



# EXTENSIONNet

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## Facilitating Transition – Agriculture in Indonesia

Joanne Bates

*Agriculture Victoria Knoxfield*

Sustainable agriculture has human and bio-physical dimensions suited to countries such as Indonesia, delegates were told at the recent Australasia-Pacific Extension Network Forum in Melbourne.

"The lessons learnt from the past are that intensive and high-input agriculture can have devastating effects on the environment. In developing countries, the transition to sustainable agricultural systems is also the path towards helping growers to increase their efficiency," said Coordinator of the Working Group on Participatory Research and Learning at the International Potato Centre in Indonesia, Elske van de Fliert.

Technology transfer in developing countries has traditionally aimed at straightforward adoption of standard recommendations. In comparison, extension for sustainable agriculture aims to facilitate the **adaptation of innovations to suit location-specific conditions at the grower level, and to influence the development of a supportive policy and institutional climate.**

In developing countries in Asia and South America, an extension method is encouraging growers to "go back to school in the field, their daily work place."

Known as the 'farmer field school', this method is designed to encourage growers to study ecological processes favouring crop production, and adapt sustainable production practices into their everyday work.

Growers make their own observations and experiments about pests and diseases and cultural practices, and how preserving an ecological balance can benefit agricultural production.

"Growers need to have knowledge of ecological processes and skills and be able to make informed decisions if sustainable agriculture is to be effective," Dr. van de Fliert explained. "This knowledge gives them the ability to analyse a situation and decide what changes could be made to improve their production."



**Elske van de Fliert at the Forum Dinner at "Albert by the Lake"**

"Another aspect of the farmer field school involves collective learning, this facilitates 'collective action'," she explained.

The collective and group learning approaches are increasingly becoming a focus of extension in Australia.

"Training programs being developed in Victoria, such as the Government's Grapecheque program, brings growers together for regular meetings. Through farm visits and discussion, growers have first hand evidence of how a change in practice can lead to a more sustainable business," said Grapecheque facilitator Jane Fisher.

Australia has a strong emphasis on providing policy support for sustainable production, but Dr. van de Fliert said there is a requirement for institutional and policy frameworks to support training programs in developing countries.

"Indonesia has been pro-active in this area. In 1986 the then Minister for Agriculture passed a law that farmers weren't allowed to use 57 broad-spectrum insecticides on rice. The decree, which included declaration of integrated pest management (IPM) as a national policy and the ban of 57 pesticides, provided the political climate for the government to later organise large-scale IPM training," she said.

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## FROM THE CHAIR

Jane Fisher

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## Best Attended APEN Annual Forum

The 2000 APEN Forum "Creating a Climate for Change" appears to have been a resounding success. With approximately 170 registrants, it was the best attended annual forum that APEN has organised. We have more than 510 members, an all time high, which is fabulous.

The theme of the forum "Creating a Climate for Change" sprang from a growing awareness that while APEN has been fulfilling its stated purpose of improving the practice and profession of extension through forums and ExtensionNet, we have not been lobbying government, industry organisations and universities as well as we might. The time has come to grasp the nettle of policy. By listening to and participating in discussion with people about approaches to extension, and how or if research is planned with extension in mind, we developed a clear understanding of where the profession is headed. I recommend that you reflect on this information, ask yourself if you like what you heard, and are content to be going in that direction. If you want to make changes, get involved with APEN Policy. Jeff Coultts of the Rural Extension Centre is going to set up a policy list server, where discussion can take place amongst interested parties. You will be able to nominate to be part of this.

The breakfast meeting of the Annual General Meeting was well attended. We farewelled Horrie Poussard (Treasurer), Sally Marsh (WA), Chris Sounness (Western Vic)

and Emma Robinson (Qld) and welcomed Amanda Miller (WA), Paul Ainsworth (Western Vic) and Terry Reid (Qld) to the Committee of Management.

I would like to thank Horrie for all the work that he has done in the four years that he has been Treasurer. In the last year, Horrie coordinated the APEN submission to the RIRDC extension review, participated in the revamp of ExtensionNet, personned the APEN booth at the International Landcare Conference, and wrote a submission to ACIAR for funding to establish APEN chapters in both the Phillipines and Vietnam.

Sally has been very involved in APEN at both the Chapter level, and in the Committee of Management (CoM). She worked with me on asking chapters what they were doing, and what support they want from the CoM, and gave editorial assistance to Mark Paine on ExtensionNet.

Both Sally and Horrie will be working in Vietnam.

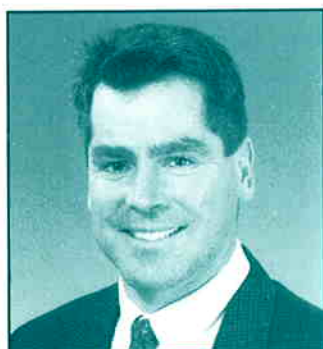
Chris Sounness has been involved in developing policy and working hard to get our website up to date.

The next year will be an exciting one. Tasks that the CoM will tackle are continuing to pursue ways to provide support to the chapters and policy - putting extension on the national agri-industries' agenda.

## FROM THE EDITOR

Mark Paine

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*The Editorial Committee is seeking feedback and suggestions for improvement, so please send me any comments, no matter how brief, and indicate whether you want your comments published. If you have any articles for publishing please contact me.*

## Research and Development for Practice

Research and development for practice is the theme for this issue of ExtensionNet. The recent Extension Forum in Melbourne (26 to 27 Oct) was a venue where this theme received considerable airing. **Sally Marsh** provides a personal perspective on the forum which I am sure you will enjoy.

**Anne Hope** discusses the experiences of a team developing training materials for advisors. Providing advisors with adequate resources to perform their extension and consulting functions is often a neglected area in the literature on learning and change. Anne draws heavily on her evaluation work to identify what worked well and where improvements in the program could occur in future. Several levels of learning have emerged in this program where a considerable investment has been made in evaluation to discover ways of learning as you go.

**Guy Penny's** article is about a research project that used new technology to work with groups of farmers dealing with learning in the context of supply chains. Farmers could work with Guy to map their ideas and then discuss the implications of their maps towards constructing an overall approach that im-

proved relationships between processors and farmers.

**John Stantiall** challenges extension agents to focus on what it means to operate in an increasingly accountable funding environment. He suggests the extension profession has been preoccupied with input considerations when the investing agencies are demanding an outcomes focus to programs and projects.

Finally **John Pethram** provides a very interesting history to work in the area of farming systems. This personal and honest profile of work in a developing country context makes for interesting reading for all people concerned about how to improve their support processes for others.

Thank you to all those people who offered to provide assistance with editorial work. I was amazed at the extent of goodwill and generosity that was so spontaneously forthcoming in response to my request in the last editorial - particularly as I thought most people skipped over the editorial to get into the juicy articles inside!

# Releasing Resonant Power

## Resonance

For every object there exists a particular note that can cause it to start to vibrate, resonate and release energy. This physical phenomenon is my analogy for what Countdown Downunder is trying to achieve with the Adviser Short Courses.

## Adilemma

The knowledge and skills to improve animal health and milk quality performance on farms already exist in the industry. Although veterinarians, factory field officers, milking machine technicians and consultants have professional competencies and local knowledge to deal with performance issues, farmers are concerned that the advice they receive from different advisers is often inconsistent and appears contradictory. The conflict of professions having individual competencies but limited capacity to work together to solve complex, multi-factorial problems hinders Australia's ability to capture global opportunities and was one of the catalysts for the Countdown Downunder project.

## The big picture

Countdown Downunder is a national extension program aiming to improve mastitis control and milk quality in Australia's dairy industry. Between January 1999 and July 2001 it is delivering a series of training programs, seminars and resources to farmers and their advisers (see Diagram 1). These elements are based on extension messages embedded in the project's core resource, a manual for farmers titled the *Countdown Downunder Farm Guidelines for Mastitis Control*. Countdown has heavily invested in processes that enable the scientific support and extension of its key recommendations to farmers using existing advisory networks. This allows vets, machine technicians and other dairy advisers to deliver clear, consistent messages at a time when they will have maximum impact (for example when troubleshooting problems one-on-one with farmers) as well as building skills that will endure beyond the funding of the project (see Diagram 2).

Experiences  
with the  
Countdown  
Downunder



## Adviser Short Courses



A  
DAIRY RESEARCH AND  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION  
Farmer Funded Project

The Adviser Short Course is a critical component of Countdown. It provides an interface where different disciplines can develop team skills as a first step toward harnessing their collective power for improved performance in the industry. In particular, applying the theory of Engel and Solomon (1997), a shared sense of purpose among different advisory professionals and their joint commitment to a solution will promote the development of realistic and robust mastitis strategies for farmers.

## Course design

More than 20 experts were involved with the development of the Adviser Short Course, including representatives from the peak bodies of the professional groups. The course was designed to have technical content that appealed to trained practitioners, be of a duration that was effective without taking them away from their businesses for too long, and be sufficiently valued by participants to enable cost recovery for its delivery.

The end result was a "short" four day course that had positions for a maximum of 10 veterinarians, 10 milking machine technicians, and 10 dairy advisers. Each discipline had separate sessions on the first day and joint sessions for the remaining days. Most learning was interactive and was based on paper exercises and video clips, with 'hands on' activities limited to the machine technicians. Technical messages were embedded in case studies of recent mastitis

## THE AUTHOR

Anne Hope

Scientific Officer, Countdown Downunder



investigations on real farms as requested by advisers at seminars and focus groups held in 1999.

Distinct team building exercises were included to provide a space to focus on the strengths of working in teams, understand people's expectations of other professions, and develop creative solutions in teams. Although the exercises competed with the time spent on technical issues they were considered worthwhile as successful performance depends as much on communication, negotiation and management as it does on knowledge. How an audience eager to explore the 'nuts and bolts' of mastitis investigations would receive them was not known.

During a 4-6 week break after the third day, participants were required to investigate a mastitis problem on a client's farm in a multi-disciplinary team and present their findings to the whole group on the fourth day of the course.

Feedback from trainers and participants was actively sought during the first course. The mechanisms for this were detailed observations and reflections made by an education researcher, written comments from participants about the content and delivery made at the end of every topic, H-form questioning of groups at the end of each session (Guy and Inglis 1999), and appraisal of the farm assignments.