

# Media Release

**The Hon Ros Spence MP**

Minister for Agriculture

Minister for Community Sport

Minister for Carers and Volunteers



Thursday, 18 December 2025

## EMPOWERING THE NEXT RURAL WOMEN LEADERS

The Allan Labor Government is empowering rural women to step into leadership roles – providing the skills, confidence and opportunities they need to support the next generation of Victoria's farmers.

Minister for Agriculture Ros Spence announced today that applications are now open for the Victorian Rural Women's Network 2025/2026 Leadership and Mentoring Program, helping more women take part in professional development to increase their ability to influence their sector.

Since its foundation in 1986, the Network has played a pivotal role in increasing the number of women in agricultural leadership roles as one of only a few leadership programs in Australia tailored for women in the sector.

The 2026 cohort will receive mentorship and leadership training from highly skilled leaders from both industry and government, equipping women with the skills, confidence and networks needed to participate in leadership and decision-making – advancing gender equality, economic participation and empowerment.

It's flagship Leadership and Mentoring Program offers participants the opportunity to deepen their understanding of sector challenges, examine barriers facing women leaders, build insight into government and industry decision-making and set purposeful goals for their leadership growth.

Rural and regional women often experience lower economic security, greater vulnerability to financial shocks, and persistent underrepresentation in leadership. These challenges are particularly prevalent in agriculture, despite women making up approximately one third of the workforce.

Costs are covered for each participant, including a bursary towards accommodation, childcare, and travel costs in acknowledgement of the financial barriers that prevent many women from participating in leadership programs.

To learn more about the program, including viewing the Program's guidelines, visit [agriculture.vic.gov.au/support-and-resources/networks/rural-womens-network](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/support-and-resources/networks/rural-womens-network)

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Agriculture Ros Spence

*"Women make up a third of the agricultural workforce and contribute significantly to Australia's food and fibre production and encouraging them into leadership is key to attracting and retaining more women in the industry."*

*"This program gives rural women the tools to lead with confidence – building skills, networks, and opportunities that drive gender equality, economic participation, and empowerment across Victoria's agriculture sector."*