

Rural women take the reins

By ROWENA McNAUGHTON

TWENTY-odd years ago Cheryl Graham would have laughed at the thought of an all women, all rural, business workshop.

But now, after seeing what 24 determined women can achieve with encouragement and skills, the Millawa agricultural consultant and Wooragee Bestwool/Bestlamb (BWBL) co-ordinator is confident the sky is the limit when it comes to business with that female touch.

"Women for a long time have played key roles in farm businesses but this was about honing their capabilities and providing a network to build upon," said Mrs Graham, who helped run a three-month Developing Women's Businesses course.

It's no secret that women have increasingly played central roles in small businesses in rural Victoria, both with partners and alone.

An AgScan report revealed farm wives were becoming increasingly involved in the financial aspects of running the family farm, with almost half of the 1356 farms surveyed for the report stating that research and final decisions regarding banks and insurance providers was the result of joint decisions between husbands and wives.

While the research suggests rural women are helping steer the direction of farm businesses, Mrs Graham reckons women approach business decisions differently to their male counterparts.

Course participant Ali Pockley from the Indigo Valley – who runs the Wiltshire Horn-



cross Dorper self-branded lamb business Indigo Valley – agreed.

She said the financial one track mind often taken by men was different to females who often thought strategically.

"This was how the workshops were tailored so we learnt skills that were targeted at women," Mrs Pockley said.

Ms Graham said one of the key messages from the workshops was to get business owners to not only work in their business

but also on it. She said people should be spending 5-10 per cent of their time "strategizing and planning where they are heading and how they are going to get there."

The course was a collaboration between the Wooragee BWBL group and the Beechworth Business and Professional Women's Group, funded through a Recognising Women Farmers Grant from the Department of Agriculture's Forestry and Fisheries division.

■ Wooragee Bestwool/Bestlamb members hone their business skills at Developing Women Businesses workshop recently.