

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE3501

Drechsler, Audrey Louise

(1933 -)

Nationality	Australian
Born	3 June, 1933, Preston Victoria Australia
Occupation	Farmer, Political candidate, social activist

Summary

Following a visit to a farm in Gippsland during a period of rehabilitation, Audrey Drechsler developed a lifetime love of farming. Audrey was heavily involved in the CWA as a regional president, but was also a leader in the movement for recognition and support for women's hands-on involvement in farming, through farmers' organisations, and the women in agriculture movement. She was a member of the steering committee which organised the 1994 First International Women in Agriculture Conference, and an organiser of the 1997 and 2010 Women on Farms Gatherings. Sharing the movements' commitment to sustainable agriculture, Audrey has been active in land conservation, occupying, amongst other positions, that of first woman president of the Grassland Society of Victoria. She still farms at Sedgwick, south of Bendigo.

As Audrey Walsh, she stood as a candidate for the Democratic Labor Party in the Legislative Assembly seat of Evelyn at the Victorian state election, which was held in 1967.

Details

Audrey Drechsler was born Audrey Walsh, the daughter of James Walsh, who in 1928 took over the Warrandyte bakery, which she still owns. She won a scholarship to University High which she took up in 1949. Whilst recuperating from an operation in 1953, she attended the former West Melbourne Technical School for rehabilitation training in secretarial studies. It was through a friendship formed there that she was introduced to farming. She commenced secretarial work at RMIT in 1956, studying various subjects at night, including book keeping. In 1963, she went overseas, and worked briefly on farms in a number of countries, including Ireland, Denmark and the USA. In 1967 she stood for the DLP in the seat of Evelyn, and while campaigning, met Bendigo candidate Bill Drechsler, whom she subsequently married. Bill Drechsler was a sheep farmer from Sedgwick in Central Victoria, and Audrey invested money in improvements in the farm, and time and energy into learning practical farming skills, and in keeping the books.

Audrey became involved in many community and farming organisations. She was the secretary of the Strathfieldsaye and Sutton Grange branches of the Victorian Farmers' Federation; the public relations officer, political action convenor, president, treasurer and secretary of the Bendigo Pastoral District Council, and Bendigo branch president and inaugural convenor of the Australian Farm Management Society.

Along with other involvement in her community's schools, church and CFA, Audrey was involved in the Country Women's Association, as secretary and president of the Sedgwick branch, and as president of the Bendigo Northern Group in 1981-3 and 2001-2003. Audrey was active in the movement to achieve recognition, a voice and education for women as farmers in their own right. She was a member of the steering committee for the 1994 First International Women in Agriculture Conference, and a constant support for the Women on Farms Gatherings, attending 17 out of the 20 held, and helping to organise the 1997 Bendigo and 2010 Inglewood gatherings. A person of forthright character, who holds the attention of those around her, Audrey is also a woman of great courage and integrity, sharing at the Bendigo gathering her story of being pack-raped at the age of 18, in Queensland, in 1951, and her steadfast appearance at five criminal trials to secure convictions, and gaol terms, for those involved. After the 1994 conference, she was a co-founder of the Central Victorian Women in Agriculture Group, and is now a member of the Victorian Branch of Australian Women in Agriculture, as well as of the national body.

Reflecting the Women in Agriculture movement's commitment to sustainable agriculture, Audrey has been involved as a leader in a number of organisations. She was the first women president of the Grassland Society of Victoria (1985), the Victorian State President and Federal Vice- President of the Soil & Water Conservation Association of Australia (1990), and a member of the Shire of Strathfieldsaye Environment Planning Advisory Committee. Later she became Chairman of the Land and Water Working Group, Bendigo Region Conservation Strategy, as well as a member of the Bendigo Region Land Protection Advisory Committee of the Department of Conservation, Forests and Land. Audrey was the convenor and inaugural president of the North Harcourt-Sedgwick Landcare Group, the 14th such group set up in Victoria, the Convenor of the Axe Creek Catchment Landcare Group, and a Victorian Committee member of the Australian Landcare Foundation. For thirty years she has been involved with departmental trials, experiments and field days.

When Audrey was widowed in 1989, and the farm passed to her son, she secured 125 acres of it, did a six months farm mechanics course, borrowed on her bakery to build a mud-brick house, and still farms there today, producing prime vealers. She is concerned about the drift to the city, with encouraging young women to stay on the land, and about water policy.

Events

2019 - 2019

Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM): For service to agriculture, and to the community.

Published resources

Site Exhibition

Carrying on the Fight: Women Candidates in Victorian Parliamentary Elections, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2008,

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cws/home.html>

The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

Papers of Mary Salce, 1976-2007 [manuscript]

Papers of Laurene Dietrich, 1990-1994 [manuscript]

Records of the Gippsland Women's Network, 1994-2006 [manuscript]

Papers of Audrey Drechsler, 1979-2009 [manuscript]

Australian Historic Records Register

Country Women's Association of Victoria Inc.

Private Hands (these records may not be readily available)

Grasslands Society of Southern Australia Inc. Records

Author Details

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