



MEDIA RELEASE

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Victorian dairy farmer features in new best-seller

A Victorian dairy farmer is among eight women featured in a new book which hit the current best-sellers list for non-fiction in Australia within weeks of its national launch.

Women of the Land brings together the inspiring stories of women from across the country who have run their own farms, capturing their ways of life, their personal struggles and their remarkable achievements.

Published by Allen & Unwin, the book has been written by award-winning rural journalist and Churchill Fellow Liz Harfull, who grew up on a farm near Mount Gambier in South Australia.

Among the women she chose to feature is Timboon dairy farmer Jan Raleigh, from western Victoria.

“Jan always wanted to be a farmer, but like many country kids she was encouraged by her parents to gain a profession, not just because she was a girl but because farming can be a tough way to make a living,” Liz said.

“Jan went on to become a very highly-qualified coronary care nurse, at one stage in charge of the Geelong hospital. After her father died she saw the chance had finally come for her to realize her dreams so she gave up caring for patients to care for cows. She has since established one of Australia’s best performing herds of Aussie Red dairy cattle, and a highly successful dairy operation.

“The story is very inspiring and truly illustrates that while making your living from the land is full of challenges it also has its rewards. It also throws a spotlight on women who are farmers in their own right, in what many people perceive is still a man’s world.

“Even though people generally realize there are many women farmers out there, I suspect there is a belief that women only farm in partnership with their husbands, or brothers or fathers. That is one of the reasons why I was so keen to explore this theme, made even more pertinent by the fact this is the Australian Year of the Farmer.”

Liz said she was also particularly keen to write about parts of rural Australia not considered the Outback, which was already the focus of many books and movies about the bush.

“The vast majority of rural Australians live in more closely settled areas, which are rich in their own stories, traditions and characters,” she said. “This is the world I grew up in and know best because my family have been farming a small property near Mt Gambier since the early 1860s. When I was young it was a dairy farm, supplying a cheese factory at Mil Lel.”

The women featured in the book come from different backgrounds and operate diverse enterprises. They also include:

- Lynette Rideout, from Oakdale on the outskirts of Sydney, who reinvented the family orchard she inherited from her hard-working parents, and is inspired daily by her remarkable grandmother.
- Susie Chisholm from Adelong in NSW, the original 'earth mother', raised in the eastern suburbs of Sydney, who overcame the grief of losing the love of her life to cancer, to become an elite beef cattle breeder.
- Keelen Mailman, from Augathella in Queensland, the first Aboriginal woman in Australia to manage a cattle station.
- Catherine Bird, Willalooka, SA, a station brat from the Northern Territory who survived a near fatal farming accident to raise a family and produce organic beef a world away from where she grew up.
- Mary Naisbitt from Lake Grace, who took on a sheep and wheat farm in WA's isolated salt lake country after her husband died suddenly leaving her with the farm and four children under the age of seven.
- Nan Bray, an American oceanographer who walked away from a job with the CSIRO as Australia's leading marine scientist to produce one of the world's most elite fibres, superfine Merino wool in the Tasmanian Midlands.
- Cecily Cornish, from Wando Bridge in western Victoria, in her 80s and still farming sheep and cattle, and a passionate horse woman who, as a young woman, sailed to an England still recovering from the war to find and bring back a remarkable Arabian stallion that continues to influence the breed in Australia today.

Women of the Land is Liz Harfull's second book. Her first effort about the traditions of country shows and show cooking was named runner-up in the Gourmand World Cookbook awards in Paris in 2009, and is also a best seller now in its fourth print run. Based in the Adelaide Hills, Liz juggles a busy writing career with her voluntary work as president of a national council representing rural journalists and communicators.

Ends

Caption: *Women of the Land* author Liz Harfull (left) with Timboon dairy farmer Jan Raleigh, who features in her new book. Photo by Rosey Boehm.

***Women of the Land* by Liz Harfull is published by Allen & Unwin Book Publishers, April 2012. Extent:** 336 pp
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