Entry type: Person
Entry ID: PR00291

Salce, Mary

(1945 -)

Born	19450324, Cromvoirt Holland
Occupation	Activist, Community worker, Farmer

Summary

Mary Salce is a dairy farmer from Gippsland, in Victoria. She has been actively involved in agricultural politics since the 1960s, often, in the first twenty years, as the only woman on industry boards. By the mid-1980s, Mary had emerged as a leader of the Women in Agriculture movement. She was instrumental in establishing the Rural Women’s Network, and her role in organising and convening the First International Women in Agriculture Conference was pivotal in the process of securing a voice in decision making for rural women nationally and internationally. Her leadership and influence has resulted in profound change in the profile of rural women: in the acknowledgement of their contribution to the rural sector, in their empowerment though the development of their leadership skills and confidence, in the development of a co-ordinated voice airing their particular concerns with social, welfare and sustainability issues, and in their role in strengthening communities.

Details

Mary Salce was born on a dairy farm in Cromvoirt, Holland, in 1945. Her father was a noted Friesian breeder. The family emigrated to Australia in 1954, bringing the cheese plant for a European-style cheese making venture. They ran dairy farms in Yarragon and Nilma in Gippsland. Mary began her working life with the accountancy firm Manning and Perry, studying accountancy at night. In 1968 she married dairy farmer Reno Salce; she herself worked in 1968-9 for the Drouin Co-operative.

Mary began to attend farmer's meetings, becoming the first woman secretary of the United Dairy Farmers of Victoria in 1976. Her background in accountancy led her to question figures being quoted in regard to prices being paid to farmers for milk.

The difficult economic circumstances of the 1970s in the rural sector – falling prices, and rising interest rates, fuel and labour costs – were followed by drought in the early 1980s. Though individual women raised their voices to draw attention to their concerns and possible solutions, Mary realised that they were not being heard, that women's significant contribution to agriculture was not being acknowledged and that their perspective – which focused on social, welfare and sustainability issues – was being ignored.

The formation of the Women's Drought Support Network and the Women in Dairying Group in Gippsland saw the first networks formed amongst rural women in Australia, at a moment in time when government was receptive to their needs. Against this background Mary emerged as a leader.

Chronology:

1976 (-1990): United Dairy Farmers of Victoria – Sale Branch, Inaugural Secretary/Vice-President/District Delegate/State Conference Delegate

1985: Mary was instrumental in the formation of the Rural Women's Network with the support of the state government.

1987: Board Member, Victorian Dairy Industry Authority

1991: Attended the National Farm Women's Conference in Canada, representing the Gippsland Women's Network, and realised that the lack of recognition of women's contributions to agricultural sector was worldwide.

1993: Guest speaker, Sixth National Canadian Farm Women's Network Conference.

1994. Headed the Steering Committee for, and convened, the First International Women in Agriculture Conference, which attracted 860 delegates from 33 countries

On the last day, in response to a motion from the floor, an ongoing body was created – the Foundation for Agricultural Women – and Mary was appointed the first President.

She would be instrumental in the organisation of the second conference, in Washington in 1998, and a member of the organising committee of the third in Madrid. She has been a keynote speaker at all four conferences.

In October Mary organised the Victorian Women on Water Forum, calling for 'social impact studies of water reform'.

1995: Presenter, Workshop Facilitator, Women in Agriculture and their Participation in Development of Agriculture Technologies Conference, Beijing, China

Mary, as president of the FAAW, was a Steering Committee member for the first National Rural Women's Forum, which addressed the key issues of the movement: the visibility and recognition of rural women, access to participation in decision making, networking, women's contribution to agriculture and environmental sustainability and to viable communities, women's education and training needs and social justice issues.

In April she was a keynote speaker at the Swan Hill Women on Farms Gathering.

1996: Mary coordinated the Achieving Your Goals Seminar in Bairnsdale, for 200 women, one of a series of initiatives aimed a developing women's skills, including leadership skills, and encouraging their industry participation. From this seminar the East Gippsland Business Women's Group was established.

She was listed in the Who's Who in Agriculture Top 100, Australian Farm Journal (one of five women).

In this year she also lobbied the United States Department of Agriculture in Washington to hold the Second International Conference on Women in Agriculture in the USA. She addressed a reception hosted for the FAAW by the Australian ambassador, John McCarthy.

1997: National Chair, Uniting Our Rural Communities Cultural and Community Leadership Project.

1998 : Facilitator of, and an opening speaker at, the Second International Conference on Women in Agriculture in Washington, chaired by Jill Long Thompson, United States Under Secretary for Agriculture. National Chair, Salute from

Australia Event, at the conference.

2001: Inducted into the Victorian Women's Honour Roll, for her role in gaining respect and recognition for farming women in Australia and around the world. In this year, as Chair of the Women in Rural Communities Taskforce, she was a committee member of the ministerial Advisory Committee for Victorian Communities,

2002: Member of Organising Committee for the 3rd World Congress of Rural Women, one of six Australian women invited to present. Recipient, International Women in Agriculture Award for Vision, Courage & Leadership. Met in Basque Region, Spain, with Co-operative representatives. Met in Rome with Senior Italian Government Officials and NGOs to discuss possible global regional forums re Women and Water.

2003: Recipient, Centenary Medal, for service to the community through women's services within the rural and agriculture sector

2004: Mary was a participant, as a community activist, representing the Gippsland Women's Network, in the Women and Water Forum, New England .

2005-2006: President of the Gippsland Women's Network. This body had been a loose collectivity of local women from the beginning of the movement. It was incorporated in 2004.

2006-2009: Member, West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority Board.

2007: Keynote speaker, 4th World Congress of rural Women, Durban South Africa. Met with senior ministers, Winnie Mandela, and with African rural women in their communities.

Other Organisations:

Mary has also been involved with the following organisations: Southern Rural Water Licensing Business Forum (Current Member); A Future for Rural Australia Inc. (Current Member); Rural Women for Community & Economic Development Inc.(Inaugural Steering Committee Member, 1999-2000); Southern Rural Water Avon River Stream Management Plan Project Group (Current Member); National Reference Group – Rural Women for Cultural and Community Leadership (Chairperson, 1996-1998); Victorian Eastern Development Association (Member, Steering Committee, pilot program, 'Achieving Your Goals', 1995-1998); Gippsland Community (SCOPE) Leadership Program Steering Committee (Committee Member, 1995-1997); Lake Wellington Rivers Authority, Victoria (Deputy Chairperson, 1995-1998); Avon-Macalister Implementation Group (Member, 1995-1998); Federal Special Rural Task Force – Impact of Assets Tests on Rural Customers (Member, 1997); Women Chiefs of Enterprise International – Victoria Division (Current Member); Department of Primary Industry and Energy Canberra – National Rural Women's Co-ordinator Selection Panel, Representing FAAW (May 1995); Gippsland Water Quality Group (Member – River Management Representative, 1993-1995); Avon Macalister River Management Board (Member, 1991-1995); Gippsland Lakes Implementation Council (Member – River Management Representative 1992-1994); Lake Wellington Catchment Salinity Management Plan Community Working Group (Committee Member – Community Representative, 1993); Business and Professional Women's Association (Finance Chairperson, 1985).

Events

2001 - 2001
Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

Published resources

Book
Breaking Through the Grass Ceiling: Women, Power & Leadership in Rural Australia, Alston, Margaret, 2000

Women of The Land: Stories of Australia's Rural Women as told to Ros Bowden, Bowden, Ros, 1995

Resource
Salute to Mary Salce, Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women,
http://www.faaw.org.au/pubs/d2002s/04a.htm

Women Shaping The Nation: Victorian Honour Roll of Women, 2001,
https://herplacemuseum.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2001-Honour-Roll-Booklet-2.pdf

Conference Report, National Rural Women's Forum: Parliament House, Canberra, June 7-8, 1995, Alston, Margaret,
http://rsj.e-contentmanagement.com/archives

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Conference Proceedings
Women in Agriculture: Farming for Our Future, Women in Agriculture 1994 International Conference Committee Inc., 1995

Edited Book
Who's Who of Australian Women, Pearce, Suzannah, 2006

Report
Agents For Change: Farming for our Future, Dietrich, Laurene (ed.), 1995

Project Report: International Women in Agriculture Conference, Rose, Maria, 1994

Booklet
The Salute From Australia at the 2nd International Conference on Women in Agriculture, McDougall, Valerie (ed.), 1998

Book Section
Mary Salce, Bowden, Ros, 1995

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

The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Papers of Laurene Dietrich, 1990-1994 [manuscript]

Records of the Gippsland Women's Network, 1994-2006 [manuscript]

Papers of Mary Salce, 1976-2007 [manuscript]

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection
Mary Salce interviewed by Ros Bowden in the Women of the Land oral history project [sound recording]

Women of the land oral history project

Mary Salce interviewed by Nikki Henningham

Author Details
Janet Butler

Created 24 August 2009
Last modified 22 August 2018