



Update: The Invisible Farmer: securing Australian farm women's history

Nikki Henningham  and Helen Morgan 

eScholarship Research Centre, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

This article reviews the Invisible Farmer project – the largest study of Australian women on the land – a third of the way through its three year funding period. It introduces the aims of this collaborative and multidisciplinary project, focusing on the role of records and oral histories in the creation of new narratives, and the task of raising public awareness of the important historical and contemporary contributions made by Australian women farmers. We examine the way digital platforms work to curate records and promote research, and outline the important role that the Australian Women's Register, a core project of the Australian Women's Archives Project, will play in achieving outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Women; rural; farmers; oral history; work; rural women's networks; farm women; women's archives; women's records; women's history; gender equity; Australian Women's Archives Project; Australian Women's Register; Australian Women in Agriculture Movement

'The Invisible Farmer: Securing Australian Farm Women's History', funded for three years (2017–19) through the Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project scheme in 2016, is the largest-ever study of Australian women on the land.¹ A multidisciplinary team of scholars, in partnership with experts from government, cultural institutions and community groups, is working collectively to redress the ongoing invisibility of Australian farm women in cultural, historical and contemporary narratives. By promoting collections in existing repositories, unearthing materials held in private hands and proactively creating new collections through topic-based oral history programs and social media campaigns, the project will make public the stories of women on farms, mapping the diverse and complex contributions of women to agricultural production across time, across Australia. Records, their collection, curation, access and their use as a tool for activism lie at the core of this project that the Australian Women's Archives Project (AWAP) is excited and proud to be a part of.²

The article serves a number of purposes. As a discussion of the Invisible Farmer project's aims, we hope to enlist the help of readers to identify material in their own collections that the project team should know about, be that in public repositories or in private hands. As a discussion of why it's necessary, we will highlight the importance of these records, as a platform for storytelling, to the task of raising public awareness of the important historical and contemporary contributions made by Australian women farmers, as part of a broader

project to enhance gender equity across Australia. As a discussion of who's involved, we will briefly outline the way digital platforms will work to curate records and promote research, in order to explain the important role that the Australian Women's Register, a core project of the AWAP, will play in achieving outcomes.

By focusing on the role of the AWAP in this article, we are in no way suggesting that it is the central cog in the project wheel. This is a truly collaborative venture that seeks to combine the skills of many to create project outcomes much greater than the sum of its parts. Furthermore, like most projects that receive funding from the ARC, the Invisible Farmer has been a long time in the making and the collaborating partners have been involved in making farm women visible for many years, in some cases, for decades.³ Our aim is not to diminish this important work, which can be traced through the references throughout.⁴ But the project is in its infancy, and so to give a work-in-progress article some vitality, we thought it would be instructive to narrate the story of our involvement as a way of providing a model of how a small, grassroots feminist organisation can become involved in a major cross-sector research collaboration, with all its attendant possibilities.

Why is the AWAP involved?

In 2010 the Australian Women's Archives Project, a community-engagement project supported by the National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW) and the eScholarship Research Centre (ESRC) at the University of Melbourne,⁵ secured a small amount of funding to research and publish online an exhibition to celebrate the winners of the ABC Radio Australian Rural Woman of the Year award for the years when it was administered by the ABC. 'Brilliant Ideas and Huge Visions: ABC Radio Australian Rural Women of the Year – 1994–1997' recognised over 150 award-winners at a regional, state or national level.⁶ The award was an important first step towards getting rural women the public recognition they thoroughly deserve. An AWAP Board of Management member, Georgie Somerset,⁷ herself a farmer and important woman in Queensland agri-politics, was instrumental in creating the funding opportunity, and for opening the networks that were essential to getting the project off the ground. The amount of funding was modest, but it was supplemented by the generosity of the National Library of Australia's Oral History and Folklore collection, which funded six life-history interviews with women farmers from around Australia for permanent curation in their collection. The exhibition was well received and we were given the opportunity to launch it in May 2011 in Canberra at the announcement of the Australian Rural Women of the Year award, now run by Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC).

Two important things happened at that event. Firstly, a farmer in her seventies professed her gratitude for the work we'd done, as modest as it was. 'Thank you,' she said. 'You have no idea what it means to me to have our stories presented to a public audience. I love how it is up on the internet.' Another woman at the event, Cathy McGowan, invited the research team to meet her so they could get the story right. 'Thank you, but you really have got it wrong!' she said. She then issued an invitation to the research team to meet some important women in agriculture from Victoria.⁸

There were mitigating circumstances that explained why our interpretation differed from McGowan's that relate directly to the project's focus on the ABC award program of the 1990s. Because it was the initiative of Queensland journalists, there was a Queensland focus and

this irritated some of the Victorian farm women. As is the case with all our exhibitions, however, we had always considered Brilliant Ideas and Huge Visions to be a starting point for further research, not the definitive story. Meeting up with McGowan was an important event leading to further conversations and, as it turns out, research. We travelled to lunch in northeast Victoria with an open mind. This was a community that was keen to be documented and, based on the conversations at the project launch, we expected some vigorous storytelling and debate.

What we did not expect was to be inundated with records as we left. Cardboard boxes and shopping bags full of papers and photographs recording the activism of women in the late 1980s and 1990s were thrust into car boots by women who were grateful that they'd found a home. Women in their seventies were fearful that their children would not appreciate the value of the records and 'toss them down mineshafts'. Others who hadn't brought their papers that day insisted that we make arrangements to collect them another time. On the one hand, it was wonderful to know these papers had been temporarily saved, as one donor put it, 'from the bonfire her children would have lit'; on the other hand, we felt guilty and somewhat helpless as we took them. We had neither the space to keep them personally nor the resources to properly assess and accession them. Regular phone calls from one of the donors, wondering why they had not been catalogued yet, indicated that once gone, the papers were not forgotten. This material was given away not only with preservation in mind, but reuse.

As well they should be; these vulnerable, valuable collections record the activities of remarkable women who created something special and wanted it to be remembered as such, for others to be inspired by. 'Women come in and out of public life,' said a woman we met during the process. 'We are like the tides. We do something, and then we return to our families, to our communities.' The records reflect this process, and document a tide of change that began around farm kitchen tables across country Victoria in the late 1970s, and which spread from Victoria across Australia, and eventually the world, reaching both to the White House, and to Africa, in the guise of international conferences. This tide became known, by researchers looking back, as the Australian Women in Agriculture Movement.

As previously noted, it should come as no surprise to learn that the Australian Women's Register research team was not the only team interested in the records and stories of Australian women farmers. Curators and researchers at Museums Victoria had been working for many years with key figures in the movement to collect material relating to one of the most important features of the movement, the Women on Farms Gatherings. But, as often seems to be the case, the left hand didn't know what the right hand was doing. The academics, archivists and curators were working separately on the same project. It wasn't until one of the authors had a casual conversation over lunch with a friend that we discovered that the Australian Women's Register, Museums Victoria and researchers at the University of Melbourne all had a common interest in the women of the Australian Women in Agriculture Movement. In September 2014, a group of them met for lunch. And then, step by step, the ARC Linkage project *The Invisible Farmer: Securing Australian Farm Women's History*, came into being. A collaborative project born of the power of networking, it unites academics, industry experts and community organisations under the one cause, to raise the visibility of women farmers through the power of storytelling. By doing so, the project will document new histories of rural Australia.

Why do we need new histories?

Women in Australia play a vital role in agriculture and farming communities, contributing over 49% of the total value of the output of farming communities.⁹ However, women's contributions to agriculture have continued to be ignored, unrecognised and rendered invisible. Historically, farm women have been excluded from censuses and official documentation, stereotyped as 'housewives', 'helpmates' or 'domestics', despite their significant contributions to the farm economy. Women's invisibility is a product of the traditional view of Australian agriculture as a masculine profession and of rural Australia as a male domain. This is best summarised in a 1992 Australian Government report, *The Invisible Farmer: A Report on Australian Farm Women*: 'Farming has traditionally been seen as a male domain, while women have been seen as homemakers or in domestic occupations rather than a visible or significant contributor to agriculture.'¹⁰

Compounding this invisibility is the fact that academic interest pertaining to the histories of Australia's rural women has been scant. Prior to the advent of feminist history, historians tended to celebrate Australia's agrarian past by focusing on male achievements, endeavours and 'legends'. Rural women were occasionally mentioned in the works of Australian nationalist authors such as Russel Ward and Manning Clark, but as historian Gerald Walsh pointed out in 1993, 'if they were mentioned at all in these general histories, [rural women] were seen only as helpmates to pioneering men.'¹¹ With the arrival of feminist history in the 1970s attention turned to rural women. However, as historian Kathryn M Hunter has highlighted, 'historians concerned primarily with the power relationships between men and women portrayed white women in Australia as victims and not in an active role.'¹² There has been very little detailed analysis of the historical lives of rural women in Australia.

Over the last 30 years or so, Australian historical scholarship has expanded to include rural women.¹³ However these studies are limited, and have tended to prioritise the colonial and pre-World War Two eras.¹⁴ The more recent history of the Australian Rural Women's Movement of the 1980s–90s – a movement that had its roots in Victoria and led to significant outcomes on a state, national and international level – is still largely undocumented. The first focused historical work in this field was by Liza Dale-Hallett with the development of Museums Victoria's Women on Farms Gathering Collection, a partnership with farm women which documented the contemporary changes affecting Victorian rural communities, in particular the leading role of women in sustaining family farms and rural communities.¹⁵ Another pertinent historical survey of agricultural women was undertaken by Nikki Henningham and published as part of the *Australian Women's Register*.¹⁶ Henningham built on the work of Ros Bowden, who conducted a nationwide oral history project featuring women who had won the ABC Rural Woman of the Year award.¹⁷

The most substantial and longer academic studies have come from beyond the history discipline. During the Rural Women's Movement of the 1980s–90s, a number of influential publications emerged by James, Dempsey and Franklin et al.¹⁸ Sociologist Margaret Alston has led the world in her studies of the role of Australian women in agriculture from the 1980s and onwards and argues that 'discourses of agriculture and rurality are framed around a male standpoint with women mere shadows of outraged silence.'¹⁹ Alston has published widely on various aspects of rural women's lives from the 1980s onwards including analyses of agricultural work, leadership, economic contributions, ongoing restructuring, health and welfare issues.²⁰ A small number of unpublished works have also been produced, including

an Honours thesis on the Victorian Women on Farms Gathering Collection at Museums Victoria.²¹ Despite these small headways into documenting the lived experience of rural women, the existence of published academic material on this topic remains scant.

This is a problem that must be redressed, for a number of reasons. The UN acknowledges the importance of recognising women as ‘key agents for achieving the transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development.’²² Closer to home, a number of pivotal Australian Government reports have documented the problem of the missed opportunities that result from the continued invisibility of farm women.²³ They highlight the cost of the continued failure to recognise and value women’s existing contributions to their regional communities, the failure to recognise women as essential partners in the viability of agricultural activities and communities, and the importance of women as the social glue which sustains rural communities.²⁴ They recommended investing resources in quantifying women’s contributions to agriculture, implementing mentoring programs for young women interested in careers in agriculture, and making visible the skills and roles of older women and acknowledging the significant value of experiential learning as a tool for change; in particular being exposed to other’s experiences, actively sharing women’s stories and mapping rural women’s experiences in order to make them more visible.²⁵ In the state of Victoria, Fiona Richardson, Victorian Minister for Women and the Prevention of Domestic Violence prior to her untimely death in 2017, was keenly aware that records, archives, collections (be they archival or museum based) are vital to creating public narratives that encourage equity and social justice. On International Women’s Day 2017 she wrote: ‘The lack of women represented in our statues and public space shows how we fail to recognise, respect and pay tribute to women’s achievements. It shows women are not expected to take up their equal share of public space.’²⁶ This is why, in the Victorian State Government’s Gender Equality Strategy announced in 2016, increasing the visibility of women in our cultural heritage institutions was included as an important plank in improving gender equality.²⁷

Filling the gaps in historical knowledge, public collections (in libraries and museums) and contemporary understandings of agricultural production isn’t only a matter of academic interest, it is in the national interest.

Who is involved?

The Invisible Farmer project team is comprised of investigators and research associates from the following institutions:

- ABC Rural (Dan Hirst);
- Monash University (Prof. Margaret Alston and Laura Coady);
- Museums Victoria (Liza Dale-Hallett and Catherine Forge);
- National Foundation for Australian Women (AWAP and Maggie Shapley);
- National Library of Australia (Kevin Bradley and Shelly Grant);
- National Pioneer Women’s Hall of Fame (Dianna Newham);
- the University of Melbourne (Prof. Joy Damousi, A/Prof. Gavan McCarthy, Helen Morgan, Dr Nikki Henningham and Jessie Matheson);
- the Victorian State Government, Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (Dr Sara Hely, Dr Johanna Christensen and Anna Lotkowitz).

Individuals on the team will document and explore the following key research areas:

- The history and legacy of the Australian Rural Women's Movement. This research, undertaken by a PhD student, will trace the emergence of this national and international movement and the significant outcomes and legacies that were created during the 1980s–90s. It will involve the collection of oral histories and documents of the leading individuals involved in this movement. In doing so, it will reflect on the cultural, industrial and political structures that have contributed to the continued invisibility of farm women in Australia.
- A contemporary analysis of women in Australian agriculture. This research, also undertaken by a PhD student, will analyse the contemporary opportunities and limitations to women's leadership in agriculture and the impacts of these on the health and sustainability of rural communities. This research will draw on the research data and expertise within the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR).
- The power and potential of digital narratives, online archives and social network tools in the emerging National Broadband Network environment. The project will explore the use of oral history, collection databases, social media services and digital methodologies as vehicles for access, research, community transformation and cultural change.

The project will contribute the following significant outcomes, in accordance with the specific expertise of the partners. Firstly, the project aims to fill a substantial gap in historical knowledge, public collections and contemporary understanding of farming. Through the expertise of the University of Melbourne's eScholarship Research Centre, the project will draw upon, expand and develop creative tools in digital documentation and data management to support research. This will include the development of a specially designed online exhibition published through the Australian Women's Register, as well as datasets that record the community engagement and dialogues created by the project. The innovative use of community-created content and community-engagement strategies, so crucial to this project, will foster new public and research collections that allow for a major revision of the Australian rural narrative. Through its unrivalled networks in both rural and urban Australia, and coupled with its position as the largest specialist unit of rural reporters in the world, the partnership with ABC Rural will ensure that the outcomes of the community participation and research work are shared and profiled across Australia and internationally. This network has begun to deliver results which can already be seen online.²⁸

Furthermore, with much of this important history currently undocumented, oral history will provide an excellent tool to capture the voices and experiences of rural women before their stories are lost to fading memories, ill health or death. The project will create a national collection of extended life-story interviews of 45 leading women involved in agriculture in Australia. This critically important collection of oral histories will extend the Australian historical narrative and enable critical and ongoing research into this new and relatively untouched field of history. It will be housed by the National Library of Australia (NLA) and made accessible online via the NLA website, with permission of the interview subjects. Personal papers and photographs that might be associated with these oral histories will be assessed by the NLA for inclusion in their collections. In addition to this NLA core collection, our project team will profile the existing collections relating to the history of

farm women, invite participation from the broader community of Australian farm women and promote the theme of farm women to historical societies and museums.

As well as giving voice to these stories through new collections, the project will address the urgent need to bring together an alliance of research and collecting repositories to assess strategies for the identification, collection and preservation of rural women's stories. Strategic collection discussions with the State Library of Victoria, Public Record Office Victoria, the University of Melbourne and Monash University about the significance of preserving this history have started and we hope to draw more cultural organisations into the discussion. Drawing on Museums Victoria's expertise and commitment to this area of Australia's history, the project team will continue this work with public and research repositories – from local museums and historical societies to regional and state repositories. The team will then create a register of material in private and public hands from around the nation, to be published in a special exhibition via the Australian Women's Register. The Online Heritage Resource Manager technology, developed at the ESRC, will provide the infrastructure and method for collecting, analysing and displaying the connections, divergences and consistencies across our multimedia archive at the same time as we test, globally and locally, how to make networks of related knowledge and information sources work better.

A significant historic and contemporary story is the role of indigenous women in land use management – the deep cultural practice/knowledge of Australia's 'first farmers'. As part of the project, the National Pioneer Women's Hall of Fame (Alice Springs) will work closely with local Arrernte women to create cross-generational programs for young Indigenous women on the traditional knowledge and economic potential of bush foods and fibres. They will also support the project through exhibitions, indigenous oral histories and public programs.

Finally, an important and strategic outcome of this project will be research that facilitates women's leadership roles within their industries and communities. The research project will contribute to the evidence base of policy and planning in DEDJTR. The partnership with DEDJTR will provide important research and engagement opportunities to inform policy and program development in DEDJTR aimed at increasing women's participation and recognition as leaders in rural industries, contemporary farming and economic development.

Conclusion

The Invisible Farmer project has big aims and many supporters outside the official partners in the ARC-funded project. A pilot study conducted in 2015 received significant and persistent media attention which in turn generated an extraordinary and ongoing community response.²⁹ The general public were excited at the prospect of active involvement in documenting the role of women in agriculture and the unearthing of new and existing sources in repositories of all sorts, be they local history museums or state and national collections. The outcomes of this pilot study reaffirmed the critical need, and the active community and stakeholder interest, in documenting the neglected history of women's involvement in Australian agriculture. It also indicated that where there are documents, they are incomplete and fragmented. The findings of a survey of key Victorian collections undertaken during the pilot reveal the scarcity of research collections that hold relevant content relating to Victorian women involved in farming, a significant absence of material in the second half

of the twentieth century, difficulty in locating these collections and a significant absence of this topic in collecting policies.³⁰ We call upon archivists across all sectors to survey their collections, consider where women farmers exist in them and contact us. We need to know the stories of the invisible farmers in your collections.

Interestingly, the title of this project, *The Invisible Farmer*, has received a mixed reception from those it hopes to make visible. Many women bristle, claiming that they are most definitely *not* invisible! And, indeed, the name could work against us as people go looking in catalogues for the fruits of the research. Without ‘women’ and ‘farmer’ in the title, will researchers find them if they use those two words as search criteria? We will need to think carefully and creatively about our titles in future! But at the moment, it speaks not of the women themselves but of their legacy which has gone unnoticed. The *Invisible Farmer* project has much to achieve and not much time to do it, so we look forward to hearing from anyone who has collections, or knows of collections, or who wants to take on new records in their collections, so that the term ‘*Invisible Farmer*’ becomes history.

Endnotes

1. Although the title refers only to farm women, the project considers the experiences of women in all food and fibre production in Australia.
2. The *Invisible Farmer* project website, available at <<https://invisiblefarmer.net.au>>, accessed 6 October 2017.
3. See, for example, the following publications by Margaret Alston: *Women on the Land: The Hidden Heart of Rural Australia*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1995; *Leading Women in Agriculture*, Centre for Rural Social Research, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, 1998; ‘The Work of Farm Women: Why is it Not Recognised?’, *Australian Journal of Sociology*, vol. 34, no. 1, March 1998, pp. 23–34; *Breaking Through the Grass Ceiling: Women, Power and Leadership in Agricultural Organisations*, Harwood Academic, Amsterdam, 2000; ‘Women in Agriculture: The New Pioneers’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 18, no. 41, 2003, pp. 163–71. See also Liza Dale-Hallett and Rhonda Diffey, ‘Motherboards and Desert Sands – Stories of Australian Rural Women’, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2006, pp. 90–115; Liza Dale-Hallett, Ruth Panelli, Rhonda Diffey, Christine May and Barbara Pini, ‘Creating Collaborative Living History: The Case of the Women on Farms Gathering Heritage Collection’, *History Australia*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2006, pp. 1–14; Liza Dale-Hallett, Rhonda Diffey, Quentin O’Keefe and Kerry Wilson, ‘Rural Women Reclaiming their Place Through Symbols, Stories, Rituals’, in Frank Vanclay, Matthew Higgins and Adam Blackshaw (eds), *Making Sense of Place: Exploring Concepts and Expressions of Place Through Different Senses and Lenses*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2008, pp. 55–77; Ruth Liepens, ‘Making Men: The Construction and Representation of Agriculture-based Masculinities in Australia and New Zealand’, *Rural Sociology*, vol. 65, no. 4, 2000, pp. 605–20; Catherine McLennan, ‘Making Rural Women Visible: A Living History of the Women on Farms Gathering Collection’, Honours thesis, Department of History, the University of Melbourne, 2007.
4. See also Nikki Henningham, ‘Rural Women’, in *The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth Century Australia*, Australian Women’s Archives Project, 2014, available at <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0426b.htm>>, accessed 6 October 2015.
5. You can read about the history of the AWAP and its relationship with the NFAW and the ESRC in Nikki Henningham and Helen Morgan, ‘The Australian Women’s Register and the Case of the Missing Apostrophe: Or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Librarians’, *The Australian Library Journal*, vol. 65, no. 3, pp. 167–80, available at <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2016.1206094>>, accessed 6 October 2017, and Nikki Henningham, Joanne Evans and Helen Morgan, ‘The Australian Women’s Archives Project: Creating and Co-curating Community Feminist Archives in a Post-custodial Age’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol.

- 32, nos. 91–92, pp. 91–107, available at <<https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2017.1357015>>, accessed 6 October 2017.
6. Nikki Henningham, 'Brilliant Ideas and Huge Visions', Australian Women's Archives Project, available at <http://www.womenaustralia.info/rwya.htm>, accessed 6 October 2017.
 7. Nikki Henningham, 'Somerset, Georgie (1967–)', in *The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth Century Australia*, Australian Women's Archives Project, available at <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0698b.htm>>, accessed 6 October 2017.
 8. Personal communication with author, May 2011.
 9. Alison Sheridan and Fiona Haslam McKenzie with RIRDC, 'Revisiting Missed Opportunities: Growing Women's Contribution to Agriculture', *Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation*, RIRDC Publication No. 09/083, 2009.
 10. Julie Williams, *The Invisible Farmer: A Report on Australian Farm Women*, Commonwealth Department of Primary Industries and Energy, Canberra, 1992, p. 12.
 11. Gerald Walsh, *Pioneering Days: People and Innovations in Australia's Rural Past*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, NSW, 1993, p. 57.
 12. Kathryn M Hunter, *Father's Right-hand Man: Women on Australia's Family Farms in the Age of Federation*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2004, p. 15.
 13. See for example, Joy Damousi, "'The Slowly Changing Status of Women": Women's Studies and Gender Studies', in Fay Anderson and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *Life of the Past: The Discipline of History at the University of Melbourne*, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2006, pp. 321–38 and Joy Damousi, Kim Rubenstein and Mary Tomsic (eds), *Diversity in Leadership: Australian Women, Past and Present*, ANU Press, Canberra, 2014.
 14. Hunter. Marilyn Lake, *The Limits of Hope: Soldier Settlement in Victoria, 1915–38*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1987.
 15. Liza Dale-Hallett, Catherine Forge and Georgia Harvey, 'Victorian Women on Farms Gatherings – What is a Gathering?' Museum Victoria Collections, available at <<http://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/4409>>, accessed 6 October 2017.
Liza Dale-Hallett, Catherine Forge and Georgia Harvey, 'History of Victorian Women on Farms Gatherings', Museum Victoria Collections, available at <<http://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/6235>>, accessed 6 October 2017.
 16. Henningham, 'Big Ideas' and 'Rural Women'.
 17. Ros Bowden, *Women of the Land: Stories of Australia's Rural Women as Told to Ros Bowden*, ABC Books for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sydney, 1995.
 18. Kerry James (ed.), *Women in Rural Australia*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1989; Ken Dempsey, *A Man's Town: Inequality Between Women and Men in Rural Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992; Margaret-Ann Franklin (ed.), *Country Women at the Crossroads: Perspectives on the Lives of Rural Australian Women in the 1990s*, University of New England Press, Armidale, 1994.
 19. Alston, 'Women in Agriculture', p. 165.
 20. See Alston, *Women on the Land, Leading Women in Agriculture*, 'The Work of Farm Women', *Breaking Through the Grass Ceiling* and 'Women in Agriculture'.
 21. McLennan.
 22. UNWomen, 'Empowering Rural Women through the SDGs', 2015, available at <<http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/rural-women-food-poverty>>, accessed 6 October 2017.
 23. Williams, *The Invisible Farmer*. Rural Industries and Research Development Corporation (RIRDC) and Department of Primary Industries and Energy (DPIE), *Missed Opportunities: Harnessing the Potential of Women in Australian Agriculture*, Commonwealth Government of Australia, Canberra, 1998; Sheridan et al.
 24. Sheridan et al.
 25. *ibid.*
 26. Fiona Richardson, 'Water Nymphs Aside, Where Are All the Women Hiding?' *The Age*, 7 March 2017, available at <<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/water-nymphs-aside-where-are-all-the-women-hiding-20170306-gurva6.html>>, accessed 6 October 2017.

27. Women Victoria, 'A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy', 2016 available at <<http://www.vic.gov.au/women/gender-equality/a-victorian-gender-equality-strategy.html>>, accessed 6 October 2017.
28. ABC Open, 'Invisible Farmer', 2017, available at <<https://open.abc.net.au/explore?projectId=153>>, accessed 6 October 2017.
29. Liza Dale-Hallett and Catherine Forge, 'The Invisible Farmer Project', Museum Victoria Collections, available at <<http://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/14480>>, accessed 6 October 2017; Konrad Marshall, 'Rural Women Share Stories of the "Invisible Farmers"', *The Age*, 18 April 2015, available at <<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/rural-women-share-stories-of-the-invisible-farmers-20150416-1mml54.html>>, accessed 6 October 2017.
30. The survey covered collections held by the State Library of Victoria, Public Record Office Victoria, the University of Melbourne Archives and Dookie Campus of the University of Melbourne.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

The Invisible Farmer: Securing Australian Farm Women's History [LP 160100555] is funded by the Australian Research Council under its Linkage Program Scheme for three years (2017–19 inclusive).

Notes on contributors

Nikki Henningham is a research fellow in the eScholarship Research Centre at the University of Melbourne, where she is Executive Officer of the Australian Women's Archives Project, established in 2000 to promote the protection of women's archival heritage. She has a PhD in Australian women's history from the University of Melbourne and is an experienced oral history practitioner who has participated in many interviews on behalf of the Oral History and Folklore section at the National Library of Australia, including the Invisible Farmer. She is co-editor of the Australian Women's Register, for which she has contributed over a thousand entries.

Helen Morgan is a senior research fellow at the University of Melbourne's eScholarship Research Centre. A historian with archival and editing qualifications, she has worked as information architect and exhibition designer on the Australian Women's Archives Project since its inception in 2000, and is co-editor of the Australian Women's Register. Helen is Deputy Chair of Her Place Women's Museum, Australia, and an investigator on the Invisible Farmer project. Her research interests include the collecting and curating of personal, private (archival) and public domain data and its publication online in a climate of waning privacy, and life histories and life writing as seen through the lens of oral history, archives, social informatics, biofiction and feminist theory.

ORCID

Nikki Henningham  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6634-192X>

Helen Morgan  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6040-8807>