

AUSTRALIAN NUFFIELD FARMING
SCHOLARS ASSOCIATION



1998 SCHOLARSHIP REPORT

By

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Topic: Women in Leadership Roles
in the Dairy Industry"

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Introduction

Life is a series of experiences. One by one, each of these experiences forms us into interesting, educated and open-minded people. Quite often an unexpected turn will lead to a new direction and this path can be a discovery one never expected.

As the 1998 Merlyn Myer (Woman in Agriculture) Nuffield Scholar, I never realised the depth and breadth of the experiences that would befall me prior to my departure in February 1999. Each individual event enhanced my Nuffield study, making this Scholarship the event of my farming life to date.

Of course none of this would have been possible without the support of some key people. My husband Brett has been the real rock behind me, supporting me in every way. Brett has encouraged me since my initial application and throughout the selection process, as well as during my time away in Asia, Europe, and in the UK and Ireland in which I spent the majority of my time. It is he who kept the home fires burning at our home farm and it is this sacrifice I will always be grateful for.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to my sponsors, Qantas and the Merlyn Myer Foundation. To Lindy Hayward, I thank you personally for recognising the special needs of women in agriculture. To the Australian Nuffield Farming Association, I offer my deepest thanks for developing a network and organisation conducive to such a program. My fellow Australian Scholars, as well as those from New Zealand, Canada, France and Zimbabwe proved to be interesting characters as travelling companions. Their diverse backgrounds contributed to my experience.

In particular I would like to thank the Australian Nuffield executive for their decision to grant an ex gratia payment due to the devalued Australian currency. Financially, the investment in me as a Scholar will now flow through to the many committees and organisations I am involved with in the dairy industry.

Last but not least, I must thank the many people who welcomed me and gave me time and hospitality throughout my study. These people, too numerous to mention one by one, assisted me with industry facts and figures and general advice and information. The Nuffield network is an exceptional group of people. It is with great pride that I can now call many of them friends and colleagues.

Objectives

I set out with three main objectives-

- ⇒ To research women's roles in the dairy industry.
- ⇒ To investigate women in leadership roles in the dairy industry.
- ⇒ To visualise the future gender landscape of leadership roles in the Australian dairy industry.

Introduction

When I set out on my Nuffield study to investigate *women in leadership roles in the dairy industry*, it never occurred to me that I would have any difficulty finding any. I naturally assumed that I would come upon these women as a matter of course once I made contact with the various dairy organisations and farmer groups. It soon became apparent however that women just weren't in visible leadership roles. Indeed, women are conspicuously absent from the public world of farming organisations, agri-support services, processing co-operatives and PLCs. Given this, I decided to look at women at the 'grass roots' level of farming and work up, in an attempt to discover if there was any impediment to the elevation of women into leadership roles in farming.

Women on the family farm

Family farming is the dominant form of agriculture in Australia and indeed the world. With the exception of large producers with hired labour, the majority of milk production is from farm holdings in family ownership, which rely almost exclusively on family labour. It is the women on these farms, and their roles as wives and mothers that were the subject of my investigation.

With the exception of a small minority, women become farm wives in two ways. They are either born into it or marry into it. Of the few women who classify themselves as farmers in their own right, these women are usually widows or single women who acquired land only in the absence or death of a male heir. For a vast majority of women it is through marriage that they enter farming, rather than as a career choice. Whichever the case, the women involved in farming carry a double burden of farm and household work. The fact that she is nearly always unpaid for her labour both on the farm and in the house contributes to the lack of independent status of a farming woman. Unless these women have off-farm employment they are commonly referred to as *farmers' wives* rather than as *farmers*. It is this male monopoly on the occupation of farmer that reflects the woman's role as an assistant to her partner who enjoys the status of 'farmer'. This can even be despite her significant contribution to physical farm work.

Despite their invisibility in the public world of agriculture, farm women are indeed essential to the everyday running of dairy farms. They are quite clearly at the heart of the family farm and contribute to its success in a very different way to the men.

As mothers and child carers, women are responsible for the farm children and can influence the next generation of family farmers. A woman's power is also under-estimated in the area of family farm succession planning. In a climate of farm holdings increasing in size to accommodate future commercialisation and deregulation in the dairy industry, it is becoming almost impossible to divide properties amongst siblings. It is the mother's influence on farm children that will directly result in offspring selecting an alternative career to farming if the future is not financially secure. It is in these distinctly different gender roles that women provide family farming with its security for the future by selecting the next generation of farmers as easily as diverting their other children away from the industry.

Traditionally...

For farm women, marriage rather than occupational choice, generally marks their entry into farming. This is essentially different and unequal to that of their partners in that it is a deeply ingrained cultural structure based on gender. Traditionally the young farm wife may have married a man who was heir to his family farm. For much of their young married life she and her husband would work for her parents-in-law, bringing up a family and assisting in the day to day house and farm work. These women in turn would pass their farms onto their eldest son, effectively being in a non-custodial position for most of their working lives. This patriarchal method of farm succession perpetuated intergenerational farming whilst maintaining women in a subordinate role. Clearly, women enter marriage on family farms on a different basis to their male counterparts.

The most significant thing about this is that the men in the family nearly always inherit the farm. It is very rare that a female with brothers will inherit land.

A new generation of farm wives

Today there exists a new generation of farm wives. Younger women marrying into family farms generally have a career and significant skills that are brought on to the farm. It is often that these women are more highly educated than their partners who may have been apprenticed to take over the family farm from a young age. Quite often these men are not given the opportunity of higher education or to select an alternative or complimentary career.

In Australia, only 18% of males aged between 15 and 64 years in farm owner-manager households have some form of post-school education, compared with 44 per cent in the general population. (ABARE, 1996) In contrast, the women belonging to these households with university or equivalent education is similar to that in the general population, yet only 3 per cent of farm owner- managers are women. (Garnaut & Lum-Applegate, 1998)

It could also be that men and women are getting married at a more mature age, bringing to the marriage more self confidence, independence and a higher educational status. Marrying later in life usually means a smaller family size. This coupled with birth control, means that women today are in a different situation to that of their mothers and grandmothers who were traditionally committed to raising children for many years.

Marrying later in life quite often means that a woman may bring her own capital into the family farm business. This may well give birth to a 'partnership' mentality, particularly if the wife contributes significant assets of her own.

The farm as a business

With the evolution of family farming into a business enterprise, gender roles again come into play. Whilst men's roles are significantly less physical with the advent of agricultural machinery and technology, women's roles have also evolved.

In dairying in particular, women are very aware of their labour contribution to the farm. Due to the physical and constant demands of milking and calf rearing, they have a very real sense of their contribution to the farm as part of a team. Their work is normally centered around the yard and only help out in paddock work in emergencies. It is driving the tractor that is the critical boundary between yard and paddock work. It is also the traditional boundary between gender roles.

In addition to the traditional farm woman's roles of wife, mother, homemaker, milker and calf rearer, there is also the non-manual farm work. Almost all women on dairy farms are involved in some way. This typically includes dealing with callers, awaiting deliveries, running errands, and discussing the farm business generally. It may well include the account keeping and record keeping. Generally this work is seen as 'inside' work, akin to the child rearing and housework. It is the non-manual nature of this work that allows it to be cast as *supportive* rather than *managerial*. We often make the mistake of dismissing this farm work as work at all, but the truth is that these jobs would not be necessary if the farm did not exist.

It is interesting to note that the financial management of the farm is a key role that actually controls the business and has enormous repercussions to its success. It would also be most appropriate to mention women's excellent communication skills. This ability to mediate and negotiate is fully transferable into the corporate world.

Women as leaders

When I began to research *women in leadership roles in the dairy industry*, I did what everyone else would naturally do. I tried to go straight to the top of leading agricultural organisations. I was indeed disappointed to find very few women in the roles of directors or chairpersons. I couldn't even find many women climbing these leadership ladders. Instead, I was sent off in the direction of successful farming women, that is, women farming in their own right.

So, in what terms do we measure farming success? Is it in setting physical farm goals that achieve results? Certainly, these are traditionally the roles which men seek.

Part of the problem lies in the lack of recognition women receive for their role on the farm. It seems that neither ourselves, nor the industry at large recognise the work we do with sufficient weight and respect.

Increased recognition has to start in us.

1. We need to realise that non-paid, non-manual work is indeed farm work.
2. We need to be involved in organisations from the grass roots level up.
3. We need to participate more in development groups and discussion groups.
4. We must positively affirm women who are breaking new ground in our industry and support these women's achievements.
5. We need to recognise ourselves as *farmers* and NOT farmer's wives.

Finally, women need and seek the support of the current leaders in the dairy industry at policy-making levels. We have been traditionally cast in the role of support as secretaries, rather than as presidents, chairpersons or directors. It is time women's work was recognised for the contribution to the dairy industry that it is.

Women's needs

Having established that women need to be recognised for their contribution to agriculture, and that it is essential that there is a more even gender balance within it at all levels, the challenge lies in getting women to become involved.

I would like to identify five factors that may limit this.

1. Child care responsibilities
2. Lack of self confidence
3. Lack of farm education/training
4. Lack of rural transport
5. Gender stereotyping.

Childcare responsibilities

There is no doubt that childcare responsibilities are one of the differentiating factors between the roles of men and women. The role of *father* and *mother* are obviously different both biologically and physically. But it is the role of *parent* that is the same for both. It is important that the role of parent be encouraged, rather than exclusively the domain of the female partner.

It is also essential that crèche facilities be available at industry meetings so as not to exclude women with young children from attending.

Lack of self-confidence - Lack of farm training

Lacking in self confidence and lack of farm education go hand in hand. It takes women with extraordinary vision and determination to re-invent their traditional roles. By learning and developing relevant skills, women will be empowered to contribute and in turn increase their self-confidence. It is essential that women involve themselves in training and discussion groups and that these groups in turn meet their needs.

For this reason it is essential that the current women in dairying discussion groups be encouraged to develop. It is my personal opinion that there will be no more need for them on the day we have a more gender balanced leadership team in the Australian dairy industry. At that point we will have experienced a genuine recognition of the contribution of women to agriculture.

Lack of rural transport

Lack of transport in many areas can also be a significant barrier for rural women. It is essential that meetings be held in close geographical areas and that rural services be as readily available as possible. This is where access to the Internet and email facilities can be a huge benefit for the exchange of information.

Gender stereotyping

Of course gender stereotyping is not exclusive to the agricultural industry. I hope that this study into women in agriculture will demonstrate the differences and equalities between farm men and women.

Conclusion

This brings me to three points:

1. There is no doubt that men and women are in fact different. *Different but equal*. It is quite obvious that there are physical and biological differences between the genders.
2. Women have had very few public role models in positions of leadership and authority.
3. Most importantly, there is no evidence to suggest that women should be excluded from the roles men play in the dairy industry. They may well bring different traits to these roles, but that in itself would be a good thing.

We make up 50% of the population. Women should be involved in the industry not because they can do the job *better*, but if they can do it as *well*, and that's good enough for me. They will bring a new dimension and balance to the industry.

The following quote by Nelson Mandela sums up the attitude we should all adopt.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves '*who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?*'

Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world.

There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Nelson Mandela 1994

It is my hope that women will never feel that they have to match their male counterparts blow for blow in physical farm work, but rather that they are recognised for their positive contribution to the dairy industry as a genuine player.

Agricultural organisations and their initiatives to promote women's roles-

International Women's Day- 8th March

World Rural Women's Day- 15th October

England

National Farmer's Union- Women in Agriculture Conference (15 October 1977)

Recommendations:

1. The creation of a Rural Women's Network (RWN) to focus existing organisations on key issues facing rural women. RWN to meet regularly to develop strategy and review progress.
2. Develop a national agenda highlighting priority issues. Namely, education, employment, training, rural child care, access to transport and funding.
3. Closer working relationship with government to increase the role of women in rural policy making and agricultural institutions.

Ireland

Irish Farmers Association- National Farm Family Committee

1. Actively supporting and promoting farming women's roles.
2. Researched, produced and distributed a book called 'Farm Women'. A Changing Role in the 20th Century'.

Macre Na Feirme- (Young farmers movement, currently with 35% female membership)

New Opportunities for Women (NOW) programme.

8th March 1999- launched NOW programme and the first meeting of Network of Female Farmers.

NOW initiatives include:

1. Gender awareness and training for all staff and members.
2. Guidance, support and encouragement for all members wishing to take part in further study.
3. The development of pilot projects in the areas of interest to female members.
4. A disability awareness campaign with a special emphasis on women with disabilities.
5. Establishment of an Equality Manager within the organisation.

IFA Family Farm Committee, Irish Farmers Journal and Bank of Ireland

Farm Women of the Year Awards

The competition is open to all women involved on family farms for a minimum of two years.

Objectives:

1. To identify, encourage and reward the enormous contribution of women on family farms throughout Ireland.
2. To recognise the work women do to make or keep the farm viable.
3. By recognising this work it is hoped that the work of all farm women will become more valued.

Women's Information Network (WIN)- A self help group of like-minded dairy women.

Group description:

1. The members consist of women with a commitment to wealth creation with farming as their core business.
2. The members are focused, motivated, positive, trustworthy women who have a desire to learn and share information.
3. The ethos of the group should be friendly, supportive, open and helpful nature while placing a premium on confidentiality.

Objectives:

1. Networking, sharing ideas and information.
2. Personal development.
3. Education.
4. Investigate investment and business opportunities not necessarily in the farming sector.
5. Recognise their role as a pilot group with the vision to expand the network in the future.

Department of Agriculture and Food- Action Programme for the Millennium.

Special Advisory Committee on the role of Women in Agriculture

Mr Joe Walsh, the Minister for Agriculture, has invited the submission of proposals by interested bodies as to the Terms of Reference for such a committee.

Objectives:

1. Advise and monitor progress in policy initiatives to support women in agriculture.
2. Establish a network for women in farming.
3. Address specific training requirements of women.
4. Identify specific measures to facilitate women combining farming and family duties.

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- Susan McCarthy- *Women's Information Network*
- Tory Baker- *Chairperson, Women's Information Network; Finalist- Irish Rural Woman of the Year 1999*
- NAC Dairy Club (Hungary tour participants)- *For excellent debate on these issues.*

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