

EXTENSIONNET

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Improving Extension Practice and Professionalism in QDPI

Janice Timms, Research and Extension Unit, DPI, Brisbane

Over the past 6 years in particular, QDPI has put in place a number of mechanisms to support improvements in extension practice and professionalism. No one of these mechanisms can achieve all the support necessary. They need to be looked at as components of a total system and environment which is about enabling Extension practitioners and others who contribute to the total DPI Extension effort, to do their jobs well. Below I have listed just a few of the range of mechanisms we have in place.

Rural Extension Centre (REC)

The Rural Extension Centre was one of the strategic components in the 1992 DPI Extension Strategy Statement. It was established in 1993 as a result of a Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Queensland and the Department of Primary Industries. Its primary task is to provide a vehicle to increase the level of skills and professionalism in extension staff (including formal extension qualifications) in Queensland and beyond, and to contribute to the development of effective extension methods, policy and management.

The REC operates 4 programs, which together contribute to supporting

extension practice and professionalism. The programs are:

- Extension Development
- Education and Professional Development
- Rural Community Development
- Communication Technology in Rural Development

Research and Extension Unit

In 1995 the Department established the Research and Extension Support Unit. This Unit has gone through some changes over the past few years and is now known as the Research and Extension Unit (R&EU). The overall role of the Unit is to provide leadership for the Department as a whole, in the development and delivery of excellent extension and research services. In general, staff of the Unit are involved in developing policies, formulating strategic directions and providing specialist support for the Department's roles and responsibilities in extension and research.

With regard to extension, some of the major initiatives the Unit is responsible for include implementation and updating of the DPI Extension Strategy, implementation of the DPI Client Information Services Statement



Janice Timms

and overseeing the Department's involvement in the Rural Extension Centre. The Unit also includes the DPI Extension Specialists and ensures the provision of specialist extension development support to all Business Groups and Institutes in the Department through several different strategies.

In addition to the support outlined above, R&EU supports Institutes and Business Groups to further develop their extension service capability and capacity by providing funds for staff to undertake formal extension training at the Rural Extension Centre. The strategy that R&EU is using to allocate the resources available, purposefully focuses support towards using funds to help DPI officers to complete the Certificate, Graduate Certificate, Post Graduate Diploma or Masters programs in extension at the REC.

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From the Editor

Elwin Turnbull

This edition has a geographical bias towards Queensland which is near the center of our Australasia Pacific region. For those who were at the conference in Albury there will be no surprise that a culture has emerged of improving and supporting extension activities in the Queensland Department of Primary Industries. I hope that those in other regions can find some new ideas and enthusiasm for improving the quality of their extension activities from the energy and thinking evident in Queensland. The articles in the next newsletter will be drawn from projects in the Asia Pacific part of our network.

The value of the articles in this newsletter depends on what you see as extension. The concept of a core business (so often mentioned by successful commercial organisations) is also relevant to extension. How often have you asked? **What is the Core Business of Extension??** and, how satisfied are you with your answer?

Reading about the 1973 radical transformation in the Brotherhood of St Laurence (an organisation which formed in 1933 in Fitzroy, Victoria) has helped me with this question about the core business of extension. In 1973 the Brotherhood changed to a multi disciplinary approach of development. In this new model they articulated their goal as **improving the socio economic functioning of the client group**. They aimed to do this through a process of empowerment in four human living domains, as follows.

To develop participative strategies to assist the clients develop power over:

- **Resources**
- **Relationships**
- **Information and**
- **Decision - making.**

In my view this model provides a solid foundation on which to base both:

- a future career for extension professionals, and
- a positive contribution to our communities.

The difficulties currently faced by farmers and rural communities are extreme, both in Australia and the Asia Pacific. It is incumbent on us, as the privileged professionals who work with farmers and rural communities, to have crystal clarity about our own contribution. This can be done through a core business concept of improving the socio economic functioning of the clients. The key performance indicators (KPI in the Queensland DPI current terminology) would be **client power** over resources, relationships, information and decision making.

Extension operators cannot afford to view themselves as merely communicators of scientific discovery. “Sleepers Wake” as Barry Jones would say! Metaphorically we are at a cross roads in APEN and our professional roles in rural development. It is time to lay to rest the myth that extension is just a group of marginal social scientists or an also ran gaggle of agricultural scientists working on the fringe agricultural research (with its core business - scientific discovery and technological innovation). If we choose to have commitment to the alternative concept of empowerment facilitator then we have a large, complex, worthwhile and interesting challenge. We also have an expanded corps of close colleagues. In addition to cooperating closely with our



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Janice Timms article (Continued)**Extension Development Support**

Extension development support is provided to all Business Groups and Institutes through several different strategies, including:

- One strategy which involves support being provided by Extension Specialists who are attached to the Research and Extension Unit but are fulfilling specifically negotiated extension development roles for particular Institutes or Business Groups. This type of support is of particular benefit to Business Groups and Institutes for which the concepts of contemporary extension are fairly new and/or which have a relatively small extension work force;

- Another strategy has been developed for the Farming Systems Institute and Queensland Horticulture Institute since both these Institutes have larger extension work forces and some very experienced extension practitioners who can take on an extension development role. Research and Extension Unit is financially and professionally supporting three Principal Extension Officers in the Farming Systems Institute to jointly undertake the specialist extension development function.

R&EU is also financially and professionally supporting the Discipline Leader (Extension) in the Queensland Horticulture Institute to fulfil the specialist extension development role.

Extension Specialists and Discipline Leader (Extension) Roles

The type of expertise and support provided by the Extension Specialists and Discipline Leader (Extension) to enable improvements in extension practice and professionalism include:

- support and advice on the development, design and evaluation of extension programs, projects and activities;
- advanced adaptation of existing extension processes;
- conceptualisation of new extension processes;
- facilitating access to extension knowledge and experience;
- providing professional development advice and opportunities;
- providing and leading training programs in contemporary extension processes, management and evaluation;
- undertaking and supporting high level extension research; and
- creating and guiding professional extension networks.

Professional Progression Scheme

In 1997 DPI introduced the Professional Progression Scheme for professional research, extension, regulation and diagnostic staff. The Scheme is a state-wide process of internal promotion to recognise and reward outstanding achievement and performance of DPI's Professional staff regardless of their geographical location.

The Scheme is now into its second year and, while there are areas where improvements can be made to the process, it has been a mechanism through which DPI has recognised and rewarded Extension practitioners for outstanding achievements and professionalism.

Conclusion

DPI is committed to a continuous improvement approach to its extension services. If we are practice continuous improvement then we must continue to support extension development and learn from our experiences in the delivery of extension services. To me, the outlook for DPI extension is of a bright and dynamic profession that is well supported by the organisation. I look forward to being involved in that future.

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From the Editor (Continued)

traditional colleagues (in policy and the scientific community) people from agribusiness companies, rural stores, credit institutions, welfare services, local government will become key partners in our joint endeavours. The APEN committee of management is currently exploring forming new partnerships to this end with both:

- the traditional scientific discourse - through the journal committee, and
- agribusiness - through a survey and special sessions at the workshop in Adelaide.

Our hope is that we can get interest and commitment to become equal partners in an integrated endeavour to improve the socio economic functioning of rural communities in the Australasia Pacific region. If you have energy or resources to help in this transition of the role of extension in rural development please contact the APEN committee of management.

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**Please Respond to the letter from Peter Davies which is an insert with this issue.
By August 6th if possible.**

AVAILABLE AT THE APEN Secretariat

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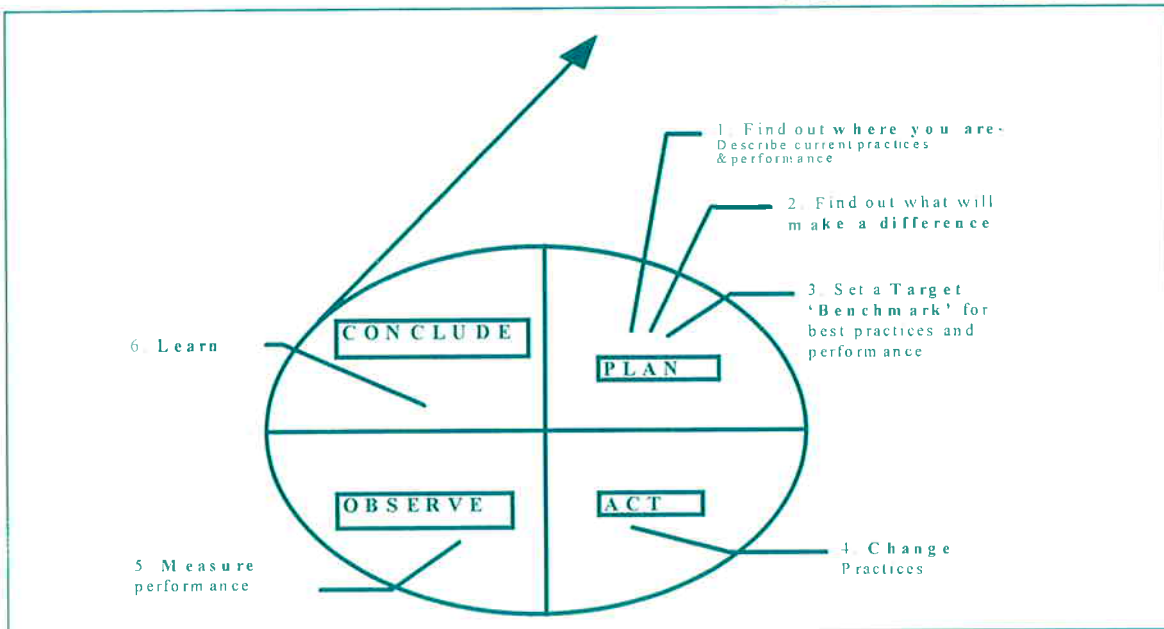
BEST BEEF - Focusing on Making a Difference

Emma Robinson, Program Extension Officer, Emerald

The Best Practices process of extension that I have been using with producers in central Queensland, is a structured six-step process that targets **learning** as the principle outcome.

The Best Practices process **enables ALL participants to continuously improve Key Performance Indicators.** The 6 steps of the process (shown in the following diagram) have key features which ensure:

1. Continual and conscious learning
2. A focus on practices that make a real difference to performance.
3. Formation of interdependent learning partnerships



The Best Practices Process

The Best Practices process has been applied in the BEST BEEF project, with the goal of focusing on what makes a difference to beef enterprise performance. Using the Best Practices process as a 'road map' participants can apply/access tools at each of the six steps to achieve an objective understanding of the impact of different practices on their beef enterprise performance. One of the key tools used to 'focus' group participants

is Key Performance Indicators. Participants agree what are the key performance indicators of a beef enterprise. Models of herd production and economic performance are then used to determine the impact on these indicators according to the number of different management practices that are operating or being considered. These management practices can then be ranked according to their positive impact

on the performance of the present beef enterprise.

Some Outcomes

I've had numerous learning's through my participation in the BEST BEEF project.... I'd like to share some of them with you!

- When using a new process greater time needs to be spent on establishing participants