

RURAL



WOMEN'S
NETWORK

Special Report

May 1992 ~ June 1996

Achievements and future directions

Acknowledgements

Many heartfelt thanks are due to all those with whom the RWN has worked over the last four years:

- ◆ individual women throughout NSW and beyond who form a strong vital network,
- ◆ the State Advisory Committee members who do so much in their networks and local areas,
- ◆ NSW Agriculture Director General, staff around the state, and particularly in the Office of Rural Communities – Jim Booth and Anne Muir, for their assistance, support and guidance,
- ◆ those from many agencies and communities in partnership projects,
- ◆ and within the RWN, the excellent dedicated staff who have worked on behalf of rural women – Sonia Muir (Assistant Coordinator), and as the Support or Project Officer at various times – Susan Campbell, Janet Van Dorst, Alison Messner and Pam Cuelho.

Margaret Carroll, RWN Coordinator

The Special Report

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Acronyms

| | |
|--------|---|
| ACE | Adult & Community Education |
| AWiA | Australian Women in Agriculture |
| BAVRA | Bathurst Area Volunteer Resource Agency |
| CSU | Charles Sturt University |
| CWA | Country Women's Association |
| DPIE | Department of Primary Industries & Energy |
| DSS | Department of Social Security |
| FAAW | Foundation of Agricultural Women |
| LOP | Luncheon on the Plains (arts project) |
| NCOSS | NSW Council of Social Service |
| NGO | Non government organisation |
| NZ | New Zealand |
| OAM | Medal of the Order of Australia |
| RAA | Rural Assistance Authority |
| RAS | Rural Assistance Scheme |
| RAP | Rural Access Program |
| RHSET | Rural Health, Support, Education & Training Program |
| RLPB | Rural Lands Protection Board |
| RWN | Rural Women's Network |
| RWSP | Rural Women's Satellite Project |
| SAC | State Advisory Committee (RWN) |
| SWArts | South West Arts |
| TAFE | Technical and Further Education |
| WAC | Women's Advisory Council |
| WCC | Women's Consultative Committee |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |
| WOW | Work Opportunities for Women |

Foreword

In 1992, NSW Agriculture established the Rural Women's Network program within the Department to recognise the needs and contribution of rural women to agriculture, their families and their communities. In setting up this program, the NSW Government responded positively to important issues raised by over 650 rural women from throughout NSW at the Parkes Rural Women's Conference in 1991.

The RWN has operated mainly through its three staff members and State Advisory Committee (SAC) drawn from major rural networks in NSW. As Director General, I jointly chair the SAC with a community representative – Audrey Hardman OAM from the NSW Women's Consultative Committee in 1992-94 and Fran Rowe, Rural Financial Counsellor from Tottenham in 1994-96.

Over the four years of its operation, the RWN has worked with rural women, with NSW Agriculture staff and many other agencies to produce some significant outcomes. It has developed an extensive communication network with rural women and service providers in NSW and interstate through The Country Web newsletter. The NSW Women of the Land Gatherings are now an annual event organised by community based groups of women in different regions.

The priority issues of rural women were identified in an innovative way through the Rural Women's Satellite project organised jointly between NSW Agriculture and NSW TAFE, NSW Health and the NSW Board of Adult and Community Education. This consultation has been the catalyst for many projects to address some of these priority needs such as leadership programs for rural women, educational programs, rural women's information days, and community cultural development.

The RWN plays an important role in information provision for rural people – men and women, through its response to hundreds of requests monthly and in compiling data from across government to produce and distribute the 1995-96 Country Guide, a directory of government services in NSW.

NSW Agriculture, through the RWN program has formed new partnerships, for example with St Vincent's Outreach in the Country Care Link 1800 service, with NSW Health in the Orana and Far West in the Building Stronger Communities project, with Central West Adult and Community Education in *Stepping Stones* leadership program, with State and Regional Development Department and Central West Community College in the Business Skills and Mentoring project.

In addition, the RWN has accessed and introduced NSW Agriculture to

Foreword

new funding sources beyond the traditional avenues for agricultural projects. These have provided the resources for many of the RWN partnership projects.

The RWN has contributed to raising the profile of rural women in Australia through important events such as the feature *Women in Agriculture* at the 1995 Australian National Field Days, and its involvement in national planning of the 1994 inaugural International Women in Agriculture Conference and the first National Rural Women's Forum.

The RWN is now part of the newly established Office of Rural Communities in NSW Agriculture. The future directions of the RWN in focusing on women in decision making, women as agents of change, and with other NSW Agriculture programs on women as clients of the department – will be integral parts of this initiative.

I commend to readers this Special Report about the Rural Women's Network over its first four years 1992 to 1996 – as a record of the ways in which the program has improved the opportunities for rural women and rural families in NSW.



KP Sheridan
Director General
NSW Agriculture
11 June 1996

Rural Women's Network Mission:

To enhance the opportunities for rural women & rural families in New South Wales by promoting the development & facilitation of efficient & effective programs & communication networks.

Overview 1992 ~ 1996

The concept for the Rural Women's Network (RWN) program in NSW came from the 1991 *grassroots* Rural Women's Conference in Parkes, attracting 650 women & organised by the NSW Women's Advisory Council (WAC). The driving forces were keen rural women such as Audrey Hardman (Country Women's Association, CWA & WAC), Vivienne Sinderberry (NSW Farmers' Association) & Cathy McGowan from Victoria.

This conference *"identified the need for rural women to be better informed, to share ideas & concerns, to have access to information on services/resources available, & to be able to speak in a united voice about their needs"* (RWN Proposal to Premier, Oct 1991).

The then Premier, approved the proposal in December 1991 & Coordinator, Margaret Carroll was appointed in May 1992 to work from the newly relocated NSW Agriculture head office in Orange. The NSW Agriculture Minister launched the RWN program as *"recognition of the strength of women as a key factor in the survival of rural families"* & said that *"the Network will be an ongoing program targeted to rural women in an effort to bridge isolation & the communication gap between rural families & the Government."* (Ministerial Press Release, December 1991).

The original intention of the RWN was seen in information provision, particularly in the areas of agriculture, education & finance. From listening to rural women's concerns over kitchen tables, in halls, at crossroads, via satellite links – other important & un-met needs also emerged.

The focus of RWN work is people, especially rural women in town & country areas of NSW, & those who provide them with services, assistance, information or inspiration. In the first RWN Annual Report, the Coordinator outlined the philosophy the RWN adopted in establishing a new statewide program:

- ◆ *'Going where the smiles are'*
- ◆ *Working with those who need assistance or are catalysts within their own group or community*
- ◆ *Listening to what are different issues & concerns in different areas, & taking account of what those women want to do as the basis for strategies & action*
- ◆ *Not 're-inventing the wheel' because there are many good programs, ideas & resources already existing that can be adapted & moved to other areas.*

Accessing a rural client group that is often isolated, lacking finance for travel & other communications like phone calls, & unaccustomed to working with government has been the most important challenge initially. Hence, RWN work has emphasised travelling to our clients, use of radio & other communication avenues, trialling a 24 hour phone service & networking." (RWN Annual Report 1, June 1993)

"The key approaches that work well for the RWN are:

- 1. being based within NSW Agriculture with its support, linkages, resources & expertise***
 - 2. a community based advisory structure with nine State Advisory Committee members from different networks & regions***
 - 3. working jointly with other agencies & groups to meet rural women's needs, such as the St Vincent's Sisters of Charity, NSW TAFE, NSW Health, landcare, Arts Councils & therefore accessing a broader range of ideas, experience & resources***
 - 4. accessing funding from a variety of sources for various projects & therefore developing valuable links & resources externally (\$423,500 accessed)***
 - 5. focusing on information & communications through regular use of the media, The Country Web newsletter, RWN Information Resource Centre & modern technology such as the use of satellite link-ups with rural women***
 - 6. developing a credible, accessible, non-bureaucratic & pro-active image."***
- (RWN Annual Report 2, July 1994)

Overview 1992 ~ 1996

RWN Focus – Issues & Action

To maintain relevance & operate most efficiently the RWN program has concentrated on dealing with issues. Issues affect women across the board, often regardless of their geographic location, particular group, age, socio-economic status or ethnicity. Issues change & evolve. To *keep an ear to the ground* on what are current & important issues, the RWN uses consultations & an extensive communication network, including its State Advisory Committee.

The RWN has **consulted with women informally, through over 220 community workshops, conferences, presentations & in a systematic way through the statewide Rural Women's Satellite Project (RWSP)** which focused on the roles of women in agriculture, post-compulsory education & women's health. From these arose a wide range of community & agency actions to deal with priority issues (see p 10-11).

Over the period 1992-95 during times of prolonged drought & rural recession – the themes of isolation, lack of communications & information, need for support, counselling & stress management have been the most significant forces shaping RWN strategies. Emerging in 1995-96 are other more positive themes of recognising the roles of women in agriculture, increasing women's involvement in decision making, the management of change in a rapidly changing world & accessing learning on sustaining the family farm & rural communities.

Isolation and Breakdown in Support Networks

These were the initial major themes the RWN encountered. Women spoke about loneliness, social & geographic isolation from friends, family & services, diminishing communications through both lack of personal skills & cost of travel & phones, family & financial stresses, & breakdown in support networks.

The first significant RWN partnerships emerged around meeting some of these needs:

- ◆ **Country Care Link 1800 line initiated by St Vincent's Outreach** in Sydney with western women provides confidential professional counselling, information & referrals for the cost of a local call & has expanded to cover all rural NSW (see p 17).
- ◆ **Building Stronger Communities pilot project with NSW Health** in the most severely drought affected region – 43% of the state in the Orana/Far West – brings people together & strengthens support networks, building communication skills & developing good community information bases (see p 16).
- ◆ **RWN trialled two info-action programs over four week periods with 2CR ABC Radio (Central West – 1/3 NSW) & commercial radio 2WEB Bourke (50,000 listeners)** on managing stress of finances, marriage & children. Written material was available on request & 1800 phone access to Country Care Link.
- ◆ **Support for women's self help initiatives** has been a continuing strength in accessing project funding, developing skills & programs, & empowerment of women eg Bathurst (BAVRA) volunteer training Project, Rural Women's Mentor program, Challenge of Change.

Lack of Communication and Information

- ◆ The first **Women of the Land Gathering in Orange** convened with Farmsafe Central West, grew from needs to network, share experiences, inspiration & information, communicate & learn new skills. Gatherings are now an annual event organised by groups of women in different regions (see p 13).
- ◆ The **Country Web** newsletter produced by RWN Assistant Coordinator, Sonia Muir has developed as RWN's major communication avenue linking rural women with each other & service providers, with 23,000 now printed three times a year (see p 14).
- ◆ Constant needs for **provision of accessible, user friendly information** is the daily work of RWN staff through responding to hundreds of requests per month, distribution of information through field days, production & dissemination of the **Country Guide** directory of government services for country people in NSW, & development of a comprehensive Information Resource Centre (see p 14).

Overview 1992 ~ 1996

- ◆ **Working with the media** has been an effective strategy in improving communications & information on rural women's & community issues to a wider audience through 60-80 interviews per year.

Drought Support

Drought has been a recurring theme – from 73% of NSW drought declared in 1992 to an unprecedented 98% in January 1995. Prolonged drought saps finances, strength & eventually hope. The challenge is how to survive, manage risk & recover, how to maintain hope & support ourselves & each other, our farms & our rural communities.

In 1994-95, RWN produced a *Special Drought Country Web* distributed to 35,000; & the State Advisory Committee proposed various initiatives:

- ◆ the **Drought Support Worker scheme in NSW** to provide emotional support, emergency funds & information to farm families. This scheme has operated across the state through NSW Agriculture
- ◆ **extension of Country Care Link to all rural NSW & provision of free legal advice.** St Vincent's Outreach initiated accommodation & transport assistance for rural people coming to Sydney, & Telepal linking outback & inner city schools. The impact of such care & practical support has been invaluable in building bridges between country & city
- ◆ **production of a video "Let's Talk" by RWN with Tocal College & Family Life, Dubbo** to improve family communications in the face of cumulative stresses on family farms, self esteem & relationships (see p 15).

Women's & Family Health

- ◆ The attraction for the first **Rural Women's Days** at Cobar, Bourke & Narrabri in 1992-93 was improving women's health. Over 900 women came from vast areas around these centres to learn about menopause, osteoporosis, managing stress, communicating in families & with partners, backstrains & pains, farm safety. Rural Women's Days since have often followed these themes because they have universal importance.
- ◆ The **Rural Women's Satellite Project** involved consultation with NSW Health, identified important issues in funding & provision of services, better access to mental health care, women's health & preventative health care, & the need to attract health professionals to rural areas.
- ◆ Dealing with grief through losses of all kinds was a largely un-met rural health need from RWN consultations, leading to Fran Spora's **Challenge of Change** project which has benefited many through her booklet, workshops & is now funded to train others across NSW (see p 17).

Learning Opportunities

The RWN initiated the **Rural Women's Satellite Project** originally with NSW TAFE & Adult & Community Education because women expressed concerns about lack of ongoing programs meeting their learning needs. The main issues identified were for better coordination of education providers, greater flexibility & relevance in course content, timing & delivery, improved information on learning opportunities, participation of women in educational decision making, recognition of prior learning & experience, increased opportunities for Aboriginal women, & reducing the access barriers such as cost & childcare provision. Various programs arose:

- ◆ **Isolated women at Bonalbo in the North Coast accessed a special Work Opportunities for Women (WOW) project** organised by NSW Agriculture, NSW TAFE & Adult & Community Education
- ◆ **Isolated women in the far South West accessed Luncheon on the Plains**, an Australia Council funded cultural development project run by RWN & South West Arts (see p 15).

Overview 1992 ~ 1996

- ◆ NSW TAFE Western Institute initiated the Farm & Life Skills pilot program to tailor learning to rural women's needs.

Roles of Women in Agriculture

Recognition of the contribution of women to agriculture & rural life, agricultural/environmental sustainability, involvement in decision making, & opportunities to develop their potential further were significant themes in the RWSP, the first **International Women in Agriculture Conference** in 1994 in Melbourne, & the first **National Rural Women's Forum** in Canberra in 1995.

- ◆ The RWN coordinated & planned the **landmark feature exhibit – Women in Agriculture for the 1995 Australian National Field Days in Orange**, & was also involved with the Women in Agriculture Feature at the **1996 Tocal College Small Farm Field Days**. Both events highlighted women's contributions to agriculture to many thousands (see p 18).

Women in Decisionmaking

This is a national priority for rural women identified through various forums. Through RWN partnership with Central West Adult & Community Education, two leadership programs have developed in the NSW central west region in response to the voice of RWSP participants – **Business, Mentoring & Leadership Skills & "Stepping Stones" for young rural women** (see p 19). They are giving women new skills, sharing experiences, building strong networks & providing valuable leads, resources & impetus to other programs & areas.

Women as Agents of Change

In times of rapid change in rural communities, on farms & in people's lives - women are voicing needs for new skills to deal effectively with change. These will shape RWN work over the next two years – in **communication & information technology, in accessing women from different ethnic backgrounds, in working with youth & older women**.

Women as Clients of NSW Agriculture

NSW Agriculture has provided ongoing support to the RWN program. Opportunities are continuing to develop for **the Department to play a leading role in meeting the needs of women in agriculture through its mainstream programs** – Farming for the Future, in industries such as dairying & pigs, the education courses & colleges, & the newly established Office of Rural Communities.

The Rural Women's Network can provide opportunities for communications, information & action on rural women's issues.

What makes the difference is the partnerships & working with the strength, wisdom & drive of rural women themselves.

Input to Policy

Increasingly the RWN has contributed to policy at State & National levels through reports, submissions, comment on government papers & input through avenues such as the NSW Women's Consultative Committee (see p 20-21).

- ◆ At National level, **RWN has represented NSW on the inaugural International Women in Agriculture conference planning group & first National Rural Women's Forum steering committee**. From these fora recommendations, the National Rural Women's Unit in the Federal Department of Primary Industries & Energy has developed in 1995, convening the first national Rural Women's Stakeholders Meeting in 1996.
- ◆ RWN submitted **recommendations to the 1995 United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing through the lead-up Platform for Action and co-convened a workshop on Global Networking for Rural Women**.
- ◆ The newly established **Office of Rural Communities in NSW Agriculture** under which RWN will work, will provide **an avenue to the NSW Government through its Rural Communities Consultative Council**.

Consulting on Priority Issues

The first task for the RWN was to access rural women on farms, in country towns & regional cities across NSW & listen to their concerns. Over the past four years, RWN staff & SAC members have done this in 3 ways:

1. Informal Meetings

Staff travelled extensively in the first two years especially, covering over 80,000 kilometres to meet with rural women on their farms, in halls & over kitchen tables to observe & listen, develop a credible image for the RWN & find out practical ways of dealing with concerns (refer map p 36).

2. Rural Women's Days & Conferences Presentations & Workshops

Rural Women's Days began in Cobar in 1992 from small beginnings of women meeting at their nearest crossroads during a dust storm & deciding to bring other women in their district together. Two hundred gathered to learn about women's health & other identified priority issues, followed by 100 gathering at Bourke, over 600 at Narrabri, then many other areas. Local groups of women & men, see below NSW Agriculture staff in Yass & Goulburn doing a great job) organise these. The RWN role is in providing information, support & referrals to helpful contacts.

In 1992-93, RWN staff met with over 110 groups ranging from a few women to hundreds. In 1993-94, staff reached over 5,500 women through presentations & workshops providing valuable opportunities for consulting on issues, communication, information exchange & networking. This form of consulting takes a lot of time, energy, resources & travel, although it fulfils the need for personal contact & understanding.

3. More Structured Consultation ~ *Rural Women's Satellite Project*

The Rural Women's Satellite Project (RWSP) in 1993-94 complemented & built on the informal meetings & Rural Women's Days. The RWSP used technology to bring more than 500 rural women together to identify gaps in programs & services, & develop strategies across NSW in the areas of *Women's Health, Post Compulsory Education & the Role of Women in Agriculture*.

NSW Agriculture's Rural Women's Network, NSW Health, NSW Board of Adult & Community Education & TAFE NSW undertook this joint landmark project to consult, develop partnerships across government & the rural community & act as a catalyst in dealing with issues.



Rural Women's Satellite
Project

Consulting on Priority Issues

Role of Women in Agriculture

The particular emphases raised by rural women whether on the land or not, relate largely to factors of isolation & access, level & relevance of service, lack of information & lack of recognition for their accomplishments.

Women's Health

"The range of comments included broader questions about funding, cross border issues, greater collaboration between departments, transportation to services, attracting health workers to work in rural & remote areas, & more localised education & training for health workers"

Post Compulsory Education

" They [the women] are also seeking increased flexibility of courses, their content, timing & methods of delivery."

Funding for the RWSP was provided through the Rural Access Program (Federal Dept of Primary Industries & Energy) & the NSW Women's Consultative Committee (NSW Department for Women).

Considerable inkind support given by NSW Agriculture, NSW Health, TAFE NSW, the NSW Board of Adult & Community Education.

The Sites

From the TAFE satellite network 26 sites were selected to reflect a range of geographical regions which included rural towns & cities as well as coastal, inland & isolated areas. At each site facilitation teams representing each agency gathered together a group of 15-20 local women with an interest in issues.

The facilitators were asked to ensure that the group reflected cross-sections of their local community & surrounding districts by selecting women of different ages, localities & backgrounds. Women came from farms, country towns, & rural cities, & included those employed, unemployed & women from Aboriginal & non-English speaking backgrounds.

The facilitating teams were critical to the success of the project. They developed local ownership & commitment to the project, highlighting the knowledge & potential of local rural women, & following up on issues.

With the support of the trained facilitators, rural women participated in two days of workshops which included interaction by satellite with a panel of decision makers.

The Panel

The panel included key decisionmakers from the four agencies in the issue areas & spokeswomen from the Office of Aboriginal Affairs & the NSW Women's Consultative Committee (now Premier's Council for Women). NSW Agriculture's Director General, Dr Kevin Sheridan & Audrey Hardman OAM (State Advisory Committee) participated on this panel.

The immediacy & flexibility of the satellite network enabled women to have a voice directly to decisionmakers on their issues of concern.

The Report

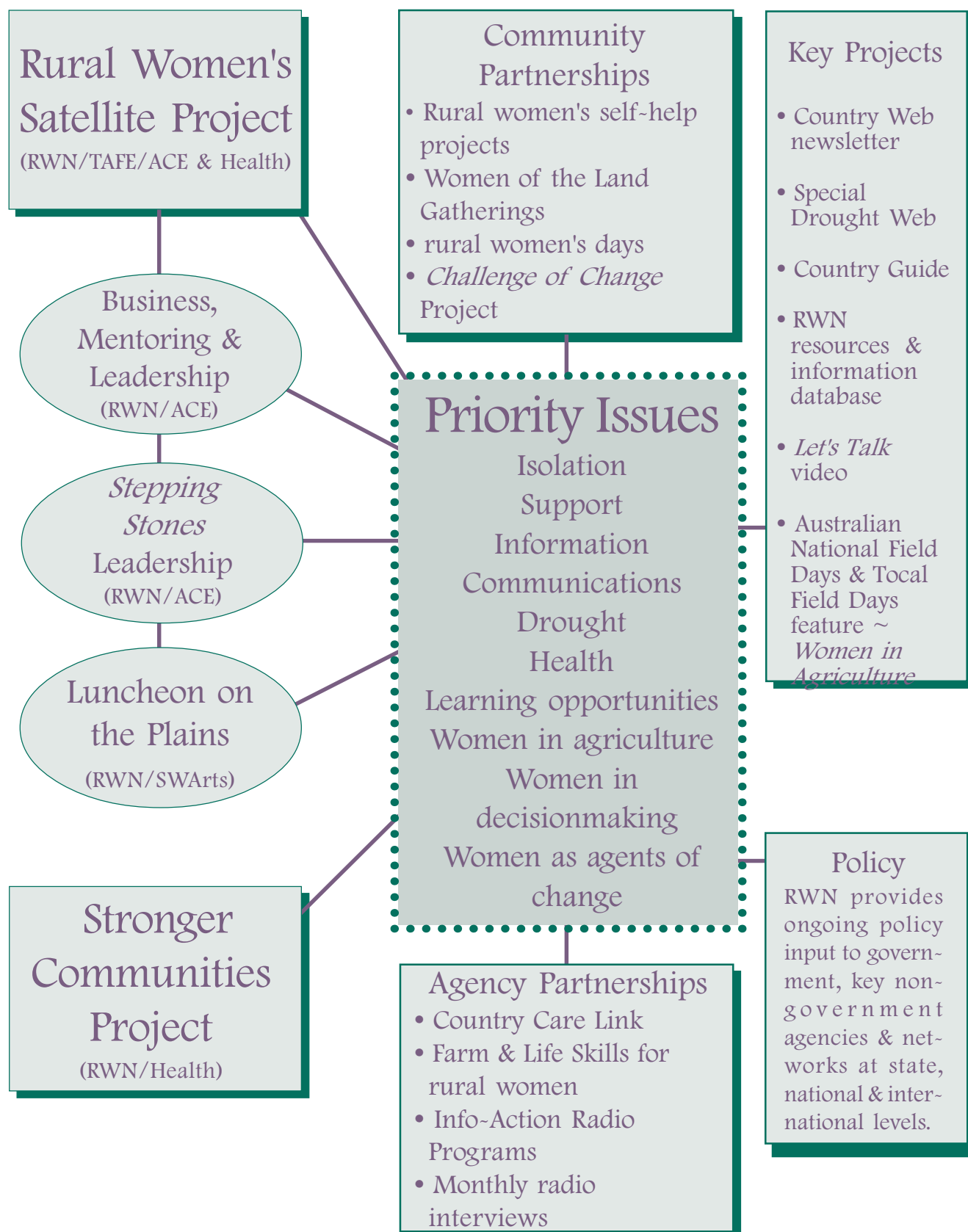
The needs & issues of the groups involved were collated, analysed & documented in a report. Over 2,500 of these were distributed.

Direct feedback from decisionmakers together with follow-up interviews with representatives from each government department were also used to develop a comprehensive list of *Ideas for Action*.

The report has provided direction to rural women, community groups & agencies in taking up issues both within & across agencies. (For agency joint projects, see diagram p 12).

Rural Women's Network Action on Issues

Joint Projects



Action on Issues



Women of the Land Gatherings

Background

The *Women of the Land Gatherings* in NSW emerged out of a similar idea in Victoria where *Women on Farms Gatherings* have been a part of the rural women's calendar for a number of years.

Philosophy and Purpose

The Women of the Land Gatherings are not conferences or lobbying events. Gatherings provide an opportunity for rural women – from farms, rural cities and towns – to come together to learn, network, and share information and experiences.

It is an important avenue for forging links between urban and rural women and also offers an opportunity for rural women to access decisionmakers and service providers. It is also instrumental in raising the profile of rural women through wide media coverage.

Each Gathering has a theme and is held in a different location in the State. Over 350 women have attended each year in what has now become an annual event – 1993 – Orange, 1994 – Gunnedah, 1995 – Yanco, the 1996 Gathering will be held in Cobar, & in the Hunter Region in 1997.

Program

Gatherings are organised by local women from the local community who take ownership of the event for that year. The RWN plays a strong coordination and support role assisting these committees throughout the planning.

The two and a half day program includes a host of activities including – women's stories, displays, workshops, guest speakers, panels, farm tours, entertainment, exhibitions. Childcare is also provided.

Each year the organising committee approaches organisations for sponsorship to ensure top speakers are a feature and to keep the costs for participants affordable. Many organisations and groups also provide inkind contributions.

The Gatherings have become a highlight for rural women with similar events being held in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania.

"I have been enormously impressed by the wonderful spirit of sharing, caring, the sense of excitement, the levels of energy that I have been able to detect at the Gathering."

Pat O'Shane, Magistrate
(Keynote Speaker, 1993
Gathering, Orange)

"What a wonderful opportunity to see the strength, support & encouragement women can offer each other when they come together."

Lyn Sykes
(Workshop facilitator, 1994
Gathering, Gunnedah)

Support for Gatherings comes from a variety of sources including both financial and inkind.

Local business, industry and government play an integral role working with the organising committees to ensure the event is a success.

Action on Issues

The Country Web Newsletter

The Country Web newsletter emerged out of a need for rural women to have a voice. *The Country Web* provides an effective avenue for better communications for rural women and their families throughout NSW. Through the newsletter women are able to share ideas, issues, inspiration, information, experiences and opportunities. It has also become a valuable resource for government and non-government agencies to inform the rural sector about services they offer.

The Country Web is produced by RWN Assistant Coordinator, Sonia Muir. Over its 3½ years, its print run has built up to 23,000 for the three editions a year, with a constantly growing direct mailing list of over 10,000 individuals and groups. In its evaluation (1994) 98% of the respondents found it excellent or very good.

It is an *issues-based* newsletter and each edition has a focus. Past newsletters have highlighted:- ♦ Isolation, ♦ Women's Health, ♦ Education, ♦ Family, ♦ Drought (Special Edition) ♦ Environment, ♦ Women in Agriculture, ♦ Work & Employment, ♦ The Law

Information Provision

One of the major tasks for RWN is providing information in an accessible & digestible form for rural women. This is tackled in four ways:-

1. Dealing with requests on a variety of subjects from a wide range of people. These average about 500 a month between the three staff members & are often referred onto other service providers or rural women.
2. Janet van Dorst & Alison Messner, former Project Officers collated information from across government to produce the **1995-96 Country Guide Directory** of government services for country people. RWN has also been responsible for the Guide's promotion & distribution in previous years. The Guide has proved popular with 15,000 copies distributed for each production run.
3. Distributing a large amount of information at field days & rural women's gatherings on a regular basis.
4. Operating a small Resource Centre at NSW Agriculture (Orange) of relevant publications, videos & tapes on rural women's & rural community issues.



Excerpts from Country Web readers...

"I am so excited that such a paper is circulating & is long overdue, giving an outlet for country women."

Barbara Murray, Kyogle

"I was given The Country Web & found it interesting. I have been on the land for most of my 82 years where I reared a family of six & now have thirteen grandchildren."

Elsie Kerr, Gunnedah

"As always, it [Country Web] is so readable, & the things that I appreciate about it is that there is an input from so many areas, & so many different people."

Quendryth Young, Alstonville

The Country Web and Country Guide are funded by NSW Agriculture & available free through the Rural Women's Network

Action on Issues

"The workshops allowed them to explore their own histories, exchange stories & express these in meaningful artworks."

Anna Glynn, Artist/tutor

"I attended the photography workshop at Jerilderie. The day was thoroughly enjoyable & I learnt a lot."

Caroline Heath
participant from Jerilderie



Luncheon on the Plains was funded by:



with inkind support from RWN & South West Arts.

Luncheon on the Plains ~ arts project

Luncheon on the Plains (LOP) arts project (1995) celebrated the lives of remote rural women. The project was run jointly with the Hay based South West Arts Regional Arts Development Officers (Andrew Manning & Kim McMahon). The impetus for the project emerged out of the Rural Women's Satellite Project which highlighted the need for better access to services & networking opportunities for rural & remote women in the isolated South West of NSW.

Due to their extreme isolation & the economic hardship encountered with the ongoing effects of the drought, remote rural women from this region had little opportunity to meet with each other. LOP brought over 140 remote rural women together, fostering community cultural support networks.

Professional artists were contracted to provide a total of 19 workshops (photography, collage, drama, drawing, printmaking & patchwork) at 9 locations – including Hatfield, Balranald, Hillston, Moulamein, Hay & Jerilderie.

Regional exhibitions were held at Balranald, Moulamein, Wagga Wagga & Yanco. Exhibitions provided an opportunity to network & share their experiences. The arts were used very successfully as a forum with which to explore identity, ideas, to converse with others & develop individual skills for the elevation of the participants' self worth.

Let's Talk ~ communications video

RWN proposed & coordinated the production of a video *Let's Talk on Communication for Farm Families* as part of the drought support measures for farm families announced on 9 August 1994. It emphasises the importance of open & honest communication within farm families, especially in tough times.

The video portrays real-life situations using unrelated rural people as the *players*. It looks at issues of self esteem, levels of communication, handling conflict & dealing with difficult issues through a family meeting using a facilitator. Jenny Laffan (Tocal College) scripted & produced it with Lyn Sykes, Family Life Counsellor (Dubbo), & Tom Braz (Communications Unit, NSW Agriculture) filming & editing.

Over 500 copies have been sold or distributed as resources & used by people working with farm families – NSW Agriculture staff, Drought Support Workers, Rural Financial Counsellors, RWN, other agencies & rural people themselves.

"The important thing to remember as a farm family was that you had to work as a team & communication was an important part of that. During the drought & tough times, people tend to put all their efforts in just keeping going & not have family meetings & there is often a communication break-down."

Trixie Hawke
(member of the video
'farm family')



Let's Talk funded by:

- NSW Agriculture
- NSW Government Drought Support Package

Action on Issues

Stronger Communities Project

This joint RWN/NSW Health project was developed in response to the consistently voiced issues of stress, depression, isolation, declining community support networks & poor communication skills for people living in the Orana/Far West region, 43% of the State.



The 3 year project (1993-96) funded from the Federal Rural Health Support, Education & Training Program is monitored by a steering committee of 12. A full-time community liaison & training worker, Fleur Herscovitch, is based in Dubbo. In 1995 extra funding enabled a part-time worker to establish a volunteer home visiting program in Nyngan & it now has continued funding.

Training Programs reaching over 1000

Professional training included undertaking community inquiries, focus group research, puppetry in clinical practice & health promotion, counselling & role delineation, communication skills for specialised settings & community development skills.

General training included conflict resolution & other aspects of communication skills, community development, managing emotions, play, child development & coping with hard times. Individual volunteers have accessed training, but few volunteer groups at an organisation level.

Community Support in 8 shires

In the shires of Nyngan, Cobar, Gilgandra, Coonamble, Coonabarabran, Dubbo, Wellington & Coolah support has included mediation for organisations & community groups, facilitating for group planning & organising, advice/assistance with lobbying, submission writing, advertising & media releases, questionnaire development & program development, assistance & resource provision for adult education processes, information sources, tertiary studies entry, assignment writing, conference paper preparation & presentation.

Rural ~ Urban Links Strengthened

Visits facilitated included students in the Health Professions, a delegation of Health managers/planners from China under the auspices of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Regional Training Centre, workshop artist Geoff Nance who worked with counsellors & teachers, Aboriginal Black Hearts Production team who conducted workshops. These initiatives along with other Project consultancy work have helped to narrow the urban-rural divide.

Working with Aboriginal People on request

Education sessions were conducted for Aboriginal health professionals, women's groups, a men's group in Gilgandra, & a group of high school students. Over 100 people participated in *Walking Together*, a program of nine sessions promoting understanding between Aboriginal & non-Aboriginal people in Dubbo. Presenters were all Aboriginal with the project worker & Social Justice group providing media, publicity, facilitation & other backup. Wellington, Lightning Ridge, Cobar & Dubbo people requested these programs.

Project Aim

To strengthen communities through providing community development training, building communication skills & support networks for people & groups engaged in health enhancement & service provision. These include family & community carers, teachers, volunteer service providers, health & welfare professionals.

Key project users have been health workers wanting to do more for their communities through improving communications & community development.

Stronger Communities Project funded by the federal Rural Health, Support, Education and Training Program (RHSET)

Action on Issues

Sr Jude thought of linking isolated outback children with their counterparts in the city for support & so Telepal was established in 1993 initially linking two schools. In 1995, ten city schools are linked with ten country schools & approximately 150 students are involved with fortnightly calls. Valuable friendships have been established, students exchange photographs and letters & a very special exchange about school & life in general.

Country Care Link funded by:

- St Vincent's Outreach & supporters
- NSW Agriculture
- NSW Government Drought Support Package

"Nearly always, people have the resources within themselves to support each other. But they need affirmation. Maybe they need to learn a few skills to become more effective supporters. That leads to having confidence in themselves... a kind of empowering."

Fran Spora
Drought Support Worker

Challenge for Change funded by:

- Department of Primary Industries & Energy's Rural Access Program
- Ongoing funding for 1996-7 from Burnside for 'trainer the trainer' workshops.

Country Care Link

The Sydney-based Sisters of Charity Outreach Centre commenced a 008 number Country Care Link on August 3rd, 1992 providing a confidential family support and information service for residents in the 068 and 080 Telecom districts. Sr Jude Doyle, Mrs Pauline Noyce and Carolyn Lyons with the "flying padre" Rev Rob Rutzou (Uniting Church) visited the Far West, meeting local people in their homes, in halls, at BBQs, in pubs and under gum trees.

In July 1994, with the advent of FARMHAND requesting Country Care handle hundreds of incoming calls, the service was extended to all country NSW including legal counselling and assistance, transport and accommodation, hospitality at the Centre, visits to country people in hospital and respite or a holiday for a family who needs a break. A friendly voice for a chat is always available.

Challenge of Change Project

Since 1994 RWN has been working with Fran Spora, currently NSW Agriculture's Drought Support Worker at Coonamble on the Challenge of Change project on dealing with grief & loss in country areas. RWN consultations had identified issues of unresolved & widespread grief of rural people as a result of the losses incurred through recession, – loss of relationships, farms, identity, community networks.

Phase 1 carried out by Fran Spora, focused on development of a booklet, *Through Deep Waters* & workshops using the booklet. Fran was highly effective in this project:

- & reaching over 700 men & women throughout NSW for 35 workshops held over a six month period
- producing & selling over 2,000 copies of the booklet through CB Alexander College, Tocal (3 reprints)

Phase 2 Training & setting up a statewide network – *to develop long term means of dealing with grief & loss in country communities by –*

1. Preparing & producing a *mix & match* module training kit on dealing with grief & loss in country communities
2. Planning & running 2 regional training workshops for key selected people already working in this field to enable them to offer community workshops across NSW on dealing with grief & loss.

Action on Issues

Women in Agriculture ~ Field Days Guest Exhibit

The 1995 Australian National Field Days provided an avenue for rural women to contribute to the dynamic feature exhibition *Women in Agriculture*. The program highlighted the vital contribution women make to Australian Agriculture in all sectors.

The RWN and two members of the State Advisory Committee (SAC) Audrey Hardman OAM and Jenny Quealy developed the program around a number of themes with an emphasis on hands-on interactive displays:-

Learning to Manage Change – showcased educational opportunities for rural women including farm skills, leadership, home study, TAFE & ACE.

Taking Care of Ourselves – Health display focused on preventative health including stress management, osteoporosis, cancer detection, aromatherapy & massage.

Recognising the Changing Roles – a large video wall and travelling photographic exhibition highlighted women's contribution to agriculture.

Keeping up with Technology – an interactive display of information technology including electronic faxing, email & using the *internet*.

Networking and Supporting Each Other Through Change – RWN display and a postcard wall where women wrote about how they saw themselves as women in agriculture.

Working With Mother Earth – outside demonstrations and displays focused on sustainability and self sufficiency. It included permaculture, herb spiral, companion planting, worm farming & no-dig gardens.

Paddock to Profit – Showed women's ability to produce, add value and market agricultural goods. Included demonstrations by a female blade shearer, spinning, weaving, feltmaking & crafts.

Farming - Food, Fashion and Fun – Women shared their creative and practical skills through music, guest speakers, entertainment, fashion & parades.

Another feature of the program was the very entertaining *Great Debate* where speakers deliberated the topic *Women in Agriculture – Invisible Partners?*

A *Women in Agriculture* theme was also featured at the 1996 Tocal field days.

"The feature provided tens of thousands of Australian National Field Days visitors with detailed insight into the important & changing roles of women involved in agricultural industries."

Australian National Field Days Committee

Onsite Childcare

"The onsite childcare proved very popular with families, enabling both partners to look at the displays."

This was the first time such a service has been on offer."

*Margaret Corby
Onsite Childcare
Coordinator*

Funding for the Feature was provided by:



Inkind support was also provided by individuals, businesses, industry and community groups.

Action on Issues

Leadership Projects:

Business, Mentoring & Leadership Skills for Women

Business & Mentor project funded by:



Women in business lead busy lives balancing work and family life. This joint Adult and Community Education/RWN project (1995-96) was coordinated by Sue Pardy. Sue looked at identifying the training needs of women in business and how to provide access to quality learning opportunities.

For most women in business finding time for further training and learning presents a challenge. The training provided through the project reflected these women's needs. It was short, sharp, focused, provided by experienced people and was relevant to their business. Topics included business planning, marketing, conflict resolution and negotiation. 146 women participated in 14 workshops over 6 months.



The establishment of *mentor circles* was an intrinsic component of the program, giving the participants opportunities to network and develop relationships with other women in business.



Stepping Stones ~ Leadership Skills for Younger Rural Women

The *Stepping Stones* project is another joint ACE/RWN project coordinated by Pam Cuelho (RWN). This twelve month pilot project (1995-96) is being run in small communities in the Central West of NSW – Greenthorpe, Tottenham, Garema and Tullibigeal.

The project will provide women with opportunities to establish and develop networks and enhance skills through training designed to meet their needs.

Through such needs-based training rural women are more able to understand and take on decisionmaking roles within the family and community.

Local representatives in each areas were involved in the program development. Times, dates, childcare needs and topics were negotiated with the women at these meetings.

Stepping Stones Project funded by



Department for Women
Grant's Program

Input to Policy

State

- ◆ 1992-95 Women's Advisory Council (WAC) & Women's Consultative Committee (WCC)
- ◆ 1995 Premier's Council for Women
- ◆ NSW Government agencies
 - NSW Agriculture
 - Department for Women
 - NSW TAFE
 - NSW Board of Adult & Community Education (ACE)
 - NSW Health
 - Former Social Policy Directorate
- ◆ NSW Council of Social Services
- ◆ Community agencies
- ◆ RWN State Advisory Committee member networks
- ◆ Rural Women on Boards

National

Community Based

- ◆ 1994 Foundation Australian Agriculture Women (FAAW)
- ◆ National Conferences/workshops
- ◆ 1995 first National Rural Women's Forum – Canberra, convened by CSU Riverina produced recommendations to Federal Government on themes of:
 - Recognition
 - Access and Participation
 - Management of Change
 - Education /Training and Resources
 - Agricultural & Environmental Sustainability
 - Social Justice

State

RWN input through:

- ◆ Representation on WAC & WCC
- ◆ Regular liaison with govt & non-govt agencies
- ◆ Submissions, comment on papers eg. Social Policy, Rural Suicide, Youth, Vocational Education & Training, NSW Health Drought Support
- ◆ Consultations on issues eg. Rural non-English speaking background people's issues, ACE planning, welfare for farm families
- ◆ SAC recommendations to member networks eg. Country Women's Association strategic planning, agriculture/environmental officers (Pam Moore), Rural Lands Protection Board's grant for getting women on boards (\$78,000 received from NSW Women's Department)
- ◆ Rural women on Boards eg. NSW Social Justice Ref. Group (Pat Le Lievre), NSW Breast Cancer Institute Board (Judy Thompson).
- ◆ Conference Presentations eg. Rural Communities Looking Ahead, NSW Spokeswomen's.

National

Community based RWN input through:

- ◆ Represented on FAAW Board by NSW Agriculture's Program Leader, Rural Community Development, Office of Rural Communities
- ◆ On National Forum Steering Committee; outcome report produced
- ◆ Conference Presentations eg. National Adult & Community Education. (Rural women's education)

Input to Policy

National Government

RWN input through:

- ◆ Regular liaison with Rural Women's Unit/input on Federal issues eg. *National Rural Finance Summit, West 2000*, assisting interstate RWNs
- ◆ Participants in *Stakeholders' Forum* & development of action on priorities
- ◆ Submissions, comments on papers eg *Older Women's Health, Vocational Education & Training*
- ◆ Consultations on issues eg. Australian National Training Authority (rural women's education), DSS (community development), Women in Landcare
- ◆ Rural Women on Boards eg. SAC member Fran Rowe on Rural Assistance Scheme Advisory Committee, Gay Rose on National Registration Authority Community Consultative Committee (community based)

International

RWN input through

- ◆ Margaret Carroll invited to NZ to speak on NSW RWN
- ◆ Represented NSW on International Women in Agriculture Conference Planning Group. Margaret Carroll coordinated Women in Agriculture Action Group; co-convened Global Network Meeting
- ◆ Input to UN Platform for Action. Sonia Muir co-facilitated workshop – Global RWN in Beijing
- ◆ Working with VIC RWN and the Foundation for Agricultural Women to implement global rural women's networking strategies
- ◆ Visits from key women in NZ, China, Japan, Philippines, USA, UK

National

Government

- ◆ 1995 National Rural Women's Unit established in Department of Primary Industries & Energy to provide:
 - Input to federal policy
 - Facilitate national networking
- ◆ 1996 first National Rural Women's Stakeholders' Forum – Canberra Recommends priorities:
 - Women in Decision Making
 - Women Managing Change
 - Delivery of Rural Services
 - Developing a Positive Rural Image
 - Technology

International

- ◆ 1993 first NZ "Paddock to Parliament" Conference
- ◆ 1994 first International Women in Agriculture Conference, Melbourne Recommendations to Federal/State Governments & Beijing Conference on:
 - Education of Rural Women
 - Visibility and Recognition
 - Decisionmaking and Participation
 - Networking
 - Environmental Sustainability
 - Social Justice
- ◆ 1995 United Nations Fourth Women's Conference – Beijing
- ◆ Platform for Action with government commitments – Australia's focus:
 - Women – work and families
 - Violence against women
 - Aboriginal Women's Health
 - Women in public life and decisionmaking
- ◆ Proposal to facilitate a Global Rural Women's Networking as a result of the International Women in Agriculture Conference and the Beijing Conference.

Milestones for Rural Women

1992



RW N program is established in April within NSW Agriculture, Orange. Coordinator, Margaret Carroll is employed to improve communications & access to information for rural women in NSW.

RW N State Advisory Committee is set up — linking major rural networks & jointly chaired by NSW Agriculture's Director General Dr Kevin Sheridan & NSW Women's Advisory Council Member Audrey Hardman OAM.

Cobar & Bourke show the way with successful rural women's days organised by local women attracting hundreds of participants.



Country Care Link is set up by St Vincent's Outreach with western women to provide counselling, information & referral to western NSW.



35,000 kilometres are covered around NSW personally meeting & listening to rural women's concerns to identify priority issues.

1993

The first RWN issues based newsletter, *The Country Web* is produced by newly appointed Assistant Coordinator, Sonia Muir as the RWN's main communication avenue for rural women. Initial print run is 15,000.



Surviving & Thriving

The first NSW Women of the Land Gathering is held in July in Orange, convened by RWN & Farmsafe Central West, attracts 400 women.

Country Creative Arts Cooperative is established with Pam Moore, RWN State Advisory Committee member as a founding Director.



The *Building Stronger Communities* pilot project established by RWN & NSW Health in the Orana/Far

West Region with federal funding for three years. (Issues – lack of community & personal support, lack of communication skills & high stress levels.)



RW N initiates joint TAFE/ACE/NSW Agriculture Project for isolated women at Bonalbo on the North Coast – Work Opportunities for Women (WOW)

Rural Women's Satellite Project, initiated by RWN, jointly planned with NSW TAFE, NSW Adult & Community Education & NSW Health, consults via satellite with 500 women at 28 sites across NSW identifying important concerns in Post Compulsory Education, Women's Health & the Role of Women in Agriculture. Proved a catalyst for action on issues from both community & government.



1994



First International Women in Agriculture Conference, *Farming for our Future* is held in Melbourne & attracts 850 women from 40 countries. Coordinated by a national group including the RWN. Highlights the roles & contributions of women to agriculture & environmental sustainability.

Country Care Link now covers all of rural NSW offering free legal advice, accommodation & transport assistance, information, referral & Telepal linking outback & inner city school children.



ABC Rural Women of the Year Award is launched to recognise the achievements of rural women nationally.

New South Wales 1992~1996



RWN obtains Australia Council funds for a creative community cultural development program. Run jointly by RWN & South West Arts, *Luncheon on the Plains* uses arts workshops to network & teach new skills to women in the isolated south-west of NSW.

The Second Women of the Land Gathering – *Caring & Sharing* is held in September in Gunnedah & convened by local women.

Prolonged drought grips NSW. RWN produces a special Drought edition of the *Country Web* – distributed to 35,000.



RWN State Advisory Committee proposes the Drought Support Worker Scheme – to provide emotional support, emergency funds & information to farm families.

Project Support Officer Position is established within RWN. (Janet van Dorst ~ 1994, Alison Messner ~ 1994/5, Pam Cuelho ~ 1995/96)

1995

United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, reviews & debates 12 critical areas of concern & adopts a new Platform for Action. Non-government (NGO) Forum is held concurrently. Sonia Muir runs workshop on global networking with Victorian Rural Women's Network & Foundation of Australian Agricultural Women.



The first National Rural Women's Forum in Canberra is coordinated by a national group including RWN Coordinator. Forum participants develop recommendations to the Federal Government on rural women's issues.



Video on improving family communications is produced by RWN & Tocal College – effective in accessing hundreds of rural people.

A partnership between RWN & the Central West Regional Council of Adult & Community Education develops a Business, Mentoring & Leadership project. Funding from NSW State & Regional Development.

The Third Women of the Land Gathering – *Today's Knowledge, Tomorrow's Success*, held at Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture, Yanco in September & convened by Riverina women.

First Women in Agriculture feature at any Australian field day is coordinated by the RWN for the National Field Days in Orange highlighting the roles & achievements of rural women.



1996

Stepping Stones project is funded by the Department for Women & run jointly with the Central West Community College. It provides opportunities for rural women from smaller communities to develop leadership skills & networks within their own communities.



Future Women of the Land Gatherings confirmed – September 27-29 1996 ~ Cobar & October 1997 ~ Tocal in the Hunter region.

Rural Women's Memoirs Project will provide training & networking opportunities for rural women who are carers. Grant from the Department of Primary Industries & Energy's Rural Access Program.

Rural Women's Stakeholder's Forum to be held at Orange to develop & coordinate a commitment to action on issues from community, government, non-government agencies & industry.

State Advisory Committee Reports

Chair: 1994-96

Rural Counsellors' Association

Representative: Fran Rowe (Tottenham)

Aim: To develop communication links between the Rural Women's Network, NSW Financial Counsellors' Association & the Rural Assistance Authority & to promote the economic & social welfare of rural families.

Highlights & Progress

The **NSW Rural Assistance Authority (RAA)** has supplied consistent support to the Women of the Land Gatherings over the past three years. This support has included sponsorship & participation in seminars. **Rural Counsellors** throughout NSW have coordinated distribution of RAA sponsorship to the Gatherings & ensured each Gathering benefited from Counsellor attendance.

FARMHAND Appeal – I represented rural women on the FARMHAND Advisory Committee. The FARMHAND Appeal, its direction & support to rural families was an incredible success working with groups such as the Salvation Army to reach rural families, conducting media interviews to promote awareness & access arranged through Rural Counselling Services.

Funding & Launch of *Your Farm, Their Future – Together* manual was the culmination of three years research in the Tottenham/Maleny areas, by the University of Western Sydney (Hawkesbury). It resulted in a publication highlighting many of the important issues involved in intergenerational transfer including awareness of the importance of communication within the family. **The book is available from the Lachlan Advisory Group, Rural Counselling Service, Bombah, Tottenham 2873.**

Rural Women's Conference – Parkes 1991. Participants assisted in the identification of the need for rural women to have opportunities to network, share ideas, access information & have a voice in decision making. Subsequent to this conference the *Rural Women's Network* program was established within NSW Agriculture.

The Country Web newsletter. I have provided information/articles on issues relating to adjustment support through the NSW Rural Counselling Service & the NSW Rural Assistance Authority.

Australian Banking Industry Ombudsman Council. I am continuing to lobby the Council to include rural representation. The Council supports this in principle & aims to have rural representation in the future.

Pro Bono Support for Rural Families. I met with representatives from the NSW Bar Association which resulted in a commitment to support rural families by way of pro bono legal advice.

National Rural Women's Officer. I was involved in the many discussions with Commonwealth Department of Primary Industries & Energy with regard to the appointment of a National Rural Women's Officer to enhance the effectiveness of rural women's networks in policy & program formation. A National Rural Women's Officer was appointed in 1995.

Fran Rowe
Chair 1994-95
Rural Counsellors' Association
Representative
1992-1996

"I believe the RWN provides the opportunity for women to support each other, their families and their communities and to contribute through their shared experience to a more productive sustainable rural Australia."

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Community Gatherings/ Women's Information Days/ Media Activities

- ◆ Careers for Women in Agriculture – Murrumbidgee College
- ◆ Royal Agricultural Society Regional Seminars (Orange, Tamworth, Dubbo, Griffith, Wagga Wagga).
- ◆ Drought Information Days (Tottenham, Condobolin, Forbes)
- ◆ Access Program Tele-Linkup, Years 11 & 12 (Tottenham, Tullamore, Tullibigeal, Yeoval)
- ◆ Agquip RWN Information Stand
- ◆ Mercy Foundation/Salvation Army – Rural Needs
- ◆ Condobolin Women's Link Program
- ◆ Sisters of Mercy (Parkes)
- ◆ Talkback Radio – ABC – All Regional Centres – Topics – FARMHAND/ DSS/RAS
- ◆ Media Research Assistance on Rural Issues – Law of the Land & A Country Practice/ Big Picture, Business Review Weekly – Farm Divorce.
- ◆ Numerous print & radio interviews on rural financial & drought issues.
- ◆ Fodder Drop Community Organisation.

Conference Participation & Input on Rural Issues

University of Western Sydney (Hawkesbury) – *Passing a Viable Farm on to Future Generations*. Establishing a support network for rural families.

- ◆ NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) Rural Conference, Dubbo
- ◆ Department of Mental Hygiene, Dubbo – Rural Health

Drought Support Initiatives for Rural Families

- ◆ Through RWN SAC – needs identification such as Drought Support Workers etc.
- ◆ Meetings with Commonwealth Officers – Drought Relief Payments
- ◆ Meetings with Senator Collins – Rural Family Needs.

Chair: 1992-94

NSW Women's Consultative Committee

Representative: Audrey Hardman OAM (Mandurama)

Aim: To enhance opportunities, promote & encourage the development of effective programs & communication networks for rural women & their families.

Highlights & Progress

Audrey Hardman OAM
Chair 1992-94
NSW Women's Consultative
Committee Representative
1992-1996

"I am totally committed to improving services for rural and isolated people and gaining greater recognition of the important contribution women make to the stability and strength of the family units and their communities, as well as the vital role they fill in partnership with men to ensure the future prosperity of family farmers, rural industry and the economy of Australia."

As **Deputy Chair of the NSW Women's Advisory Council (WAC)**, renamed in 1993 to the NSW Women's Consultative Committee (WCC), I have given monthly reports of RWN at Committee meetings:-

- ◆ increasing awareness & understanding between country & city women
- ◆ procured – \$5,000 sponsorship for 1993 Women of the Land Gathering
– \$5,000 for the 1994 Women of the Land Gathering
– \$5,000 towards the Rural Women's Satellite Project Report

WCC Consultations & Projects

- ◆ **Post Natal Stress & Depression** consultations were held in the Far West, Far South West & Coastal Regions. Surveys were distributed with 14,000 included in the *Hersay* newsletter. (Articles on **rural women's issues** have appeared regularly in *Hersay*.) Rural & isolated women participated

State Advisory Committee Reports

in & contributed to the Report – *If Motherhood is Bliss Why do I feel so Awful*, with very positive results in some areas.

- ◆ **Women into Parliament** consultations were held in the country including:- Orange, Tamworth, Albury, Ballina & Newcastle.
- ◆ **Women's Issues** – In 1990 a major consultation was held at Bowral.
- ◆ **A New NSW Women's Register** was launched in 1994

I have participated in a number of rural women's projects including:

- ◆ **Women of the Land Gatherings** in Orange – as a member of the Organising Committee & chaired the Sunday session; Gunnedah – chaired the Opening Session & launched the *Rural Women's Satellite Project* Report; Yanco – a participant.

I have acted as a referee for successfully funded rural programs including:

- ◆ Building Stronger Communities Project
- ◆ Rural Women's Video Library
- ◆ *Homestart* program in Nyngan. Further funding from Burnside will enable it to extend in the west. *Homestart* program is also starting in the Deniliquin area
- ◆ *Rural Women's Satellite Project* – Statewide conference. I was also privileged to represent rural women on the State Panel of the Conference with Departmental Heads & launched the final report.

I represent the RWN SAC on:

- ◆ The Farming for the Future State Committee
- ◆ Country Mayor's Regional Development Committee
- ◆ Drought Support Workers State Steering Committee – an excellent recommendation made by the SAC of the RWN
- ◆ I also participated in a States Telelink which resulted in the appointment of 19 Rural Health Counsellors.
- ◆ A member of the Coordinating Committee for the Australian National Field Days Guest Exhibit.

I represent rural women & rural communities & farmers as:

- ◆ Chair of the Regional Council for Adult & Community Education in the Central West
- ◆ Chair of the Western Institute of TAFE Council
- ◆ Chaired of the Regional Management Committee for the pilot on *Recognition of Experience & Prior Learning of Farmers* managed by the Orange Agricultural College, Sydney University
- ◆ Chair of the Board for the Lachlan Region Environment Employment Program (NSW Agriculture is a major contributor)
- ◆ Member of the Organising Committee for the 1995 CWA State Conference in Bathurst.
- ◆ I attended (representing the WCC) the *First International Women in Agriculture* Conference in Melbourne 1994, & the first *National Rural Women's Forum* held at Parliament House Canberra in June 1995. Both landmark occasions which gave recognition to the valuable contribution rural women make at all levels of our society. The next step will be the important one.

I have been a **Guest Speaker** at many seminars, dinners, lunches & conferences where I always distributed the *Country Web* newsletter & any relevant RWN material.

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Main engagements:

- ◆ The Annual Spokeswomen's State Conference, Sydney
- ◆ *Churches caring in Christ* – a 2 day seminar, Bathurst
- ◆ International Women's Day Celebrations 1995, Dubbo
- ◆ Murrumbidgee College Women's Careers Day, Yanco
- ◆ Rotary, Probus & VIEW Clubs
- ◆ A panellist at the NCOSS Rural Communities Conference, Dubbo 1995

The *Country Web* newsletter is also distributed at the meetings I attend with Western Institute of TAFE Council, Central West Regional Council of Adult Education, State Women's Hospital Advisory Committee, 3x3 Fuel Tax State Committee.

I have attended all RWN SAC meetings & those on which I represent the RWN. I have enjoyed assisting people at Field Days at Mudgee, Orange, Henty & Agquip Gunnedah & gave a number of press & radio interview on rural & family issues.

Even though I was a prime mover & present at the birth of the RWN Program, I marvel at how much has been accomplished in 4 of the worst years in rural history. Obviously it was **THE RIGHT PROGRAM** introduced at **THE RIGHT TIME** in **THE RIGHT DEPARTMENT** by **THE RIGHT PEOPLE** making the best possible use of our money for the benefit of rural people. Congratulations Margaret, Sonia, Susan, Janet, Alison & Pam for making **VISION** a permanent **REALITY**.

Country Women's Association

Representative: Pam Moore (1992-1995)

(Burren Junction)

New representative Dec 1995: Margaret Smith

(Wallendbeen)

Aim: To strengthen communication links between the Country Women's Association (CWA) & RWN.

Highlights & Progress

It seems hard to believe that my [Pam] three year term as a member of the SAC is over. It has been a most interesting & challenging time, & very satisfying to see the recognition & respect that the Network has received & in particular, the wide acceptance of the *Country Web*.

As the CWA representative, my commitments gave me the opportunity to travel widely throughout the State. It was exciting to be part of the innovative *Rural Women's Satellite Project*.

The CWA has always been involved in Health & Educational issues, & to a certain extent, Agriculture & the Environment, & due to the recognition of Women in Agriculture, the CWA has decided to appoint **Agricultural/Environmental Officers** to give more prominence to those topics within the Association.

I was appointed a **Director of the Country Creative Arts Cooperative** which

Pam Moore
Country Women's Association
Representative
1992-1995

"I am particularly concerned about the state of country roads and the limited educational opportunities and health services available in the more remote areas of NSW."

State Advisory Committee Reports

was formed to provide an avenue for country people to earn off farm income during the rural recession.

The invitation to speak at the NSW **AVCARE Conference** on Chemicals – Communication & the Women's Perspective, gave me the opportunity to express the concerns of rural women on the transportation, safety, labelling, use & effects of farm chemicals to manufacturers & distributors. I consulted with many different women whilst preparing the address, & all suggestions for improvement were accepted favourably. I had the impression that nobody had thought to ask a women before!

I travelled to Griffith to speak to the Riverina **Soroptomist International Conference** on the drought & its affects on the rural communities.

I was appointed to the **NBN Drought Appeal Committee** which distributed \$80,000 in fodder, grain, & agistment to drought stricken farmers in the North West & Tablelands areas, & I am presently a member of the North West Drought Consultative Committee with representatives from Health & Community Services, Anglican Counselling Service, NSW Farmers & NSW Agriculture. We work with the North West Drought Support Worker.

It has been a pleasure to work with such a talented Committee. I congratulate Margaret & Sonia, & I wish the Network continued success & look forward to participating in some other way in the future.

Independent Member

Representative: Cathy McGowan (1992-95)

(Rural Consultant, Albury/Wodonga)

New Representative, Dec 1995: Lyn Riley Mundine

(Aboriginal Development Manager

Western Institute of TAFE, Dubbo)

Highlights & Progress

I [Cathy] came to the RWN with a passion & desire to be part of the rural women's movement in NSW. Much water has passed under the bridge since the heady days of the first Gathering at Parkes. In this report I would like to mention three of the projects which I think have fundamentally changed the way we see agriculture & our role as rural women. Child care for farm families, the International Women in Agriculture Conference & work with the NSW Dairy Industry.

Childcare

When the RWN began, the idea of sponsored childcare at a field day was thought to be absolutely out of the question. "Impossible!" "How would it be organised?" "Women won't use it." These were some of the comments. Yet at the 1995 Australian National Field Days in Orange, many families said that the provision of quality childcare was one of the highlights.

Over the three years, not only has the RWN introduced the concept of quality

Margaret Smith
Country Women's Association
Representative
1995-1996

"Through involvement with the local Branch, Hume Group and State level of the CWA, I have come to recognise many of the needs of rural women, and women in general throughout NSW.

I trust some of this knowledge can be put to good use through my involvement with the RWN."

Cathy McGowan
Independent Member
1992-1995

"We have an important contribution to make and the more women can participate in agriculture, economic and social decision making, the better decisions will be. The RWN provides a way for rural and farming women to have their voices heard - by government and by each other."

State Advisory Committee Reports

childcare for major events they have also supported the project to look at how farm families could have access to quality childcare. I developed the report *Country Kids – Who Cares?* which was accepted by the Commonwealth Government & pilot projects are now underway in South Eastern Victoria.

The provision of childcare for farm families is an important recognition that women, as well as men, work on farms. It also acknowledges that in planning services for rural people, different models of service delivery may be necessary.

Lyn Riley-Mundine
Aboriginal Development Manager
Western Institute of TAFE
Independent Member
1995-1996

International Conference of Women in Agriculture

This conference was a land mark for Australian women. It was the first conference anywhere in the world which looked at issues of concern to farming & rural women. Senator Bob Collins said it was the largest gathering of its kind ever to take place in Australia. Over 850 women from 35 countries were in attendance & this conference was sponsored & supported by the RWN.

I felt an enormous sense of pride when I was in the Great Hall of Melbourne University, surrounded by women from all around the world. At one stage I looked around & caught the eyes of Margaret Carroll & Sonia Muir. We smiled at each other, sharing our knowledge that we had helped make this event a reality. The second conference is proposed for Canada in 1997 & there is talk of the third conference in China in 2000.

Social Issues in the NSW Dairy Industry

This project is still in its early days. Groups have formed in Bega, Nowra, the Hunter Valley & around Lismore to look at social issues which impact on productivity in the dairy industry. These groups are made up of women who care for their industry, their families & their communities. Through the NSW RWN, these women are linked to each other & importantly, statewide resources.

Landcare – NSW Decade of Landcare Coordinator

Representative: Jenny Quealy (Sydney)

Aim: To ensure the objectives of the RWN are widely understood through the landcare network & to ensure opportunities through landcare programs encourage the participation of rural women.

Highlights & Progress

Women in landcare have participated in all Rural Women's Network initiatives including:

- ◆ **Women of the Land Gatherings**
- ◆ **Rural Women's Satellite Project**
- ◆ **Consultations** with communities around the state along with SAC meetings
- ◆ **The International Women in Agriculture Conference**
- ◆ **The Australian National Field Days Guest Exhibit Women in Agriculture**

As the NSW *Decade of Landcare Coordinator* I have been a member of the Rural Women's Network State Advisory Committee since its inception.

Jenny Quealy
Landcare Representative
1992-1996
"Women are managing farms and natural resources. The number of women in Landcare groups is very encouraging. But women do need continued support to tackle land and water degradation of land under their care and control. Links between the Landcare and RWN networks can assist this crucial challenge."

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During this time there has been an ongoing exchange of information between the networks through newsletters, workshops, meetings, brochures & other communication methods.

The Landcare message has been promoted through the RWN & the profile & messages of the RWN have been communicated through:–

- ◆ RWN information regularly in Catchment Management News & other landcare publications.
- ◆ Women in landcare groups receive recognition in landcare publicity in *Country Web*.
- ◆ RWN has been invited to participate in landcare display, workshops eg. The National Field Days, Orange NSW.
- ◆ SAC member for landcare to address RWN & landcare specialists when appropriate re strategies for ensuring women's continued participation & profile in landcare.

Women have played a strong role in landcare since its official launch in 1990 – through both active participation in on-ground works to care for natural resources & in the important areas of property & catchment planning. Women are recognised as the *backbone* of many landcare projects – bringing to landcare their considerable skills & community development experience.

The message & image about rural women's real & considerable participation in agriculture has been very obvious through landcare.

Many landcare publications now feature rural women prominently. **Landcare Awards** have been granted to rural women for their achievements & commitment. Media coverage of women in landcare continues to grow.

Awareness about land & water degradation amongst rural women has increased through the involvement of the **Decade of Landcare** project with the RWN. A healthy sharing of ideas & forums has allowed this to happen & will continue.

Landcare gatherings have included rural women & their particular issues, including in the **Australian National Field Days Landcare Guest Exhibit** & the **Australian Farm Management Society's Annual Conference** Canberra 1994.

Rural women have been specifically targeted to attend & participate in various landcare field days, workshops & forums.

Most landcare gatherings now consider & arrange their meetings & workshops with the timetables, issues & commitments of rural women in mind.

Minister for Agriculture

Representative: Merrilie Slack-Smith (1992~1995)
(Wee Waa)

New representative, Dec 1995: Doreen Clough (Bathurst)
Aim: To keep the Minister informed on the activities of the RWN, & the needs of rural women & families

Merrilie Slack-Smith
NSW Agriculture Minister's
Representative
1992-1995

"I hope my experience in both the Health industry and business, and the fact that I am a rural mother with many of the same problems affecting rural families, with diminishing services to the country/rural areas, means I am well able to assist rural women"

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Highlights & Progress

Dr Sandra Cabot's meeting in Narrabri – September 1992; along with Katreena Forsyth we organised 600 women to attend from Moree, Gunnedah & Coonabarabran regions to hear her talk on women's health & menopause.

Rural Women's Satellite Project, Moree – I [Merrilie] was a participator in this group & we all worked very well on both days, then a smaller group was formed called *Community Aid at Home* & we are still active today.

The aim is to improve quality service within the Local Community, through the distribution of information & services. We have held a number of days at Bingara, Croppa Creek, Bellata, Weemelah & Bullahra Hall & more than 350 women & some men have attended. These are on going & through Drought Support Worker Barbara Ball spoke at Burren Junction in October 1995 with Fran Spora on Grief & Loss.

At each of these days we have asked the communities what they wish to hear, & mostly we do Communication, Farm succession, Women's Health, Handling Stress, Legal advice, setting up Small Business, & also a representative from the Department of Social Security & the Rural Counsellor if he/she is free.

1994 International Women in Agriculture conference in Melbourne was wonderful & to be part of it was fantastic, so many women from all over the world & with much the same problems. I spoke at two functions on this to people who were unable to go.

1994 Women of the Land Gathering Committee at Gunnedah – This was a very big commitment & I was very happy to be involved. The travelling was a problem as I am 170kms from Gunnedah, however, I only missed a couple of meetings. We had 450 women at Gunnedah on 16th-18th September 1994 & it was a wonderful weekend.

Many National Party meetings & Conferences I have attended over the three years, & I have lost count how many Rural Shows: I have opened Quilting Shows & launched a Book & almost everywhere I go the *Web*, & information from RWN, comes with me to hand out & it is always well accepted especially the Web Drought package.

All through the area small groups are forming, book clubs, landcare & I feel that with the start of the RWN more focus has been put on women & they now feel it is OK to talk about their problems, rather than try to conceal them as we are all part of the big picture.

Families are so very vital to the rural industry & the rural industry is vital for Australia's future. A lot of the problems are still there with the ongoing drought.

There will always be hardships on the land, & I feel the RWN has assisted tremendously in Government decisions to assist those families on the land with Special Circumstances, Drought Support Workers just to name a few, & hopefully will keep families on the land & through this crisis.

Doreen Clough
Minister's Representative
1995-1996

"I have received an invitation from the Hon. Richard Amery MP, Minister for Agriculture to represent him on the RWN State Advisory Committee.

I come with no great qualifications, but I hope plenty of common sense. I do come though with a genuine desire to work towards alleviating the hardships endured by many rural women in NSW."

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NSW Farmer's Association

Representatives:

Vivienne Sinderberry (1992-1994) (Junee)

Susan Mitchell (1994-1995) (Cooma)

Aim: To foster understanding & communication between the RWN & NSW Farmers' Association.

Highlights & Progress

Our role is to act as a conduit between the Association & the SAC – I [Susan] found it a little difficult to start with as so much of what the SAC was doing was based on the RWSP linkup & this had not been offered on the Monaro. However I had attended the International Women in Agriculture Conference in Melbourne as a private citizen & also the Women of the Land Gathering in Gunnedah.

Reports have been presented to every **NSW Farmers' General Council** meeting since I was appointed to the SAC, & also in reverse to the SAC – A copy of the Web has been distributed to members at the NSW Farmers' Annual Conference in Dubbo this year & also other RWN information – I even wore a T-shirt to promote the RWN for one day at the Conference!

I am also keen to have a very basic bookkeeping course in place – to assist the bottom 40% of farm families – before the end of the 1996/97 financial year. I believe that if farm families could be convinced that an understanding of *"where we are now & how that compares with budget"* could assist them in running their businesses & in keeping them on the land, then the prosperity of rural Australia would start on the long climb up.

Our role is also to encourage rural women to become actively involved in the NSW Farmers' Association rather than leaving it to their men. The most immediate issue was the perception within the Network that NSW Farmers does not encourage or use women – This is not a reality – the Association does not differentiate between men & women, it may be the perception of some women but if they test it they would not be able to prove it.

The group of women that are working for & with the Rural Women's Network are most inspiring & dedicated to the furthering & support of women within NSW.

Rural Lands Protection Boards (RLPBs)

Representatives:

Mary-Jane Douglas (1992-1993/4) (Walgett)

Maree Coughlan (1994-1996) (Morundah)

Aim: To strengthen communication links, exchange information & develop the profile of women in RLPBs.

Highlights & Progress

- ♦ As the RLPB representative I [Maree] have spoken about the RWN & RLPBs to groups including: –

Vivienne Sinderberry
NSW Farmers' Association
Representative 1992-1994

"My philosophy is simple – if women are to be effective decision makers within their industry, they must first understand where their own dollars and cents come from. Knowing their own enterprises, they will begin to understand their own industry, and then they can become effective politically."

Susan Mitchell
NSW Farmers' Association
Representative
1994-1996

"I believe the RWN brings women together... with an aim of increasing the general awareness of women of their potential and contribution to agriculture in Australia. One of the most important features is that by meeting and working with others on the committee, you find so many ideas that can be taken up in one's own area."

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Mary Jane Douglas
Rural Lands Protection Boards
Representative
1992-1993

Landcare, CWA & Soroptomist Meetings. This has assisted in local network building & increased the profile of women in agriculture & helped identify the need for women to be encouraged to stand for election to Statutory Boards such as – RLPB, Rice Marketing & Water.

- ◆ The drought has afforded the opportunity to consult with local health authorities & promote RWN Drought related initiatives through the local press & RLPB monthly meetings & newsletters to ratepayers.
- ◆ I promoted & attended the **Women of the Land Gathering at Yanco** through local women's groups (courses & meetings)
- ◆ I assisted Carolyn Lyons with organisation of her tour of the Riverina region with Sr St. Jude to promote the **Country Care Link 008** facility by arranging financial assistance through donation, use of a vehicle & itinerary suggestions
- ◆ I put forward Sue Sampson, Director Cobar RLPB, as the RLPB representative for the **Rural Communities Looking Ahead Conference** in Dubbo, 28-30 June, 1995. A comprehensive report was made in the September, 1995, RLPB Monthly Newsletter
- ◆ A successful proposal was put to the Women's Ministry Grants Program to employ a woman to work on strategies to involve women in RLPBs. (\$78,000 over 1996/97)

The role of RLPBs has broadened & developed over the past three years in response to changing rural & political situations & their representation on the RWN has assumed greater relevance over that time.

There are presently 12 women Directors of a total of 456 RLPB Directors. With support & encouragement more women will take up the challenge. We need an increasing number of articulate representatives, women & men, for the survival of our rural life.

Maree Coughlan
Rural Lands Protection Boards
Representative
1993-1996

"RLPBs play a vital role in the agricultural and livestock industries of NSW and the state-wide coverage provided by them offers an important communication link between farmers and their families and the RWN, and other rural organisations"

RLPBs play an important role in the livestock & agricultural industries of NSW & through their state-wide coverage they offer an opportunity to strengthen links between rural agencies & organisations for the benefit of farmers, their families & communities.

I maintain links between the RWN & RLPBs by:-

- ◆ Distributing of RWN resources at RLPB Annual Conference, Regional Conventions & Directors' Information Days
- ◆ Exchanging reports & articles between RLPB & RWN on relevant activities through The Country Web, RLPB monthly newsletters & local Board publications
- ◆ Liaise between RWN & RLPB State Council.

Western Division

Representative: Pat Le Lievre (Cobar)

Aim: Improving communications & opportunities for rural women & communities in the far west of New South Wales.

Highlights & Progress:

Since taking up my position on the RWN SAC representing the Far West in 1993, my area has been experiencing some of the most difficult economic, social & environmental times in its history. With these circumstances in mind,

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programs have been undertaken to offer support & encouragement to deal with everyday needs, communications, the grief & loss of changed circumstances, & health.

- ◆ *Networking at the Crossroads*, stress management workshops, were held in seven different locations throughout Cobar & the village of Tilpa. The issue of suicide was raised – how to recognise the outward signs of suicide contemplation was especially addressed.
- ◆ *A Better Health for Women in the 1990's* day was held in Cobar that attracted 200 women with Dr Sandra Cabot providing information & options to those participating.
- ◆ Through the Cobar Community & Rural Network Committee, a grant of \$15,000 was granted to do *Placing Life Skills Within Reach of Rural Women* workshops around the West (Rural Access Program funding); Lyn Sykes from Family Life Dubbo was the presenter. Places such as Ivanhoe, Enngonia, Wilcannia, Wanaaring, Louth, Helman's Tank, Cobar, Bourke & Black Range in the Mt Hope area, had day long programs on better communicating.
- ◆ Through my role on the *Orana/Far West Building Stronger Communities Committee*, grief & loss workshops were held in Cobar. Conflict Resolution workshops for the community as a whole are also in place.
- ◆ **Volunteer Week in 1994** was celebrated & an information book of all volunteer organisations in Cobar was put into the Cobar library & is now on computer.
- ◆ I am especially proud that my idea of the *Let's Talk* Communication Video came to be & the back up it can provide to families who participated in programs such as the Road to Green Pastures, held in Cobar in 1993 & the Placing Life Skills Within Reach of Rural Women. I have an objective to see that a copy is placed in every Far Western Library & Rural Lands Protection Office.
- ◆ The writing of submissions are very regular occurrences, the most recent being to extend the *Homestart* program to Cobar & Bourke.
- ◆ The year of 1996 will provide the challenge of coordinating the *Women of the Land Gathering in Cobar*. As part of our theme, *Resourceful & Resilient*, we wish to recognise the role of mining families who share & strengthen many of our rural communities, & we are greatly enriched because of their presence.

As I reflect back over the last two years in the Rural Women's Network, we in the Western Division appear to be in *more of the same mode*, drought & diminishing returns for commodities are still the agenda. Keeping people in touch with each other is a great challenge in the Far West, what I have provided in my report is just a small part of my endeavour to meet the challenge.

Pat Le Lievre
Western Division Representative
1992-1996

"The RWN Committee has given me the opportunity to bring an awareness to this State forum, of the Western Division. The saying that "there is nothing new under the sun" is true, how we go about addressing issues is the challenge"

Future Directions for the RWN



Rural Women's Network Program Structure

