

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN FARMING



Full course name: Certificate IV in Agribusiness

Training provider: Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE

Project supporters: AgBiz Assist, Murray Dairy

Delivery location: Various

COUNTRY CHALLENGES – THE CONTEXT

There is evidence to suggest women are often in charge of a family farm's financial operations. It's a specialist role that requires specialist training as farming becomes more competitive and technological advances bear a greater influence.

Distance and family commitments are two of the main factors that often prevent women from travelling to a TAFE to undertake relevant training.

Those are not the only barriers however - the project identified other disadvantages in the Hume region of north-east Victoria. An AgBiz Assist report found many women in the region feel isolated, experience relationship, mental health and financial problems, and often have poor digital skills.

ONLINE OPPORTUNITY – THE SOLUTION

GOTAFE aimed to overcome the distance problem by bringing the Cert IV in Agribusiness to women through a combination of online learning and workshops for small groups of students in some of Victoria's most disadvantaged towns.

This iteration of the Certificate IV course first emphasises digital skills taught through face-to-face sessions. The idea is to build participants' confidence and set them up to tackle the course online through the Zoom platform.

Regular workshops and a mentoring program run by Agbiz Assist provide further support, in keeping with the project's strong focus on student retention and support.

All of this is made possible by GOTAFE'S successful application for up to \$932,000 from the Regional and Specialist Training Fund.

HITTING THE ROAD – THE OUTCOMES

- The targeted marketing campaign for the course was a success, with 63 enrolments across two cohorts. One group is scheduled to finish this November, the other in December.
- Workshops have been run in places such as Tallangatta, Rochester and Shepparton, making it easier for participants to attend.
- Students and trainers have also participated in events such as careers days and supported a study tour where 24 Indian delegates travelled to the Hume region to learn about Australian dairy farming.
- Other events are planned, including a women in agribusiness networking day.
- GOTAFE is in discussion with organisations such as Agriculture Australia and the Victorian Farmer Federation to have them provide demonstrations on topics such as drones, farm safety and soil test interpretation.

COMMUNITY AMBASSADORS – WHAT'S NEXT

One of the aims of the project was that the students would pass on their new-found digital skills.

"(These skills) will enable women to become ambassadors of technology within communities," says Travis Heeney, chief executive of GOTAFE. "This will help them reduce barriers to education, while also improving the business productivity of the farms."

Another strength of the project is that the resources it has developed will be shared with other TAFE providers delivering the course. It is hoped that these will be used to make a difference to the lives of farming women across Victoria.

The Regional and Specialist Training Fund is a targeted *Skills First* funding stream that supports training for specific skills in regional and specialist areas that are not being met by the current training market. Training providers who hold a current *Skills First* VET funding contract are eligible to apply for higher subsidies and one-off grant payments for selected courses in specific regions to meet local industry demand or specialised occupations. Funding will be considered where there is a strong connection between industry, training and job outcomes.

To find out more visit:

www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/funding/Pages/rst.aspx

or email the RSTF team at:

rstf@edumail.vic.gov.au

"THE COURSE HAS OPENED UP A WHOLE OTHER WORLD TO ME"

Student case study: Rebecca McDonald



As a mother of six children aged three to 15, Rebecca McDonald had every excuse to keep scrolling when an ad for the Certificate IV in Agribusiness popped up in her Facebook feed.

Instead, she clicked on it – a decision that has changed her outlook on life.

"I had been flat out raising kids and I'd always put it in the 'too hard' basket before, but I decided to throw caution to the wind," Mrs McDonald says.

"The idea of doing any kind of formal study scared me. All my life I've avoided paperwork. When we started the first unit it was so daunting and I didn't know how I'd go, but it turned out not to be as scary as I thought it would be."

Her initial goals were to understand farming better and be able to take some of the pressure off her husband Ewan on the family farm at Timmering, about an hour from Shepparton.

She now has the skills to do that as she nears the end of the course, and it is just one of many benefits she has reaped from her studies.

"This course has opened up a whole other world to me," she says. "It's so empowering. I have more confidence in myself now, having proven to myself with every unit that I can learn new things."

She says her IT skills have improved dramatically, that she can now talk about agribusiness with neighbours and friends, and will be able to pass on knowledge to her children.

She's also now confident enough to indulge her love of fiction – she's writing a novel. The discipline she learnt from online study helped, as did encouragement from her trainers.

"I've had nothing but positive experiences with my trainers," she says. "Megan (Dodd) particularly has gone above and beyond with me."