



Image courtesy of Emma Lewis.

## CELEBRATING GIPPSLAND'S WOMEN IN HORTICULTURE

The inaugural Gippsland Women in Horticulture conference was held on 23 November 2017, where around 40 women from all facets of the horticulture industry gathered to discuss three dimensions of horticultural production: water, waste and wellness.

A picturesque view of the rolling Strzelecki Ranges in West Gippsland, Victoria, greeted attendees to the Gippsland Women in Horticulture event at Ellinbank.

Held at the Victorian Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) facility, the event aimed to inform women about opportunities in the horticulture industry including leadership, wellness and collaboration.

The Gippsland Women in Horticulture event was organised by the East Gippsland Food Cluster as part of the National Vegetable Extension Network (VegNET) Gippsland project (VG15047), a strategic levy investment under the Hort Innovation Vegetable Fund.

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Following the official opening and 'cracking of the capsicum', the morning session was devoted to individual speakers addressing the topics of leadership, wellness and collaboration.

Nicole Griffin from Gippsland Water provided the keynote address of "Water, Waste, Wellness". She spoke about the need for water and how its scarcity can affect the health of communities. Following a long and distinguished career in agriculture, Ms Griffin also outlined her desire to pave the way for other females to join the industry.

Collaboration between horticulture industry members working in partnership with government agencies (such as the CSIRO) and researchers was brought into focus by East Gippsland Food Cluster Executive Officer Dr Nicola Watts. She presented the challenges and opportunities facing the food sector, including the large amount of waste. Dr Watts noted that if food waste was an economy, it would be the third largest in the world behind the United States and China.

Other speakers included AUSVEG National Manager – Science and Extension Jessica Lye who spoke about current challenges for Australian plant health and outlined the biosecurity initiatives which are in action to prevent exotic pests from entering the country.

Jill Briggs from Rural Training Initiatives focused on the '#Leadershipspace' and the common traits that make a great leader of a team, while ReActivate Latrobe Valley Co-Director Emma Lewis informed the audience about 'Get Stuffed', an initiative which uses the local food network to strengthen the economy, create jobs and improve community health.

### GROUP DISCUSSIONS

In the afternoon, attendees joined small groups to discuss key areas of interest including irrigation, organics, biosecurity,

mental health, industry leadership, innovation and the new generation of horticulture.

In the irrigation group, the challenges of how to best manage water and water quality on-farm were discussed, as was the need to share knowledge and information with like-minded people.

Meanwhile, there was a general consensus among members in the organic group that there needs to be a discussion about both organic and non-organic sectors sharing information, as both need to grow and produce more food.

Biosecurity group members spoke about emergency responses and how industry acknowledges biosecurity risks, as well as 'bridging the gap' of collaboration between local councils and state/territory governments.

Industry leadership focused on the challenges facing female leaders and using their passion and knowledge for horticulture, while the new generation group discussed the job opportunities available to young people in the industry and how to attract prospective workers.

Raising awareness of mental health and wellbeing was also on the agenda, and it was mentioned that more funds are needed to assist in this area.

The results from these thought-provoking discussions were then presented in three minute bites to the whole group, with plenty of takeaway messages and a wealth of knowledge generated for the entire room.

### EVENT BENEFITS

VegNET Industry Development Officer for Victoria – Gippsland Shayne Hyman said the event was a way of raising awareness of opportunities for women in the horticulture industry.

"It's all about the themes that run right across horticulture. If you broaden an event to horticulture, it means you're cross-pollinating from one area, one idea, one plant, one business to another. I think it makes perfect sense; thinking outside the veggie plot."

### INFO

Regional capacity building to grow vegetable businesses – Victoria Gippsland (East Gippsland Food Cluster) has been funded by Hort Innovation using the vegetable research and development levy and contributions from the Australian Government.

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**Hort  
Innovation**  
Strategic levy investment

**VEGETABLE  
FUND**