

Mary continues to shine

In a male-dominated industry, Dr. Mary Cole stands out as a trailblazer and a finalist for the 2025 AgriFutures Rural Women’s Award. Gazette journalist Afraa Kori shares that her legacy shines a spotlight on women’s contributions to agriculture and innovation, inspiring local farmers and younger generations.

Garfield’s Dr. Mary Cole has been named one of three inspiring Victorian finalists for the 2025 AgriFutures Rural Women’s Award, a prestigious recognition of leadership, innovation, and contributions to rural industries and communities.

This award celebrates women driving positive change in regional Australia by equipping them with the skills, support, and leadership opportunities to shape their industries.

Now in its 24th year, the program provides each state and territory winner with a \$15,000 Westpac grant, professional development opportunities, and access to an influential alumni network.

The Victorian winner, to be announced in March in Melbourne, will go on to represent the state at the National Award in September at Parliament House, where the national winner will receive \$20,000.

Dr. Cole is a leading scientist, educator, and founder of Agpath, a biological farming research and education centre. With a PhD in plant pathology from Monash University, she has spent over 45 years advocating for regenerative agriculture—a sustainable approach to farming that focuses on soil health, biodiversity, and climate resilience. Her work helps farmers reduce costs, improve soil fertility, and transition away from synthetic chemicals.

Her passion for agriculture stems from her childhood in North Queensland’s Atherton Tablelands, where she was inspired by her father’s love of nature and her grandparents’ dairy farming

practices. Despite facing resistance from conventional agronomists and chemical companies, Dr. Cole persisted, driven by mentors who assured her she was on the right side of history.

Among her many achievements, she has helped a Western Australian grain farmer reduce input costs from \$3 million to just \$29,000 in a year while increasing production by 30&percent;. She is also a strong advocate for women in STEM and agriculture, encouraging young women to pursue science and gain hands-on experience in her laboratory

Currently the 2024 Cardinia Shire Senior Citizen of the Year, Dr. Mary remains dedicated to educating farmers and communities on sustainable practices.

If she wins the award, she plans to create a permanent resource documenting farmers’ experiences transitioning to biological farming, ensuring practical knowledge reaches a wider audience.

Dr. Mary is passionate about empowering women in agriculture and sees this recognition as a step toward greater inclusion.

“Women have always been the backbone of white Australian and Indigenous Australian agriculture. They just have not been recognised.”

“Women have always been the backbone of modern agriculture. They just get written out of history. It’s time for this to change. women now play leading roles in all aspects of agriculture.

“I want my story to inspire young women into S.T.E.M and then into a scientific or agricultural fu-



Dr Mary Cole. (File)

ture. It’s not easy because there are still men who think women cannot do the work.”

“Women have already proven they can, They just need to be recognised. The rural women’s award helps to do this.”

She believes that the platform provided by the AgriFutures Rural Women’s Award can drive systemic change.

“The more exposure women have, the less they can be ignored. The more stories about women farmers and agriculturists there are in the mainstream press, the less they can be ignored. I would have more credibility to talk to the wider community about my methods and aspirations for a healthier, kinder planet for our next generations.”

On a positive note, Dr. Cole is pleased that women are now taking leading roles in all aspects of agriculture and succeeding. Despite these advancements, she acknowledges that challenges

remain.

“It’s a male-dominated industry. Women can succeed, they must be strong though. They have leadership qualities and I encourage young women to take S.T.E.M subjects at school. I have them spend time in my laboratory as part of their school placements.”

Her passion for her work is unwavering. “We have one life! We have one planet! We have the privilege of being given time on this Earth. We must leave it in a better state than when we arrived. Our footprint must be light and transformative.”

Regardless of the final outcome, Dr. Cole is honored to be a finalist. “I am proud to stand alongside the other two wonderful ladies because now we are being recognised for our input into the rural scene. It is an acknowledgment that we are making a difference in our own ways.”

BUSINESS PROFILE

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Offering a broad range of garden and land care services with a focus on positive environmental outcomes, Eco-Lane Solutions is your go to for bushland regeneration, weed control, slashing and fuel load management, re-vegetation and tree care.

While the business is approaching two years, director Trent Lane has been in the industry for 15 years.

“I enjoy being outdoors, working with my hands and I’m passionate about the environment. I get great satisfaction from seeing a site change positively either for the clients’ direct benefit and/or for the wider environmental benefit,” Trent said.

“We have a unique set of skills that blend well together from training in trades as both a mechanic and arborist to higher tertiary studies in conservation and land management.

“This coupled with our experience working on projects spanning from private gardens to farms and national parks allows us to approach jobs from both a practical and theoretical lense.

“We’re a small family business that wouldn’t exist without my wife Bodhisti, who’s the heart-beat of both the business and home.”

Trent enjoys the interactions with his clients which he finds the most rewarding.

“For example, at one of our regular client’s

properties, we’ve been able to manage a variety of invasive weed species while raising the client’s awareness of some of the indigenous plants growing on site. The client expressed that since having us work there, they’ve gained a greater appreciation of their property.”

Trent also highlighted they’ve recently added an exciting new machine to their fleet, the AS Motor’s 940 Sherpa 4WD RC.

This is specially designed to navigate through difficult terrain and vegetation while having minimal environmental impact, with safety being front of mind with the option of remote operation.



Eco-Lane Solutions director Trent Lane.

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