



Media information

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Agri trust marks 1000 graduates in 5 years

Five years of developing the skills and confidence of more than 1,000 women in agriculture and their achievements was celebrated last week by a charitable trust created in 2010 and industry leaders.

The Agri-Women's Development Trust (AWDT) builds women's business, leadership and governance skills through programmes and support delivered throughout New Zealand in partnership with industry.

Beginning with 11 participants in its first year, the trust now has 500 women per year participating in its programmes, which range in duration from two days to 10 months.

"AWDT was set up to provide a trusted and enabling environment for all women involved in agriculture to realise their potential, and grow the sector," trust founder and executive director Lindy Nelson said.

"Experience over our first five years has validated our earlier research - women's lives change when they find their purpose and fulfil their potential. When this happens, and they are supported, they change outcomes in agriculture."

Mrs Nelson said AWDT worked with women of all ages from grass roots farming to corporate backgrounds. "Our graduates are increasing their own farm profitability, and leading regional initiatives with major economic and environmental impacts. Others are sitting at the decision making table in governance roles and leading within industry organisations, companies, Māori agribusiness and regional communities.

Speaking at last-week's celebration in Wellington attended by more than 130 people, Minister for Primary Industries Nathan Guy thanked the trust for its work in creating 'vital behaviour change and confidence'. "The huge role women play in the primary sector should not be underestimated - they are the silent heroes and big achievers."

Guest speaker and businesswoman Theresa Gattung talked about the value of integrating 'head and heart' in leadership. "The trust recognises that women have this quality and its work to develop it is impacting positively on the business of agriculture."

ANZ central region's John Bennett, said the bank was seeing the impact of AWDT's work across the sector and every day with its clients. "The perspective of the phrase 'behind every great man is a great woman' has shifted to align more closely with reality which is good men and good women working side-by-side running their farming and agri businesses."

More than 200 farming women were now measuring and monitoring their farm performance and improving profitability as a result of the trust's Understanding Your Farming Business programme. More than 30 had taken up new governance positions and others had moved into senior management positions. Four graduates sit on Canterbury water zone committees, two as chairpersons and one as deputy chair.

Seven graduates were now facilitating in AWDT programmes – a move Mrs Nelson said built the trust's unique culture of supported growth. Others had set up new regional groups to develop and support other women with support from the trust.

"Over the past five years women's visibility, potential and influence in agriculture had grown significantly," Mrs Nelson said. "Our sector increasingly understands the real value women can add, particularly when they gain confidence, harness their rich array of transferable skills and experiences, and are supported."

"We're also seeing our connections with women open up opportunities for industry organisations to directly connect with both women and their farming partners who want to grow their businesses and engage in issues."

"In these challenging times for agriculture, strong business performance is critical and we are working to better equip women to manage volatility through improved business, leadership and governance skills."

"Tangible results over five years provided a compelling case for sustainable and scalable growth for the trust which, with industry support, aimed to enable development of 5,000 women by 2020. Investment in women's development by our partners who include ANZ, Beef + Lamb New Zealand, DairyNZ, FMG and Agmardt has enabled our programmes to be accessible to all agri women."