

EXTENSIONNET

NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALASIA-PACIFIC
EXTENSION NETWORK (INC)

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EDITOR'S NOTES

OUR POINT OF VIEW - Future front pages will be available to espouse opinions in a reasoned way. The aim is to start debates. Guest editors, when producing an issue of ExtensionNet, will have the right to select that issue's contributor. Otherwise, people can submit contributions to me, but publication is as always at the editor's discretion.

EXTENDING EXTENSION-RESEARCH - This issue is only partly about research into extension, not all as planned. Not enough articles were readable and interesting to people other than fellow researchers, funding administrators or journal editors. I wonder if extending the results of extension research to practitioners receives the attention it deserves (as distinct from publishing in journals, reporting to funding bodies or teaching in class). I'd like to see a regular column extending research-into-extension.

THE NEXT ISSUE - The Tasmanian Chapter will produce the March/April issue. Other Chapters or special interest groups are urged to produce future issues. Guidelines about how to do this are available from me (please note my new address).

APEN BUSINESS NOTES

Paid up membership at 20 January 1995 stood at 176 ordinary members, five student members, four corporate members and two sponsors. APEN needs regional activities to drive it to the required 500 ordinary members, 14 corporate members and five sponsors by July.

Could established Chapters please provide the APEN Secretariat with their Bank Account (Commonwealth), so that we can transfer their share of the subscription money.

At the APEN committee meeting held on 21 November as part of the COMEX Forum some items were raised which are not covered elsewhere in this issue; the role of women in APEN, a lack of practitioners with basic training and a concentration of post-graduate people in APEN, relations with farmers and researchers, overcoming distances in Northern and Western Australia, involving more private industry people in some Chapters, and widening the disciplines and industries beyond agriculture and conservation.

THE NEXT APEN EXTENSION CONFERENCE

14 - 17 October 1996, Albury Convention Centre
The next Australasia-Pacific Extension Conference was scheduled for 1995/96. However, many Chapters prefer to organise a regional conference, seminar or other event first. There are also too many other conferences in related fields in 1995, and there is not enough time left. The interim Core Group and the conference working party thus agreed to delay our next APEN Conference until October 1996. The location was decided in Melbourne at the ComEx Forum. The venue has been booked.

OUR POINT OF VIEW



By Pam Swepson
and Janice Timms,
Queensland Department
of Primary Industries

NETWORK: Is It a Noun or a Verb or Both?

As we engaged in discussion with others about what we wanted in a South East Queensland/Northern New South Wales Chapter of APEN we discovered that we seemed to be talking at cross purposes with others. It seems to some of us that this is because we are using the word 'network' in a different way from some others.

We can progress our discussions if we make these two different meanings clear.

Some people use Network as a noun, and mean a structure. We, on the other hand, think of it primarily as a verb, a process. It is something that we do naturally and automatically in informal settings - if we are not unnecessarily obstructed by structures.

From our point of view, the term 'Network Organisation' is a contradiction in terms. Network is a process and organisation is a structure.

We think it is impossible to talk about an appropriate structure until we know how we want to network. It has been causing us some angst that the discussions about 'network' have been about 'structure' before we have discussed it as a 'process'.

Management literature suggests that structure needs to follow function. Invariably management imposes a structure and function has to fit in. This is what we are concerned is happening with APEN. Without a clearer understanding of our function, we are concerned about developing prematurely a structure that will restrict our function.

We personally will have no energy to put into another structured organisation because it reduces the time we then have for actual networking. We do, however appreciate the need for some structure. And the structure at national level seems appropriate. However, we believe that 'network' must remain a verb at regional level.

Our meetings of the Queensland Chapter of APEN have strongly resisted any structure. We are pleased that we will not have a 'management committee'. We are pleased, that, instead, we will have a 'facilitation group'. This group will organise the activities suggested so far and allow the structure to follow when it becomes clear what would suit our style of networking best.

As extension specialists we feel that it is important to be exploring the full range of extension methods, including the notion of 'network' as a process. ■

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Peter

As an extension specialist with the marine environment in north Queensland, I would be interested to know who else in the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network is also working in this 'field'. It seems that all APEN members are predominantly 'land-based', and therefore newsletter stories and conference agendas are land issue-based too. I realise that extension and community education principles are similar for any type of attitude or behavioural change programme, but I am after quite specific ideas and contacts for particular marine and coastal environments. Can you help?

Don Alcock,
Manager Extension & Training

CRC Reef Research Centre
Ph: (077) 814 976
Fax: (077) 814 099
e.mail: crc.reef@jcu.edu.au

Dear Peter

I am involved in the development and extension of Integrated Pest Management Programmes in vegetable crops. I'd appreciate the opportunity to get in touch with others working in this field. Can your Network provide this?

Tim Herman,
New Zealand Institute for
Crop and Food Research

Private Bag 92169, Auckland
Ph: 64 9 849 3660
Fax: 64 9 815 4201.

Please contact these extension colleagues if you work in the same areas.

Peter Van Beek, Editor



Tom Morley from the Keith Turnbull Research Institute and members of the Burnt Creek Landcare group setting up a site of the Paterson's curse crown boring weevil, *Mongulones larvatus*.

Landcare Groups & Biological Control

By Sue Darby, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Frankston, Victoria.

Scientists from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (Victoria) are improving the implementation of biological control of weeds by co-operating with groups in selecting and managing sites suitable for biological control. Groups are given colonies of appropriate biological control agents for release at selected sites and are trained to manage them as 'nursery' areas for re-distribution of agents to other suitable weak infestations. Participation of Landcare groups increases community understanding of biological control and integrated weed management. ■

Farm Business Management in Queensland - a Survey

By Don Cameron, University of Queensland, Gatton

A farm business management survey conducted by mail across all major rural industries in Queensland attracted a response rate representing approximately 2.6 per cent of the State's farmers. Responses revealed a wide range of attitudes to changing circumstances, both between and within industries, and some confusion as to how best to respond to change. There was general agreement on the need for decision-makers to upgrade skills in a range of business management areas, with areas of greatest need being identified. Key decisions and major risks affecting farm financial viability were identified, with considerable variation

between industries. Attendance by respondents in the last 5 years at business management related training opportunities, the main reasons for non-attendance, and preferences for the most suitable training format were recorded. The survey has provided information for formulation of rural industry training policy. ■

HARVEST HINTS

By Ian Ballantyne
Manager, Client Services, Sunraysia
Horticulture Centre, Mildura

The Sunraysia Horticultural Centre Video Unit (Agriculture Victoria) has established an innovative approach using broadcast television to communicate with dried fruit growers in Sunraysia.

Last year a pilot series of 30 second television segments were produced which focused on quality and productivity issues in dried vine fruit production. Each segment is replayed many times, often in prime time, and is accompanied by a commercial. Sunraysia Horticultural Centre staff are responsible for scripting, technical content and production while the air time is commercially sponsored and the technical production sponsored by the Victorian Dried Fruits Board.

The series was so successful last year that 28 dried fruit segments are planned for this year with the local citrus industry joining in and supporting another 5 segments. ■

Extension and Training Plan for the CRC for Ecologically Sustainable Development of the Great Barrier Reef

Reprinted with permission from the CRC Reef Research Centre Newsletter, September 1994



A twelve month plan to develop interactive communication, extension and training programs between the Centre's partners and client groups has been finalised. Don Alcock, on secondment from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) to manage the CRC Extension and Training Program, has developed the plan with input from various groups. Most people know the term 'extension' to mean a co-ordinated advisory service providing information exchange between reef management, research, user and industry groups. Another good definition is a system of direct contact between management and user groups which aims to encourage responsible behaviour of reef user groups and a change in user practices.

The Queensland Department of Primary Industries has developed a very useful definition of extension as 'the use of communication processes to identify and assist change in the decisions of its target population without coercion'.

The results of extension include:

- inputs into policy, legislative, technological and industry development;
- assisting people to identify and solve problems;
- education and training; and
- information and technology transfer.

It is a very strong view of the CRC Reef Research Centre's Extension Advisory Group that extension is seen in its broadest context: 'to facilitate change in the Great Barrier Reef region'.

The following are the priority areas for the program:

Communication

- Develop industry technical/extension advisory groups to assist in program delivery;

- Undertake or facilitate social market research for Centre program;
- Develop a communication network;
- Promote the Centre, its programs and staff;
- Facilitate internal communication; and
- Facilitate and promote liaison with industry and media.

Training

- Identify training needs of CRC staff and provide skills workshops for effective communication with client groups;
- Develop non-technical short courses to improve understanding of Reef

research, ecology and management issues for client groups; and

- Present courses using Centre resources or contract with agencies such as TAFE.

Community Education

- Facilitate preparation and distribution of quality written and audio visual materials;
- Assemble technical output from the Centre into information packages for target groups;
- Arrange preparation of technical posters and visual displays; and
- Promote Centre staff presentations at seminars, workshops and industry meetings. ■

CHAPTER ROUND-UP

Information supplied by Chapter contact persons

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The elected management group for South Australia from our meeting on 8 December 1994 is: John Bourne, Primary Industries SA (08) 303 9343; Michael Good, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (08) 226 2497; Paul James, Primary Industries SA (08) 389 8800; Mark Seeliger, CRC Soil and Land Management (08) 303 8672; and Leigh Waters, CRC Soil and Land Management (08) 303 8674.

A programme for 1995 was considered, including a dinner meeting on lessons from Landcare, a proposed debate or panel to discuss the interface between research and extension, and additional seminars addressing the community consultation process and evaluation in extension. *John Bourne.*

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

A core working group is canvassing support and suggestions for direction for the WA Chapter. This group is considering whether regional groups are more appropriate than a single State Chapter. This would make sense, given the geographic size of WA.

Initial meetings to appoint inaugural management committees for regional groups are likely in March. *Peter Nash.*

SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND

The elected 'management committee' proposes that it now be called a 'co-ordinating team', acting as initial caretakers. Its role is to act as a team to draw ideas from the South East Queensland Chapter members and arrange to implement them.

A survey was conducted to find out what activities APEN members would like the regional Chapter to run. An organising committee was subsequently formed to organise the first SE Qld APEN 'event'. *Larissa Wilson 07 365 1860.*

NSW NORTH COAST

The first meeting of the NSW North Coast Chapter has been delayed due to John Mackenzie, one of the organisers, being transferred and the other organiser, myself, having to relieve in Head Office until February 95. We hope to organise the first meeting in February or March 1995. *Peter Davies.*

(The holiday season, and my late reminder, are blamed for the silence from the other Chapters. Peter Van Beek.)

Needs Assessment Using Rapid Rural Appraisal

By Ken Crawford and Evelyn Hurley,
Agricultural & Horticultural Systems
Management Department,
Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.



A small class of senior undergraduate and post-graduate students at Massey University, as part of their learning experiences in planning for agricultural extension, undertook a needs assessment exercise. The prime objective was to identify farmers' needs within the farming and rural community, a secondary aim being for participants to gain experience in such assessments.



Of the 27 dairy farmers in a small geographical area (identified on the basis of a now non-functional discussion group), 15 were selected using criteria covering willingness to participate and the time allocated.

Interviews were essentially unstructured in order to avoid preconceptions and to elicit farm and farm family views and concepts about issues of concern to them, their farm, community and industry.

The interviewing group consisting of six students (including international students) and one staff member from a range of backgrounds and experience, including business, agriculture and development studies, formed two groups of two, three or four, and were rotated on a daily basis. One member was designated scribe, and interview notes were returned to the farmers to validate. Needs were grouped into five areas: information, community, family, education, farm operating and personal.

Conclusions from this brief pilot study were that:

- discussion group mode meets only some needs because of diversity in all areas;
- extension systems functioned but not in traditional ways; and
- Rapid Rural Appraisal principles can well be applied to the needs assessment phase of extension planning. ■

Using Grower Experiences to Enhance Extension Messages

By Sue Bestow, Extension Specialist
Western Australian Department of Agriculture, Geraldton

As extension officers we present information and educated opinions to a target audience in order to improve their knowledge. Through this improvement, we aim to influence growers' critical decisions to improve their wheat cropping efficiency.

To be effective, it is imperative that our information is correct, up-to-date and applicable to the growers' situation. This obviously requires us to be constantly updating our information base. To facilitate this, feedback from growers is imperative. In this case study, I did this by way of a survey which gave some excellent results and extension tools.

The 1992 growing season presented many growers in the northern and eastern areas of the wheat belt with an opportunity to sow wheat in April, an event that occurs about one year in three or four. Extension officers and research staff had little trial data on, or experience with, this practice. This was reflected in our extension and advice at the time. To ensure that the collective experiences of the growers were not lost, but rather were used to add to our previously limited information, I surveyed growers with April sown crops to ascertain:

- crop management techniques used by growers;
- actual crop performance with different management; and
- grower opinion of crop performance.

This tapped in to their combined experiences in a manner that was formalised. The results of the 172 grower responses were analysed and the survey results gave us a very clear message on the above.

This information was summarised into a set of 'rules of thumb' for future April sowings, which have been published. They are currently our best bet set of management tools for sowing crops in these circumstances which we can now use as a base line for future extension and research on the topic.

This has proved a very effective way of increasing our knowledge and enhancing our extension on very early sown wheat crops in Western Australia. The survey provided excellent back-up data to our own limited trial data in a more unusual year. Further to this it was used to base a Grains Research and Development Corporation research project which is now up and running. ■

Very Successful ComEx Forum

By Terry Makin, Interim President of APEN

The ComEx Forum was the first joint venture between the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science (AIAS) and the newly formed Australasia-Pacific Extension Network (APEN). Its aim was to determine some of the key issues that needed addressing to achieve best practice in extension and communication and what to do to progress these issues.

The program was designed to stimulate the learning of the participants by providing a workshop environment, with small groups defining the key issues, and plenary sessions where group learning was shared, and final priorities determined. The plenary sessions included key experts providing information about the latest theories and methodologies in evaluation, communication, learning and adult education; and several presentations of innovative successful extension programs.

The Forum was a very successful gathering of professionals from around Australia to determine the key issues affecting extension in Australia. Sixty-five professionals attended from around Australia, including the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Approximately half were employed by Departments of Agriculture and Primary Industries. Other major groups represented were; R&D corporations, CSIRO, private consultants and corporations, universities and educationalists, and Landcare and Conservation Departments.

The participants determined that the five major issues affecting best practice in extension were:

1. The project cycle (plan- implement-monitor and evaluate).
2. Securing ownership of projects.
3. Benchmarking for best practice in extension.
4. Professional education.
5. Networks; The role of APEN, AIAS, R&D corporations, farmer organisations, universities and government departments.

Issues and outcomes

The forum then developed actions for these 5 issues.

The Project Cycle

There had been a strong theme throughout the Forum of the importance of the project cycle of planning, implementation, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation. In particular, people thought that there was a lack of expertise and knowledge of evaluation and how to integrate it into the planning process. We need to be clear about what we are evaluating and how. How do we do this effectively? How do we assess the value and place of qualitative v quantitative evaluation. What are the different methodologies available? Participants thought that evaluation needed to become part of the culture of extension.

They concluded that it was important to develop a national database of the extension courses and education that are available to practitioners. This would allow practitioners to more readily access these courses and information to develop their skills in extension methodologies, including the concept of the project cycle and evaluation.

Benchmarking and Best Practice

There was uncertainty in the group about what benchmarking meant and how this could be done in the extension project cycle. Was it determining a reference point that reflected the performance of the extension profession? Did it imply a process of measuring current performance and then aiming for a target of improved performance? And in any case what were the variables for which reference points were established? Were they the issues which emerged during the Forum; the project cycle, securing ownership of projects, professional education and networks?

Clearly the Forum was unsure of how benchmarking and best practice could be carried out in extension projects. The extension profession needs to address this issue, as clearly, it has not been given a lot of attention before. This was signified by the uncertainty and lack of knowledge about benchmarking in the Forum discussions.

It was decided to pursue development of a national strategy for extension in Australia. This would be complementary to the National Strategy for Agricultural Research being developed.



Professional Education

The need for continuing education to support the extension professional was a common theme over the two-day Forum. It was suggested that the APEN branches could easily workshop their skills and educational development needs. (Some of the branches that are formed had already started doing this.) During the Forum, the project cycle, evaluation and benchmarking were highlighted as high priority areas to address. There was a need for flexible and modular post-graduate training.

Networks

Throughout the Forum, participants wanted to improve their knowledge and their professional development and be able to share this across differing organisations, industries and regions. They saw networking as a very important means of doing this by assisting in the sharing of knowledge, peer review of projects and programs, improving access to information, providing conferences and workshops and improving communication between professionals, both academics and practitioners. APEN was seen as starting to do this through its branches and ExtensionNet.

The Forum decided to further promote these ideas by running a national extension conference and by seeking funding for an R&D project to develop a better understanding of the extension professionals network and knowledge system.

Securing Ownership of Projects

Forum participants recognised the importance of clients having ownership in extension projects and of taking account of their needs. Examples of successful projects reinforced this and showed how different approaches were being followed. They also discussed the need for achieving a balance between all the stakeholders' interests. ■

Two Heads are Better Than One

By Ian Hubble, Principal Dairy Officer
Elliott Research Station, Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries,
Tasmania

With new developments and aids to the extension process, such as self-help information centres and farming by video, we should not forget that personal contact (one-to-one or in a group) is the major source of information and information exchange to aid a farmer's decision-making*.

Farmer discussion groups are a cost-effective form of communication and become an increasingly important activity for government extension officers to contact farmers as reducing resources necessitate a move to more group-based activities.

Discussion groups provide opportunities for comparison, learning and discussion (healthy debate at times!) and a social benefit (important as farmers often work in relative isolation).

A discussion group represents a combined pool of experience from which most of the information relevant to a topic or problem/issue readily comes forward. It can also broaden thinking through exposure to new ideas and the perspectives of others.

Various farmer discussion groups operate in Tasmania, including 23 dairy discussion groups (involving about 35% of Tasmania's 798 dairy farmers) which are at various ages and stages. Some groups have lasted for years; others have come and gone once their purpose has been served. Some groups are farmer led; others rely more on the dairy adviser.

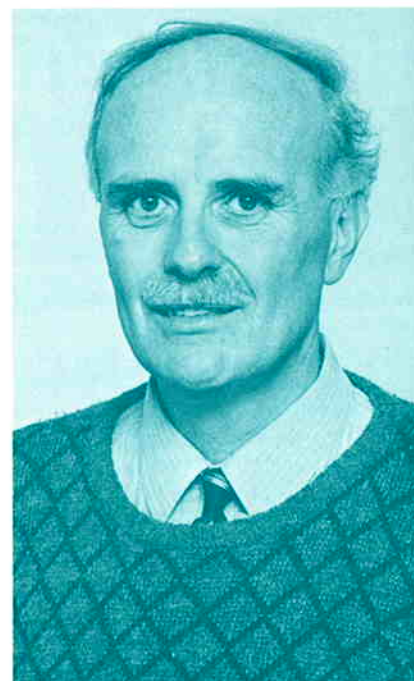
The dairy groups meet about every two months on participant's farms (usually on a rotating basis amongst members) to inspect the farm, discuss timely issues and hear items of interest from the farmer participants, dairy adviser and, perhaps, a visiting 'expert'.

Groups are very effective in sharing knowledge and experience to improve practices. Preliminary results from a survey of discussion group participants indicate that average productivity per hectare had risen from 477kg milksolids (MS)** (425kg State average) in 1988-89 to 637kg MS (540kg est. State average) in 1993-94. Key factors cited for this improvement were (in order of frequency of mention) more cows, better management, improved soil fertility, use of irrigation, rearing young stock off farm, strategic grain feeding and acquisition of more land.

Discussion groups are a valuable extension activity, helping farmers stay ahead by working from the neck up, rather than from the neck down.■

* See 'Information Exchange' A report commissioned by Australia's Rural Research & Development Corporations, Rural Extension Centre, Gatton, Qld, Sept 1993.

** Milksolids = solids of milk for which payment is made i.e. fat and protein.



ComEx Report

NOW AVAILABLE

The outcomes of the 1994 Communication and Extension Forum are now available in the ComEx Report for \$15 including postage.

For copies contact:
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1st Floor

91 Rathdowne Street
CARLTON VIC 3053
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