

Partners in Grain

Pat Hamilton, retired secondary school principal, turned specialist sheep breeder is helping the grains industry recognise and harness the value of the 'reserve labour force' – women and young people. Pat is now in the final stages of her PhD thesis which looks at the capacity building project Partners in Grain (PinG).

Partners in Grain is a national project funded by GRDC. It was initiated in 2001 to help address and overcome the barriers that inhibit women and young people participating in professional development. The GRDC recognised that women and young people can be highly influential over business decisions but were often excluded from the professional development opportunities provided due to lack of invitation, or child care facilities or inappropriate scheduling. PinG is now active in each state; guided by a state reference group, the project supports workshops on grain marketing to beer appreciation and activities including crop walks that are inclusive of all members of the family farming business.

Pat initially reviewed the PinG project in 2003. She found in three years the project had organised events that gave young people and women the opportunity to develop and strengthen technical knowledge and skills that helped them increase their participation and contribution to managing the family grains business. This review provided the basis for her PhD thesis that addresses the question – How does a capacity building project, which is also a social network, promote and assist the education of women to help them become a visible, active force in decision making in the family farming business and as future leaders in the grains industry?

For her PhD, which is supervised by Prof Margaret Alston, Director of the Centre for Rural Social Research at Charles Sturt University, Pat has interviewed 40 men and women from across Australia and run three focus groups. She has identified that the role of men and women on farms is changing and currently many women have considerably more tertiary education than men. Pat has found that women often find it easier to work off farm, in order to retain their identity; this is a loss for the industry. However, involvement in PinG activities and training programs is helping women and young people to contribute to their family farming business and gain recognition for this contribution.

"A balanced partnership is essential for the productivity, profitability and sustainability of the family grain business," said Pat

"The PinG activities help women who want to become more involved, at a range of levels, to learn the language of farming and evolve and develop their skills so they can confidently contribute to the farm business."

Pat found that the introduction of GST was a real turning point for women in grain businesses. Suddenly accounts needed to be reconciled monthly, new calculations were required and computerised accounting made much of this easier. In many businesses women took on the GST and with training and support have expanded their role to office manager with responsibilities including grain marketing and input purchasing.

Training activities organised by PinG, such as those detailed in 'Around the Regions' are open to all women and young people. They are generally arranged to run during school hours and not in school holidays they also encourage participants to stay in contact and mentor each other away from the training sessions.