

EXTENSIONNET

NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALASIA-PACIFIC
EXTENSION NETWORK (INC)

AUSTRALIA POST APPROVED PP 34140310040

EDITOR'S NOTES

This issue has been prepared with major contributions from the Tasmanian Chapter. Thank you to Frank Walker for organising that.

CRUNCH TIME FOR APEN

It is crunch time for APEN. Either we get 500 paid members this financial year, plus at least eight working Chapters, or the dream of an independent Network for extension people will die. It took 25 years of talking about it before we finally made the effort. APEN needs your help.

The people who have not yet paid will not receive this issue. They will have received a letter telling them that we can no longer afford to send ExtensionNet free of charge. Terry Makin also has written to all contact persons asking them to form a Chapter, if there is not one already, or hand the job to someone else who can do it.

If you know of people who have not yet paid, please encourage them to do so. If you are in an area where there is no Chapter as yet, please ring the local contact person and help her or him to get one started. We have prepared a binder with all the necessary instructions to make the job easier. All local contact people will have one.

Peter Van Beek, Editor

Contents

In Our Opinion	1
Editor's Notes	1
The Untapped Extension Network	2
The Farm Best Practice Program	3
Chapter Round Up	4
Better Extension Services	4
An Ethnic Extension and Publicity Program	5
New Ways to Better Meetings	6
Farmer Reliance on Private Consultants	7
Postgraduate Extension Training	8

IN OUR OPINION...



By Keith Jones, Principal Scientist
DPIF, Tasmania

Other Targets, Other Roles, Other Methods

If this article gets readers to closely examine the paper that prompted it, I have succeeded.

Rural Battlers

Peter Oakley's paper is primarily concerned with the 'Third World'. He criticises using the 'technology innovation transfer' approach in these countries. While the superimposing of technical systems on unsophisticated farmers in 'Third World' conditions is severely criticised, the arguments could also have meaning in 'First World' Australia.

When you consider disincentives such as depressions, droughts, frost, increasing farm costs and decreasing revenues, exclusion from markets, disease, land degradation and ever-changing government policies, are the recipients of extension 'First, Second, Third or Fourth World'? Or is it that our Pitt Street rich think we should be all 'First World'? Are we to be accused of being purveyors of technology for the rich? Oakley has a Chinese proverb to end his article 'There is no purpose in teaching a person to ride a bicycle if that person has no bicycle'.

Changing Roles & Targets

It is not hard to think back a few months to high interest rates and widespread rural distress.

It is also easy to say the banks were also the victims of circumstance and only doing their job evicting farmers and selling farms. But: 'what price normal extension' when this is going on? Did Australian 'Extension Agents' alter their modus operandi to cope with those happenings? My feeling is that such change happened too rarely. Why? Primarily we are not set up to deal with this sort of a situation, we conform generally to the 'technology innovation transfer' model.

Although agriculture has cycles, which are often predicted no more accurately by well known economists than the average rural battler, there are constant problems in survival on the land. We have a series of crises to deal with, as well as our very scientific innovations to implement. How do we cope with this?

Let us get away for a while from technology innovation transfer and its attendant terms of adoption and diffusion rates, research-extension linkages, knowledge or expert systems or models, and key operators. Let us think instead more in terms of properly informing the powerful in our country of the problems faced in rural areas. This means educating our rulers, governments, banks etc. on what is happening in country areas.

Information should readily transfer in both directions. Instead of, as Oakley puts it, pushing technology on peasants, policymakers should be made aware of the limitations in various income or social groups. Education, facilitation, enabling, arbitration or brokering may fit this role better than just technology transfer.

Australian Progress

Perhaps the Australian Landcare program could be used as an example of a more enlightened approach to this form of extension. It embraces the concept that farming problems are community problems. Its team approach and regular consultation between many interested parties has shown that few individuals have a mortgage on all the good ideas. It has successes and failures, each story giving something to build on. If you have empathy with this approach please let us Tasmanians know about it. You can use ExtensionNet to voice your opinion as well.

Oakley P (1988). Extension and technology transfer: the need for an alternative, HortScience, June 1988, 23 (3) 482-485. Peter Oakley is from the Agricultural Extension and Rural Development Centre, University of Reading in the United Kingdom.

The Untapped Extension Network in Rural Tasmania



Many schools throughout rural Tasmania offer Agriculture courses, some at a very basic level, while others are comprehensive courses for certification. However, over the past years agricultural programs have struggled to survive, and some have 'gone to the wall'. Financial and staffing cutbacks to schools have meant few support staff and very little funding. Nevertheless, some motivated, committed and often isolated teachers have continued to be the difference between the survival of agricultural education and its demise from Tasmanian schools.

Rising from the ashes now are community-linked Landcare programs; initiatives in which many schools have become involved or are leading the way. Many of these have projects designed to raise the profile of primary producers as landcarers and increase the linkages between rural and urban people. Schools can therefore assume a significant role in promoting an awareness of sustainable agriculture to both their rural and urban communities. At the same time they

help to monitor changes occurring in their environment, for example as in 'Water Watch' and 'Weed Watch'.

What of the Future?

An increased awareness in schools of the value of Agriculture Education as a medium for learning many useful life skills is also emerging (although slowly). The applications of science, technology, business and studies of the environment, plus many other useful personal skills, competencies, attitudes and values can be learned through Agriculture.

Thankfully, the National Association of Agricultural Educators (mostly school teachers) has recently completed the first draft of a National Statement on Agriculture for Australian Schools, using funds from a Commonwealth Professional Development Program. This is a marvellous initiative since the Australian Education Council did not view Agriculture as one of the eight basic curriculum learning areas for the future in this country. Amazing!

'Lift Our Game'

However, to capitalise on these developments, schools now desperately need the vocal and written support of Agriculture organisations and Agribusiness. Lobby your education department: Why do very few Agriculture teachers in schools have any formal qualifications in this area? Why is it so often seen as a subject for low ability students? Non academic! Why is it not a standard offering in the school curriculum in all states? Why is its status so low?

Is a third world image of agriculture the way you wish to see it promoted in our school communities, both urban and rural, especially when schools often have a central, pivotal role? There is a large indirect value and importance of Agriculture awareness programs and courses in schools. Hundreds of thousands of families are being reached through young people.

How can we become the 'clever country' and internationally competitive if we cannot attract talented young people into giving a career in Agriculture some consideration?

There is a huge potential to plug the drain of talent from rural Tasmania and Australia and tap the hidden network which will ultimately lead our country into the next century.

The School Agriculture Programs urgently need the support of influential organisations, your support. Find out what is happening in schools near you. Use your organisations to seek information from your state government and Federal politicians and pressure them to do better. ■



Grade 10 Agriculture students pre-testing a school dairy herd.

The Farm Best Practice Program – Tasmania

By Stewart Brown
Program Leader

The Tasmanian Farm Best Practice Program was established in October 1993 with the objective of encouraging farmers to adopt practices which will maximise their profits from the production of potatoes and processed vegetables on a sustainable basis.

Its formation arose from the desire of the major processing company, Edgell Birds Eye, to access export markets following a major investment in upgrading its potato processing plant in Ulverstone to a world class facility with increased capacity. A benchmark study in New Zealand, USA and Europe highlighted the fact that, to be competitive on world markets, the company will have to source products from a farm sector which is efficient and cost-effective by world standards.

The company also has a plant in Scottsdale in north east Tasmania. Total potential production will result in a farm gate value for potatoes of around \$60 million per annum from over 500 growers. As such, the crop is a major contributor to the Tasmanian economy.

The Farm Best Practice Program has been funded by Edgell Birds Eye (\$400 000), the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPIF) (\$200 000) and the Commonwealth Agribusiness Program (\$200 000) for an initial period of three years. The initial objective was to set up local farmer discussion groups in all areas of the State where potatoes are produced. This has been achieved with 24 groups in operation.



Private consultants and farmers are sharing information of potato production through the Farm Best Practice Program.

At the first meeting of each group the members identified aspects of production which were seen as limiting factors. A plan was formulated to address these issues.

Most groups, with 10-12 participants, meet monthly for 1-2 hours on a property with expert input drawn from both the public and private sector. They discuss a subject which is relevant and topical. Every effort is made to ensure that the meetings are as interactive as possible by using practical examples and demonstrations.

A recent initiative is the introduction of a crop-costing service. Each grower will complete a simple record of crop inputs and yields. From this, and from supplementary information on fixed cost, Program staff will calculate crop profits, using a DPIF developed computer program. This will aid in management and allow growers within groups to compare results on a confidential basis. The practices which account for high and low profits will be identified, which is a first for a Tasmanian vegetable industry.

The Program is managed by a steering committee, chaired by the Executive Officer of the Tasmanian Farmers' and Graziers' Association and comprising representatives of Edgell Birds Eye, DPIF and growers. The Program is thus seen as independent and grower-driven

and, as a result, it has achieved solid grower support.

A firm base has been established by concentrating on basic husbandry and crop production issues as identified by growers. Discussion group members have readily accepted that they undertake local trials and demonstrations which they consider relevant. The Program will organise and co-ordinate this work, evaluate the results obtained through the crop-costing service, and disseminate results. ■

APEN SE QUEENSLAND WORKSHOP

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 28, 1995
NAMBOUR

A chance to discuss the use of action learning principles in extension programs.

Set aside this day in your diary for a stimulating workshop which could change the way you think about extension forever.