

EXTENSIONNET

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“Partnerships in Extension – Extending the Boundaries”

As government pulls out from the provision of agricultural extension and research corporations and private enterprise move in, the recognised pathways of technology transfer between research and extension have become blurred. The objective of the APEN forum at Roseworthy SA, December 2 and 3, 1998, was to look at the opportunities for the old and new players in the extension system to learn and work together. Summaries from some of the presentations at the forum are presented here and full papers may be accessed from the Proceedings.

Some Forthright Crystal Ball Gazing



Geoff Fosbery of Farm Focus Consultants, P.O. Box 321, Northam, WA addressing the national forum.

The concentration of Agriculture Western Australia on group extension is reducing the ability of their officers to understand the implications of their advice on individual farming businesses. I can see that **development officers will wish to accompany private consultants on individual farmer visits.** This time can be allocated to the development officers' training time.

Resellers are finding the margins on products to be too small to maintain free agronomic services to farmers and are now beginning to charge for their services. As agronomists begin to charge for their services **they will learn their true worth and question why the company they work for should**

be taking a slice of the action. This prediction is re-enforced by the number of company agronomists wanting to discuss their future options and directions.

Government institutions will concentrate on research, development and maintenance of natural resources. They will need to continue to extend their findings to the private sector as well as their group structures. There will need to be constructed **some more solid feedback linkages to government institutions from the private sector** to make sure problems that are defined in the paddock are actually addressed by the research institutions.

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Coming event: “The Role of Extension Education in a Global World”

14th European Seminar of Extension Education, Agricultural University of Cracow, Poland,
August 30 – September 4, 1999. Papers required by 30th April.

More information: email ese@rol.ar.krakow.pl or through the APEN Secretariat.

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From the Editor

Elwin Turnbull

This edition was collected with the hard work of **Emma Leonard** who gathered ideas from the speakers at the conference and **Roe Currie** with the APEN business matters. The following short articles describe the thrust of some of the papers presented at the conference and the outcomes of the discussion. There was also the fun of a role play with an APEN anthem created for the after dinner entertainment by "Helpful Productions". This anthem highlighted the real need to work together for the effectiveness of our own professional roles and by good fortune, for the benefit of our clients and communities. There was much more discussion at the conference than mentioned in this newsletter and the full proceedings are now available. Hopefully this newsletter will provide you a starting point for networking with one or two new people with ideas about extension which build on the way you think and act in your various roles in our rural communities.

As always we are seeking articles for this newsletter and hope that you could put pen to paper to let APEN know about the ways you are thinking and acting as an extension professional. Email, fax phone or post either Elwin or Roe so we can make sure that your good ideas or key problems are the basis of learning for all of us as we try to improve our effectiveness.

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**PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE FOURTH ANNUAL
GENERAL MEETING,**

WEDNESDAY 2ND DECEMBER 1998,

UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE, ROSEWORTHY CAMPUS

This has been another year of growth for APEN. I would again like to recognise the hard work of the Committee of Management, who collectively "grease the wheels" and keep the organisation running.

We have already congratulated Peter Davies and the organising committee of the Albury Conference on the tremendous success last November, but I would like to repeat that for the annual report. Subsequently Peter has initiated discussions on greater involvement of private sector extension in APEN, which has led directly to the theme of Private and Government Sector Partnerships at the Forum at Roseworthy. This initiative has come from the conference at Albury last year, where it was recognised that a greater balance of private and government input was important for APEN to continue to represent the changing face of extension.

Bob Edgar has been a most able treasurer and together with Rosemary Currie has kept a critical watch over our finances. Roe has done an excellent job again this year as our Secretariat, and continues to be the focal point for much of the networking that goes on.

ExtensionNet is still APEN's most visible sign to most members, and I would like to thank Elwin Turnbull for putting together all of the editions this year. He is currently working in Nepal but has still managed his editing role by e-mail.

(Continued on Page 8)

What the Client Wants

Peter England, Woolgrower, Kingston SA. (Summary by Denys Slee)



APEN Chairman, John Bourne (centre) with keynote speakers Peter England and David Heinjus.

At the forum, Kingston SA woolgrower Peter England gave an example of **problem solving and action** by a group of local graziers.

The group comprised 12 producers all with heavy emphasis on Merino wool production and very limited crop production. **The key common factor was recognition of skill limitations** to pasture and livestock assessment and scope for improvement in performance of their livestock enterprises. The key initiating activity was a Prograze course centred on Keilira station.

Commitment was cemented by the diabolical 1996 season over which pastures and livestock were monitored. 1996 had an extremely later break and wet winter. This saw course participants constantly applying their new skills at home and collectively challenging concepts such as the minimum "food-on-offer" for varying categories of livestock.

The inevitable question of "what do we do next" was answered by a successful application to IWS for PIRD funding. The project topic was "fixing the autumn feed gap", the ultimate targets being a 10 per cent increase in lambing percentages and a tensile strength

improvement of 10 Newtons per kilotex. The \$10,000 funding was to be applied in roughly equal proportions to testing of feed and wool, study tours, consultancy fees and facilitation expenses.

In the 17 months since commencement of the two year PIRD project in July 1997, all participating farm businesses in the Keilira Farm management Group have:

- Established base line levels of pasture productivity, wool quality and reproductive performance.
- Assessed the nutritive value of the autumn feed base.
- Travelled extensively in similar environments in WA assessing feed base and sheep management strategies.
- Critically assessed the range of 20 strategies identified in WA.
- Established on-farm trials to evaluate those strategies judged to best offer prospects in the Keilira environment
- Participated in a second study tour of farm businesses, research activities and wool processing facilities through Victoria and southern NSW.

Strong team work, group ownership and excellent communication have been highlights of the group's activities. **The coordination, data analysis and reporting services provided by the facilitator**, the regional sheep and wool officer with Primary Industries and Resources SA, have clearly been a critical element in maintaining the group momentum as has the strong sense of enjoyment and social interaction at frequent meetings, all of which include a meal and a guest speaker.

Field inspections and discussion of members' on-farm trials, has no doubt contributed to members' willingness to adopt new technology. For example, a successful trial planting of Cadix Serradella on one participating property in 1997 has spread to broad-acre sowings by five additional members in 1998, plus trial planting by another two.

Bonding of the group strengthened during study tours has seen the group well positioned to take on other technology adoption initiatives.

Already five members have signed up for The Woolmark Company Triple P program and another sub-set is participating in an SA initiative to establish marketing alliances between woolgrowers and major early stage processors. The group is **moving towards employing a private farm management consultant** to assist with benchmark analyses and technical advice.

Views from the Input Supplier Perspective

Brenton Lewis, Business Development Manager, IAMA, Agribusiness Pty. Ltd.

In my mind in the future there will be **less farmers and less providers** as we know them today. Tomorrow's supplier of services will not resemble that of yesterday and to some degree the multi agent is at threat as well due to the shrinking supply chain and the inventory cost in the face of declining sales. The action of decreasing margins is not the way to survive in the long term, saving a few dollars on a drum of chemical or a tonne of fertiliser isn't doing anybody in the circle any good. The key is to **provide products and**

services that increase the profitability and long term viability.

Producers need services that can keep them competitive in world markets and there are adjustments to be made all round with a **'going-it-together' attitude** as an industry. If Agribusiness in South Australia and furthermore in Australia is going to continue to progress, I believe **we can learn a lot from the wine industry** to see how it has grown but also established

profits and had reasonable control over its own destiny.

In the short term, Agribusiness needs to be much smarter at marketing its services, whilst producers need to be better at marketing their end products with production. In the longer term, I see a bright future for Agriculture and Agribusiness but the hard yards are still to come.

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Building Partnerships with Government

Anne Currey, Naturally Resourceful Pty Ltd, Alstonville, NSW 2477

In the last few years the attitude in government to working with private industry, including consultants, has changed markedly. Industry is being encouraged to enter into partnerships with agencies to achieve particular outcomes. Communications is a relative newcomer to this partnership model. As its role becomes more accepted, more sophisticated approaches, based on concepts such as communication competence will be recognised as integral to any project.

Communication

One of our concerns at Naturally Resourceful has been to extend the concept of communication so that it is more encompassing. For example we impress on groups we work with the importance of other forms of communication, such as interpersonal communication, in getting a message across. We also emphasise the importance of knowing why they

want to communicate a particular message rather than simply the appropriate process, eg. to do it.

This is all related to a concept called "communication competence". This concept sees **communication not as a linear process** ie. source > message > channel > receiver, **rather it is a circular, reflective process** involving a sensitivity to factors such as perceptions and world view of those involved in the communication loop and an ability to listen. Communication competence "involves **understanding** what to say or do **as well as being able to say or do it.**" (Kaye 1994).

In this context the inter-relationship of communication and extension becomes obvious. In the past, extension was practised very much according to the linear model, ie. results from research have been "transferred" to the farmer audience via

extension tools such as field days, on farm visits and publications. However, in the eighties questions were asked about the success of this model. Extension has undergone a change in focus away from the linear approach to one that is circular and more holistic.

Role of the Consultant

A recent article in *Management Review* (February 1998) outlined a "new look" for the consulting industry today based on:

- Accountability ie. consulting firms producing some sort of change rather than simply a report full of recommendations
- High visibility and hands-on effort ie. not just observing, studying and taking notes, rather being involved in implementing changes recommended, for example by training staff

- Short term timeframes, ie. benefits are required not in years but in periods of months
- Innovative fee arrangements eg. pay-for-performance or success based billing linking payment to achievement of stated goals.

Fundamental to our consulting approach at Naturally Resourceful is a belief in the necessity of combining the concept of communication competence within the framework of a relationship based on partnership and full disclosure of information.

Role of Agencies

Our experience has shown us that if industry, which includes consultants, and government agencies are to have a meaningful partnership then the agencies have a role to play as well.

There must be more than lip-service paid to the input of industry.

Rather there needs to be a commitment to partnership, which for some people in some agencies and organisations is a difficult paradigm to shift. Related to this is a commitment

to doing things differently. If there is no commitment to this then there is hardly any point in calling on the input of consultants like us.

The objectives of projects and issues at stake need to be clearly stated. **If there are assumptions that aren't stated a project can end up a disaster.**

This means that constant communication and checking of where a project is up to is essential.

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Shrinkage of Public Sector Agricultural Extension

Sally P. Marsh and David J. Pannell, Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Western Australia, 6907.

The ideas in this paper are based on the findings of research funded by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation. **A more detailed description of this work and other related papers are available on the Web: www.general.uwa.edu.au/u/spmarsh.**

In Australia, extension services are currently funded and delivered in many different ways. There is a trend towards increasing service delivery by the private sector with either public or private sector funding, or a mix of both. In the prevailing political climate, there is every indication that this will continue and that there will be further growth in the private sector.

There are at least **three means by which agencies are achieving the partial privatisation of funding for extension services.**

1. By simply **ceasing to provide funds** for particular areas of extension (eg. herbicide advice). The gap is being filled in part or in

whole by farmer funds paid direct to the private sector.

2. By starting to **charge for private-good information.** Farmers are likely to have lower demand for this information, or to shift their demand to private sector providers.
3. By **selling service units to the private sector.** We are not aware of this happening in Australia in the same way as it has, for example, in New Zealand. However it is happening by default and for free because many people are leaving public agencies.

The result of each of these approaches is reduced government funding for traditional types of agricultural extension. There are justifiable fears that government extension is somewhat vulnerable to potential further cuts in funding. The push for accountability and the withdrawal from provision of private goods combine to threaten the security of existing public funding.

These three approaches also help to deliver privatisation of extension delivery. In addition this is pursued by outsourcing (ie. use of public funds to purchase private sector services). Unlike the previous three approaches, outsourcing can be applied to public good extension.

The two core questions still facing government extension are:

- **What should government continue to fund?**
- **What should government continue to deliver?**

We have noted that there are **ideological and theoretical ideas** which are influencing the push for change in the answers to these questions, but these **ideas are not fully appreciated or understood by many of those responsible for implementing the changes.** Those agencies that have changed or are changing face substantial challenges in getting clear the answers to these questions and getting them widely understood.

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APEN ANTHEM

We need co-operation
 We need a flow of information
 We can't do it alone
 We can't do it alone

I've got to learn to communicate
 I need someone to facilitate
 Everything's taken on a new dimension
 I've got a lot of family tension
 Should I hire an agronomist?
 Should I give up and just get pissed?
 I've got to come up with a business plan
 A farmer can't be superman

We need co-operation
 We love to have participation
 We can't do it alone

Farmer/community group/individual (eg Ag Bureau, Landcare, Farmer)

We need the information
 We welcome new participation
 We can't do it alone
 We can't do it alone

Research/Education Groups (Scientists/Unis/educational bodies/Industry research councils)

We need good education
 We need funds for Experimentation
 We can't do it alone
 We can't do it alone

Agribusiness/freelancer Elders/individuals

We need a reputation
 Good profits mean continuation
 We can't do it alone
 We can't do it alone

Policy makers/Govt Depts

We want co-ordination
 So we can match the legislation
 We can't do it alone
 We can't do it alone

Communicator/Media Rep (freelancer/lecturer/journalist)

With good communication
 We spread the information
 We can't do it alone
 We can't do it alone

As sung at APEN forum, Roseworthy College, Wednesday 2nd December 1998,

Helpful Productions (08) 8271 9271

1998 AGM

Before the fun of the Conference Dinner and the entertainment provided by **Helpful Productions** (see the rest of this page), the AGM was held. The President's Report is printed on pages 2 and 8 with a brief summary of APEN finances on page 9. Elections were held for positions on the Committee

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 committee is
 for contact de

President
 John Bourne

Vice Prende
 Peter Davies

Helpful Productions calling for help in song for a needy farmer



The chosen helpers are given appropriate headwear.



They are then asked to link arms



and form a team to work with the needy farmer (see appropriate hat).



Management and the 1998/99 committee is as follows: (See back page contact details)

President
 John Bourne South Australia Chapter

Secretary
 Amabel Fulton Tasmanian Chapter

Treasurer
 Bob Edgar Melbourne Chapter

Editor
 Elwin Turnbull SE NSW & ACT

Committee
 Chris Sounness Western Victoria
 Sally Marsh Western Australia
 Emma Robinson SE Queensland Chapter
 John McKenzie Central NSW Chapter
 Jane Fisher Melbourne Chapter
 Dick Kuiper New Zealand Chapter
 Horrie Poussard Overseas Chapter



The helpers must get together

to work as a team

until a solution is "Bourne"

John Bourne.

Then the APEN Anthem is sung with pride!

PRESIDENT'S REPORT *(Continued from Page 2)*

Sally Marsh was seconded during the year as our WA representative when Ian Maling left the committee due to a change in job. Sally has a wide perspective of extension around Australia as shown by her paper during this Forum.

Chris Sounness from Horsham is addressing policy issues for APEN. He is working on a draft policy document and strategic plan which I am sure he will circulate widely for comment in the near future. It is easy to be caught up in day to day extension activities without stepping back and looking at the big picture, and seeing what progress we are really making. The only way to do this is to have a strategic direction and to continually monitor progress towards stated goals.

My experience is that many field extension people don't put strategic planning high on their list of priorities. I think we need to change this perception and to quote an old cliché, failing to plan is a plan to fail.

Dick Kuiper from Massey University in NZ, joined the Committee early in the year and has provided lots of helpful input during our two-monthly teleconferences.

This is the end of their two year term on the committee for Sue Hinton from Tasmania and Jane Wightman from Queensland. I would like to thank both of them very much for their efforts and time that they have given to APEN in this capacity.

Horrie Poussard is our overseas representative, who is still working in Vietnam. This year he has contacted a wide range of people in the Asia-Pacific region to bring APEN to their attention.

There have been a number of worthwhile events taking place in the chapters this year. The Tasmanian chapter ran a very successful workshop in Launceston in July of this year, "Who's listening? - The Place of Communication Technologies in Rural Communities". This included a number of segments on how and when to use electronic communication techniques. This is clearly an area that we need to continue to address as extension people, and so have a session on new techniques tomorrow as part of the Roseworthy Forum.

The Melbourne chapter has run several excellent meetings this year, and tried to extend their own boundaries by addressing non-agricultural extension situations. On the concept of planning, this chapter has also produced a very professional business plan for the coming 12 months. I would recommend that all chapters seriously consider a similar process as a way of focussing our resources.

An interest meeting was held at Hamilton in October to begin a new Borders chapter, to cover south western Victoria and the SE of South Australia. The meeting was advertised as a night of Laughter and Learning which was certainly the case, thanks to the organisation of Lee-anne Mintern from Hamilton and Debbie Cesari from Mt Gambier.

As a promotional exercise APEN sent a display and two delegates, Bob Macadam and Mike Gooley, to the annual conference of the Australasian Association of Agricultural Consultants in September at Macquarie University in Sydney. This was to complement the initiative of involving more private sector extension people in APEN.

It was pleasing to receive a letter in October from the Murray Darling Basin Commission, requesting an APEN representative on a steering committee for one of the Commission's projects. The project is, "Tools to Investigate and Plan for Improved Management of Dryland Salinity - Stage 2". This is clearly recognition that APEN is an important stakeholder in the process of adoption of new technology and community development, and can provide through its members clear direction in appropriate extension methodology to organisations or groups. I see this as a role for which we should promote ourselves more in the future. In this case we have asked Tony Dawson, from the Department of Land and Water Conservation in NSW, to represent us on the steering committee and to liaise with the APEN Committee of Management on a regular basis.

I would like to thank those who have been able to make the trip to Adelaide for this AGM and Forum. Working for other organisations and still making a commitment to an organisation such APEN is not easy. It is often difficult to obtain approval from your "boss" for trips to conferences interstate, let alone in your own state. Many people arrange additional activities to justify the travel.

This means that APEN national and international Forums must be real value for money, and I believe that this Forum in Adelaide meets that requirement.

Finally I would like to thank our major sponsors, Queensland Department of Primary Industries and the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment for their continuing support.

John Bourne, Chair, APEN Committee of Management 20/11/98.

Excerpt from the Treasurer's Report

APEN Chapter and Secretariat Finances - Profit & Loss for 12 months ending 30 June 1998

	SA Chapter	SEQld	Tasmania	Melbourne	Western Victoria	Murray Riverina	WA	APEN Secretariat	Total APEN
Income									
Activities			\$850.00	\$885.00			\$75.00	\$0.00	\$1,810.00
1997 Conference								\$229,185.00	\$229,185.00
Membership								\$28,705.00	\$28,705.00
Chapter levies	\$290.00	\$410.00	\$410.00	\$410.00	\$490.00	\$350.00	\$550.00	\$0.00	\$2,910.00
Investments		\$1.24	\$1.37	\$1.83			\$0.53	\$220.16	\$225.13
Other/Sales							\$332.50	\$1,971.70	\$2,304.20
1996 Forum Profit Share				\$3,500.00				\$0.00	\$3,500.00
Total Income	\$290.00	\$411.24	\$1,261.37	\$4,796.83	\$490.00	\$350.00	\$958.03	\$260,081.86	\$268,639.33
Expenditure									
1997 Conference								\$213,993.76	\$213,993.76
Audit Fees								\$670.00	\$670.00
Administration								\$8,799.96	\$8,799.96
Bank Charges	\$8.79	\$0.25	\$6.84	\$8.51	\$0.59		\$0.88	\$272.88	\$298.74
Catering				\$837.90			\$50.00	\$0.00	\$887.90
ExtensionNet								\$13,296.44	\$13,296.44
Meeting Costs			\$290.90	\$1,017.00	\$60.00		\$36.00	\$0.00	\$1,403.90
Postage			\$165.30					\$0.00	\$165.30
Printing/Stationery			\$188.82					\$404.00	\$592.82
Speakers Expenses			\$571.37	\$40.00				\$0.00	\$611.37
Travel				\$202.40				\$0.00	\$202.40
Other Expenses			\$300.00	\$102.97				\$619.00	\$1,021.97
Chapter Levies								\$2,910.00	\$2,910.00
1996 Forum Profit Share								\$3,500.00	\$3,500.00
Total Expenses	\$8.79	\$0.25	\$1,523.23	\$2,208.78	\$60.59	\$0.00	\$86.88	\$244,466.04	\$248,354.56
Net Profit	\$281.21	\$410.99	-\$261.86	\$2,588.05	\$429.41	\$350.00	\$871.15	\$15,615.82	\$20,284.77
Accumulated Funds									
Year Start (1/7/97)	\$1,168.88	\$1,102.78	\$1,773.29	\$2,170.00	\$1,646.44	\$402.56	\$354.64	\$9,137.89	\$17,756.48
Year End (30/6/98)	\$1,450.09	\$1,513.77	\$1,511.43	\$4,758.05	\$2,075.85	\$752.80	\$1,225.79	\$25,385.62	\$38,673.40

NOW AVAILABLE FROM THE APEN Secretariat

"Partnerships in Extension – Extending the Boundaries"

Proceedings of the National Forum of the Australasia Pacific Extension Network, December 2nd and 3rd, 1998, University of Adelaide Roseworthy Campus, John Bourne and Rosemary Currie (Editors)
\$15.00 for members, \$17.50 non members, post and handling included.

See order form as insert in this newsletter

Farmer Education and Good Farm Management: What's the Link?

Annette Lamont, Tony Dunn, and Geoff Bambrery



Tony Dunn

Introduction

This paper discusses the findings of a research project undertaken for RIRDC¹ in an attempt to answer the question in the title. It begins with a brief overview of the issues that led to the research followed by discussion of the research methodology and the findings on the nature of farmer education and good farm management in Australia. It concludes with a comment on the nature of the link between these two areas.

Background

The view that farmers who have reached higher levels of formal education are better managers is often stated or implied by policy makers and educators who like to imagine that the relationship is causal. However, in thinking about the research question we felt that this proposition was too simplistic because it ignored existing research results and implied that quick fix solutions (such as 'farmers should be better educated') were the answer to the complex problems faced by farmers today. Citing lack of formal education as the cause of farm business problems fails to appreciate the complexity of farm management.

¹ Bambrery, G., Dunn, A. and Lamont, A. (1996) A pilot study of the relationship between farmer education and good farm management. Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, Research Paper No 97/50.

The importance of farm size, land capability, business structure, personal attitudes and family relationships as well as an education and the ability to learn and change is well known.

Appreciating our view of the problem situation, RIRDC approved of a pilot study to investigate the relationship between 'good' farm management and farmer education in its broadest sense.

The aim of our research was to define education and farm management from two sources, the literature and farmers in our survey. Our propositions were – first, that the literature would reveal previous research shedding light on notions of farmer education and learning, as well as how this related to improved farm management. Second, that a lot could be learnt from farmers by asking them what they did and thought about good management, education and learning. In taking this approach we kept an open mind about what the research question really was – especially viewed at the farm/family level. In a sense our approach was participatory, in that it allowed – even encouraged farm families to contribute to our work. We report some success in this, as many participants continue to discuss the project in terms of issues raised and the formulation of strategies to improve farm management and farmer education.

Research Methodology

A qualitative approach was used in gathering data – meaning that a small number of people were interviewed in depth using a semi-structured interviewing methodology. This allowed the interviewer to follow a reasonably open agenda – which could follow the concerns of the interviewees. It also enabled active listening and probing for interviewees' experience.

In a nutshell we believed that people were both a central concern and source of inspiration when formulating policy on improved farm management and education. This was our research focus. Empirical data gathered this way could be rich in description and capable of informing action locally. It was expected that examples of successful action would be revealed.

Since the 1997 APEN conference in Albury there have been at least 3 further papers on this topic – one by Archer and Catt (1998) who used a quantitative approach. Their findings agreed with our thesis that it is misleading to underrate the capability of our farm workforce based on formal education qualifications.

Figure 1 depicts the players and knowledge areas that we drew our data from – as well as defining the context of our research. The diagram is reflective in that it was drawn after the research; however, it portrays the research situation accurately.

Findings

Farmer Education in Australia

Results from the literature review show that on the face of it Australian farmers have relatively low levels of formal education compared with other countries at similar stages of development. It was also revealed that:

- In a global context there is a positive link between work-force education levels and economic development.
- Work done at the same time as ours by Kilpatrick and Williamson (1996) asserts that the Australian farm work force is relatively poorly educated, and that this limits (farm) productivity as well as inhibiting further training.
- Farm income may be affected by external factors as well as on

farm factors such as capitalisation, scale, land value, business structure and personal goals (Rendell *et al.*, 1996)

- There is substantial evidence to explain why Australian farmers do not participate in formal courses (Lees and Reeve 1991) but that farmers entering the industry now have higher levels of formal education (Hamilton 1995).
- Although farmers may not have high participation rates in formal courses, we found that they used a variety of self-education avenues. Candy (1995) recognised the need for on-going learning in an increasingly complex and changing environment and he advocated the development of life long learning skills as a primary focus in formal education. Generic skills, he argued are essential for increasing people's ability to adapt and change.
- Farm families should be the unit of research – not the individual farmer. Education is a family matter and every person's knowledge is important. There is evidence to show that farm women and children have been under-appreciated for the knowledge and skills they bring to the farm.

Our interviews revealed that farmers value and use a wide range of education and information sources. Informal education, learning by experience and from mentors and groups were stressed. School, university and technical learning were also mentioned. Value was put on the whole family's contribution to learning in farm management matters. Farm Management 500 groups were specifically mentioned.

Farm Management

Farmers' views on the definition of farm management and desirable competencies needed, while containing some variations, were generally consistent and close to views expressed in the literature. Key elements of farm management raised by farmers included decision making,

financial management, technical aspects, marketing, managing change, and managing family business relationships and structures. One farmer expressed it this way:

Farm management is using all available means to manage all aspects of the farm, from physical to financial, to come up with a plan to hopefully be profitable in the short term and the long term.

In discussing competencies, personal attributes were stressed - examples mentioned were ethics, honesty, trust and openness. Also mentioned was hard work, drive, ability to work alone and for long hours, plus having a positive attitude and the ability to learn, change and adapt.

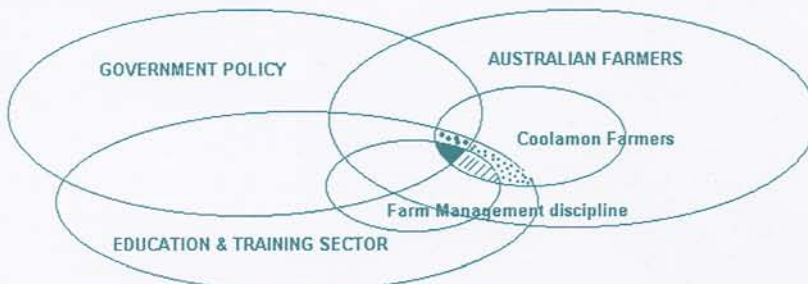


Fig. 1 A conceptual view of key relationships in researching the role of education and farm management.

All interviewees were able to identify good farmers and give reasons for their choice. They mentioned long run success and visible indicators like high quality crops, pastures, and stock. Also mentioned were good farm presentation, sound fences and trees, healthy land and a sustainable life style. It was noted that technical and production aspects were observable farm management indicators in the short term, while in the long term financial and business skills were recognised as essential.

In summary, farm management competencies mentioned by farmers were consistent with the literature. Particular emphasis was given to personal factors, learning ability, decision making and the ability to change and adapt. Farmers also recognised the increasing complexity of decision-making, marketing and the large range of skills and attributes needed by good managers.

The Link between Good Farm Management and Farmer Education

Being involved in this project required a range of skills in the team including an appreciation of the problem and willingness to tackle the complexity of the vast range of sources in the literature. A healthy scepticism of "normal" (as in structured survey) research methods was needed and an ability to take an open ended approach to learn from farmers. Excellent rapport and social networking was needed plus the patience to organise and analyse the data.

Follow up feedback from the interviewees has occurred and there has been continuing local interest in

the outcomes of the research. The main report lists 20 recommendations and discusses implications for extension providers.

The value in taking a qualitative approach lies in the appreciation of complex problems and the discovery of local solutions and action. To focus on the lack of higher formal education levels amongst farmers masks the value of informal education, people's own way of solving problems and the contributions of family members and advisers to improving farm management. It also underestimates the importance of personal attributes such as intelligence, motivation, positive attitude, communication skills and ability to learn and change.

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