

Facilitating an effective information supply chain from R&D providers through agribusiness advisers to growers

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Abstract. Earlier research by the author indicated that although agribusiness was emerging as a key conduit for transfer of research and development outputs and outcomes to end users such as growers, little strategic engagement appears to exist between agribusiness and Research and Development providers (RDCs). The objective of this project was to focus on development of a central point of access to R&D outputs that would meet the priorities of RDCs and agribusiness with resulting benefits for growers. Additional research was conducted to identify issues and common factors between stakeholders affecting the development of an effective information supply chain. There are differences between the environments in which agribusiness and RDCs operate, which could inhibit future engagement. Collaboration between RDCs and agribusiness on development of an appropriate supply chain was suggested as an effective means to both facilitate stakeholder access to R&D information, and foster engagement. A Working Group of RDC stakeholders concluded that the commercial entity FarmPlus would be an effective central access point for R&D information. An effective supply chain solution is based on three key learnings: 1. R&D outcomes must be reported by RDCs in terms that are relevant to agribusiness and growers; 2. agribusiness is an effective conduit for both outputs from R&D organisations to growers, and inputs back in to R&D priorities through a feedback loop; and 3. Terms of trade that exist between RDCs and agribusiness need to be understood and acknowledged to foster appropriate engagement.

Keywords: agribusiness, RDC, R&D, engagement, information delivery, conduit, supply chain, FarmPlus.

Introduction

As stated on the website of the Council of Rural Research & Development Corporations' (RDCs) Chairs:

there are 15 Rural Research and Development Corporations covering virtually all of the agricultural industries. The RDCs bring industry and researchers together to establish research and development strategic directions and to fund projects that provide industry with the innovation and productivity tools to compete in global markets.

The \$500m/year Australian Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation sector represents all major farm industries using farm production levies and matched Government funding. This sector is seeking new ways to spearhead Australia's \$35b farm sector as changing economic, climatic and environmental threats loom. Agribusiness companies, through their valuable grower relationships are ideally placed to support these developments.

Contemporary agribusiness can be described as encompassing, consultants, trainers, accountants, associations, reinvented producer organisations, farmer directed groups, resellers and their product suppliers, privatised and semi-government organisations, banks, advisers on insurance and superannuation, marketers and seed companies (Stone 2005). It has been estimated that there are approximately 1,300 private consultants operating in rural Australia. Coutts et al. (2005) and in excess of 1,500 personnel employed by national and regional company resellers, suppliers and banks.

Stone (2005) noted that 'Agribusiness has largely supplanted the previous government extension role and increasingly, it is undertaking R&D work and can act as an information conduit from farmers back to researchers and decision makers'. The role of extension is described by Coutts et al. (2005) in the national extension/education review '... in terms of its outcome, i.e. capacity building. It is defined as the process of engaging with individuals, groups and communities so that people are more able to deal with issues affecting them and opportunities open to them'. The capacity-building role of agribusiness advisers is also noted in Coutts et al. (2007) '... there is a lot of evidence gathering that agricultural consultants are becoming an increasing force in supporting managers of agricultural enterprises across Australia and that they play a critical role in assisting managers to integrate wider learnings in to their specific farming system'.

Therefore the importance of the engagement of all RD&E providers including RDCs, (Co-operative Research Centres (CRCs), universities and state agricultural departments to facilitate the role of agribusiness in capacity building is apparent. An effective information supply chain between these providers and agribusiness generates widespread benefits:

- For research organisations to promote research outputs, meet key performance indicators (KPIs) and encourage adoption of new practices and technologies
- For agribusiness organisations and consultants by facilitating access to sources of relevant, cutting-edge information allowing them to maximise their value to their clients
- For end users such as growers, whose sustainability ultimately relies on an effective information supply chain from both the RD&E providers and agribusiness
- For all stakeholders in the form of a feedback loop at many stages of the supply chain, including from end users back to RDC research priorities.

The project '*Maximising the connection between Research, Development and Extension providers and agribusiness*' – was undertaken for the Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building (CVCB) and was completed in June 2008. The objective of this project was to develop an effective strategy for future interaction between these RDCs and agribusiness in order to build the capacity of agribusiness to carry out extension and transfer of R&D information. The focus of the study was to canvass how this might be achieved in an applied setting and to consider how to get both RDCs and agribusiness to address the issues and find 'common ground' for collaboration.

Project background

Stone (2005) in his previous CVCB funded project '*Agribusiness Role in Extension, Education and Training: a Case Study*' recognised agribusiness as a 'key conduit to facilitate the delivery of levy funded knowledge and information from Research and Development Corporations and other R&D organisations, to growers'. He suggested that although the advisory processes for agribusiness to operate effectively with clients are largely in place, a key impediment for agribusiness to advise grower clients effectively is the ready access to relevant, robust, scientifically based information. Similarly, this current project has confirmed that farmer innovation is driven by access to cutting-edge data and found that limited access to cutting-edge data and information on innovative practices, through agribusiness, was a key impediment facing growers. Stone and Coutts et al. (2005) made the point that private consultants have a specific and crucial role in building capacity and are seen as 'honest brokers'. Stone suggested that agribusiness should provide feedback to support the RD&E priority setting of RDCs and that the RDC/agribusiness link be strengthened. This led to CVCB funding of this subsequent project which commenced in 2005.

The specific objectives of this new project were to:

- Gain a baseline understanding of how RD&E providers currently connect with agribusiness and how they propose to do so in the future.
- Assess and report on the key success factors that would characterise a strong RD&E provider-to-agribusiness link.
- Explore potential strategies to: maximise the interaction between RD&E providers and agribusiness that support and benefit end users; facilitate access and transfer of R&D information by agribusiness; and develop a feedback loop whereby RDCs can ensure they are meeting on-ground needs of users through feedback from agribusiness and end users who assist in priority setting.

Methodology

Stone's previous CVCB project in 2005 provided a rapid overview of the role of agribusiness in capacity building, and it was determined that more detailed research was needed. The focus of this project was to research and answer several key questions:

- What are the agribusiness information needs that RD&E providers can supply?
- How can the needed information be best supplied/accessed?
- How can a RD&E advisory, priority setting and feedback model be established to collectively satisfy the needs of growers, agribusiness and RD&E providers?
- Can this be widely implemented?

Key Stakeholders were identified as: growers who are the ultimate users of R&D outputs; agribusiness which acts as a key conduit to growers; and RDCs that are primary strategists and funders of rural RD&E. The original proposition was to gather data about the information needs of these stakeholders, using that data and three case studies to: canvass a likely interaction process; determine an appropriate framework; confirm and test that framework; then report back to stakeholders accordingly.

Engagement with RD&E Stakeholders was based on face-to-face meetings and phone interviews with senior program managers of the major RD&E providers. These included nine of the then 14 RDCs and three of the then 20 relevant CRCs (those who were known to be most interested in

and affected by the possible strengthening of their engagement with agribusiness). Interviewees were asked four simple open questions:

- What is the value or otherwise of an R&D provider connection with agribusiness?
- What is your current connection with the agribusiness sector if any?
- What is your proposed future connection if any?
- What view do you hold about the value of some form of information management process?

Growers and agribusiness adviser stakeholders (as well as senior agribusiness personnel) were also directly interviewed with a variant of the above four questions. Grower surveys were carried out with 25 growers in four varied regional locations around Australia Bendigo (Victoria), Wagga Wagga and Junee (Southern NSW), Toowoomba and Brisbane (Qld) and regional sites east of Perth, Western Australia. The majority of the growers operated in the grain or mixed farming sectors.

The survey of growers particularly sought their views about their information needs and their preferred methods of access to information. It sought their views on the role of their agribusiness adviser as an information provider and the ideal or preferred process their adviser should use to provide access to information that would best meet their needs. This included seeking their opinions on the links with R&D providers and the niche they saw for their advisers as information conduits to them. Since advisers referred all grower respondents to the project leader, this could have biased the sample.

Adviser surveys were carried out in those same survey areas. Of the 59 adviser participants, 32 described themselves as agronomists, 12 as business advisers, 7 as specialists, and 8 as other. The survey questioned advisers about their links with their clients, information needs and preferred methods to access that information and about the role of information providers to supply that information. The direct views of consultant agribusiness personnel on best connections with R&D providers, how to develop and manage those connections, who their grower clients were and the extent/type of R&D information they sought and how they expected it to be delivered to them, were obtained.

Upon completion of this data collection in late 2005, work began on development of a conceptual model for a structured framework of RD&E provider and agribusiness interaction so that outputs and learnings from the project could be made available. This was proposed to encompass a series of forums, discussion groups and newsletters. More research was expected to come from the case study process.

Case studies were chosen on the basis that they demonstrated collaboration between RD&E providers and agribusiness with agribusiness functioning in a capacity-building role. The three case studies selected were:

- Dairy Australia – through their 'Taking Stock' program
- GRDC – through their proposed project of 'Connecting the grains industry more strongly with agribusiness'
- The national agribusiness company, Landmark – through their work with the former Salinity Cooperative Research Centre (now the Future Farm Industries CRC) as the extension partner of the salinity management program.

Engagement of all three case studies commenced early in 2006. However, the worsening drought and reduced staffing levels affected the overall contribution of stakeholders to the project and in late 2006 the case studies concept was abandoned. Instead, it was decided that the required baseline data could be gathered through additional direct contact, discussion groups or field visits with agribusinesses and their clients as described above.

Findings

Growers

Results from the grower interviews confirmed that growers see their agribusiness adviser as a key person who is the specialist or expert 'information contact' and who is a direct source of information or has direct access to the information required specifically by them as growers. A significant number of growers indicated that there was so much information available to them, that they were in 'information overload'. They indicated a need for the agribusiness adviser to not only be a conduit for information from all sources, but to be a skilled synthesiser of information, to possess or access a significant collection of relevant and current information with a corresponding depth of knowledge, while being able to provide a snapshot view on request. Growers indicated that the agribusiness adviser is regarded as the 'honest broker' in comparison

to a sense of mistrust that growers have about the motivations of RDC and government (publicly funded) staff.

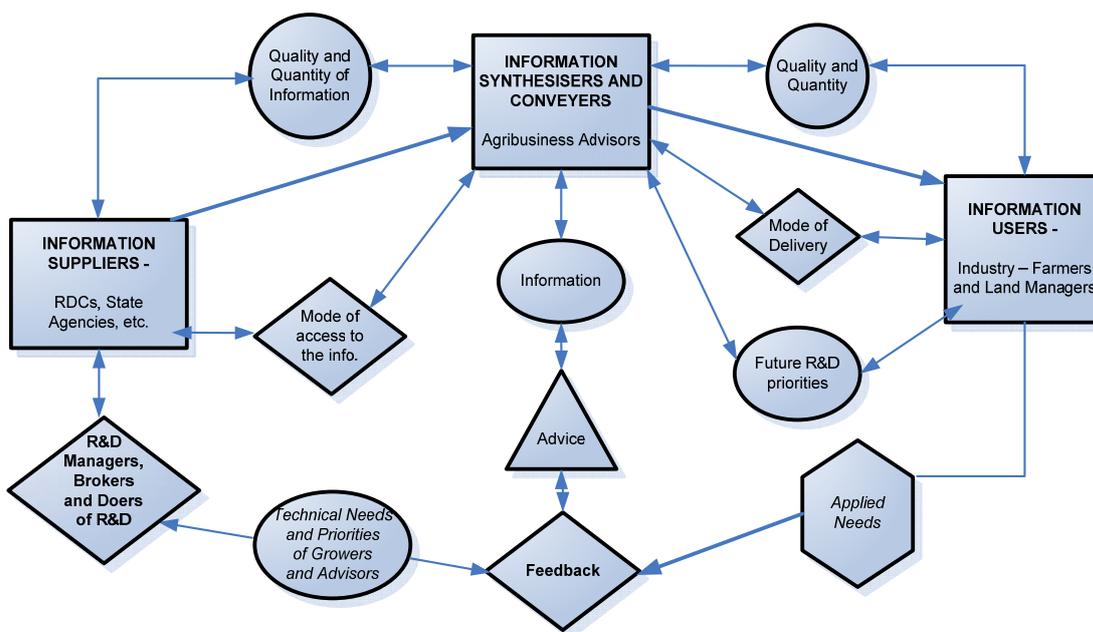
Agribusiness

Key messages from the agribusiness advisers were:

- Advisers foresee a more specialised role in the future as a synthesiser to the grower of the increasingly vast array of information available due to rapid changes in technology and the move to more business like farm enterprises (this is in accord with grower views).
- Accessing data is difficult and locating relevant information rapidly are two significant limitations. This is due to the considerable volume of information available from RDCs alone, let alone other public sources and because it is widely scattered in disparate systems that must individually accessed/searched.
- Growers have an expectation that the adviser will possess an in-depth knowledge of relevant information and be able to present it in language that they understand.
- Access to information is crucial and many advisers suggested that one centralised repository would be a practical place to access R&D.
- There would be benefits in fostering better linkages between advisers and RDCs.
- An understanding of grower segmentation is needed to effectively categorise the diverse range of growers into groups or market segments – for targeted information delivery.

The emerging role of the agribusiness advisor as a source of knowledge and information transfer between R&D organisations (Information Suppliers) and Farmers/growers (Information Users) is demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Agribusiness Knowledge Framework



Research and Development (R&D) organisations

Outcomes from the surveys of these organisations identified that there was a strong perception of a lack of interaction and understanding between RDCs and agribusiness and vice versa. When the project began, there was little initial strategic engagement between RDCs and agribusiness, although both groups indicated a desire to seek a level of strategic engagement. During the project life there was progress towards greater interaction, due in significant part to this project. Future engagement of target audiences to access outputs from R&D organisations would need to encompass knowledge of how these audiences seek their information and how it is best delivered. Recognising that data from grower surveys indicated that they preferred that agribusiness act as the conduit and a provider of this information in more relevant forms, this provides an opportunity for RDCs to address their KPIs by increasing adoption of innovation practices and technology by growers via the agribusiness sector as a conduit.

Summary

Findings from the data collection process were reported at the CVCB project meeting held in November 2006. It emerged that the matter of connection between agribusiness and providers

of RD&E information was a secondary issue. It became apparent that the primary issue for agribusiness and growers was access to cutting edge, relevant R&D information and addressing issues in the supply chain to support access to that information. A key issue emerging from the surveys was that growers and advisers were both seeking more streamlined access to information and sought a 'one stop shop' where they could find what they needed in a variety of formats.

This indicated that further investigation was needed to determine the factors that affect that delivery from R&D providers to agribusiness and acquire greater understanding of the interaction between RD&E providers, RDCs, agribusiness and growers. Accordingly, with the demise of the case study process and the issues arising from the interim report noted above, it was decided that the focus of the project should shift to the development of an effective supply chain model to improve Stakeholder' access to R&D outputs.

New project direction – development of an information supply chain solution

The notion of a structured framework for interaction, designed to achieve the objectives of the project, was substituted with a core investigation into methods to facilitate access to and delivery of RD&E information via agribusiness to growers. A CVCB Agribusiness Working Group consisting of RDC and agribusiness representatives was established as a project reference group for the last half of the project.

Key findings of the project research to date would drive the next phase of the project:

- Information delivery to grower end users is a key area of common ground between R&D providers and agribusiness.
- Agribusiness is a key information delivery, advisory and practice change agent for the most influential grower segments and potentially more widely for all growers.
- Agribusiness seeks to engage with RDCs.
- RDCs seek to engage with agribusiness.
- Strategic and structural issues with agribusiness influence their ability to be an information conduit to growers and these issues must be understood by R&D providers.
- Agribusiness is evolving in its extension role and this provides an opportunity for RDCs to engage with and support that process. This in turn addresses the accountability of RDCs to funding agencies, to be able to demonstrate delivery of R&D results.
- Further collaboration on providing feedback on R&D priorities for RDCs and R&D providers from growers via Agribusiness is another area of common ground and reciprocal benefit.

Segmentation of growers and the agribusiness sector

To better understand these issues, it became apparent that work was needed on segmentation of the agribusiness sector, segmentation of agribusiness clients (growers), the motivation of agribusiness and their clients, and the value in a 'whole of RDC approach to agribusiness interaction'. It was agreed that in order to facilitate information transfer, it needed to be determined how to encourage effective direct engagement between RDCs and agribusiness.

Work focussed on: identifying structural issues on both sides that impede links between RDCs and agribusiness; identifying and understanding the segmentation of the target audiences on all sides; investigating contextual differences that influence the interaction; understanding transaction parameters such as how each sector operates and their terms of trade; and greater understanding of the key drivers of growers and agribusiness which dictate how they ultimately interact.

The CVCB Agribusiness Working Group agreed on a 5-Step process for the remainder of the project:

1. Review the interaction of member RDCs with agribusiness and see what changes had occurred in the interaction between RDCs and agribusiness.
2. Consider how to value add to these relationships through joint RDC projects to create a win: win for RDCs, growers and agribusiness.
3. Determine how to formally engage relevant RDCs with agribusiness to discuss how to establish relationships and what to bring to the table.
4. Convene an agribusiness and RDC forum to consider how to achieve the outcomes
5. Enter a partnership phase with agribusiness and RDCs.

The Working Group also defined stakeholders encompassing growers, agribusiness and RDCs, and discussed their drivers and value propositions. The importance of understanding the various market segments was acknowledged.

Categories of growers, from an agribusiness perspective, were defined as:

- 'A' class clients/growers are the top growers in their discipline and are proficient farm business operators and innovators
- 'B' class clients/growers – are actively moving towards the 'A' class and follow 'As'
- 'C' class clients/growers – have operations that are largely static in terms of innovation and development – and are regarded as traditionalists
- 'D' class clients/growers – are expected to exit the industry
- Peri-urban/lifestyle – mostly professionals and city dwellers with smaller weekend farms
- Corporate farms – aggregated family farms and corporate entities like super funds
- Next generation farmer young professionals returning home.

Of the grower/farmer clients surveyed in this project, the majority of clients were A (34%) and B (33%) class clients with the remaining 33% of clients at C and D. Advisers reported that they preferred A and B clients, to C and D clients and would actively pursue that mix for profitability and job satisfaction reasons as these are the clients who generally implement their advice and recommendations and are their main source of income. Similarly, they also preferred clients from the corporate and professional categories.

It can be expected that existing drivers will continue to focus agribusiness advisers on the more profitable and motivated clients. This reinforced the importance and value of fostering the connection between RDCs and agribusiness to influence the most influential groups of growers.

In terms of segmentation of agribusiness as a market, the following categories were identified:

- Suppliers of products such as chemical suppliers and equipment suppliers e.g. Monsanto, NuFarm, Bayer, Netafim
- Resellers with personnel who are both experienced and in-experienced and have multifaceted businesses, e.g. Landmark, Elders, CRT/Ruralco, IHD Group
- Private consultants such as agronomists, marketers, farm financial advisers, specialists, (e.g. irrigation), including personnel who are both experienced and (less so) in-experienced
- Specialist management consultants, e.g. Hassalls
- Dealers, e.g. Case IH, John Deere
- Technical associations and marketing groups, e.g. Kondinin Group
- Bankers, accountants

Cultural differences between R&D organisations and agribusiness

It was reported during this project that there was contextual disparity between the public and private sector and that this could have a negative influence on the interaction between these groups. It was considered essential to examine the differences in order to overcome limiting influences and to foster positive interaction between the sectors.

One limitation (as perceived by RD&E personnel) is that 'agribusiness can make money' from access to and the use of R&D outputs. While this is true, as the terms of trade of agribusiness revolve around generating income, this is at odds with a similarly strongly held RDC perception that growers (their levy payers) are encouraged to make money from implementing R&D outputs on farm and for industry good. Table 1 contains a range of issues that illustrate the differences between drivers and needs affecting the target outcomes of agribusiness and R&D organisations.

The contextual disparities demonstrated above create barriers to engagement between agribusiness and RDCS and effect how they interact. Conversely, the cultures of agribusiness and growers are strongly aligned with a focus on greater profitability versus less accountability.

It appears the crucial action to diminish the effects of these differences and foster collaboration is to determine the terms of trade for the interaction between the two groups. Understanding and acknowledging differences and collaborating on determining appropriate terms of trade was concluded to be a key factor in maximising engagement.

Table 1. Comparison agribusiness vs RDC stakeholders drivers/needs

Agribusiness stakeholders drivers/needs	RDC stakeholders drivers/needs
Long term, high profit client relationships that generate a win: win	Industry survival and 'good' (rather than individual business growth)
Meeting specific client goals and drivers to grow their business	R&D strategic planning & management of aggregated / leveraged investments of public monies that is accountable and transparent (that is time based rather than needs / urgency based)
Access to specific information on a needs basis (that meets grower client needs)	Manage the R&D system or process (rather than focussing on achievement of outcomes direct to growers)
Delivery (making sense of information) in terms growers relate to, in language relevant to them – that is detailed yet simple and practical using specific outcomes	Show benefits and ROI to stakeholders – especially levy payers – over time and at a program level
Ability to synthesise – into advice / products – that can be on-sold to clients or form part of the business relationship	Development of a system of Extension, Adoption and Practice Change for the wider industry
Relationships based on \$ changing hands to generate mutual profits.	Increase \$ returns to industry rather than individual growers
	Triple Bottom Line.

Engaging the cultures

The Working Group agreed that common ground exists between agribusiness stakeholders and RDCs with regard to their joint requirements. These are:

- To facilitate access by agribusiness to R&D information for delivery to growers.
- To deliver practical and relevant R&D outputs associated with the end-user’s needs in terms of their segmentation, their industry sector and geographic location.
- To seek input from agribusiness into setting future priorities for R&D.
- To encourage agribusiness and growers to assist in trials/R&D work.
- The strong desire of agribusiness to engage with R&D providers and provide strong feedback mechanism from growers to RDC/RD&E priority setting is a desirable factor.
- The joint aim of RD&E providers and agribusiness is for practice change through the adoption of new technologies thereby creating financial benefits for individual enterprise and wider industry/community benefit.

The Working Group also considered that meaningful RDC and agribusiness engagement was a joint priority and that reciprocal benefits could result from collaboration. To do so, it was agreed that one relevant key project or activity could serve to focus the engagement. The CVCB Working Group members canvassed how current and future activities of each RDC could connect with agribusiness. Specific projects were targeted for further investigation as potential mechanisms to foster engagement between RDCs and agribusiness.

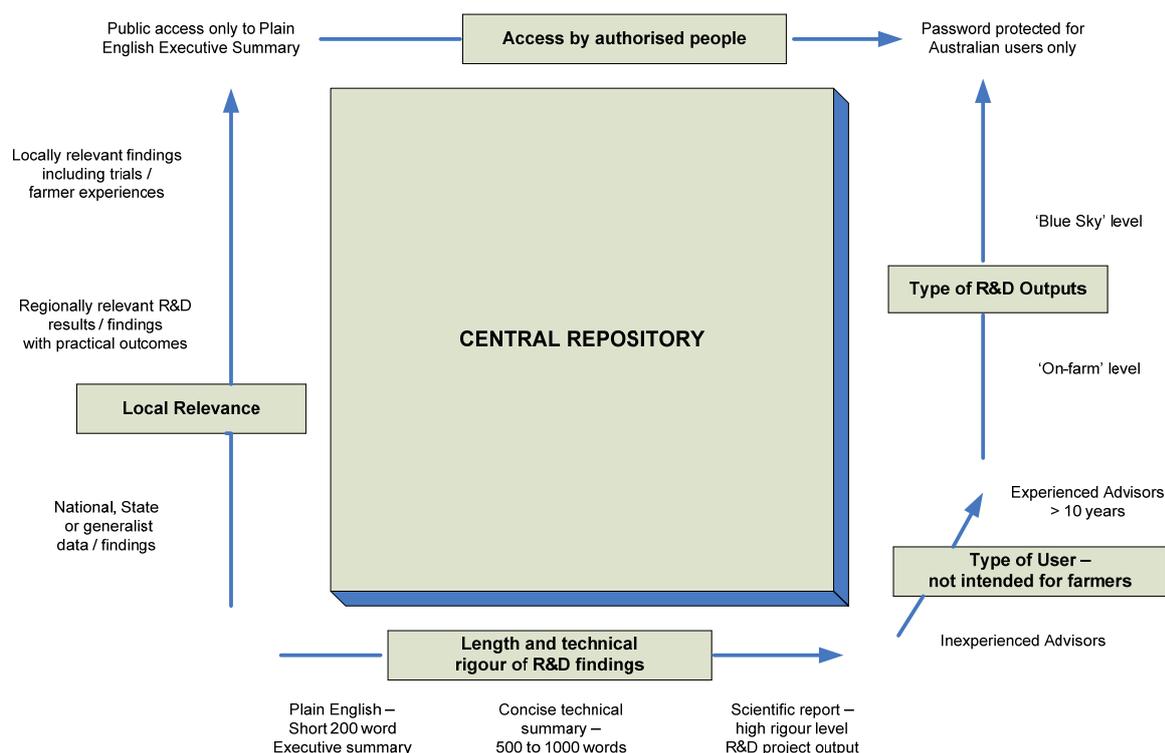
The information access point in the supply chain

One overarching issue had emerged from the needs analysis. This was the importance of common access by agribusiness and growers to R&D information in appropriate and relevant formats. This issue was identified as being a joint priority and one which could initiate and facilitate meaningful engagement between RDCs and agribusiness.

The emerging proposition was to develop a central information repository or (central access point) in the R&D supply chain, at which R&D information from RDCs could be housed and then accessed by agribusiness and end-users. The Working Group began investigation into options for a central information repository. Such an access point was proposed as the means to establish a supply chain for R&D information from RDC to agribusiness and on to the grower. It would also have to encompass a feedback capacity – from grower to agribusiness, and from grower and agribusiness back to the R&D organisations.

Figure 2 is a representation of the ideal process – transferring information from RDCs to agribusiness (next users) to growers (end users). This system would be web based.

Figure 2. The Ideal Information Repository – supporting two-way flow of R&D information from R&D suppliers to agribusiness to end-users



The information repository – a supply chain solution

The development of such an information repository was identified as being a major value-adding proposition that could benefit rural industry overall, as well as individual RDCs and agribusiness. Some of the particular considerations with regard to the application of the Information Repository included that it would:

- Generate benefits (link to a value proposition) for all stakeholders
- Need to consider knowledge exclusivity
- Address commercial in confidence and intellectual property issues
- Focus on agribusiness as the primary client of the repository
- Be marketed as a place where ... 'Agribusiness can get access to unprocessed knowledge and summarised information – that directly meets your needs'.

It was considered that some form of commercial information repository might already exist. It was noted that some RDCs had already canvassed models. It was proposed that such a model would ideally link with the existing Australian Agriculture and Natural Resources Online facility (AANRO) and the specific delivery processes of the RDCs. As a result of investigation, the commercial entity 'FarmPlus' was canvassed as a suitable model.

The two key elements for the information repository concept were described as being:

1. AANRO is a facility for storing R&D outputs in an e-library. AANRO was regarded as creating a central R&D results 'warehouse' where unprocessed R&D information was catalogued and stored. It was noted that AANRO's function was primarily a storage facility for use by the R&D community.
2. FarmPlus, the commercial model developed by Sydney based consultants was known to aggregate information in such a way that users could easily search for specific issues like 'weeds at Dubbo'. It was being developed to operate on the slower line speeds used by many agribusinesses and growers in regional sites.

The FarmPlus product

Specific features and benefits of the FarmPlus product were detailed as follows:

- Its ability to be an in-store information shop that agronomists and others can use when clients come into the premises.
- Its ability to be used on-the-road by agronomists / advisers.

- Its capacity to be used 'at the farm table' during advisory sessions between advisers and growers.
- Its search capability which allows it to separate and sort information specific to Australia and specific regions / issues / sources of information.
- Its classification capability which allows sorting by people who are time poor and want to decide whether to explore further into final R&D reports.
- It has both a detailed information access point and 'overview / summary information' capability.
- It has defined plans to provide potential 2/3 coverage of growers who use advisers.

A prototype FarmPlus model was presented at the final meeting of the Working Group in late April 2008. A series of issues were canvassed that would finalise the next stages of implementing FarmPlus as an information delivery tool. In terms of this implementation phase, a series of key issues were to be considered by FarmPlus management – in terms of a final business plan – before further engagement with the Working Group.

Implementation

A further one-year Implementation Phase in 2008/9 was conducted in order to commence securing the engagement of agribusiness with RDCs using the FarmPlus model as the 'point-of-engagement'. It was anticipated that such an implementation phase would include:

- A proposed RDC-Agribusiness Roundtable to commence communication
- Confirmation of the FarmPlus Business Plan and its value to both agribusiness and RDCs
- Discussion of arrangements for Terms of Reference between a group of the RD&E providers as potential users – CRDC, HAL, LWA, RIRDC, GRDC and possibly Future Farm Industries CRC, who had expressed an interest in FarmPlus – to engage with FarmPlus
- Monitoring success of the proposed outcomes against agreed objectives – over 6-monthly intervals – to create a robust measurement and management method for accountability thereby ensuring future management of the RDC and FarmPlus relationship would be built on strong achievables.
- Using FarmPlus as a driver for longer term engagement by RD&E providers with agribusiness to ensure R&D findings could be cost effectively accessed by the agribusiness adviser sector.

A series of immediate steps to finalise key issues regarding the suitability of operations of FarmPlus to meet RDC accountability and management parameters were finalised by project conclusion on 30 June 2008.

Since project completion

Since project completion in June 2008 the FarmPlus system is being trialled in the cotton and horticultural industries, there has been agreement to commence operations in the meat and livestock industry and negotiations continue with one major national agribusiness company. It is known that GRDC has an agribusiness interaction strategy as does FFICRC.

Unfortunately, it was announced that Land and Water Australia, the manager of AANRO, would cease operations on 30 June 2009. It is understood that the CVCB, which took a leadership role with this project but ceased operations on 30 June 2008, is also unlikely to be reconvened.

There are specific positive initiatives that have resulted from the project in order to develop RDC and agribusiness sector engagement. However, it is disappointing that no 'whole of RDC' strategy to engage with agribusiness is being undertaken, as that was a clear signal from this project. This illustrates the imperative of a leadership entity to take a coordinated and integrated approach to strategic issues such as the engagement between the RD&E sector and the agribusiness sector. This is particularly relevant given the emerging role of agribusiness in capacity building and that growers (50% funders of the R&D work of RDCs), agribusiness and RDCs all agree that R&D outputs and technical information delivery to growers is an extremely high priority for attention.

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