



# EXTENSIONNET

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## Extension research comes of age

### An update on the state-of-play of extension in Australia

by Jeff Coutts

I am constantly amazed how extension in all its forms is continually being 'rediscovered'. In the 1970s, the Federal Government played a significant role in funding extension through the states before opting out in the early 1980s. Now in the early 2000s the Federal Government through NHT, NAP, AFFA (FarmBis) and the R&D corporations are again directly funding extension and education programs across Australia to the tune of millions of dollars!

What adds to the excitement is that a number of R&D corporations have banded together to provide a critical mass to support extension research. The purpose of the *Capacity Building for Innovation in Rural Industries Co-operative Venture* is to fund research and development into human capacity building to foster innovation in rural industries and so help rural Australia become more sustainable and financially viable. It kicked off this year by commissioning three projects:

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#### From the editor

Seasons greetings on behalf of the NE to all APEN members and casual readers of ExtensionNet. We've worked this year to bring you four jam-packed newsletters and we've made a few changes along the way, both in layout and features. I hope you think the changes are for the better and continue to enjoy your newsletter.

I'm a keen advocate of the theory that if you've got something intelligent to say, then say it. I'd like to encourage all APEN members to consider writing their work up

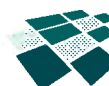
periodically and subjecting it to the scrutiny of their peers (say, in the pages of ExtensionNet!). The benefits are many: when you record your work, it helps you focus on what you've done and clarifies how you'd do it better next time. It also means you've got some more ammunition to fight the wars in this publish-or-perish world we work in. Last, it allows others to build on your successes, learn from your mistakes and do extension better. That's what newsletters like this are all about.

*Darren Schmidt*

APEN is pleased to acknowledge the support of:



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Horticulture Australia

## Extension research comes of age (cont'd from p1)

- A National Extension/Education Review - what works and why?
- Fostering Involvement - how to improve participation in learning (contact Jenny Andrew [jenny@repol.net.au](mailto:jenny@repol.net.au) );and
- Institutional Arrangements - improving institutional support for learning in the rural sector (contact: Neil Inall [inall@planet.net.au](mailto:inall@planet.net.au) ).

These projects are well underway and there was a recent call for new project proposals in these topic areas (as well as the program area of supporting rural educators).

I am in a project team working on the National Extension/Education Review. Kate Roberts (Victoria) and Fionnuala Frost (Western Australia) are also members of the team helping to provide national coverage. We are focusing on collating (using a data base), evaluating and analysing innovative extension/education projects across industries, issues and geographical location. The aim of the project is to allow agencies, industries and funding bodies to learn from innovative and successful approaches tried and tested in other arenas. This will open the window on opportunities to modify and build on these lessons to improve their own strategies, avoiding 'reinventing the wheel' and 'making the same mistakes'.

What a great excuse to go digging into a whole lot of fascinating extension projects! For too long we have all worked in our own little silos. We've done tremendous work but as a rule we have not shared our learnings –

nor, in many cases, learnt from others' successes and problems.

We have developed a 'Program Analysis Framework' to provide a common basis from which to analyse and compare projects. A key element has been to identify the specific 'niche' of the project – the specific objectives using specific methodology with specific groups in specific areas. This provides the context of the project to put it clearly into perspective. Through this process we have teased out the learnings that have emerged about extension/education models and application.

The project is initially for two years, but already some significant findings are coming out of the analysis. Some of these findings are as follows:

The "bottom-up" approach to extension (we refer to it as the "group facilitation/empowerment model") in Australia is alive and well! Projects such as BestWool 2010 and BeefPlan are demonstrating that a focus on supporting producers to seek their learning needs is an effective platform for human capacity development.

There is a parallel significant growth in comprehensive training courses/workshops (we refer to these as the "programmed learning model") with many being linked into the Vocational Education & Training (VET) sector. MLA's Edge Network is making significant inroads here, but there are also significant examples in the horticulture

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**For too long we have all worked in our own little silos. We've done tremendous work but we have not shared our learnings**

A screen from the developing data base which will provide a memory of extension & education projects for research and analysis.

**Bestprac** EXIT

Project No:	<input type="text"/>	Street Address:	<input type="text"/>
Name:	<input type="text"/>	Suburb and Post Code:	<input type="text"/>
Commenced On:	<input type="text"/>	First Contact:	<input type="text"/>
Completion Due:	<input type="text"/>	Second Contact:	<input type="text"/>
Completed On:	<input type="text"/>	Email:	<input type="text"/>
Annual Budget:	<input type="text"/>	Phone:	<input type="text"/>

**Select Funders, Issues etc.**

Funders	Providers	Industry Issues, Methods and Models	Beneficiaries, Competitors and Geographical Range
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Australian Wool Innovation P...</li> <li>NSW Dept of Agriculture</li> <li>NSW Dept of Primary Industries</li> <li>NSW Dept of Agriculture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business Plan Consulting</li> <li>NSW Agriculture</li> <li>NSW Dept of Primary Industries</li> <li>NSW Agriculture</li> <li>Rural Extension Centre</li> <li>NSW Dept of Primary Industries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Industry Wool</li> <li>Issue Profitability</li> <li>Method: Technical Cycle</li> <li>Method: Group</li> <li>Method: Individual Mentoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demerits: Wool Producer</li> </ul>

**Evaluation**

Review Report	Context	Inputs/Evaluation	Niche	Methods/Process Used	Remaining Issues
Philosophy/Approach	Effectiveness	Recommendation	Resources, Management	Conclusions/Review	

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## Extension research comes of age (from previous page)

industry and elsewhere. Participants in projects such as BeefPlan and BestWool are finding ready sources of 'packaged learning' through these available courses. FarmBis is playing a major role in supporting learning in this way.

On-farm visits, demonstrations and trials have also found to be critical to developing and applying specific technologies for productivity or natural resource management. The Rural Water Use Efficiency Adoption Program in Queensland is one example of a concerted extension effort across a number of industries to facilitate on-farm change.

As we analyse projects falling under each of these approaches, a number of 'lessons

learnt' are showing up. These are being used to develop guidelines on ways to maximise the effectiveness of using these approaches to bring about desired outcomes.

A critical part of this review is to work in concert with the other projects funded by the Cooperative Venture. In November we will all be pulling together our learnings to date at a workshop with the Steering Group and planning refinements in the on-going research and analysis. We will certainly keep APEN members up to date on what is emerging from the projects – and we continue to seek out interesting and innovative projects to maximise the learning. Please contact me (details front page).



# Christmas greetings from the President !

Everyone has had a busy year (that includes me!) so I wish all APEN members a blessed, peaceful and safe holiday break.

Much has happened since our Toowoomba AGM in 2001. Some of the highlights:

### Achievements

For me, the pinnacle was our third international conference, where 250 people from six countries gathered in Toowoomba. I enjoyed the mix of formal presentations and the open space technology which allowed participants to interact and network at a high level. It was healthy for APEN to use a different format for our conference. We received a \$20,000 surplus from the event, which will help support our other activities.

### Chapter activities

It's good to see the high-level of activity in some of the Chapters. The WA Chapter has been extremely industrious, and their workshops have been well received by members and a good introduction to APEN for the non-members attending. The Melbourne Chapter has also been busy and the Qld Chapter has just launched into a program of activities that will continue into 2003.

While it is good that those three Chapters have been offering activities for members, it is a concern that the rest are rather quiet. The National Executive is better supporting Chapter representatives and we hope this will flow through to better activities for members.

### President's activities

I attended the AAAC/APEN workshop on developing a national accreditation scheme for NRM and agricultural practitioners in Canberra in March. I gave a presentation on APEN to the cooperative Joint Venture in Human Capacity Building in Sydney in May and also to the NSW Agriculture conference at Tocal in July. I attended a SPAN meeting in Sydney in July which looked at how various small to medium sized organisations like ours could better work together. I coordinated two funding applications on behalf of APEN to the Joint Venture in Human Capacity Building. One was a proposal to run a workshop for national extension managers, the second for funding to further increase the effectiveness of APEN. We were invited to submit a full proposal for the second one and await the outcome.

The National Executive has met by teleconference every second month to progress a range of issues and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank each of the members... Amanda Miller (as Vice president until she needed to resign for personal reasons a few months ago), Heather Shaw, Greg Cock, Darren Schmidt, Jon Warren, Terry Reid, Paul Ainsworth, Janet Reid, and Jane Weatherley. I would also like to specially thank our Secretariat, Rosemary Currie, who enables most of the work to actually happen.

APEN President  
John James



# Tools for extension planning

## A checklist guide for any extension program

Colin Holt

*President, APEN WA Chapter*

Jenny Crisp

*Development Officer*

*Department of Agriculture, Western Australia*



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Careful planning gives any project the best chance of success and if you answer yes to any of the following questions, then we can make your job easier.

- Have you ever had the task of developing an extension strategy for a large project or program and didn't know where to start?
- Have you been busy planning short-term events and activities without really knowing how they fit within an overall strategy and how they contribute to achieving project outcomes?
- Have you had to organise field days, workshops or similar events and weren't confident all your bases were covered?
- Are you making the best use of resources to deliver your project outcomes?

We have developed two planning frameworks that will help overcome these issues and provide a springboard for your extension planning.

For more than ten years we have been extension officers working with farmer groups and communities in rural Western Australia. During this time we have developed and delivered a number of training programs specifically for extension officers. Whilst exploring the theory and principles behind extension, we discovered several gaps in the available tools.

Planning tools often depended on the user's level of experience and we felt more specific guidance and detail was needed to help the inexperienced as well as the experienced users. Critical thinking and consistency checks are both part of rigorous extension planning. Finally, we decided that one tool was needed for strategic extension planning on a program or project level, and a different tool to help plan short-term activities or events.

This led to the development of two specialised extension planning tools:

- Framework for planning an extension activity: matching process to purpose
- Framework for planning an extension strategy with rigour.

Both frameworks have a series of steps to provide a practical planning sequence. Each step includes guiding questions to stimulate and expand thinking. The frameworks have been tested in the field by a number of extension officers. This has helped fine tune the tools so that they have practical application.

### Tool 1

#### Framework for planning an extension activity: matching process to purpose

This tool will help you design relatively short-term extension activities and events such as workshops, field days, meetings and presentation sessions. It can also be used to plan more passive things such as information and show displays.

The tool intends to:

- guide you to develop an effective process that matches the purpose and outcomes of an activity
- help you consider a wide range of ideas, tools and processes before finalising an overall activity process
- help you consider ways to incorporate principles of adult learning and good communication in process design.

**Critical thinking and consistency checks are both part of rigorous extension planning.**

#### WHYTEBOARD WONDERPHRASES

**"If you fail to plan, you plan to fail"**  
There must be a million of these hoary old extension standbys ... words of wisdom that sum up hours or pages of explanation. Know of any more? Email them to ExtensionNet and we'll publish a collection.