

ExtensionNet

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It's Happening

It's happened! APEN has been born. The constitution for APEN has been lodged and we are now incorporated. We have appointed the office of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science as our secretariat. Groups of people are starting to form interim regional chapters. The South Australians have met and there was a meeting of interested people in Launceston in Tasmania on July 27.

John Lacey and Peter Davies are looking for interested and enthusiastic people in New South Wales to form chapters there. Bruce Frank and Claire Holsinger are trying to instigate regional chapters in Queensland. We rely on Alan McRae in New Zealand, Tom Price in NT, Horrie Poussard and Warren Straw in Victoria, Ross Andrews in the ACT, and Peter Nash in WA to do the same.

If you are interested in helping to start a chapter in your region please contact

these people (they are listed at the back). I will send out a draft letter to them for (interim) chapter committees to request permission to form a chapter from the core working group. This procedure is required by our constitution.

The core working group believes that chapters will form naturally. Individual members will decide the chapter boundaries by nominating which chapter they wish to belong to. The core working group also believes that it should not set boundaries, this is much better sorted out locally. Extension professionals are used to forming groups of clients to facilitate the sharing and generation of knowledge. This is your chance to do it for yourselves. It should be easy.

Once these chapters have been formed, we need to look for ways to help our members outside Australia and New



By
Terry Makin
*Chairman
Interim Steering
Committee,
APEN*

Zealand. We need volunteers to do that! Please contact me if you are interested.

This newsletter contains a subscription form for everybody to put their money where their mouth is. This is the critical time. We need your money now to get a viable organisation up and running. Please help to enlist other members who may not know what we are trying to do. It is important that we continue to see APEN as a broad organisation that is concerned with change and learning, not just production agriculture.

So let's do it.■

DO WE NEED AN EXTENSION NETWORK IN TASMANIA?

**Amabel Fulton and Frank Walker,
Department of Primary Industries
and Fisheries (DPIF).**

Are you living in Tasmania? Are you involved in: technology transfer; extending research results; working with groups; advisory or consulting work; social research; communication; project management or agricultural education?

Are you interested in: improving your extension skills; raising the profile of

extension; sharing your extension knowledge and experiences with others; forming networks with extension people in other states; and finding out the latest about extension methods and approaches?

Then you may be interested in the outcomes of a meeting for the formation of an extension network in Tasmania held on 27 July, at the Mt Pleasant Laboratories conference room. Frank Walker, Extension Co-ordinator, DPIF, opened the meeting and Terry Makin

outlined the background, purpose, structure and function of the extension network and explained the constitution. This was followed by a discussion of the possibility of forming a Tasmanian Chapter(s) of the extension network and determining the steps to be taken to achieve this: what will be done, who will do it, and when it will be done by? A list of possible activities for the Chapter was then established. Please contact Frank Walker or Amabel Fulton for further details.■

The Adoption of New Technology in the Wool Industry

Michael O'Keeffe and Nicki Marks,
Agribusiness Research Unit,
Monash University, Caulfield, Victoria.

The returns to R&D investment in agriculture are a function of:

- (i) the size of the industry;
- (ii) the magnitude of the benefits or cost savings of the new technology; and
- (iii) the level and rate of adoption.

Thus, for any given industry and new technology the return on investment of R&D expenditure will depend upon the level and rate of adoption.

In the case of new farm products and practices there is little doubt that we have a poor understanding of the adoption decision, the barriers to adoption and ways of overcoming these constraints.

It is generally recognised that adoption behaviour is a function of the interaction between:

- The individual decision-making unit - in this case the woolgrower and the family;
- The innovation and how it is marketed; and
- The social system and word-of-mouth communication processes (Midgley and Dowling, 1990).

Bass (1969) maintains that potential adopters of an innovation are influenced by two means of communication - mass media and word-of-mouth. There are essentially two key groups of farmers that are influenced by these factors - the innovators and the imitators. The innovators exhibit the characteristic of independent judgement-making. They seek out information from mass media and base adoption decisions on this information. Imitators are more likely to be influenced by word-of-mouth

communication and tend, on the other hand, to wait until a new product is trialed in the local area.

The results of a recent study for the Australian Wool Research and Promotion Organisation showed that innovators and imitators do respond and behave differently to new wool production technologies.

In general terms, the results indicate that innovators, compared with imitators, are more likely to:

- use mass media as a source and to rate it more highly;
- adopt new products earlier than imitators;
- imagine new products or practices working for them;
- trial new techniques more readily;
- place more emphasis on a new product or practice being effective and easy to apply; and
- they are less likely to completely reject new technology.

These results also lend support to the importance of 'search' and 'experience' communication attributes of new technology. New products, such as a new chemical, are conceptually easy for wool producers to imagine working on their property and generally have high 'search' attributes. Industry experience indicates that successful new products, such as CLOUT and IVOMEK, have rapid rates of adoption, diffusing quickly through the population.

New practices, however, often have high 'experience' communication attributes and do not lend themselves to word-of-mouth communication. For example, it is not easy for a wool producer to

observe the benefits of a new practice by looking over the fence. They have to trial the practice for themselves and 'experience' the benefits.

While this research went a long way to developing our understanding of the adoption of new products and practices and ways of overcoming the constraints, further research is needed to answer the following questions:

- Why do producers talk about some new practices and not others?
- What is the role of discussion groups, retailers, consultants and advisers in stimulating word-of-mouth communication between innovators and imitators?
- Can extension and marketing strategies influence the perceived level of 'search' and 'experience' communication attributes?■

REFERENCES

- O'Keeffe, M and Manifold, F (1994), 'The Adoption or Rejection of New Wool Production Technology'. Australian Wool Research and Promotion Organisation.
- Bass, F M (1969), 'A New Product Growth Model for Consumer Durables', *Management Science*, 15, 215-27.
- Midgley, D F and Dowling, G R (1990), 'A Predictive Test of the Impact of Innovative Predispositions and Contingent Factors on Adoption Behaviour', Working Paper 90-031, Australian Graduate School of Management.

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This is the Newsletter of the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network (INC), incorporated in Victoria.

For further information, please contact the acting chairpersons of the APEN chapters in your area. For administrative matters, please contact the secretariat (see back page).

NOTES FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

Bob MacAdam, University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury.

My four months sabbatical in the System Department at the Open University in the UK is drawing to a close. The locals think Australians are taking over - Ray Ison is the new Professor of Systems and David McClintock is doing his PhD. Ray and David worked together on the CARR Project at Broken Hill (Community Approaches to Rangeland Research). Ray is projecting his interest in action research and participative learning for rural development into the research agenda of the Department.

The issue of community participation in decision-making is a major one in the UK, but does not appear to enjoy the same level of bipartisan political support evident in Australia. I attended a World Environment Day Symposium on 'Values for a Sustainable Future' in London. At this symposium David Marquand, the Professor of Politics at Sheffield University, highlighted 'reductionist individualism' as a set of values and assumptions at the core of what he sees as a crisis in the politics of most advanced societies.

Within this set of assumptions there are only two ways of living together in society: the command mode, or the

exchange mode. Society is either a kind of hierarchy held together because those at the bottom obey those at the top, or it is a kind of market held together by the calculating self-interests of its members (the latter seems to me to be the basis of 'Thatcherism' - still very evident here).

Marquand suggests that if we abandon the 'reductionist straight-jacket', a third option becomes possible, what he calls a 'preceptorial mode'. In this, change comes neither from commands nor exchanges, but from persuasion, discussion, indoctrination, conversion. People change because they have learned to see the world and themselves in a different way; in some measure they have become different people.

It seems to me that the emergence of Landcare and the growing emphasis on regional development in Australia is consistent with Marquand's preceptorial mode. (A colleague here says it won't take off until he comes up with another title). The interest in action learning, action research and process management among extension practitioners is also consistent with this mode. Ever the optimist, I came away from the Symposium with a sense that the world is in the early stages of a revolution in

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social values. This will result in profound changes in our institutional structures.

I hate to think about what the future holds if I am wrong. The vocal minority of 'eco-fascists' at the Symposium would impose draconian measures to protect the environment. The free-marketeers would carry on regardless (they were not evident at the Symposium). John Wybrew, the Planning and Public Affairs Director of Shell UK, advocated a systemic learning approach and maintained that this is growing within industry. (*Parts of Shell have worked closely with Peter Checkland, as is shown in the case study in chapter 9 of Checkland and Scholes' Soft Systems Methodology in Action, Wiley, 1990, which is worthwhile reading, Editor.*)

I subsequently attended the Third World Congress on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management at Bath from July 6-9. A feature here was the large Australian contingent: Pam Swepson, Ron Passfield, Bob Dick, Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt from Queensland, Zelma Bone, Paul Forbes and Joe Zarb from NSW, Richard Wheater from WA, and Yoland Wadsworth from Victoria will be known to rural extensionists.

An unfortunate aspect of the Congress was the emphasis on semantics about what constitutes action research. However, there were some excellent small group sessions where it was apparent that Australians are playing a leading role in developing participative approaches to working with community groups. ■



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