

Entry type: Event
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First International Women in Agriculture Conference

(1994 - 1994)

Born	1 July, 1994, Melbourne Victoria Australia
Died	3 July, 1994, MelbourneMelbourne Victoria Australia
Occupation	Conference

Summary

The First International Women in Agriculture Conference was held from 1 to 3 July 1994, at the University of Melbourne in Victoria. It attracted over 850 participants from 33 countries, and was the largest agricultural conference held in Australia. It was a pivotal moment in the women in agriculture movement and in the process of securing a voice in decision making for rural women, nationally and internationally. The conference was organised by women who were active in the movement, from farmers to their supporters and advisors in government departments and non-government rural organisations. Its aims reflected the concerns of women in agriculture: to raise the profile of rural women, to increase awareness of the economic, social legal and cultural factors affecting their status, and to provide learning opportunities to develop new skills and access to information and networks. Its focus reflected women's concern with the social, environmental and cultural dimensions of agriculture, as well as the economic and production aspects, and their desire to develop and capture opportunities in world markets

Details

Chronology

1980s Women in agriculture groups arose and grew through meetings, workshops, skills courses, newsletters and government support through Victorian and Federal Labor government's affirmative action policies.

1986 As the result of activism by Victorian rural women, the Rural Women's Network was set up under the auspices of the Office of Rural Affairs in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

1991 Activist Mary Salce attended the National Farm Women's Conference in Canada, and realised that the recognition of rural women was an international issue. Fellow dairy farmer Lyn Johnson had also been exposed to the activism of American farming women.

1992 Liz Hogan, a Project Officer in the Rural Women's Network, facilitated a state-wide meeting of a group of like minded women – activists, leaders and academics – in Ballarat. Out of this meeting came the nucleus of an initially state-wide Women in Agriculture group, which was eventually constituted as the national Australian Women in Agriculture (AWiA) in 1993. In the meantime, at the instigation of Gippsland dairy farmer Mary Salce, and with the assistance of women within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the statewide group began planning for the conference.

A steering committee of nine women was set up, and incorporated in order to seek funding for the event. They were: Mary Salce, convenor, and Anna Lottkowitz, Ruth Liepins, Anne-Marie Tenni, Maureen Walsh, Audrey Dreschler, Jennifer North, Rosemary Grant, Lyn Johnson and Dorothy Dunn. An advisory committee consisted of women in fourteen government and on-government bodies, including the Australian Wheat Board, the Rural Women's Reference Group, the Country Women's Association and the Sydney Myer fund. The core organisation involved forty-seven women overall.

1994 The conference took place at the University of Melbourne on 1-3 July. The sessions of the conference generated a series of recommendations and outcomes. They were tabulated in a report, which formed the basis of a presentation to the Office of the Status of Women and Australian governments, and were included in the Australian government's own recommendations to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The report reflected recommendations in six key areas: education, visibility and recognition, networking, environment and sustainability and social justice. The over all concern was for inclusion, recognition and equality of participation in the industry. Post conference evaluation was conducted.

As a result of the conference, the Australian Law Reform Commission investigated the legal status of women on farms and a global network for women in agriculture was initiated. The recommendations of the conference were reflected in the actions taken in the following years, including the formation of the Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women (1994), to act as a funding body to increase women's access to education and training; the establishment of Women's Units, after the Victorian model, in some state departments of agriculture; and the holding of the Rural Women's Forum (1995). In addition, a range of projects were undertaken to provide education in leadership, skills and management, such as (in Gippsland) the Uniting Our Rural Communities Cultural and Community Leadership Project.

Subsequent Conferences

First conference convenor Mary Salce was a prime mover in the organisation of the Second International Women in Agriculture Conference, in Washington, from 28 June-2 July 1998. With Valerie McDougall she organised 'The Salute from Australia Handover Event', which showcased Australian produce. One hundred and twenty women attended the conference from Australia. The third and fourth conferences – now World Congresses of Rural Women – took place in Madrid in 2002, and Durban in 2007. In Madrid, Mary Salce was honoured for her role in the inception of the conferences. The fifth Congress will be held in India.

Published resources

Booklet

The Salute From Australia at the 2nd International Conference on Women in Agriculture, McDougall, Valerie (ed.), 1998

Thesis

Women in Agriculture: A Geography of Australian Agricultural Activism, Liepins, Ruth, 1996,
<http://repository.unimelb.edu.au/10187/1453>

Report

Agents For Change: Farming for our Future, Dietrich, Laurene (ed.), 1995

Project Report: International Women in Agriculture Conference, Rose, Maria, 1994

Conference Proceedings

Women in Agriculture: Farming for Our Future, Women in Agriculture 1994 International Conference Committee Inc., 1995

Book

Breaking Through the Grass Ceiling: Women, Power & Leadership in Rural Australia, Alston, Margaret, 2000

Resource

Gippsland Women's Network: History, Gippsland Women's Network,
<http://www.wymb.org.au/history.html>

Site Exhibition

Brilliant Ideas and Huge Visions: ABC Radio Australian Rural Women of the Year - 1994-1997, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2011,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/rwya/rwya-home.html>

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Papers of Mary Salce, 1976-2007 \[manuscript\]](#)

[Papers of Audrey Drechsler, 1979-2009 \[manuscript\]](#)

Melbourne Museum

[Catherine McLennan with Lyn Johnson \(Interview\)](#)

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