

Media information 28 November 2016

Business programme extended to reach 2,800 farmers

A national programme to increase profitability and productivity of sheep and beef farmers by strengthening farming partnerships is being scaled up to reach 2,800 New Zealand farms.

Since 2014, almost 500 women involved in sheep and beef farming businesses have completed the Understanding Your Farming Business (UYFB) programme, designed and delivered by the Agri-Women's Development Trust (AWDT). This includes 50 women who last month graduated from the similar AWDT programme for Māori women, Wāhine Māia Wāhine Whenua.

The four-month programme, funded by the Red Meat Profit Partnership (RMPP), builds business and communication skills, and confidence of farming women, empowering them to view themselves and their farming roles differently and help lift farm performance.

Extension of the RMPP funding will enable another 2,300 women involved in sheep and beef farming businesses throughout New Zealand to do the course over the next four years.

AWDT executive director Lindy Nelson said the trust had seen increased demand from women and men for this type of development and graduates were now making a big impact in their businesses.

"Constant evaluation and ongoing research shows that graduates are going back to their businesses and creating new momentum in their farming partnerships.

"They are asking new questions, and offering new thinking and skills. As a result, these farmers are gaining more control over their futures. This is not only about women – it's about the farming partnership and men are highly-supportive of women's increased involvement.

"We're seeing men encouraging their partners to do the programme and then feeling supported themselves as partners become increasingly involved in discussions, operational strategy and decision making."

RMPP is a Primary Growth Partnership programme funded by industry and the Ministry for Primary Industries with the aim to drive sustainable productivity improvements in the sheep and beef sector to deliver higher on-farm profitability.

RMPP general manager Michael Smith said an important part of RMPP's work was to look at how to bring about increased knowledge uptake and therefore on-farm practice change.

"We know from the research that having both farming partners involved and continuing to grow their knowledge in the business is where on-farm profitability gains are greatest. We are excited about being able to offer this opportunity to even more women over the coming four years."

Twenty-four individual programmes will be held in 2017 in rural areas throughout New Zealand. This includes four programmes designed for Māori women who are trustees or involved on-farm.

Lindy Nelson said AWDT had boosted its facilitation team to more than 20 industry experts which included a number of graduates of the programme. New systems and staff to administer the higher numbers of participants were also in place.

Independent research specific to UYFB is now underway that will provide a measure of how the programme influences on-farm behavior with results expected in early 2017.

Registrations for the 2017 programmes are now open at www.awdt.org.nz.

ends

Background

Since its establishment in 2010, AWDT has delivered leadership, governance and business training and support to more than 1,600 people throughout New Zealand. It provides a trusted and enabling environment for women in primary industries to realise their potential and grow their sectors.

The Red Meat Profit Partnership is a \$64 million, seven-year Primary Growth Partnership programme aimed at achieving long-term, sustainable improvements in the sector.

RMPP partners are the Ministry for Primary Industries, Alliance Group, ANZCO Foods, ANZ Bank, Beef and Lamb New Zealand Limited (representing sheep and beef farmers), Blue Sky Meats, Greenlea Premier Meats, Progressive Meats, Rabobank, and Silver Fern Farms.

Following the success of the UYFB pilot in 2014 and a national RMPP-funded rollout to 140 women in 2015, the programme was delivered to another 220 women in 14 regions in 2016.

By taking a greater role in decision making, and applying new business, communication and change-making skills, these women are creating opportunities to lift farm performance in a challenging farming landscape.

Independent research by UMR Research released in April 2016 strongly correlated the business contribution of the female farming partner with the characteristics of high-performing farms.

Undertaken for the RMPP, the research involved more than 1,000 sheep and beef farmers throughout New Zealand. It defined five farmer types according to their openness and resistance to change and also found that in all but one of the types, women were key to initiating and supporting on-farm change.