



**Media information**

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## **Women graduates urged to enquire, challenge thinking**

The latest graduates of a national programme for women to grow and strengthen New Zealand's primary industries have been urged to enquire and challenge industry thinking to create change.

Fifteen emerging female leaders and governors from Northland to Otago graduated from the Agri-Women's Development Trust (AWDT) Escalator programme last month, bringing the number of graduates to 84 over the past six years.

The women were supported by members of the Escalator Alumni who gathered with more than 100 trust supporters and industry leaders at a graduation ceremony in Masterton.

Speaking at the event, AWDT Patron Mavis Mullins, said the disruption and challenges faced by primary industries could only be solved by people. "The bigger the challenge, the more we need to strengthen what is close to us - ourselves, each other, our families, young people and communities. We depend on this to strengthen our position as New Zealand Aotearoa Inc."

Mrs Mullins urged the graduates to be enquiring and question where they wanted to contribute. "Have a belief, invest in the best information and advice you can find, back it with your life and magic can happen. Once you've committed to something, take it all the way."

Escalator Alumni chair and KPMG farm specialist, Julia Jones, encouraged the graduates to 'stay relevant'. "Female leaders are part of the answer to making the hard decisions needed in taking our primary industries forward. The same thinking that has created problems isn't going to fix them."

AWDT executive director, Lindy Nelson, said the highly-motivated graduates were already strongly contributing across the board through leadership and governance in businesses, industry organisation and communities.

"These women are stepping up and having an impact in dairy, sheep, beef and deer farming, rural support and health, Māori enterprise, environmental management, biosecurity, and rural services."

Escalator Alumni members were moving rapidly into governance positions including eight who were elected to local government and district health board positions this year. Ten were now assisting the AWDT develop and deliver its range of programmes around New Zealand.

Since its establishment in 2010, AWDT has delivered leadership, governance and business training and support to more than 1,600 people throughout New Zealand, with support from industry partners including ANZ, Beef + Lamb NZ, Dairy NZ, FMG, Agmardt, LIC and CRS Software.

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