



Women in leadership becoming normality

By Lindy Nelson, Agri-Women's Development Trust Founder/Executive Director - 22 June 2017

Democratic process has picked a woman, Katie Milne, as the new President of Federated Farmers. For women around the world, in New Zealand and in our primary industries it's a great day to celebrate that a woman leads a national farming organisation.

It would not have been an easy choice for the Federated Farmers members to make as both candidates - Katie and Anders Crofoot - have shown great historical commitment to the organisation and the agriculture. Both have huge merit and experience.

And its merit we need to focus on. Yes, Katie is a woman, and for women interested in breaking glass ceilings there will be some celebration because her achievement sends a clear message that being a woman and leading is achievable.

However, I imagine that being female was not the reason why Katie stood for the role. It is only her gender. When we focus on gender rather than merit we do women a disservice.

While she will appreciate the support in her achievement, I imagine she will want us to focus on her merit as a candidate to the best candidate to lead the NZ agri sector through challenging times. That's what needs to be celebrated.

On the same day as the Feds election took place, AWDT held its annual Governance Forum where our panel of six experienced directors answered some tough questions put to them by people in our industry. When asked about diversity in leadership (on boards and in management) they were in full agreement. Yes, gender diversity is important but diversity of thought is what we need most of all to face the future.

I sense a change in the agri sector's attitude – AWDT is working to change how we see women, how women see themselves as leaders and how the sector utilises this talent- seems to me it's working.