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# WOMEN WHO FARM

Here is part one of a series of articles by Tara Luca from Olive Gap Organic Farm in northern NSW. Women who farm don't get the recognition or the voice of men who farm, and Tara sets about changing that.

**W**HEN my husband Alex and I bought our certified organic tea tree and flower farm five years ago, my mother declared excitedly: "Oh honey, you're going to be a farmer's wife!" I quickly replied, "No way Mum, I'm going to be a farmer!"

As a first-generation farmer now, one of the things I've enjoyed most is connecting with other farmers, especially women who are choosing a similar path to tread. Farming is a career like no other. It is a lifestyle, often with family, home, land stewardship, activism and income all interwoven into one. For this reason, it can also be the most emotionally challenging and one where community support and connection is vital.

Women in farming is nothing new. The farming industry has relied on women for both paid and unpaid work since the dawn of agriculture. It's only now that women are becoming more visible in the sector and are finally getting more opportunities to take on



Women farmers at Harvest Café in Newrybar for a coffee date in the garden.

professional leadership roles. We have still a long way to go.

It's astonishing to discover that until the 1970s, women were not able to partake in any formal agricultural studies and, it wasn't until 1994 that women in Australia could legally list 'farmer' as their profession. They were seen as domestics or silent partners, despite the amount of farm work they performed and income they earned.

The sun-kissed brawny bloke with an Akubra and his dog still tends to be the stereotype most of us think of as the 'Aussie Farmer'. However it's estimated that 50 per cent of all farm income in Australia is currently produced by women. On top of this is the acknowledgment of the unpaid

work many women do such as running a homestead, raising and often home educating children, keeping the books and managing staff. These things are just as important a contribution to many rural farms' successful running, and it often goes overlooked.

Thanks to many initiatives, female farmers are starting to be seen for the tremendous work they are doing. I've been fortunate to meet some wonderful ladies over the past few years, both online and off, and have found I have learnt so much just from everyday conversations.

Being able to socialise and bounce off 'colleagues' now and then really helps alleviate feelings of isolation and it's heartening to know other people are



Sasha has been growing certified organic fruit and vegetables for 12 years.

experiencing similar challenges. Women supporting women is really powerful, and it's fun too.

Recently I met up with some lovely local female farmers at Harvest Café in Newrybar for a coffee date in the garden. As part of a series over the next few issues, I'll be featuring some of these inspiring women from my region and share with you what it's like for them to be farmers in this day and age.

**SASHAWELKER FROM GREEN GODDESS FARM, FINDON CREEK NSW**

Sasha has been growing certified organic

fruit and vegetables from her farm in Northern NSW for 12 years with her husband Rhys.

**What led you to farming?**

Just chance really. Initially we began as homesteaders growing vegetables because we wanted to teach ourselves skills and were preparing for self-sufficient sustainability. I quickly learned I had the knack for it and loved doing it. Somehow farming feels like the perfect blend of work and service and satisfies the need in me to be a part of something that feels meaningful.

*“It’s astonishing to discover that until the 1970s, women were not able to partake in any formal agricultural studies.”*

**How do you think previous work or life experience may have helped you on your farming journey?**

I used to work in a high-end clothing store and learned from the owner how to market anything! She was amazing. She bought the shop when she was only 20 years old and created a wildly successful business with zero training or experience and she ran the business for what I think was 30 years. She showed me how to trailblaze my own path and just own it in all its unique glory. Both my parents were also huge influences on me growing up. They always had an amazing garden and some of my earliest memories are of me climbing the ancient apricot tree.

**Why do you think farming is an important vocation?**

Because everyone needs to eat and as farmers, we have the ability to naturally cool the climate.

**What’s your greatest challenge when it comes to a work/life/family balance?**

I really struggle to leave my work in the field and switch off when it’s time to. I used to work all year round because the climate here allows us to do that but over the past three years, we’ve managed to cement in time off over summer. We now have a stricter growing season and off



Sasha at home on the farm with Rhys (plus Luna and Ché).

season which has made a huge difference.

**What's the most rewarding part of being a farmer for you?**

The whole thing really. It's hard to pick apart one thing I feel rewarded by because I love the entire process. However, it's a double-edged sword because sometimes the things that make me feel fulfilled (connection with community, overabundance of cabbage) can actually deplete me (too much chit chat, not another batch of kraut waiting to be made!).

**Has there been any instance where you feel being a woman has been an advantaged or disadvantage in the field of farming?**

I actually think being a woman provides more advantages than it does disadvantages in the vegie farming world. I have no issues asking questions and not knowing things so as a woman I think I have the advantage over men whose gender tells them they have to know it all. I also didn't come from a farming background so that allows me to approach it with an open mind and fewer pre-conceived ideas than perhaps someone who grew up in the culture.

**What would you say to any women out there considering a path in farming?**

I'd say there is no other more worthy profession than farming.



Women supporting women is really powerful.

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Rachael grows seasonal cut flowers in the beautiful Numinbah Valley.

**RACHAEL HARDY FROM THE LOVE GARDEN CO, GOLD COAST HINTERLAND**

Rachael grows seasonal cut flowers in the beautiful Numinbah Valley in the Gold Coast Hinterland with her family.

**Are you farming fulltime or blending it with other work or child care?**

I farm half of the time between raising kids and working. Usually, I farm in the

mornings and afternoons, along with weekends and two full days during the week. One day is for farm tasks with the other for picking, studio work and deliveries.

**What led you to farming? Was it something you always planned to do?**

I was lucky to have my formative years in the bush, as my parents lived in a shed

on acreage when my brother and I were little. We had a pretty idyllic childhood, raising animals and veggies. I guess it must have made a big impression on me as I have always wanted to return to that lifestyle.

**Why do you think farming is an important vocation?**

I think small scale, holistic farming focusing on diversity, soil building, rewilding, and habitat creation can make a tremendous difference to our future by the ability to aid carbon sequestering. If we ‘as consumers’ can embrace changes to our current convenience-driven lifestyles and actively seek local alternatives for products, we can together help to improve water quality, landscapes, ecology, climate, culture, humanities and health. There are so many benefits to supporting holistic, organic farms that transcend pricing.

**What’s your greatest challenge when it comes to a work/life/family balance?**

Just getting everything done while not burning out. Remembering to just do what I can and that’s ok.

**What would you say to any women out there considering a path in farming?**

Go for it — we need you! However, I would highly recommend starting small, learning how to build soil, succession planning, learning your plot, etc before scaling up. Planning is essential, but things don’t always go to plan, and the working process is made by getting out there! Don’t sweat the setbacks; there are always going to be highs and lows. Mistakes are inevitable, but they are always an opportunity to discover something new.

¶ Follow Rachel’s journey on Instagram ? ^sg dkuudf ‘q dm

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