



Focussing on the better half on the land

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IN A NUTSHELL

- ▶ A discussion group for women has formed at Griffith to provide farming women with better information, skills and understanding of crops and farming systems, to build their confidence to become more involved with their farm business
- ▶ The group aims to improve basic farming knowledge and skills in a friendly supportive atmosphere, as well as provide networking with other women in a similar situation

Women are an important component of any family farm business, with many responsible for the book keeping side of the operation. Few women though are involved with the day to day running of the farm including the cropping and livestock side of things.

In the past, discussion groups have been used successfully to help farmers adapt to changes in agriculture including introducing new technologies and assessing new varieties. Discussion groups have also provided a means for farmers to catch up on what others have been doing locally and learn from neighbours. Whilst these groups are open to all the farming community, very few women feel confident enough to attend.

Why a local women's group?

One wise woman said that *farming women want to learn how to become better farmers not better farmers' wives!* The aim of forming such a group is therefore to provide farming women with better information, skills and understanding of their crops and farming systems, and to build their confidence to become more involved with their farm business.

The idea of discussion groups for women is not new with several other groups already operating successfully, such as the group at Leeton. The farming women around Griffith started their discussion group in December last year. The local women involved in the group are happy to share their ideas, experiences, learn more about the range of issues on their farm and most importantly ask questions. The group is designed to meet their needs in terms of providing childcare and having the flexibility of working within school hours.

What has the group been up to?

The women involved in the Griffith group decide what topics or issues they would like covered, times to meet and dates

for future meetings. So far we have covered a range of topics including the practical basics about growing rice and learning all the technical jargon, such as identifying panicle initiation (PI), the importance of deep water at early pollen microspore (EPM) and crop water use. We have also touched on the marketing of crops as well as growing alternative summer crops to rice such as azuki beans, mung beans and soybeans.

An important part of the learning process has been the practical hands-on aspect which involves getting out and having a look at the different crops as well identifying the different stages of crop development.

Currently the group is progressing through the MIA FarmWise course. This is the first step for the group to



Figure 1 The Griffith Discussion Group for Women checking out PI in rice at Julie & Glen Andrezza's crop at Willbrigie in January 2005



explore some of the issues, which will be followed up in more detail at a later date. Having completed the Introduction to FarmWise, Vegetation Planning Theory and Introduction to Soils, the group is now up to Day 3, which involves a district bus trip focussing on irrigation principles, practical applications of vegetation management and best management practices on farm.

So far the women have found the course particularly useful as it has provided them with a good grounding of the basic farming principles. The soils day in particular was one the group found very useful with one lady heard to comment 'I never thought looking at dirt would be such fun'.

What's next for the group?

At the initial meeting in December 2004 topics of interest were listed and the direction the group would take was set. Topics of interest included the agronomy of irrigated crops, OH&S, farm accounting, livestock production, organic farming, water issues and relevant courses like the FarmWise course and the Chemical User Safety course. The list is extensive and remains flexible as other opportunities arise. In the short term, the group has planned to complete the FarmWise Course then participants will decide what they would like to continue with.

The group is all about improving basic farming knowledge and skills in a friendly supportive atmosphere, as well as networking with other women in a similar situation. If you are interested in being involved or would like to know a bit more about the Griffith Discussion Group for Women please contact Rachael Whitworth. 

Further information

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The Griffith Discussion Group for Women has the full support of NSW DPI, Murrumbidgee Irrigation and NSW Partners in Grain.



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Figure 2 The group looking at azuki beans at Vicki & Peter Soligo's at Widgelli in March 2005



Figure 3 Studying the basics of soils with Lindsay Evans, at a soil pit during the FarmWise course