



## Participatory learning - meeting the needs of producers of diverse cultural backgrounds

**Michelle C Smith, NSW DPI**

As practioners of extension in agriculture and natural resource management you would be well aware that the typical image portrayed in the media of an Australian farmer; Anglo background, akubra & moleskin wearing, generally accompanied by a kelpie, is not really an accurate portrayal of the landholders and farmers that you engage with. The same can be said for the market gardeners in Sydney Basin.

These market gardeners comprise a diverse group of ages, backgrounds and nationalities. Many have extensive experience in growing vegetables, others have little experience. Some farmers are now second and even third generation, while others have little to no English language skills and have not been in Australia for long. A number of farmers own land and can therefore make investments

in infrastructure to improve sustainability, others are on very tentative leasehold arrangements. Land size can range from as little as 1 hectare to 50 + hectares.

Grower profiles from a certificate III Agriculture course, recently delivered by NSW DPI to a group of Asian growers, illustrate the diversity of participants.

Participants farm sizes ranged from .05 hectare to over 20 hectares.

Production methods included a small scale organic grower to a large hydroponic and field grower. One marketed door to door direct to customers, others had market stands, some sold to wholesalers and some to restaurants.

The ages of participants ranged from early 20s to over 60 years of age.

The range of languages spoken by the

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market gardeners included Cantonese, Mandarin and English. Our bi-lingual Officer could speak English and Cantonese – one of the growers could speak Mandarin and English, another only Chinese and another only Mandarin!

So how do you deliver training that not only meets the requirements of the selected course but also ensures that each farmers needs are met? Furthermore as many of the farmers that we engaged with had negative experiences with government agencies in their home countries, the training had to be provided in a supportive environment. Trainers in the Department of Primary Industries NSW (DPI) found that the core principles of the farmer field school methodology (FFS) provided the most suitable framework for training this group of people.

# Participatory Learning (continued)

Farmer field schools were implemented throughout South East Asia in the 1990's initially as a way to train farmers in integrated pest management (IPM).

The schools build on Kolb's adult learning cycle that acknowledges that 'learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience'.

The farmer field school learning approach has three strands.

- Technical – understanding the physical ecosystem you are operating within.
- Practical – engaging in group work and sharing existing knowledge.
- Empowerment- gaining skills in critical thinking problem solving and the ability to take action to solve those problems

These strands are implemented by actively growing a crop as a training tool. As the crop grows farmers observe and measure physical attributes and through group discussion look for explanations or causes of their observations. Small field trails are devised that can either give farmers solutions to problems or help to give a deeper understanding to technical knowledge.

There is a distinct power shift as trainers become facilitators rather than experts. This gives room or space for farmers to drive the content that is of value to them. This is of particular importance in multi-cultural learning environments. These growers bring a range of ideas and philosophies that aren't immediately obvious to a western trainer. Allowing farmers to share their knowledge gives them confidence in their skills and forces them to critically evaluate their current practices.

Group dynamic exercises are an important component of FFS, frequently they drive the direction the training and experiences take. For example; one of the participants in the group profiled above was interested in gaining some marketing skills. During discussions, the group identified that a lack of knowledge by the general public about the Asian vegetables was an issue for them. It was decided by the group to use the Richmond Small Farm Field days to promote a selection of Asian vegetables.

During the 3 day field day, the group demonstrated how to prepare and cook asian vegetables using the crops we had been growing during the training. The public were given samples to try and recipes to take home and were shown how to select and store the vegetables.

The farmers also had the support of the Chinese Growers Association who donated branded shirts and caps. This also engaged some of the farmers with the association for the first time. Ownership of the exercise meant farmers were willing to give up their own time to be rostered on at the field days, even bringing family members to share the experience with. ..

This group exercise was empowering for the farmers on many levels. For many of these farmers long hours spent on farm and poor English skills prevent them from easily communicating and engaging with wider sections of the community. The opportunity to communicate with the public, provided by the presence of the DPI bi-lingual officer was an enriching experience. The farmers received positive feedback and encouragement firsthand which is rare for any primary producer.

By allowing active participation, the needs of all stakeholders can be met and NSW DPI achieved a successful transfer of new technologies or practices. Farmers gain not only technical knowledge but the skills and capability to solve new problems. Furthermore the community benefits by the presence of farmers who are engaged in farming sustainably.

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to this edition of ExtensionNet. With the APEN National forum just around the corner, it seemed fitting to focus this edition on participatory learning – something I hope we will all do at the forum.

In a multi-cultural Australia, it is very likely that some of our clients and/or colleagues come from different parts of the world. We therefore need to adapt our communication and extension practices as well as our training to be all inclusive. Michelle Smith, from NSW DPI outlines how she approached this when working with market gardeners in the Sydney basin. In her article Michelle refers to Farmer Field Schools (FFS) – a form of participatory learning, generally only practiced in the developing world.

The components of FFS may well be appropriate for certain areas of extension when we deal with more complex issues rather than just technology transfer. It is certainly a useful concept in pest management and I will deliver a paper at the APEN National Forum about using different forms of learning, including FFS, to gain greater adoption of IPM. In the meantime - to give you a greater insight into FFS, I have compiled some information about this form of training. While we are on the subject of entomology – we also feature an article about area wide pest management

– participatory learning while combating pests on a larger spatial scale than just your own backyard.

We all know that extension is also about establishing trust. Charlie Arnot, from the Centre of Food Integrity has contributed with an article about building consumer trust and then maintaining this trust.

This newsletter also contains some words from our APEN president, Austin McLennan, and an update on the APEN National Forum from Greg Mills, who is doing a great job pulling this together. It is not too late to register and I hope to see many of you there in November.

You may have noted that one of the editors is missing. Unfortunately, Gerry Roberts had to give up his role as co-editor due to work commitments. I have enjoyed working with Gerry, not only because it halves the workload but also because Gerry had great ideas for ExtensionNet. I hope I can continue to deliver an excellent newsletter without Gerry. Please note that I will value feedback, comments and suggestions from all of you.

Happy reading.

Kate



# President's Piece

Austin McLennan, APEN President



APEN President Austin McLennan with industry colleague and new APEN member Matt Weinart checking out a Northern Territory mango crop in the lead-up to harvest.

A very warm 'hello' to all APEN members and ExtensionNet readers!

## The Build-up is here

In the Northern Territory where I live and work there is a strong sense of urgency and expectation in the air, all due to this special time between the 'dry' and the 'wet' seasons that locals call 'the build-up.'

Not only can the heat and humidity be intense, but these conditions coincide with our annual mango harvest, bringing an additional level of intensity to those of us who work with that industry.

In a similar way, APEN is going through its own 'build-up' as we progress towards the APEN National Forum and Annual General Meeting to be held in Armidale this November.

Part of the pressure comes because, like a once-a-year mango harvest that delivers a grower's only pay cheque for the year, the APEN National Forum is one of APEN's few opportunities to earn a modest return by putting on an event of interest and value to members and non-members alike.

The Forum is also the ideal opportunity to get the full benefit of being an APEN member by making face-to-face connections, while learning more about extension and what

is working in industries and contexts other than your own.

I look forward to seeing as many of you there as possible.

## 2011 Annual General Meeting

Even with final preparations for the Forum in full-swing, I am probably sweating more over the build-up to the AGM than the Forum itself.

This is because, for the President of any organisation, an AGM should be about reporting actual results – not just outlining aspirations and intentions. Therefore, to continue the mango harvest analogy, the APEN AGM is a chance to prove that all the 'watering, pruning and fertilising' was not just for the sake of it, but actually produced a crop!

Fortunately, 2011 has been a fruitful year for APEN and I am looking forward to presenting the President's report at this year's AGM and to the elections.

## Anticipation

The Forum and the AGM are close, but we are not quite at the 'harvest' yet.

In the meantime, you might like to go to my blog at [apenpresident@blogspot.com.au](mailto:apenpresident@blogspot.com.au) for an advance tasting, where I do talk from

time to time about some of the things your Management Committee has been up to, and where I also hope you will talk back.

Finally, a special welcome to all our new members who have joined in recent months. While the catalyst for this has almost certainly been the discounted member registrations for the 2011 Forum, it is my hope (and expectation) that you will continue to find value in being a member of APEN beyond the Forum.

See you in Armidale.

*Austin McLennan*

**APEN President**

*PS. Please find enclosed with the edition of ExtensionNet a notice of motion regarding some proposed changes to the APEN constitution to be voted on at this year's AGM.*

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# Participatory Learning - Area Wide Pest Management

*Julie Ferguson and Melina Miles,  
Summarised by Kate Charleston*

*The concept of  
introducing AWM  
to the farming  
community  
received  
unanimous  
support from  
producers and  
industry.*

## Introduction

In the late 1990's, a severe, sustained and damaging outbreak of *Helicoverpa armigera* threatened the economic viability of many cotton and grain crops in southern Queensland. This resulted in a widespread realisation within the farming community that a change in the current approach to *Helicoverpa* management was needed to ensure a farming future in this region. There were also increasing concerns about the impact on the local community, environment and human health associated with increasing insecticide use.

The conventional approach to pest management is to treat crops on individual farms and while often successful, it is recognised that pest management may be more effective if implemented over a broad spatial scale. In the case of *Helicoverpa*, a pest that affected most crops, an Area Wide Management (AWM) approach was considered the most appropriate.

The concept of introducing AWM to the farming community received unanimous support from producers and industry. In addition to participating growers and consultants, the project also brought together resources and ideas from many different national and regional stakeholders.

One of the key goals of AWM was to empower farmers and consultants to make a change, from a *Helicoverpa* management system that was largely dependent on insecticides, to a sustainable system based on Integrated Pest Management (IPM). To achieve this outcome all farmers would need to work cooperatively and take a regional, rather than a paddock-by-paddock approach. With this approach, the size of the local *H. armigera* population could be reduced, giving non-chemical tools such as natural enemies a greater chance of being effective.

## Implementation of the project

Extension was central to the acceptance of the AWM concept and the implementation of key components. Assistance was provided to participating groups in the form of technical advice, group facilitation, coordination of activities and links with the researchers involved in the project. A monthly newsletter provided timely reminders, immediate feedback on research and meeting reports.

Regular group meetings were held to discuss groups' aims and expectations and provided a forum for discussion options as the season progressed. Group meetings were also venues for providing support, exerting "peer" pressure on members to comply with group aims, to suggest research directions, and for conflict resolution.





# Participatory Learning - Area Wide Pest Management (continued)

Technical information and updates were disseminated at group meetings as well as via press releases, conferences, field days, radio announcements and videos.

Communication between neighbours, spray contractors and consultants was encouraged and fostered. This communication contributed to changing the attitudes of individuals, particularly in relation to the management choices of other group members. One of the major flow-on benefits of the project, has been the opportunity for increased grower to grower communication at group meetings. In the group environment, grain and cotton growers are talking to each other about their different approaches to *Helicoverpa* management, their basic pest management philosophies and aspirations.

## Outcomes

*Changes in attitude* - AWM was a catalyst for a widening discussion on insect pest management and building on individual grower and consultant experience. Group discussion and sharing of experiences helped in developing confidence. The emphasis on local experience and local data was important in the changing of attitude to what could be achieved in relation to pest management.

There was a clear change in attitudes during the course of the project to the stage where growers started monitoring and using beneficials in pest management. They are incorporating them into pest management decisions and actively trying to augment them in the farming systems.

## *Increases in grower knowledge and skills*

- The focus on implementing the various components of the AWM strategy raised issues about how and why each tactic worked. With an increased understanding of pest lifecycles, the methods used to manage pests became more relevant.

## *Changes in management practices*

- Participants in the AWM were quick to adopt some of the tactics and slower in adopting others. In some cases, incentives were used to try new technologies such as trap cropping where seed was available free of charge for the first two years.

*Building social capital* - Growers valued the meetings and they made farm management

decisions at a group level. They started to consider what impact their own pest management decisions would have on neighbouring properties and began to view pest management on a larger scale.

AWM groups contributed to a change in knowledge, attitude and skills of growers and consultants in relation to *Helicoverpa* management, and IPM generally. Many growers increased their compliance with the key pest management strategies and this has had a flow on effect for the rest of the cotton industry where multiple tactics of pest control have replaced the sole use of insecticides.

## Conclusions

AWM in southern Queensland was successful because of a combination of factors. First, the timing was right. Second, the project combined a team of researchers and extension staff. Thirdly, the AWM 'experiment' was supported by an enthusiastic group of producers and agronomists.

Implementation of AWM, and the continued participation by growers, is dependent on meeting their expectations of what it can deliver. Ongoing education and evaluation of the regional impact of AWM activities is needed to keep expectations realistic, and to prevent participants becoming disillusioned with AWM. Working in groups, where discussion with peers has proven to be central in influencing attitude will be a means of setting realistic goals and expectations for AWM participants.

Maintaining momentum, interest and progressing learning are also major challenges for AWM groups. Once groups have been operating for two to three seasons they run the risk of becoming stale and burnt out if they are not provided with a challenging and stimulating learning environment. Groups should embark on a process of continual improvement – revising and resetting goals each year. Aim to achieve more each season, and don't be too disappointed if you fall short in any particular year, but do reflect on why.

The most important outcome of AWM was the change in participants' attitudes which began to drive a movement away from an unquestioning reliance on insecticides,

towards the implementation of integrated pest management (IPM). Growers realised that they can have a real impact on pest management in their farming systems and it is not totally out of their control. As one participant said: "We originally thought that the new ideas were all pie in the sky ideas, but now we realise that we can make an impact. It isn't all good luck. We are creating our own luck."

*Note: There are no longer any formal AWM groups in Southern Queensland. The introduction of genetically modified cotton which controls *helicoverpa*, has resulted in a marked reduction of insecticide use and took away the major incentive for AWM groups to operate.*

## References

JM Ferguson, MM Miles and C King 2003. Evaluation of Heliothis Area-Wide Management on the Darling Downs: The challenges and outcomes 2003. Proceedings of the 1st Australian Farming Systems Association Conference, Toowoomba 2003

JM Ferguson, MM Miles 2002. Area-wide management on the Darling Downs – has it worked? 'Proceedings of the 11th Australian cotton conference, Brisbane, Qld'. pp. 717–719



*"Snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile things, but just look what they can do when they stick together."*

Vesta M. Kelly

# 2011 Forum Shaping Up as Event Not To Be Missed

**Greg Mills, Convener / NSW DPI**

This year's APEN National forum will be held in Armidale at the University of New England from 28-30 November. With over 80 abstract and 100 registrations already received the forum is shaping up to be both informative, insightful and an excellent networking opportunity. The forum committee has put together a program which delegates will find to be thought provoking and create a positive environment for delegates to share their ideas and experiences.

Forum activities will commence with a field trip that will highlight the cutting edge research at the University of New England and visits one of innovative farms in the New England region. Delegates will start their field trip on the University campus looking at the ground breaking research on animal methane production before visiting one of the University's farms to view the latest research on precision agriculture in livestock enterprises. The field trip will then proceed to the Walcha district to visit a farm pioneering dairying in the traditionally beef and sheep dominated New England tablelands. At 1200m above sea level the Walcha Dairy is Australia's highest dairy, milking 750 cows in an 80 stand rotary shed. The fully computerised dairy can milk 400 cows per hour producing 18,000 litres of milk a day.

The forum will officially kick off on Monday night with a Welcome Barbeque and networking function on the University Campus with some country hospitality and entertainment. An early start on Tuesday morning will see our forum commence with the first of our inspiring and insightful key note speakers. Charlie Arnot is internationally recognised as a thought leader on food and agriculture issues. Charlie is CEO of the Center for Food Integrity and is a world leading communicator in building trust and confidence in our modern food production systems. The influence of consumers and institutions such as supermarkets has an increasing impact on what happens in agriculture, regional communities and resource management. Charlie will share his experiences and research on how extension professionals can influence this emerging environment.

Two of the most recent winners of the Australian Rural Woman of the Year award will be part of this years' event. The 2010 winner, Sue Middleton, will share her experiences on the realities of building community resilience. Sue's experience comes from a range of perspectives, starting her career in community development in western Queensland and now as a member of the Western Australian Royalties for Regions Advisory Trust Board. The 2011 winner, Caroline Robinson, will relay her personal experiences in community development and share her thoughts on the future role of extension professionals.

Our final keynote speaker has been described by contemporaries as the 'Modern day Lawson' (Australian Geographic), 'The Bard of Bourke' (Outback Magazine) and 'The keeper of Lawson's secret', (Neil Murray), and in 2002 his work was recorded in the National Library of Australia's folk archives. Andrew Hull is a writer and performer of poetry, prose and song, artist, photographer and musician from the "Back-O-Bourke" in Western NSW. Hull - as he's more commonly known - also has a day job in natural resource management extension, to which he adds his special artistic flare. Hull's presentation on the 'The art of using art in extension' will give a different perspective on modern extension. You can check out a small sample of Hull's creativity at [apen.me/HullHT](http://apen.me/HullHT)

A highlight of the forum will be the APEN awards dinner where APEN will recognise extension professionals who have demonstrated excellence in extension since we last gathered in Busselton. This year we have received seven nominations. In the Experienced/Open Category the nominees are

- Annette McCaffery and Deb Slinger - NSW Sustaining the Basin: Border Rivers-Gwydir Pilot Project Team (NSW DPI and Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Management Authority),
- John James: DEEDI, The DEEDI eExtension project
- Greg Mills: NSW DPI, Advancing the use of eExtension tools in Australia
- David Hickey: DEEDI, CQ BEEF project,

Three nominations have also been received for the Amabel Fulton Young Professional Category;

- Anthea Lisle: NSW DPI, The Hunter Valley Future Dairy Two extension project
- Damien Doyle: NSW DPI, SmartFarms Project in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment in NSW.
- Kate Sargeant: DPI Vic, Meat and Wool Services Branch, Feedbase projects

An exciting feature of this year's Forum is the DIY Space. This is a Do It Yourself opportunity to help design the forum and maximise what you as a delegate will take away from the forum. Check out [apen.uservoice.com](http://apen.uservoice.com) where you can add suggestions for activities in the DIY space. You can comment and vote on your suggestions, and those made by other people on the site. The Forum committee will provide the venues, data projectors, butchers paper, pens and webinar facilities to bring in external speakers if required. The rest is up to your imagination.

The 2011 APEN National Forum is shaping up as an outstanding event with a mix of awesome keynote speakers, 60 concurrent presentations, posters, DIY space and networking opportunities. You can check out more information and registration details at [apen.me/HitTargets](http://apen.me/HitTargets). Accommodation is available on campus at Mary White College, a short walking distance from the forum venue ([apen.me/F11rooms](http://apen.me/F11rooms)). You can also follow us on Twitter using [@APENevents](https://twitter.com/APENevents) or [#APENF11](https://twitter.com/APENF11)

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**2011 Forum:  
Hitting a  
Moving Target -  
Sustaining  
Landscapes,  
Livelihoods and  
Lifestyles in a  
Changing World**

# Communicating to build, maintain consumer trust is smart business

Charlie Arnot

*“People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”*

This quote, often attributed to Theodore Roosevelt, sums up what The Center for Food Integrity (CFI) learned in what is now a peer-reviewed and published model for building trust in today’s food system.

Research sponsored by CFI and conducted in partnership with Iowa State University shows that confidence (shared values) is three to five times more important than competence (skill and expertise) in building consumer trust. Specifically, the study measured what drives consumer trust in the areas of food safety, nutrition, worker care, the humane treatment of farm animals and environmental protection.

In our subsequent qualitative research, we learned that consumers trust farmers because they believe farmers share their values. Unfortunately, because of the change in size and structure and the use of technology in farming today, and the geographic and generational distance between farmers and consumers, they aren’t sure today’s agriculture still qualifies as farming. We see consumer alienation from agriculture and the food system expressed in increasing concerns about nutrition, food safety, affordability, environmental sustainability, animal welfare and other issues.

Some argue that maintaining public trust is a worthy goal, but not relevant to success in business. This outdated notion fails to recognize the financial benefit of maintaining the trust of stakeholders who can determine the level of social licence or social control an organisation enjoys. Maintaining the public trust that protects an organisation’s social licence to operate is not an act of altruism, it is enlightened self-interest.

Every organisation, no matter how large or small, operates with some level of social licence. A social licence is the privilege of operating with minimal formalized restrictions (legislation, regulation or market mandates) based on maintaining public trust by doing

what’s right. Organisations are granted a social licence when they operate in a way that is consistent with the ethics, values and expectations of their stakeholders. Stakeholders include customers, employees, the local community, regulators, elected officials and others who have an interest in how the organisation impacts them.

Once lost, either through a single event or a series of events that reduce or eliminate stakeholder trust, social organisation is replaced with social control. Social control is regulation, legislation, litigation or market mandates designed to compel the organisation to perform to the expectations of its stakeholders. Operating with a social organisation is more flexible and can be done at lower cost. Operating with a high degree of social control increases cost, reduces operational flexibility and increases bureaucratic compliance.

Every sector of the food system, whether farmers, manufacturers, branded food companies, grocery stores and restaurants, is under ever-increasing pressure to demonstrate it is operating in a way that is consistent with stakeholder values and expectations. Groups opposed to today’s food system are pursuing litigation, pressuring branded food companies, and initiating legislation to change how the system operates.

Historically, when under pressure to change, the industry has responded by attacking the attackers and using science alone to justify current practices. Too frequently the industry confused scientific verification with ethical justification. Not only are these approaches ineffective in building stakeholder trust and support, they increase suspicion and skepticism that the food industry is worthy of public trust.

As consumer values change, the food system needs to evaluate and potentially modify current practices and fundamentally change the way it communicates to maintain consumer trust. Meaningful stakeholder engagement and effective values-based communication with consumers are essential to maintaining the trust that protects social licence.

Building a truly sustainable food system requires balance. Maintaining public

support requires our practices to be ethically grounded and consistent with the values of our stakeholders. Objective, independent data is essential to evaluate progress and support scientific claims of improvement. Reasonable profitability is essential to assure economic viability. It is only by balancing these sometimes competing interests that we can have a food system that is truly sustainable and supported by our stakeholders and the rational majority of consumers.

Today’s new consumer environment requires innovative ways of engaging the public and new methods of communicating if we want to build trust. We need consumers to understand that while our systems have changed and our use of technology has increased, our commitment to do what’s right has never been stronger. Only by demonstrating that our practices and our products are consistent with the values and expectations of the public can we maintain the social licence necessary for sustainable success.

Charlie Arnot is the chief executive officer of the Center for Food Integrity, [www.foodintegrity.org](http://www.foodintegrity.org), a non-profit organisation established to build consumer trust and confidence in today’s food system.



*“Coming together  
is a beginning,  
staying together  
is progress,  
and working together  
is success.”*

Henry Ford

# Farmer Field Schools (FFS)

## – what are they and can they work here?

*“If you want to build a ship, don’t herd people together to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”*

**Antoine de Saint-Exupéry**

Farmer field schools were first introduced in Indonesia in the late 1980s to help farmers deal with the pesticide-induced problem of brown planthoppers in irrigated rice. These schools evolved to address the challenge of pest management, by supporting ecologically-informed decision-making by farmers that would allow them to reduce pesticide use, improve crop management and secure better profit margins.

While initially introduced for integrated pest management, the concept spread rapidly to other continents and has been adapted for a range of crops including; tree crops such as bananas, various high value crops such as vegetables and fruits and industrial crops such as cotton and cocoa.

FFS curricula and learning processes have also been developed for:

- the livestock sector (dairy, veterinary care, poultry and integrated rice-duck systems, goat husbandry, aquaculture and fishing),
- land productivity issues (land and water management, soil fertility, land degradation),
- a range of social and health issues, such as food security, HIV/AIDS and vector-borne diseases, and
- environmental issues, such as water quality.

In the classic farmer field school the experiential learning takes place in the field, allowing producers to observe, measure, analyse, assess and interpret key agro-ecosystem relationships as the basis for making informed management decisions.

Over time adaptations have been made to suit the content and specific purpose as well as the methodology. Innovations include community-based selection of participants, “commercial plots” that enable participants to recover (some of) the costs of running a school, farmer facilitators, and a range of community-based institutional developments that capitalize on the self-confidence and leadership capacities created through the FFSs.

FFS succeed as they rely on skilful incorporation of the following principles:

- learner-centred, field based, experiential learning;

- observation, analysis, assessment, and experimentation over a time period sufficient to understand the dynamics of key (agro-ecological, socio-ecological) relationships;
- peer-reviewed individual and joint decision-making based on learning outcomes;
- individual and group capacity building.

Farmer field schools are not meant for simple technology transfer or the delivery of simple messages – as such they do not have a comparative advantage and are also not cost effective for those purposes.

This form of participatory learning is best suited to areas where problems and opportunities require a location-dependent decision or management. It is also appropriate for issues that entail articulation and implementation of changes in behaviour within the enterprise and where situations that can only be improved through development and application of location-dependent knowledge.

So, can FFS work in Australia? This form of participatory learning is relatively expensive compared to other extension approaches and very time consuming. While it is unlikely that we will start setting up FFS here, we should consider the positive components of this training and where possible incorporate these into training programs if applicable. In the case of complex technologies, such as integrated pest management, the FFS principle may well lead to greater adoption of IPM. Sustainable pest management is not a simple matter of ‘technology dissemination’, as then you may run the risk of overlooking crucial processes.

FFSs are not a universal panacea for development, nor are they a substitute for more familiar technology-centred or profit-driven approaches to rural development, such as extension, credit cooperatives, farmer training centres, or the use of mass media.

The aim is to build farmers’ capacity to analyse their production systems, identify problems, test possible solutions and eventually adapt the practices most suitable to their farming system. The knowledge acquired during the learning process enables farmers to adapt their existing technologies to be more productive, profitable, and responsive to changing conditions, or to test and adopt new technologies.

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Elske van de Fliert and Ann R. Braun, 2002. Conceptualizing integrative, farmer participatory research for sustainable agriculture: From *opportunities to impact*. *Agriculture and Human Values* 19: 25–38, 2002.



# Oh no! Not another team building exercise.....

**Kate Charleston, DEEDI**

This catch cry is not uncommon when I tell a group of people that we will start the day with a team building exercise. Many people equate team building with 'trust falls', hugging and touching people they do not know and while this may be a positive experience for a few – most of us prefer to keep some distance.

I recently read an article on the internet that stated "Team-building exercises are a bunch of crap; most people participate for two reasons — they're afraid they'll be fired if they don't, or else they'd rather be doing ANYTHING else than their jobs".

So, are team building exercises a waste of time or can we actually achieve positive outcomes? Text books and online articles tell us that team building exercises consist of a variety of tasks designed to develop group members and their ability to work together effectively. The purpose of team building exercises is therefore to assist teams in becoming cohesive units of individuals that can effectively work together to complete tasks. It would be great if team building activities actually achieved this but this is often not the case.

However, team building can have positive outcomes. My primary reason for using team building in extension activities is to improve communication and for participants to get to know each other. This is particularly useful at the start of meetings when dealing with people who do not know each other. It is important to note that you need to have some idea of the

people you will work with and tailor team building to the specific group. Activities that are inappropriate to the group will make participants uncomfortable and you defeat the purpose of the exercise.

There are many types of team building activities that range from kids games to games that involve novel complex tasks and are designed for specific needs. Some companies go to great lengths and do activities that last for several days – by which time most employees are exhausted, cranky and don't wish to spend any more time with their team members. No wonder then that team building tends to put most people off.

In my opinion, a team building activity should be a short exercise which is all inclusive and it should be fun. It should never become competitive as this only serves to single people out. So what are some examples of useful team building exercises?

At a recent professional development workshop for entomologists, groups were instructed to build an insect. Each group, made up of people from different regions, had to build an insect of a specific order. Materials such as string, balloons, pipe cleaners etc. were provided to each group and they had 30 minutes to build and then present their creation. Despite the "Oh no – not another team building exercise" most participants enjoyed the activity, people got to know each other and feedback was overall positive. It also provided an excellent start to the two-day event.

A hands-on activity like the above example works well when participants have similar interests such as entomologists building insects. It was less successful when a group of cotton industry advisors were asked to design, construct and test a hot air balloon. By the time the balloons were ready to take to the skies, many had lost interest in this activity which was too complex and took too long.

Team building activities do not have to be hands-on. You can also present groups with scenarios which they need to work out. One example is the classic survival exercise – your plane has crashed in the Arctic wilderness and your group has salvaged 12 items. The group must list the items in order of importance for survival and there must be agreement about these items as a group. Scenario activities such as these require good communication among participants.

Team building can, in many cases, be a useful component of extension. However, only use team building if there is a purpose to it. Assess the needs and interests of the team before you design an activity. And finally do not overdo it, keep it short and most importantly it should be fun.

*What's the best team building event you've ever tried? Or the worst? How did it help or hinder your team? What would your ideal team building event look like? Please write a comment, I'd like to know what you think*

ENET



# Book Reviews



## ***The Handbook of Intercultural Discourse and Communication***

*By Christina Brat Paulston*

Intercultural discourse and communication is emerging as an important area of research in a highly globalized and connected world, where language and culture contact is frequent and cultural misunderstandings and misconceptions abound. This handbook contains contributions from established scholars and up-and-coming researchers from a range of fields to survey the theoretical perspectives and applied work in this burgeoning area of linguistics.

Christina Bratt Paulson is a professor of linguistics at Columbia University and has written numerous books about communication and language.

To be published in January 2012

## ***Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making***

*By Sam Kaner, Lenny Lind, Catherine Toldi and Sarah Fisk*

The best book on collaboration ever written!" - Diane Flannery, founding CEO, Juma Ventures. Completely revised and updated, this second edition is loaded with new tools and techniques. It includes two powerful new chapters on agenda design and a full section devoted to reaching closure. The twenty chapters include topics such as the dynamics of group decision-making, participatory values, facilitator fundamentals, building shared frameworks of understanding and facilitating sustainable agreements.

Published in 2007

Available online

***Want to know more about farmer field schools? Below are two publications that may give you a greater insight into this form of participatory learning.***

### ***Farmer Field School***

*By F P Miller, A F Vandome and J McBrewster*

Published April 2010 (Available online)

### ***Farmer Field School – Approach to Legume Production in Myanmar***

*By Lwin Lwin Aung*

Published January 2011 (Available online)

**Editors' note – Have you heard of or read a great publication that is a must for extension officers? Write a review and/or let me know so we can share it with everyone in the next newsletter.**



# New APEN members

If you've recently joined APEN, welcome! You'll reap plenty of professional and personal rewards. If you've been in APEN for a few seasons now, be sure to say hello to the new members.



## Sally Muir

Sally Muir is currently a soils advisor at NSW Department of Primary Industries since 2006, preparing and delivering training in management of soil health to landholders and allied workers in the agricultural sector. Her speciality area is soil biology. She has had previous careers in food sanitation, tertiary education and research in environmental microbiology, plant nutrition and plant health. Sally has written over 50 published articles relating to her work and enjoys the challenges of research to discover more about soil health and make it easy and exciting for others to understand all about it!



## Kate Schwager

Kate Schwager is the Community Officer at the Cotton Catchment Communities CRC and works with researchers within the Communities programme to ensure that information from the resulting projects is appropriately extended to the broader community during and well beyond the life of these projects. Kate also develops and undertakes short research studies on socio-economic issues of significance to cotton communities. She develops and maintains relationships with key community organisations in all cotton communities and works with the Cotton CRC Communities Programme Leader and Communications

Officer to develop effective and relevant communication resources related to the Communities Programme research. Kate assists in the development of resources to enhance the Communities component of the Cotton CRC website, and helps a committee of 10 co-ordinate the Sustaining Rural Communities Conference held each year.



## Jill Alexander

Jill has spent the last 14 years as a grazing land researcher and extension officer with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries. During her time with the department she worked on a diversity of projects across northern Australia including the Queensland Dung Beetle Project and the Desert Uplands Long-term Carrying Capacity project. She developed the Stocktake land and forage condition monitoring package and contributed to the development of the Grazing Land Management EDGE workshops. Recently Jill started her own ag consulting business where she endeavours to carry on doing extension work within the

grazing industry. In her spare time Jill looks after her two little girls and assists her husband John running their grain growing enterprise on the Western Darling Downs.

Welcome to these new members who have joined since last edition. We're glad to have you all on board.

<b>Aysha Fleming</b>	TAS
<b>David Campbell</b>	VIC
<b>Sonia Muir</b>	NSW
<b>David Hickey</b>	QLD
<b>Kate Schwager</b>	NSW
<b>Byron Stein</b>	NSW
<b>Ashley Senn</b>	NSW
<b>Dave Mason</b>	NSW
<b>Ashley Beven</b>	VIC
<b>Matt Weinert</b>	QLD
<b>Sharon Morrell</b>	New Zealand
<b>Sally Muir</b>	NSW
<b>Sandra McDougall</b>	NSW
<b>David Troidahl</b>	NSW
<b>Claire Wade</b>	VIC
<b>Carol Rose</b>	NSW
<b>Jill Alexander</b>	QLD
<b>Ramonchito Lucas</b>	Philippines
<b>Bronwyn Roberts</b>	QLD
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<b>Heather Mason</b>	NSW
<b>Sarah Limpus</b>	QLD
<b>Bec Ballard</b>	NSW
<b>Hellene McTaggart</b>	WA
<b>Adam Northey</b>	QLD
<b>Joe O'Reagain</b>	QLD
<b>Jo Robertson</b>	NSW
<b>Monique White</b>	SA
<b>Sheeraz Ahmad</b>	NSW

*"We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop."*

**Mother Teresa**



# Future Focused - Young Australians Building Trust & Confidence in Agriculture

26-27 NOVEMBER 2011

APEN NSW and NSW Department of Primary Industries are coordinating the Future Focused workshop for young Australians involved in agriculture. The workshop will be conducted in **Sydney** on **26th & 27th of November**. Participants will be provided with an opportunity to share ideas amongst themselves and with Australian and International presenters committed to building trust and confidence in Agriculture and our food system.

The event will also include a number of young Australians sharing their experiences in promoting Australian agriculture and taking on leadership roles. Presenters from industry and government will also participate to give participants a wider perspective of agricultural issues. Opportunities will also exist for participants to reflect on their personal and professional development and focus on future actions they may take.

If you are young, know someone who is young, or maybe work for an organisation that may sponsor a young person to attend, the program and presenter details are available at [apen.me/ffagoz](http://apen.me/ffagoz)

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## Guidelines and deadlines

Submissions should be made in MS Word 6.0 with minimal formatting. A portrait photograph of the author is required. All photographs, figures and/or tables ought to be provided as separate files (preferably TIF or JPEG; photos scanned at 300 dpi). Feature articles should be around 1000 words and minor articles 500 words. The editor reserves the right to edit submitted material to meet space restrictions. Letters to the editor or general items of news of interest to the network are welcome. Articles should be submitted at least four weeks prior to publication.

Preference is given to articles that are grounded in some form of project or event.

**Editing: Kate Charleston**

**Layout: Ross Tasker, Snap Printing Wodonga, Victoria.**

**Production management: Rosemary Currie, APEN Secretariat, Wodonga, Victoria.**

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