



# EXTENSIONNET

NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALASIA-PACIFIC  
EXTENSION NETWORK (INC)

AUSTRALIA POST APPROVED PP 34763700014

## From the Chair

*Terry Makin*

On June 13 I will attend a meeting to form another chapter of APEN to cover Western Victoria. We need to continue to attract new members to ensure we are a viable and effective organisation. As a new organisation with scarce resources we need your contributions and creative thoughts.

APEN has been shaped by its history of people in agricultural extension, tertiary education and Landcare who provided much of the early impetus behind APEN's inception. Yet its future can be shaped to capture the early vision of a more diverse membership around the **facilitation of social change**. ExtensionNet wishes to embrace a widening constituency. This could include increasing APEN membership among farmers; rural politicians; local government politicians; primary and public healthcare workers; individual, group, community and regional forms of enterprise management; rural counselling and consultancy; community learning, support and action groups, etc.

There is a growing appreciation that community change is a process where by sharing our collective knowledge through a process of discussion around key issues, and focused questions, we can gain new insights into our current situations. These insights can give us the ability to improve these situations in new and creative ways. A broader APEN membership with a wider knowledge base, will bring new perspectives to share with each other. This will improve our ability to add value to what we do.

As the approach to community development becomes more complex, institutions change, and people often become more isolated, we need to have better ways of coming together to share our knowledge and experiences. One area that appears to have potential to improve our communication and networking is Email and the Internet. John McKinlay is convening a working group in this area and would welcome ideas.

## Theme - Extension for Sustainable Rural Communities

*Elwin Turnbull*

Over the last decade or so there have been pressures on rural communities through the decline in the number of extension officers in the government sector and an increased community awareness in the environmental care area. New forms of government and non government structures have evolved under these conditions and there has been a parallel emergence of different extension theories to deal with this situation. This ExtensionNet is a chance to share some of the experiences of our group and to catch up on some of the guiding principles behind the initiatives. The first article by Robyn Penman uses insights from dramatic failures in communication in the PNG situation to analyse probable causes of poor communication between the scientific fraternity and farmers in Australia. The next article from Mary-Anne Young complements this assertion from some critical observation and action with farmers in the northern districts of South Australia. The clear inference is that people must be able to share a common intellectual framework if they are able to communicate effectively.

Experience from the Western Downs of Queensland shows the potential of teamwork by extension officers in building activities to help farmers which are within their framework. Property management planning and land care are not imposed constraints in this situation, rather they have become a means to an improved farming situation. It will be interesting to see if

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the early results of improved attitude to the DIP and better business management outcomes for farmers translate into more sustainable situations.

The final articles are book reviews provided by Horrie Poussard and Harold Mattner. The topics covered in

the books complement one another in that "Landcare; communities shaping the land and the future" tells the story of the movement to date and "The Environmental Imperative" takes a critical approach to the issue of environmental management through political and sociological concepts.

## Theme - Extension for Sustainable Rural Communities

### Talking About Farming Practices: The Didiman Said To Do It.

#### Robyn Penman

In 1977, Robert Scott wrote about agriculture and language in Papua New Guinea. According to Scott prior to large scale intervention by other nationals, Papua New Guinea farmers had developed a system of agriculture admirably suited to their ecological and social environment. Their land tenure system had developed around agricultural potential of the land, their concept of ownership, their need for defence, and certain other socio-religious influences.

Their gardening methods were influenced by practical and ecological needs. For example, crops were mixed to reduce the incidence of pest and diseases, and were not planted in rows, thus reducing erosion. In all, Scott's description of their agricultural system sounds remarkably like a sustainable one envisaged for today. But, something happened. The *didiman* - the expatriate agricultural officer - came.

Scott, who was one of the early *didiman*, explains that these agricultural officers failed to recognise the ecological balance of the indigenous agricultural activities and failed to acquire a language in which to do so. Instead, the *didiman* relied on Pidgin, and only to the minimal extent needed to give concrete instructions.



Scott believes that the consequence of this was to divorce the Papua New Guinea farmers from all involvement and decision making in agriculture. Agriculture instead, became a technical area of activity divorced from the villagers' broader practical world and rational deliberation. The *didiman* told the farmers what to do in concrete and simplistic terms, and the farmers did it - as labour, not as personal involvement. In doing this the *didiman* only used the existing Pidgin language (and not the local indigenous one) to describe new things and introduced little to the language except some simple naming: for example *bulmakan* for cow and *kopi* for coffee.

By the 1970's the advent of indigenous agricultural officers heralded some change. But, in Scott's assessment, "while the Pidgin of the past will be adequate to the task of concrete and action orientated things...it will need a massive infusion of simple and uncluttered English and adapted English terminology to meet the needs of our farmers. Without such growth and development [of an agriculturally adequate language] the farmers of this country will find they are limited in their ability to participate (p 731)".

Scott's analysis is very insightful. He directly points to the relationship between communication and agricultural practice. More specifically he shows how a language inadequate to the users' needs and one not sufficiently

undifferentiated) can inhibit agricultural practice.

#### The *didiman* in Australia - today!

I have written at length about Scott's article because I want to argue that a parallel situation exists in Australia today. We too have our own *didiman* - the agricultural extension officers - who, in **speaking the language of science, fail to speak a language that meets the needs of farmers.**

From our work on communication practices in the rural sector (funded by Lands and Water Resources, Grain and Rural Industry Research and Development Corporations) we have identified substantial problems arising from scientists focusing on the provision of technical information to farmers, without any consideration of what the farmers wanted to know and how they needed to know it. Scott identified this same problem when he described the *didiman* in Papua New Guinea providing concrete, technical information only, without any consideration of the broader social-ecological context or the information needs of the farmers.

The particular problems of **linguistic inadequacy and inappropriate communication practices** are exemplified with the concept of

In a recent study by Holsinger (1994), natural resource managers were asked what the term 'sustainable land use' meant to them. These managers had varied views on the term, including 'preserving resources', 'ecologically sound land use' and 'economically viable and minimal land degradation'.

Conversely, in another exploratory study into consequences of employing sustainable practices, farmers complained of the **'high input treadmill' associated with sustainability (Gray, 1994)**. It seems that to farmers in that study, the more sustainable you are, the more inputs into the land are necessary. In a different study, by Ison & Humphreys (1993), producers were asked to define 'sustainable land management'. Again, the views were varied and, in this study, the authors found they had to remove the term 'sustainability' from all discussions with producers because it created too much confusion. An earlier study by Tisdall (1990) points to one reason why there are problems with the term 'sustainable': **while many people favour 'sustainability' they want to sustain something different!**

Appropriate language - reverential adequacy & social adequacy

The appropriateness of a language can be assessed on the basis of a number of criteria. Two are particularly relevant here: reverential adequacy and social adequacy. The question here is how well does talk of sustainability measure up against these criteria?

For a language to have **reverential adequacy**, it must have sufficient lexical (word) resources to discuss a given topic in sufficient detail. Sufficient lexical resources require a language with sufficient distinctions for objects and actions, that has terms assigned to the right semantic category, and does not have non-functional synonyms. On the basis of the studies cited above, it would seem that the

concept of 'sustainability' does not meet these criteria and fails on the grounds of reverential adequacy. It is semantically vague and semantically undifferentiated, meaning many different things to many different people.

**Social adequacy** requires that language is acceptable to a maximum number of speakers in the target community, promote social unity and communication and cater for present as well as future social needs. The documented inability of producer and natural resource managers as specific rural groups to agree on what sustainability means suggests the concept is not one held, with the same reverential meaning, amongst speakers in the same community. Indeed, as the studies described above indicate, different farming groups can hold opposed meanings of the term. And the data from Ison & Humphreys (1993) would suggest that the concepts do more to divide and confuse the community than promote a unity; discussions proceed better without the term than with it.

I can't but wonder here as to the reason. Within rural communities, practices implicated by the concept of 'sustainability' have been used for centuries. Farmers may not have used the word 'sustainable' but many have engaged in farming practices that reflect what at least I think is the underlying philosophy of the word. Despite the 'bad press' of overgrazing and tree-felling (the latter once forced by government decree and grants), many farming families know they must keep the land in the same or better state for future generations (Holsinger, 1994). So why do they find the word 'sustainable' confusing?

People often find words and concepts confusing when they are not words or concepts that they have generated out of their own context to serve their own needs. This would strongly suggest that the concept of sustainability is confusing because it came from outside the rural community. Sustainability is a

term imposed by others, our very own *didiman*.

...we need a more appropriate and adequate way of talking; a way of talking that meets the information needs and practical contexts of our clients...

As with the experiences described in Papua New Guinea, inadequate and inappropriate talk about agricultural practices means the implementation of inadequate and limited practices. To foster truly sustainable agriculture we need a more appropriate and adequate way of talking; a way of talking that meets the information needs and practical contexts of our farmers.

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Article used with the permission of the author, *Robyn Penman*. First published in "Communication News" 8(1) January 1995.

Communication News is a publication of the Communication Research Institute of Australia  
PO Box 8, Hackett ACT 2602



## Attitude/Behaviour Study Changes Extension Approach

*Mary-Anne Young*

Farmers in the northern agricultural districts of South Australia have been tackling water erosion for over fifty years, primarily through the installation of contour banks. Contour banking has become a widely adopted practice on sloping cropping land, and has been complemented more recently by a swing to stubble retention and reduced tillage.

However, there are still some individual properties and areas that suffer water erosion and lag in the adoption of control measures. A study was conducted to gain a better understanding of the possible reasons for this lack of adoption.

Members of three neighbourhood groups were interviewed and it was

found that while all three groups expressed very positive attitudes towards soil conservation and tended to recognise soil erosion as a problem on their properties, the adoption of soil conserving practices by one group differed significantly from the other two. This particular group differed in its beliefs about the causes of water erosion and about financial constraints. Members tended to blame water erosion on the weather rather than on farming practices, and felt they could not make a living and completely control water erosion on their properties.

Since the completion of the study, the demand for the surveying of contour banks in the area this particular group inhabits, has increased. This could be due to "conscience-pricking" resulting from the study or the establishment of contact with the soils officer who conducted it, prompting farmers to act on their water erosion problems. The interviews have significantly increased the officer's understanding of the group

members' concerns about controlling water erosion. Emphasis on the relatively low cost of contour banking (approximately \$8.00/ha) and the visual evidence of success in controlling erosion where banks have been recently built on particular problem areas have served to address some of *these* concerns.

The study highlighted that awareness of water erosion, knowledge of control measures and expression of positive attitudes towards soil conservation are not enough to achieve adoption. An understanding of all the factors in the adoption process is required to achieve behavioural change.

*Mary-Anne Young* is Senior Soils Officer, Jamestown District Office, Primary Industries SA



## Property Management Planning - Western Downs Style

*Jim Kirchner*

The Western Downs Property Management Planning project is funded by the National Landcare Program, directed by a voluntary group of local landholders and administered by the QDPI. The project involves forming small groups of landholders for the purpose of property management planning and delivering information they identify as being important to prepare their property plans. The Landcare appointed Coordinator, Jim Kirchner, networks with a range of DPI personnel from a number of DPI centres, to ensure the most accurate and appropriate information is delivered to the property management planning participants.

Given the nature of the project and the manner in which it is presented to the groups, much of the extension work needs to be developed in a brief period of time. Giving the PMP participants the opportunity to request any information they feel is necessary, requires the team to work closely together to ensure the land holders expectations are met so their interest in seeking additional information is fostered.

### Achievements so far

In the first 12 months, a Landcare Centre was established in the first 3 months and 13 new PMP groups were formed, with 9 of those groups attending 1 or more workshops, involving

84 families or production groups which accounts for 142 people. In addition to this, 6 field days were organised, with a total of over 300 people attending those days.

The range of workshops topics that have been delivered are wide and varied and include:

- Silage production
- Water harvesting and catchment yield estimation
- Pasture establishment
- Rainfall simulator
- Woody weed control
- Strip cropping
- Deep ripping trials
- Computers in agriculture
- Melon hole levelling
- Alternative enterprises
- Farm Management options
- Manual financial record keeping
- Summer crop options
- Fodder shrubs

*Continued - Page 5*

*Jim Kirchner* is the Western Downs Property Management Planning Coordinator

### How the project operates

As no groups were already in existence, the process must begin from "scratch".

A list of potential candidates in one particular area is compiled with the assistance of a local landholder interested in the PMP process.

The landholder is encouraged to **spread the word** before the Coordinator **phones the people** on the list. Generally there is an acceptance over the phone, and an aerial map mosaic is ordered. Once completed, **the Coordinator personally delivers the aerial map mosaic to the landholder**. During this visit the coordinator and landholder/s (the Coordinator encourages all members of the management team to be present during this visit) discuss the natural resources that appear on the map at length and travel into the paddock and do a number of field soil tests at depth using 1 metre soil coring tube. Soil characteristics and production issues are discussed while in the paddock. The landholder/s are presented with a brief information package about PMP, and taken through a card selection system to **identify the issues** they feel are currently most important to their farming enterprise. This provides the participants with a far better understanding of PMP and a focus for the first workshop.

**The first workshop** provides a non threatening environment that encourages focussed discussion to identify the needs and issues as seen by the landholders and builds on the information gathered from the property visit. The day begins with a video, "The Power of Paradigms". This is shown to broaden the emphasis of the day and try to draw their attention away from what was happening on the property the morning before the workshop. Each participant introduces themselves with the aid of their aerial map mosaic, giving a brief explanation of their current operation and future plans for the property. Using a workshop process, participants are encouraged to list what they see as the most limiting factors in their business. This list is then prioritised into those issues they have control over or influence on and those they do not. This session is followed by a soils classification, uses and problems workshop, which generally draws out some agronomic questions which are tackled by the agronomist present.

Following a brief field trip which highlights an activity or approach being used by the landholder where the workshop is being held, participants are asked to map their soil types. Once this session is completed, we return to the "limiting factors" list and formulate an action plan for the group to follow in the future. Participants are also asked to provide feedback on the day in regard to expectations. Before closing, the benefits of PMP and the process are reiterated using a short video and brief discussion.



*Field trip on property where the workshop is held*

As a **result of the first workshop**, DPI extension staff and the Landcare Coordinator has a firm idea on the topics or issues the group wish to see addressed.

Delivery of this follow-up information requires tremendous team effort between a range of DPI staff and Landcare Coordinators, to ensure information is delivered in a manner that is acceptable to the target audience and in a suitable time frame.

The process is having the effect of bringing many more people into contact with DPI who had not previously done so. The result is an improved impression of and attitude towards DPI and Landcare, plus a willingness to seek more information to make more informed management and planning decisions. The process also facilitates the transfer of information between landholders and in some cases alleviates some misunderstandings between adjoining landholders.

The most visual results of the project so far is the desire of PMP participants to seek more information about a range of production and planning issues. Given the early stages of the project and difficult climatic conditions experienced on the Western Downs for the past 4 to 5 years, no major indications are demonstrated in "on-ground" works. However there is definite increased awareness in business management, possibly the only area participants have had the opportunity to alter their operations in such a short time.

By taking the approach of having one member of the team, (Landcare Coordinator), spending much of the time contacting and encouraging participants in the PMP process, allows other members of the team time to formulate and develop the content and delivery of the extension work identified during the workshops. This results in a very efficient, effective and targeted approach to extension work.





## APEN International Conference "Delivering Outcomes in Extension"

APEN is planning to run an International Conference in September, October, November or December 1997. A possible theme is: "Delivering Outcomes in Extension"

The Conference Committee met in Albury on 30th April and came up with the following ideas:

### The Audience:

landcare members, environmentalists, private consultants, extension providers (public/private), students, primary producers, small property owners, education providers, policy planners (govt/industry), researchers, non government organisations, local government, community groups - bush fire brigades etc, overseas delegates - international, Aboriginal landcare groups, women, university of the third age, overseas institutes, World Development Bank, WHO, AusAid - *anyone who has a message to get across*

### Possible Themes:

The themes need to lead to "Outcomes" for sustainability, community, industry, the profession (skills/networks) - local, regional, national, worldwide

#### **\*Evaluation\***

Accountability/ monitoring/  
continuous improvement

#### **\*Partnerships\***

Defining roles (Providers)  
public/private/communities  
co-learning  
providers/clients/stakeholders

#### **\*Lessons from other disciplines\***

marketing/communication/IT  
(Telstra)/ philosophy/ anthropology/  
sociology/ psychology/ adult education

#### **\*What's New?\***

extension theory and practice

#### **\*Extension approaches to complex problems\***

how to/what works/are you being  
inclusive?/learning from failures

#### **\*Managing Change\***

changed roles-industry/ social/  
economic  
changed roles for-practitioners/  
communities/ individuals/  
environment

### Possible Speakers:

RIRDC - Roslyn Prinsley (Review), Andrew Campbell/Jim Woodhill/Brian Sarsbrick/Anna Carr/Alan Curtis (Landcare), Terry Makin, Bob Macadam/Richard Bawden/Beth Woods/Barrie Bardsley/Max Coster (Education), Ian Crook/Ian Gibb/Kondinin Group (Peter Cook)/Bob Currie/Nigel McGuckian/Mike Stephens (Private), Jerome Winston (evaluation), Don Burnside (WA), Don Blackmore (MDBC), TAC speaker (Melb Chapter Seminar), Hugh McKay (Sydney), Telecom - Info Tech speakers from Ballarat VFF, Alistair Crombie (Adult education)

### Structure:

Model as per Dairy Horizons?, Cater for 4 learning styles - Pragmatists, Activitists, Theorists, Reflectors, - Delivery - forums, plenary sessions, small interactive workshops, open space, tours (participants, non-participants), 3 DAYS/2 NIGHTS

### Venue:

Albury, Canberra or Melbourne. Department of Land and Water Conservation NSW are potential major sponsors and they may prefer Albury. A possible venue in Albury is The Scots School during October 1997.

*The Conference Committee* (Jo Millar, Terry Makin, Peter Davies, Warren Straw, Tony Dunn and Rosemary Currie) are looking for:

- ① people wanting to submit papers or run workshops,
- ② feedback on any of the information above,
- ③ people for the steering committee,
- ④ ideas for possible speakers,
- ⑤ possible sponsors,
- ⑥ ideas, ideas

Please ✉, fax, ☎, or Email  
Rosemary at the  
Secretariat with your  
ideas.

By June 28th please  
See cutout sheet on next page



**APEN Members**

# Have Your Say

We need your ideas for the  
**1996 AGM**

It needs to be held about  
November 1996

Do you know of any speakers,  
visiting gurus, a subject we could  
build a Forum around, a possible  
venue?

Let Rosemary at the Secretariat  
know by July 3rd please. The  
Committee of Management needs  
to start planning at our next  
teleconference - 3rd July

See page 8 for cutout  
sheet



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## APEN International Conference "Delivering Outcomes in Extension" IDEAS SHEET

I would like to submit a paper/ poster/ run a workshop on the  
following topic:

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Feedback on/ suggestions for:  
title: \_\_\_\_\_

date: (any clashes with other conferences/events?) \_\_\_\_\_

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audience: \_\_\_\_\_

themes: \_\_\_\_\_

---

speakers: \_\_\_\_\_

---

structure: \_\_\_\_\_

---

venue: (preferred and any other comments) \_\_\_\_\_

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I would / not like to be on the steering committee: (name, telephone) \_\_\_\_\_

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suggestions for sponsors: \_\_\_\_\_

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ideas, ideas: (see space over page) \_\_\_\_\_

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Your telephone, fax, Email: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please fill out and the form over the page and send to the Secretariat*