

Celebrating Mackay's women in cane For International Women's Day – Friday 8 March 2019

On International Women's Day today, CANEGROWERS Mackay is celebrating the diverse and important roles played by women on cane farms in the district.

"Whether cane hauling, billet planting, picking up spare parts or working in the office to keep records and the accounts up to date - and then there's the staff to be safety inducted and paid - women in cane play a vital role in cane businesses, either working beside their partners or family members, or single-handedly running the show," said CANEGROWERS Mackay Chairman Kevin Borg.

"Often women in cane have to juggle farm work on the same days as they are having to do the school run, care for babies or sick relatives, and/or manage the household chores. I tip my hat to them because without their team work many farm businesses simply would not survive, let alone thrive," he said.

CANEGROWERS Mackay has for years supported the operation of the CANEGROWERS Network Mackay District. The organisation, which late last year celebrated its 25th Anniversary, was begun by a steering committee of seven growers and two local CANEGROWERS representatives under the chair of Rita Nielsen - who is still involved today. The Network aims to provide a regular forum for women in cane to help them get to the nub of the issues that affect their day-to-day lives in the industry and rural community. Current Chair is Ann Jansen, a cane grower from the Mt Ossa district.

Secretary, Jill Fox, herself from a cane farm at Wagoora, said the Network was the best place to come if you wanted to know what was really going on. She said it was a great time for women in cane to join the group while the sugar industry was working through such a number of challenging changes.

"The Network works hard to ensure women can talk one on one with the people able to give them real information to help them run their businesses, not the hype," she said.

In the months ahead, the group aims to talk about the new Reef regulation Bill, the Nordzucker offer and sugar marketing choices.

"Because our gatherings are not mostly men - unlike shed meetings where one or two individuals often seem to dominate proceedings - you have the chance to ask your burning questions without feeling exposed," said Jill.

"Coming together with other women in similar situations with similar experiences is also an important way to gain confidence. We've all been through difficult times before with farms sold or merged, or succession squabbles or family members lost. We are there to offer support to each other - and to have some fun, too!"

The Network is currently organising a bus tour to the Women in Sugar Australia Conference to be held from 29-30 April in Ingham.

"Taking part in the conference is a great way to get to know each other and women in other sugar districts. We usually get access to farms and places that aren't open to the general public. It's a great way to learn and build friendships."

CANEGROWERS Network meets bi-monthly with the next meeting planned at the CANEGROWERS Mackay office on 12 April.

Jill Fox urges interested women to attend: "Don't let life get in the way! Bring babies or children if you need to, or husbands and partners! We are not exclusive and all are welcome," she said.

For more information about joining CANEGROWERS Network and/or taking part in the trip to the Women in Sugar Australia Conference, contact Chairperson Ann Jansen on aajansen78@gmail.com or Secretary Jill Fox on jfoxfarm@outlook.com.

