

Media information, 16 November 2017

Business programme for farming women expands

A development programme for women involved in sheep and beef farming businesses is set to expand in 2018 to benefit 500 more farms throughout New Zealand.

After initial success since 2014, Understanding Your Farming Business (UYFB) was scaled up this year and delivered to 350 women, bringing the total number of graduates to 780 over the past four years.

Included is a second programme, Wāhine Maia Wāhine Whenua, which is adapted for women who are trustees, managers or partners in Māori sheep and beef farming businesses.

The programmes, run by the Agri-Women's Development Trust (AWDT) and funded by the Red Meat Profit Partnership (RMPP), aim to lift performance and profitability of the red meat sector. They equip farming women with knowledge, skills and confidence to contribute more fully.

Next year's programmes will be held in 32 rural centres from Kaitaia to Invercargill. More than 200 enquiries had been received for the 2018 programmes before registrations opened this week.

AWDT executive director, Lindy Nelson, said there was a thirst from farming couples and individuals to learn how they can sharpen their businesses financially and work more closely with family and advisors to achieve future growth.

"Research with our graduates consistently shows that when women gain confidence and skills to contribute more effectively, positive changes are seen across the farming business."

A recently-completed pilot programme held in Gore and Feilding brought UYFB graduates and their farming partners together to focus on business planning as a team. It revealed further insights into how women were helping to improve and measure farm performance.

"We're hearing from the men that the increased involvement of their partners in farm planning and decision making is reducing stress on them and opening up new conversations and perspectives.

"They are now sharing the workload and more able to bounce ideas off their partners who are playing a greater role, alongside family and financial advisors.

"Farmers are taking time together to question why they make certain decisions, look at how they can do better and who can help them. They are looking harder at their goals and plans, and communicating more effectively with bank managers and other advisors.

RMPP Chairman Malcolm Bailey agrees. "The UYFB programmes aren't just about upskilling women in farming, they're about building resilient farm partnerships so that the mental load of farming is shared. It's a culture shift, but one we really think the industry is ready for."

Conversations between farming partners have progressed from general discussions to specific plans for improving the business with defined outcomes. Some have taken on farm consultants and new staff.

AWDT patron, Mavis Mullins, said Wāhine Maia Wāhine Whenua graduates had gained the farming business knowledge needed to better engage with their iwi and hapu farming organisations. "As with UYFB, understanding the key business drivers is leading to different conversations around the decision-making table."

For 2018 programme dates and regions go to www.awdt.org.nz/programmes/