



## WOMEN OF INFLUENCE

Story **Mark Harding**  
Photography **Steve Keough**

Despite the gender imbalance in agricultural decision making positions, there is no shortage of brilliant women helping to make a difference.

**W**hen American born Martha Shepherd was jetting around the world in her role as Director of International Operations for a famous US based franchise, she never dreamed she would one day become Australia's Rural Woman of the Year.

Thirteen years after arriving here, Martha has attained that honour for her work in developing a model for sustainable use of small parcels of farmland on Queensland's Sunshine Coast.

Similarly, Bev Logue never envisaged that the work she would do on the family share cropping farm at Binu, north of Geraldton in Western Australia, would lead to meetings with politicians, government officials and farmer groups over the manufacture of biodiesel fuel. Neither did she think she would have the honour of being WA Rural Woman of the Year and the national runner-up to Martha.

These two great women not only demonstrate how life can take you in all sorts of unpredictable directions, they are playing significant roles in sustainable farming and increasing the impact Australian women are having as decision makers in agriculture.

The Rural Women's Awards are an initiative of the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) and were instigated

in 2000 to recognise and encourage the role of rural women. The seven winners of the State and Territory awards receive a \$10,000 bursary and for the first time this year, a national winner was chosen.

Martha's story would be fascinating even if she had never entered the awards. She first came to Australia in 1993 on business and fell so in love with the country that she asked her employers to relocate her here permanently. She resigned in 2003 to concentrate on the remarkable little business she and partner David Haviland had grown from nothing.

From their 4.5 hectare property, Galeru, in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, they are producing a range of gourmet products from fruits of the rainforest. The gourmet cakes, fruit sauces, yoghurts, ice creams and sorbets get their unique flavour predominantly from the fruits of two native trees – *Syzygium fibrosum* and *Syzygium luehmannii*. Although more commonly known as lilli-pilly, they call the fruits raincherry and rainberry.

They were so successful that other people in the area wanted to grow the fruits and came to them for advice and guidance. This has led to Martha using her business experience to investigate the establishment of a value chain management model, which will help farmers develop sustainable operations on parcels of land otherwise considered too small.

