



Caleb Smith will be a guest speaker at next month's conference.

Female agronomist guest speaker

AGRONOMIST Laura Tweedle will be a special guest at the next meeting of BPW South West.

Laura runs her own business, 'Aggies without Borders,' providing agronomic advice to farmers and is happy to share her experiences and her knowledge.

This will be of particular interest and importance now, given many farmers across the district are now facing drought conditions.

According to Laura, agronomy is the "science of farming," which considers how to grow crops effectively and profitably while conserving natural resources and protecting the environment.

Laura will share her journey to south west Victoria and the joys, challenges and learnings she has experienced as a female business owner in what many regard as a male-dominated industry.

Laura combines running her own business and working with local farmers to ensure their long-term viability, with balancing a busy family.

BPW SouthWest provides an excellent networking opportunity for local women.

Membership includes a diverse range of local businesses, both large and small, and women at various stages of their careers.

The group places a strong emphasis on professional and personal development.

Each month, dynamic guest speakers deliver presentations on business, personal development, and well-being topics during dinner at a local venue.

The group also offers members the chance to showcase their business services to fellow members and guests, enhancing local visibility.

This is a wonderful opportunity to meet local businesswomen, share experiences and build valuable connections.

Whether you're looking to expand your network, gain insights from others, or simply enjoy an evening with like-minded professionals, this event is the perfect place to do so.

The meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 3 from 6.30pm at Clovelly Restaurant in Merri Street, Warrnambool.

For more information or to book a seat email bpwsouthwest@gmail.com or find BPW SW on facebook.

Conference targets a sustainable future

WITH floods in Queensland and droughts in South Australia and Victoria, cutting input costs are key to building a resilient, sustainable future for Australian agriculture.

On-farm renewable energy is proving to be a powerful tool to help farmers get there.

With consumers demanding lower-carbon products and farmers facing rising energy costs, the integration of solar, bioenergy, renewable diesel and electric machinery is no longer a vision of the future - it's happening now.

These innovations and more will take centre stage for the first time in Victoria with the 'National Renewables in Agriculture' conference to be held in Bendigo on July 23.

Among the guest speakers will be Caleb Smith, a piggery farmer in Victoria.

Caleb has embraced the concept of a circular economy as a core part of his operations, capturing pig effluent to create power, which is helping to reduce their electricity bills.

"We were spending anywhere between \$200,000 to \$400,000 annually on electricity across three sites at our farm, so we wanted to use the captured biogas from the effluent ponds to produce power and heat, which we then use to warm the piglets.

"This saves almost \$200,000 a year in power and hot water bills."

As well as tasting Caleb's pork products at the conference, delegates will also be given the opportunity to visit Caleb's farm the next day for a tour of the biogas generator.

"Quite often farmers would like to do something like this but they don't. I think the reasons we don't often is because of the unknown," Caleb said.

"What we don't know is scarier so speaking about what we have done and having people come and see how simple it is, and showing it can be done, will hopefully encourage others to do the same."

The 2025 conference will bring together farmers, energy experts, researchers, industry leaders and government representatives to explore the practicalities, opportunities and challenges of renewable energy in agriculture.

New Zealand farmer Mike Casey will talk about his journey to electrify his farm, having the first electric Monarch Tractor in the southern hemisphere.

He has recently installed batteries on his farm and converted a ute to electric.

"We have a six hectare cherry orchard in Central Otago with 21 electric machines that saves about \$40,000 a year in energy costs which is a huge amount of inputs," Mike said.

"The cost of solar and batteries are at such a good price now, that rolling those out will really reduce our costs of operations on farms as well as the cost of living in general.

"I'm on a wholesale electricity contract now, so I can use my large batteries for protection against exposure to the open power market, and that means I can turn what has always been considered a risk, into an opportunity for farming."

Mike said his batteries will actually earn an income for the farm over the year.

"That's a whole new revenue stream for farming which is a significant opportunity for farmers."

Conference founder and farmer Karin Stark said momentum was building across the sector.

"Farmers are increasingly turning to renewables to tackle the challenge of rising diesel and electricity prices," she said.

"But there's still work to be done in making the right technologies available and ensuring regional contractors and services are equipped to deliver."

She said the conference would also explore agriculture's growing role in decarbonising the electricity grid.

"We'll be discussing the evolving distribution network and microgrids, and the potential for smaller, distributed solar projects on farms (say 5MW systems) feeding directly into the local network.

"There are also emerging opportunities for farmers to be paid for providing energy services as new markets develop."

To learn more about the National Renewables in Agriculture conference visit www.renewablesinagconference.com.au

Tree grants

WITH so many farmers doing it tough, the St Helens and District Landcare Group is again offering help through its tree grant program.

Rural property holders with land in parts of the Moyne Shire, including Orford, Bessiebelle, St Helens and Macarthur, are encouraged to apply for farm tree funding up to \$1,000.

Applications are now open and will close on Sunday, June 15.

For more information and eligibility criteria contact the landcare group's secretary on 0411 330 321 or email sthelensdistrictlandcaregroup@gmail.com