

# EXTENSIONNET

NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALASIA-PACIFIC  
EXTENSION NETWORK (INC)

AUSTRALIA POST APPROVED PP 34763700014

## From the Chair

### Terry Makin

Great news for APEN. The New South Wales Department of Land and Water Conservation have agreed to be major sponsors for the APEN International Extension Conference to take place in the later half of 1997. We are also pleased to announce that they have become corporate sponsors of APEN. The Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Conservation have also renewed their corporate sponsorship. We thank them for their support.

The Melbourne chapter of APEN have agreed to run a 2 day workshop in conjunction with the 1996 AGM. This will follow a similar format to the very successful Monitoring and Evaluation workshop last year. This year's workshop will revolve around the theme of facilitating successful community and rural development.

APEN is a young organisation that was formed to give people involved in rural development and extension a focus for sharing knowledge and ideas. The initial survey of potential members also saw a need to raise the profile of extension and the professionalism of its practitioners. To do this we need to build a strong organisation that fulfils its members needs. APEN's ability to do this is dependant on its members input into APEN in whatever way they are able.

With the economic rationalists having a major influence on the directions many organisations are taking, it is more

important than ever that the people who understand the process of change in communities have informed input into these processes. Extension is developing some very good programs with high participation rates giving excellent outcomes. Cam Nicholson has a 70% participation rate in the Woody Yaloak catchment region. We are coming to an understanding of the 'why' of this success. We need to inform our practice and our managers and policy makers of the reasons for this success. It is only when they understand the critical success factors, that the appropriate criteria will be applied to funding proposals and programs. APEN can provide a vehicle to do this.

I would like to see some discussion and letters in ExtensionNet about where you think extension is heading in this changing world.

Congratulations to John McKinlay and Matt McCarthy who organised and ran an excellent APEN meeting in Bendigo, Central Victoria. It was great to see the energy and enthusiasm present. It bodes well for the future of APEN and extension.

## The Role of Group Learning in Extension

### From the Editor



### Dale Williams

This issue's theme integrates a regional focus (Northeast Victoria and Southern New South Wales) and group approaches in extension. Participative approaches to change mean affirming the dignity and self-direction of participants and achieving their maximum mutual benefit. Group work can enhance that participation ... or it can hinder it if underlying assumptions of superiority or control create group

*Continued on page 2*

## CONTENTS

From the Chair . . . . .	1	Why has Ricecheck been so successful? . . . . .	4
From the Editor . . . . .	1	Community Drains . . . . .	6
Putting Principles into Practice: The Value of Prograze as a forum for Group Learning . . . . .	2	Group Learning in Dairy Extension . . . . .	7
Running Farmer Based Groups . . . . .	3	Coming Events . . . . .	8
		Steering Group . . . . .	8

APEN Proudly sponsored by QDPI, DNR&E(Vic), DLWC(NSW)

climate and action inconsistent with participative rhetoric. May this issue challenge us to consistency. Jo Millar, Tim Paramore, John Lacy, Fiona Johnson and Geoff Drysdale have kindly contributed articles. Thankyou very much, folks - especially Jo Millar who chased up the articles. Some articles were long and required shortening. My apologies to the authors. You might like to ask Jo, John or Geoff for a copy of their full articles if you are interested. We have also tried to include more 'action' photos and graphics, at your request.

We have the articles for next issue's Intellectual Frameworks for Extension. However, we need articles for the following issue, 'Power, Participation and Extension'. We hope to explore issues related to gender, ethnicity, culture, disability, etc. **Are there new contributors out there?** Please write in a manner that stimulates discourse. Aim at 700 words or less. Submit to me by 4th October. Firstly, give me a call on 045 701392 or fax 045 701750 or E-mail dale.williams@uws.edu.au.

### Have Your Say

**Have your say!** I'd like to encourage discourse in future issues about any matters of your concern. Could we call it 'Discourse Den' or 'Network Netty' (joking)? ExtensionNet is presently limited in size, so total space will usually be one half of a page. Keep letters to a maximum of 150 words ... the shorter the better and the more likely to be published. Perhaps several readers would like to comment or challenge article points in this issue? What about responses from farmers, agribusiness, landcare and community facilitators, etc. not represented in this issue's articles by consultants?

## Putting Principles into Practice: The Value of Prograze Groups as a forum for Group Learning.



'Prograze' is an educational program for producers that began in 1994. Its aim is to develop pasture and livestock assessment skills, in order to make better decisions regarding the setting of production targets, fodder budgeting and grazing management. Prograze is part of the Sustainable Grazing Systems Key Program. It is an initiative of the Meat Research Corporation, supported by the International Wool Secretariat, Land and Water Research and Development Corporation, Murray Darling Basin Commission and state departments of agriculture and other agencies. The course is generally conducted by Department of Agriculture extension officers in districts covering the high rainfall (600mm+) areas of south-eastern Australia. There are monthly sessions in the course, beginning in autumn.

Topics covered are:

pasture assessment; livestock production from pasture; setting production targets; sheep condition scoring and requirements for breeding and production; cattle assessment and breeding targets; pasture growth and management; grazing management options; fodder budgeting and paddock recording.

Existing farmer groups and individual landholders do the course for a set fee. Due to its success in NSW (e.g. 1350 graziers took part in 1994/1995), it has been adapted and extended to run in Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia. My research interest in Prograze as a forum for group learning, stems from my current research into the role of farmer knowledge in the information system (research, extension, education) as it relates to the sustainable management of perennial grasses.

### What are producers gaining from group learning through Prograze?

Producers value interaction with departmental officers, as well as drawing on the experiences of farmers in the group. Information and advice is tapped relating to both theory and practice and opportunity is provided for

*Jo Millar, Charles Sturt University-Albury*

integration of pasture and livestock information. Farm visits were valued, as was discussing pasture management strategies with other producers. Departmental officers were seen as fellow participants rather than outside experts. One producer commented, "They probably learnt as much from us some days as we learnt from them". Producers also appreciated opportunity to influence the content and direction of the course, highlighting flexibility in meeting local needs.

Producers learn not only valuable assessment skills, but a set of principles that could be applied to their own farm situations, rather than recipes or packages of recommendations.

The success of the Prograze course in meeting producers learning needs has been reflected in the number of groups continuing to meet after completion of the course, and the desire expressed for follow up workshop or group meeting covering broader issues of farm management and profitability.

*Continued page 3*

**Have you paid your  
96/97 membership?**

### Perspectives of course coordinators and deliverers on Prograze

Cross-pollination of ideas and experience between staff from different disciplines, resulted in greater co-operation; more uniform messages; better integration of disciplines; and learning from one another. Prograze also assisted in integrating human and technical resources across state boundaries. However, improving the confidence and competence in both technical and process skills was seen as paramount in facilitating group learning. Issues of quality control through training, provision of core competencies and involvement of consultants were raised. Course deliverers were convinced that producers were provided with improved skills in pasture and livestock assessment, resulting in better decision-making and ability to meet production targets. They saw Prograze as unique in its emphasis on concepts rather than recipes.

### Prograze as an effective framework for group learning in extension

Co-learning in group extension approaches was emphasised, necessitating an interdependency between producers and extension and research professionals, since their knowledge and experience was complementary (see Coutts and Daniels, 1996, 6). My observations were that interactions between group members and extension staff were

greatest when practical, hands-on activities were used, when time was allowed for effective dialogue, when the complexity and relevance of issues were addressed and when actual on-farm figures were used in setting production targets and making calculations. Coutts and Daniels (1996, 9) reported, 'It appears to be filling a niche both for producers looking for practical opportunities to advance their management capacity and for providers of extension in providing a structure and opportunity consistent with a focus on 'group benefit', group processes and a reducing resource base.'

### Where to from here?

An advanced Prograze course has been proposed to assist producers develop and implement whole farm grazing

plans. This will involve both private and public sectors delivering a comprehensive program dealing with financial benchmarking, feed profiling across the farm, mapping physical resources and enhancing monitoring skills. The advanced course is anticipated to be available for delivery in 1997. Other activities are also currently being pursued locally to maximise opportunities for co-learning on farms.

### REFERENCES:

- Coutts, J. and Daniels, J. (1996) Review of Prograze. Report to the Meat Research Corporation.  
 Millar, J (1996) Putting Principles Into Practice: A focus group evaluation of Prograze. Report to NSW Agriculture, Albury.



*The Burrumbuttock Prograze Group taking pasture cuts for digestibility and dry matter production.*

## Running Farmer Based Groups



What is so different about running groups with farmers as members? Well basically farmers are not usually used to being members of groups. They may have absolutely no concept of what a group is, how it should function and really what is the point of having a group? Most groups

at the start are therefore a mixture of hope and trepidation, within an initial climate of doubt and hesitation.

Adults learn best in a milieu that minimises anxiety and encourages freedom to experiment. This is what guides me, as does the precept that what is to be learned needs to be relevant to the context of the farmers. Farmers also need to have input into what, why, and how they will learn. This will develop group ownership.

*Tim Paramore, Agricultural consultant, Albury*

There needs to be no perceived bias from your organisation, as may occur if groups are run for retail companies.

When setting up a group it helps if there is a local identity, a community of need and interest and a relatively limited geographical area. A community group where farmers already know each other develops a momentum of its own, and can feed off social intercourse that takes place at