

EXTENSIONNET

NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALASIA-PACIFIC
EXTENSION NETWORK (INC)

AUSTRALIA POST APPROVED PP 34763700014

From the Chair

John Bourne

Over recent months there has been lots of activity in preparation for the conference in Albury in November. Peter Davies and the conference committee have done a tremendous job in organising things so far. By now you should have received a copy of the conference brochure. I have received very favourable comments about the brochure and so am sure this will attract a wide range of people. In speaking to people from different states I know there is a lot of interest ranging from practitioners to academics. I am sure that attendance at Albury will read like a "who's who of extension".



So get your registration form in as soon as you can and give a copy to someone else as well.

A special mention needs to be made of the excellent sponsorship that has been arranged to support the conference. Thanks to Amabel Fulton for organising this.

On another topic, have you seen a copy yet of the "Journal and Reference Lists in Agricultural Extension and Rural Development", put together by Jeff Coutts and the Reference Resources Committee of APEN? This is the sort of reference list we have all been wanting to put

together for many years but have never had the time. Well now we have one, and Jeff and the committee have clearly done a great job. You can get a copy through Rosemary Currie at the APEN secretariat. Of course if you have some additional references of your own that would be useful, then we plan to bring out future updates, and Jane Wightman at QDPI Rockhampton is co-ordinating this.

The Committee of Management is continuing to look closely at our costs of operating APEN to ensure that our dollars are well spent and costs are at a minimum. Our most important income source is membership, both corporate and individual, and again we need to keep monitoring this in relation to costs.

The committee has discussed the level of subscriptions several times and it would seem that an increase will be necessary next year. So I would like to flag this as an issue for the AGM during the conference in November. ❖

From APEN Tasmania

Jane Fisher
President

What is it about the small green state of Tasmania that produces intense activity in extension?

The answers lie in the nature of the agricultural scene here. Some years ago, the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPIF) decided to scale down its extension services. The gap was filled by a diverse range of extension services. There are now many small to medium sized providers servicing the same market.

We asked our members what they wanted from APEN - the answer was training, with a preference for one day courses in a central location.

Why Training?

The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries has provided no formal training in extension for the last three years. The many small and medium sized consultancies do not have extension experts on staff. Thus APEN has identified and filled a niche. Ultimately, we would like our training courses to be accredited with a University, and to form part of a recognised post-graduate course in extension.

(Continued on Page 2)

From the Editor

Elwin Turnbull

The majority of articles in this issue have come from the Tasmanian APEN Chapter. Thanks to Jane Fisher and her hard working enthusiastic band.

Apologies for the lateness of this issue!

CONTENTS

From the Chair 1
 From the Editor 1
 From APEN Tasmania 1
 Where is Extension Heading? 3
 Rural Development Strategies -
 That Did Not Work 4
 Letter to the Editor: Networking
 by Email 7
 Farming in the Information Age
 8
 APEN News 9
 Coming Conference Updates 10
 Chapter RoundUp 10
 APEN membership application
 form (to copy for your
 colleagues) 11
 APEN Steering Group 12

APEN is pleased to acknowledge the support of:



Natural Resources
and Environment

- AGRICULTURE
- RESOURCES
- CONSERVATION
- LAND MANAGEMENT



LAND & WATER
CONSERVATION



QUEENSLAND
DEPARTMENT OF
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

From APEN Tasmania (Continued)

Evolution of a Committee

In the beginning, there was a group of enthusiastic people determined to get APEN off the ground in Tasmania. We decided to experiment with new and different ideas in running the committee, seeing it as an ideal opportunity to test ideas and extension theory out before we used them with farmers.

We decided to work with a very flat structure - everyone had the opportunity to do everything. The positions of facilitator and scribe rotated between meetings, giving great opportunities to practise those skills. The flat structure made for a lot of fun and spontaneity, and a very effective committee. People put their hands up to do jobs as they became apparent. The structure worked well, but people did become burnt out.

In the last couple of years, things have become more formalised. We have had defined roles. Some of the spontaneity has been lost. More than that has been the increasing workloads of committee members, which has meant that they have less time to spend on APEN matters. It would seem that being on the APEN committee has been effective in building skills - to the extent that we have been offered other challenges!

New Blood

Maintaining the drive of the committee has meant rolling the committee over - providing younger members with the same opportunities for networking, for developing specific skills in a safe environment.

Success

As well as running training days, we have been lobbying the board

of the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research to include extension in their research planning. Jane Fisher (president), Amabel Fulton and Sue Hinton met with Kim Evans (Chair of the TIAR board) and Rosanna Coombes (board member) on 17th of June. We have been asked to provide our views on the process by which research results can be effectively extended to farmers by mid August.

The big change has been committee burnout. We set ourselves a very ambitious program for the 1996 / 97 year - and have realised that we need two committees, one to run the conference that we had planned, and the other to take care of the day to day management of the branch.

We have changed our focus from treating every event as a learning exercise, in which committee members identified the area of greatest weakness in their knowledge, and took the opportunity to fill the gap, to outsourcing resources where possible. This has meant that costs of our workshops have risen, and that the stress levels of the committee have not got into the red.

We have run workshops through the local adult education, and through the University Consulting Service. Both have provided excellent service. The disadvantage has been that the people handling the registrations have not always known a lot about APEN, and have not been able to market the organisation as well as we would have liked. It is an issue that will be addressed in the future. ❖

WHERE IS EXTENSION HEADING?

Keith Jones

Principal Horticulturist, Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Hobart Tas

I would like to ask the question 'who knows where the whole rural economy is heading, let alone extension?'

The Philosophy of Change

Changes in the way we do things often get imported, quite often from the USA. During the last few years leaders seem to have been indoctrinated into acceptance that change is good. It is often good in political, managerial or educational arenas to use this philosophy to show you have achieved something. The art is to move on quickly before the true results of change are established, to claim victory if they even partly worked or to blame someone else if they did not.

Often we hear such trite expressions such as "if you don't like the heat get out of the kitchen". This is often directed at people who may resist change. The agricultural environment has the dual problems of having a fixed farm asset, (some may say liability) and volatile markets.

Advice to the Rural Sector

Extension in its modern garb of advisory and information services (AIS) is a complex issue. Considerations of sustainability and the environment have become increasingly important. Education in all its forms is also a vital element. Community involvement and acceptance of requirements of farming have accelerated in the last decade. No longer should we think merely of technological transfer, marketing and economics as being the only driving forces of extension.

How many of you have listened to either financial advisers or economists about what to do with your money? How many of you have made a fortune? Often what some of these experts fail to reveal is that they have a hidden agenda. This agenda may be political or may commonly be mainly to the financial advantage of the adviser.

Teach the Teacher

One area that bears a lot more examination is building up a sense of community spirit in rural areas. During this century rural areas have been steadily depopulated. Land and water degradation has forced many communities to co-operate. Landcare and water catchment programmes have widened community involvement and co-operation. Communication has been vastly improved, which in itself is a vital component of extension.

Improvement of skills of group leaders through a teach the teacher approach has brought more skills to rural areas. The skills have been often well focused to the care of localities. The care of our resources flows on to the sustainability of rural production as a whole. Often it is resisted by some farmers or farming organisations but it appears the message is progressively getting through.

Electronic Communication in Extension

Best practice, while accommodating the above, also

must embrace proven technology and marketing and economic information. Even in quite remote communities modern, electronic data transfer can be fast and cheap. Not all individual businesses will have suitable equipment but increasing numbers have access or will have.

Although there has been a progressive downsizing of extension personnel, particularly by government, good communication can partially compensate for this trend.

Best Practise in Extension

There are moves to rationalise research and development (R&D) as well as extension. This can and does lead to R&D being tailored to a price. Best practice, as I know it, must be based on properly authenticated data. Some field trials and some untested economic data do not fall into this category. It is the duty of extension providers to check their advice on a regular basis with R&D providers and to hammer out best practice.

The future

Extension must use all the resources available. I am not suggesting each farm or station accesses everything from Internet from centrally based "gurus". Neither do I believe that we will ever re-establish the close knit rural communities of the last century. But you have to admit that both elements could play a part in future rural development.

