

Entry type: Organisation
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Australian Women in Agriculture Movement

(1990 -)

Born	1 January, 1990, Victoria
Occupation	Political organisation, Social action organisation

Summary

The Australian Women in Agriculture Movement had its beginnings in the state of Victoria. It involves a number of interconnected organisations, networks and community groups that emerged in Australia in the 1990s, although its roots spread back through the previous decade. It was driven by the desire of farm women for visibility and recognition of their contribution, for a greater role in decision making, and for a hearing for their broader concerns, which focussed on community, social justice and the environment, as well as productivity

Details

The impetus for the mobilisation of Victorian farm women in what came to be known as the Women in Agriculture movement was the farm crisis of the 1980s: severe drought in 1982- 83 combined with contracting world markets, reduction in government support, overproduction and declining terms of trade. Women took over the labour of previously employed farm workers, or took paid work off-farm to support its financial viability. At the same time, their concerns for the pressure of the crisis on community, family and the environment, and their proposed solutions, were not being heard, and male-dominated industry bodies did not provide an outlet for their leadership.

Second wave feminism was having an impact at Government level, through femocrats appointed to advance the interests of women, and in Victoria in particular the agenda of the state government complemented that of the farm women. The farm women received funding and femocrat guidance and support through the Department of Agriculture.

Networking, sharing and uniting has been a feature of the movement. It comprised inter-connected events, organisations and activists, of which the following is a brief, but not exhaustive, list.:

1979 Conference, in Melbourne: 'The Woman in Country Australia Looks Ahead'. This conference was convened by Brian Clarke, of the McMillan Rural Studies Centre in Warragul, which would be the launching pad for the Women on Farms Gatherings.

1982 Conference in Melbourne: 'Women in Agriculture: Expanding our Spheres of Influence'. This conference was organised by two Victorian farming women, Lyn Johnston and Alison Teese.

1984 Fifty seminars held by Department of Agriculture and local groups across Victoria, in response to a need noted by Frank McClelland of the Department to help women to gain practical and financial skills, and support in the drought and rural recession.

1985 Self-help groups such as Women in Agriculture – Victorian Mallee Group (Jan Adcock, co-ordinator) emerged out of the seminars.

1986 The Rural Women's Network set up under the auspices of the Office of Rural Affairs. Women who were sensitive to rural women's needs were in power in the Cain government.

1987 Farm Gate Learning program began in North-East Victoria to allow women to increase skills. Community based education centres in the 1980s had responded to this need.

1988 Women on Farms skills courses developed for women in West Gippsland, and held in Warragul. Women on Farms discussion group convened.

1990 Inaugural Women on Farms Gathering held in Warragul.

1992 Julie Williams authored a government-funded report entitled, 'The Invisible Farmer: A Summary Report of Australian Farm Women'. Women made clear their wish to be acknowledged as farmers.

– Liz Hogan, of the Rural Women's Network, convened a state-wide meeting, in Ballarat, of activists, academics and women's group leaders, from which arose the Australian Women in Agriculture peak organisation, and the committee which organised the First International Women in Agriculture Conference.

1994 First International Women in Agriculture Conference held at the University of Melbourne in July. A second peak body, Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women created on last day.

From Victoria, the movement in all its forms spread interstate, then overseas in the form of the international conferences. In post-conference activities, the needs of women identified at the conference for leadership and business skills, for recognition, and for greater participation in decision making were addressed in workshops and forums, classes and gatherings at local, national, international levels.

Published resources

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Report

The invisible farmer : a report on Australian farm women, Williams, Julie, 1992

Book

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

Journal Article

'Managing the Woman Issue: The Australian State and the Case of Women in Agri-Politics', Pini, Barbara, Panelli, Ruth and Sawyer, Marian, 2008,

http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/434932_751304851_793284390.pdf

Article

'Time-Space Geometries of Activism and the Case of Mis/placing Gender in Australian Agriculture', Panelli, Ruth, 2007,

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/117996681/PDFSTART>

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>

Archival resources

Private Hands (these records may not be readily available)

[Making Rural Women Visible: A "Living" History of the Victorian Women on Farms Gathering \(WOFG\) Community](#)

Melbourne Museum

[Women on Farms Gathering Heritage Collection](#)

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Papers of Mary Salce, 1976-2007 \[manuscript\]](#)

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