

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE5150

Johnson, Alana

(1955 -)

Born 1 January, 1955, Western Victoria Victoria Australia

Occupation Businesswoman, Farmer, Social worker

Summary

Read more about Alana Johnson in our sister publication [The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia](#).

Details

The following text is reproduced in full and with permission by ABC Open. It was originally published in May 2017 as part of an online exhibition associated with 'The Invisible Farmer' Project (LP160100555) at <https://open.abc.net.au/explore/196247>. It may no longer be available online.

From 'farmer's wives' to farmers : the generation of change

Alana Johnson, born in the mid-20th century is fifth generation farming in Victoria.

Her growing up on a sheep and cattle property near Hamilton was significantly shaped by her mother's role as a post war farmer's wife and the post-depression hard work and 'making do' of her grandmother.

Alana reflects on how our lives are determined by the era and conventions of the time we happen to be living.

Feeling constrained by the geographical isolation and the social expectations of rural (and Catholic) girls in the early 1970s, Alana was desperate to expand her life.

The provision of free university education by the Whitlam government in 1974 profoundly changed rural Australia.

Thousands of young women like Alana were given an unprecedented opportunity to become first generation female university graduates in farming families across Australia.

Following heady years of capital city university, life during the peak of second wave feminism and Germaine Greer, Alana like many of these young women returned to farms and rural communities not wanting to live the same lives as their mothers.

They returned as agricultural scientists, veterinarians, teachers and social workers, with tertiary qualifications their male farming partners did not have.

They had choices their mothers did not have, they could decide when and how many babies to have, they could earn an independent income, they determined what work they would do on their farms, they would no longer be relegated to being a 'farmer's wife' and they lead the biggest social change in Australian farming history.

In 1981, Alana chose to retain her own family name when she married, unheard of in her rural town and considered an act of 'extreme women's liberation'.

She was known to tell the shocked locals she offered her husband to take her name but he declined.

From embryonic beginnings such as meetings in Alana's lounge room in the early 1980s, over the next two decades the rural women's movement spread across the nation.

Alana was a member of the inaugural reference group for the Victorian Rural Women's Network, was a founding member of Australian Women in Agriculture, presented to the first International Women in Agriculture conference at Melbourne University in 1994, has been a speaker at and organiser of annual Women on Farms Gatherings in Victoria and interstate, was the national president of the Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women and has served on Ministerial Advisory Councils to name but a few.

For a quarter of a century, the Australian rural women's movement was the global leader and Alana together with many other rural women travelled the world to share their experience and support other women to become activists.

Following her dream as an 18 year old, Alana truly did expand her life.

Alana Johnson's story is the story of a generation, a story of opportunity grasped, the story of farm women networking together, becoming visible, commanding recognition for their work on farms and demanding their seat at the decision-making tables in agriculture, agribusiness and politics.

Over the past 35 years, Alana Johnson and Rob Richardson have raised two sons and have been breeding Angus cattle and growing trees on their property near Benalla.

Alana was Victoria's Rural Woman of the Year in 2010 and national runner up, she was named in the inaugural 100 Women of Influence in Australia and the inaugural 100 Women in Agribusiness for Australia.

She was the first rural women to chair the Victorian Women's Trust.

Events

2018 - 2018

Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

2020 - 2020

For significant service to women through leadership and advisory roles.

Published resources

Site Exhibition

The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Alana Johnson interviewed by Nikki Henningham in the Rural and farm women oral history project.](#)

Author Details

Alana Johnson (with Nikki Henningham)

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