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MEDIA RELEASE

7 May 2019

Women In Sugar Australia Conference

Eleven ladies from Women In Sugar Burdekin (WISB) attended the Women In Sugar Australia (WISA) Conference 2019 held in Ingham on Monday April 29 and Tuesday April 30. It was an opportunity to meet up with Women In Sugar members from other growing regions and learn about current issues in agriculture.

The theme of 'The Challenge of Change' allowed the conference presentations to focus not only on the changes in agriculture, but on the changes in the political and social landscape affecting our farmers.

Conference delegates were welcomed by The Hinchinbrook Shire Mayor, Cr Ramon Jayo, who attended the first day of the conference. He noted that with the current government and media attention being focused on the reef, that the challenge we face is telling our story that addresses the concerns of others.

Speakers on the first day of the conference included Michael Pisano from Canegrowers Herbert River, Caroline Coppo from Sugar Research Australia (SRA) and Leanne Carr from Herbert Cane Productivity Services Ltd (HCPSL). Productivity, profitability and sustainability were identified as key elements in successfully farming today and into the future.

The importance of nutrient, sediment and pesticide management, nitrogen efficiency and water quality were discussed.

Guest Speaker Liz Schmidt entertained the audience with her talk on how she went from pregnant schoolgirl to Charters Towers Mayor. Her serious message was that we each need to be an "advocate for your industry". She left us with a quote to hang in our work space, "Leadership is not about being the best. Leadership is about making others better."

During the afternoon, Neroli Roocke from Canegrowers Brisbane spoke about the sugar industries' social licence to operate. She presented information on surveys which had been done on people's perceptions regarding the sugar industry. One of the things her graphs showed was that older people identify the sugar industry as farmers, whereas younger people tend to see it as being the food and beverage manufacturers.

The guest speaker at the conference dinner was the 2018 National Rural Woman of the Year, Krista Watkins. She spoke about how she co-founded a business producing green banana flour, and how this led to other innovations using previously wasted agricultural produce.

On the second day of the conference, delegates headed out and around the Ingham district on a bus tour. The group first visited Bruno Fighera's orchid farm and learned about the intricacies of orchid plant propagation.

After morning tea, hosted by Liquaforce, the group toured the fertilizer plant and learned about liquid fertilizer composition and application. The benefits of liquid fertilizer were discussed.

The tour moved on and were welcomed onto Bellasato Farm. For bio-security reasons the group was unable to tour the operations of the farm. However, the work involved in diversifying into chicken production, using the cane farm's fallow rotation, became obvious. Leanne and Dan Corder were generous with information on how they operate, and how they produce and use bio fertilizer on their farm.

The bus tour of the district finished in the afternoon with a delicious hot lunch from JK's Deli with the delegates seated in Mercer's Lane.

WISB member Kimberley Mallon updated WISB's Facebook page with photos of conference activities. Kimberley said, "I have been attending Women in Sugar conferences for quite a few years now and each time I come away with better knowledge and understanding of our industry. I love being able to capture the friendships that have been built between members from all our networks throughout the state. We pack so much into our two days with both speakers and field trips, it is always a rewarding and inspiring time together."

WISB member, Margaret Linton said, "There is always something new to learn and see when we attend the different regions' conferences. With a different theme each year the conferences are well worth attending."

WISB Secretary Wendy Zandonadi said that being part of Women in Sugar Burdekin and attending the annual conferences gives the members opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have. "We have the opportunity to listen to speakers and meet people who are the leaders in their field. We get to visit places many people don't get to visit. How good is that!"

The ladies are looking forward to the next WISA Conference to be held in Mackay in 2020. Women in Sugar Burdekin Inc meet regularly on the second Wednesday of the month.

For more information email: womeninsugarburdekin@hotmail.com
or find us on Facebook and Instagram at Women In Sugar Burdekin.

"Women in Sugar Burdekin Inc. is a group of women who meet regularly to increase their knowledge of the local agricultural industry. It provides a network of support for all women in the Sugar Cane community"