous94.htm#sta>

Site Exhibition

Brilliant Ideas and Huge Visions: ABC Radio Australian Rural Women of the Year - 1994-1997, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2011,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/rwya/rwya-home.html>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Ruth Paterson interviewed by Ros Bowden in the Women of the land oral history project \[sound recording\]](#)

[Women of the land oral history project](#)

Author Details

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