

Supporting women in wine

Third-generation viticulturist Mary Retallack is working towards providing women in the wine industry with access to information and opportunities, after she was named Rural Woman of the Year for 2012.

Kellie Arbuckle

WHEN ADELAIDE HILLS viticulturist Mary Retallack embarked on her career at the age of 21, she struggled to find access to mentors and work opportunities.

Finding women in her line of work was also uncommon – a rarity she says still exists today.

“In a room full of growers, there might be four women if you’re lucky,” Mary said.

“Sometimes I’ll talk to a group of 30 growers and I may be the only woman in the room.”

Looking back at almost two decades devoted to the wine industry, Mary says times have changed, noting a tremendous increase of women now in winemaking and wine marketing roles.

But while the gender gap has made progress at closing, Mary believes there is still a long way to go, particularly in terms of providing access to support and information to women in the wine industry.

While completing the Australian Rural Leadership Program in 2008, Mary got to thinking about how this could be achieved. The idea was to provide a formalised platform for women to access information about personal development initiatives and mentorship, and to give women more confidence to apply for jobs in the industry – including senior positions.

Now, four years later, that very idea is bearing fruition, after Mary was named the 2012 National Rural Woman of the Year.

Agriculture Minister Joe Ludwig presented Mary with the award last month at an awards ceremony in Canberra.

The award recognises women for their contribution to primary industries and rural communities, and includes a \$10,000 bursary to be geared towards a project of the winner’s choice.

“I want to develop a more formalised network for women,” Mary said.

“While we have online networks that work well, like Twitter and Facebook, sometimes when you’re starting out it can be really hard to break into new networks in your local area.

“I’m really keen to encourage more women into the wine industry, but to be able to do that we need to show them the range of roles on offer throughout the value chain.”



Mary Retallack accepting the award for Rural Woman of the Year by Agriculture Minister Joe Ludwig, in Canberra, last month.

CHANGING THE WAY WOMEN NETWORK – WORDS BY MARY

“I’m really keen to encourage more women into the wine industry but, to be able to do that, we need to show them our offering. They need to know what is possible and who to talk to, so they can ask questions and get a feel for what’s involved. We hope to do this by developing a range of one-page profiles.

“We struggle every year to get women in the wine industry to put up their hand up for opportunities, such as Future Leaders, ARLP and the RIRDC Rural Women’s Award. If I can help ensure everyone is aware of the opportunities and encourage them to apply, then that’s a great start.

“Part of it is also encouraging women to be involved in leadership positions and ensuring they have the skills to be able to apply for those positions. And if they do get a committee or board position, we need to make sure we can support them while they are there.

“Importantly, we don’t want to lose women who are at the top of their game. We are losing women from the wine industry for a whole range of reasons. Sometimes women will leave and start a family, and it may be hard to integrate back due to the technical nature of their work or the lack of flexibility in the workplace. I am not convinced we are replacing women in the wine industry as quickly as we are losing them. It is important to ensure we don’t lose that wealth of experience and expertise.”

For Mary, who was among seven finalists, the money will be put towards a website where women can access information about mentors, employment opportunities and general support – the first step to achieving the formalised platform.

Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation managing director Craig Burns said Mary's project has the potential to revolutionise the Australian wine industry and change the way women network.

Speaking of the award win, Mary said it's a fantastic opportunity to represent agriculture around the nation and to tell some good news about the wine industry.

While focusing on information sharing for women, she said the website would also encourage contributions from men, as well as women who have left the industry but want to stay in touch. "It's about celebrating the contribution women have made, but also acknowledging the support we get from the blokes," she said.

"We want to be really receptive to getting feedback from a whole range of people and that includes guys as well."

Having grown up on a fruit block in the Riverland, Mary has been exposed



Third-generation viticulturist Mary Retallack wants to develop a formalised network for women in the wine industry to access information and support services.

to agriculture her entire life. As a third-generation viticulturist, her passion for the past two decades has been to extend her knowledge to Australian growers to help them produce the best winegrapes possible.

As the managing director of her own business, Retallack Viticulture, Mary has brought this passion to fruition, while maintaining an active interest in research, education and environmental initiatives. **GW**

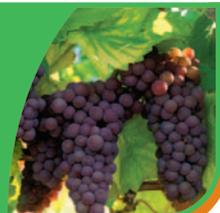


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