

Great and Growing Concerns About Farmer Welfare

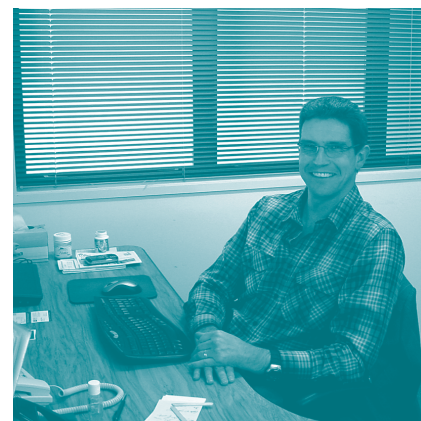
Neels Botha

Most, if not all, the readers of this newsletter have some involvement with rural people including those who make a living off the land - farmers. Admitted the current financial crisis, many of them are experiencing great difficulties in dealing with the typical pressures that occur when money is short. For a long time, I have considered farmers "my people"; perhaps because I have been involved with them for so long, in one way or another. Today, many of my people are struggling, and I am deeply concerned about farmer welfare here in New Zealand and elsewhere. This concern, and admittedly a few other external drivers, spurred me on to organise a Farmer Welfare workshop held here in Hamilton, New Zealand on the 16th September. The organising team (who did a splendid job!) kept the workshop semi-closed and invited a range of stakeholders: bankers, agri-consultants, researchers, government, policy, councillors and a few farmers – who wore two hats: farming and something else. In preparation for this workshop, I did some background reading and soon realised that the title of the workshop might be a bit misleading and narrow, but Farmer Welfare is a good start, so we went with it.

The background reading, which only scratched the surface, made it painfully clear to me that poor farmer welfare is a very serious and world wide issue. The first aspect of it, that almost jumps out at you, is suicide, something most people don't want to talk about, but which is a very real part of rural living and farming. From Africa, a press release on 20 April 2009 boldly but coldly announced: "Plummeting profits drive tomato farmers to suicide". In his 2006 book titled *The Revolution Will Not Be Microwaved: Inside America's Underground*

...farmer welfare is a very serious and world wide issue.

Food Movements, Sandor Katz reported that "20,000 farmers committed suicide in India between 1998 and 2000". Now, for those who don't know, and to put some perspective to this, 20,000 is more than the current number of dairy farmers we have in New Zealand. The Independent (2009) stated that "Over 1,500 farmers in an Indian state committed suicide after being driven to debt by crop failure". Further, "An analysis of U.S. suicide data from 1980 to 1985, a period of great crisis for farmers, found that farmers had higher suicide rates than a control group; the analysis also identified a relationship between suicide rates and farm economic conditions" (Katz S, 2006). Closer to home, authors like Miller and Burns (2008) studied suicide in Southern Australia and came up with some startling figures and conclusions, which resonate perfectly with a revealing article in The Washington Post (Cart, 2009) that graphically exposes an Australian drought stricken farmer's dire position. Quoting from an interview, Cart reported: "Suicide is high. Depression is huge. Families are breaking up. It's devastation," he [the farmer] said, shaking his head. "I've got a neighbour in terrible trouble. Found him in the paddock, sitting in his [truck], crying his eyes out. Grown men -- big, strong grown men... We're holding on by the skin of our teeth. It's desperate times." The research of Delwar Houssian et al (2008) pointed out that the issue is broader than just farmers; there is "a 'knock-on' effect on the people who interact with them". In New



Zealand, a literature review commissioned by MAF nine years ago summarised: "Most studies report increased stress and significant stress levels. An example farmer comment was 'How much leaner can we go before we snap?' and the level of stress encountered clearly concerned the researchers" (Underwood & Ripley, 2000). Farmer welfare is a serious problem and is widespread. In the foreword to a

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Great and Growing Concerns About Farmer Welfare

Neels Botha

...the rural myth of farming as an idyllic lifestyle...

Rural Health Survey report (2001), Ellen Ramsay, National President of Rural Women New Zealand, concluded that "The difficulties associated with accessing health care in rural communities were far worse and more widespread than previously thought".

It also became clear to me that farmer welfare is an old and persistent issue. The title of a very insightful report by Weaver and Munro (2009) says it all: "Country Living, Country Dying: Rural Suicides in New Zealand, 1900-1950". They discussed the rural myth of farming as an idyllic lifestyle which actually "deceived by giving impressions of independence when farmers were tied to banks and supply agencies". They made the stark contrast between political rhetoric, the rural myth and fiction of the time very clear. "The fiction of the time presents economic and social realities inconsistent with the national myth. Frank Anthony's 'Me and Gus' stories and his novel 'Follow the Call', set in the dairy farming area of central Taranaki in the years immediately after World War I, portray physical hardship, the burden of debt and inter-person disharmony, while John Mulgan's 'Man Alone' graphically emphasises the harshness of rural life in the 1920s and 1930s". What is a bit of a worry to me is that this could have been a 2009 report, bar the use of new technologies and farming systems that are quite different from back then. I believe that new technologies have contributed positively to the issues impacting farmer welfare, but may also, in a perverse manner, be contributing to them. Maybe the issue is so persistent because, simply put, it is very hard to solve. "Providing health services to rural areas has always been a difficult task" said Ramsey (2001), and I agree.

What should be of great concern is that farmer welfare seems to be getting worse. The title of the article by Hossain et al (2008) signals a bright warning light in this regard: "Determination of factors

contributing to the declining mental health of rural landholders". In his foreword to a special Issue of Rural Society about rural mental health, Lonne (2009) described the causes of deteriorating mental health and argued that "more knowledge is needed about how rural communities, families and individuals can respond positively, build resilience at the macro and micro levels, and promote social, environmental and economic sustainability".

Against this rather sobering backdrop, but none-the-less enthusiastic, we held the Farmer Welfare workshop here in Hamilton. In my short opening and welcome address, I said, perhaps, a bit presumptuously and provocatively: "We are here because we are all stakeholders, and we care". Well, I certainly do. The purpose of this workshop was to bring a group of people, real stakeholders, together to 1) share views and interact with other stakeholders; 2) identify and discuss issues regarding Farmer Welfare – from different perspectives; 3) identify how we can (help) solve this issue; and 4) determine the way ahead. I am happy to report that (this is anecdotal feedback from one of the participants - and I really want to believe it), for the first time, three competing commercial banks actually sat around the same table and discussed and agreed on an issue, and used the 'same language'. They talked about emotions quite a lot – we're off to a good start.

...the issue is so persistent because, simply put, it is very hard to solve.

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Ever

Change story

Nancye Gannaway

“Extension” means many things to many different people regardless of whether you’re a practitioner or a recipient. It’s a pathway to making learning meaningful. Extension has models that will help individuals, groups and communities to find ways to respond to change and problems. For others it’s a system of tools to support the client in the adoption of practices that will make a difference to their health, their business or their environment.

APEN plays a key role in supporting the agents of extension and facilitators in

developing the skills and knowledge needed to support the end client. Participating in APEN events like this year’s conference in Busselton is an opportunity to develop your skills and networks to help you do your work. So the Evaluation Committee for the 2009 APEN conference is looking for “Change stories” arising from your involvement with APEN either through a conference or some other event.

So what might your story look like? Have a read of mine....



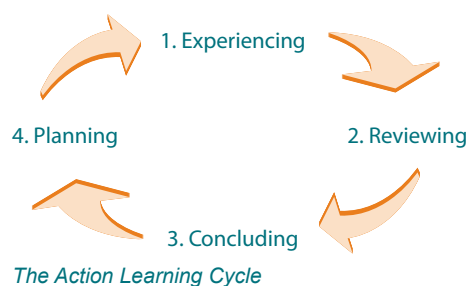
Back in 1998 I was working as the Northern Agricultural Regions Communications and Development Officer for the Sustainable Rural Development Program. Looking back on it now I was parroting the action learning cycle without necessarily truly understanding it and endeavoring to employ it in my extension activities.

About this time I organised a DAFWA display at the “Dandaragan Horticultural Expo”; we supplied 20 plus staff, hired a huge tent and all the trimmings. No one turned up; no really we had only 13 people through the tent in the entire day. The boss wanted to know, should we be doing this sort of thing and I just couldn’t answer the question. Amanda Miller a colleague working for the Time to Lime Program suggested I use some of the tools that she used to evaluate that program. I started doing this and collected data, interpreted what it meant, and developed some new extension initiatives for the region.

When the APEN conference came along, Amanda came back to me and invited me to write with her a paper on extension evaluation. The Paper “The Cross-Your-Heart Support for Project Evaluation” was born. As we were writing the conclusions for the paper I suddenly realised that I was finally truly ‘closing’ the action learning cycle. I could hear this clanging sound in my head as I finally applied the cycle to myself in a meaningful way.

My learning style preferences have changed and I get more out of my learning experiences. I can see now how I employ extension tools and learning styles more effectively in my work when organising learning experiences for others. I developed an interest in extension evaluation and got involved in developing and implementing plans for a number of projects. I’ve even managed to convert a few people to the religion of extension evaluation. However for me writing that paper was a “Eureka” moment and I will be forever grateful to Amanda and APEN for providing the opportunity to learn.

My story means a lot to me and the benefits have been practical, which is really important. I know not everybody has a Eureka moment when developing their skills as extension agents, however APEN and the conferences provide opportunities to develop your understanding, skills or networks. What did you do differently? How have APEN and the APEN conferences contributed to your understanding of extension, or your abilities as an extension agent?



Did you have a Eureka moment? Or was the change or influence more subtle?
Tell us your story - 450 words or less.
Send me an e-mail Nancye.gannaway@agric.wa.gov.au

APEN plays a key role in supporting the agents of extension and facilitators in developing the skills and knowledge needed to support the end client.

APEN 5th International Conference set to “Shape Change”



With about a month to go things are ‘Shaping’ up well for an excellent conference. Registrations have been amazing, we currently have 160 delegates coming but we are expecting up to 200 from across Australia and other parts of the world, including Japan, Fiji & Pakistan. The professional development workshops have had an overwhelming response and we unfortunately have had to close off Robert Plumb’s Creativity: Better Thinking: Greater Results, due to numbers. If you have not registered, I suggest you do so NOW so you won’t be disappointed.

The papers are being finalised and the Proceedings Editor and his team are busy finalising the review of papers.

A number of different scholarship opportunities including Next Gen (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) have been available to help in attending the conference. I have been amazed and am in awe of the applicants and look forward to meeting you all at the conference.

The WA conference committee looks forward to welcoming you to the conference November 2009.

Remember to get your registration in. The registration brochure and further information is available at www.apen.org.au.

Alison Lacey

APEN Conference Convenor

APEN 5th International Conference November 9 -12

Abbey Beach Resort Busselton WA

Shaping Change in Communities Dimensions of Excellence



Department of
Agriculture and Food



**Grains Research &
Development Corporation**



November 9 -12

Abbey Beach Resort

Busselton WA

The APEN 5th International conference is made possible through funds from major partners the Department of Agriculture and Food WA and GRDC, together with sponsorship from MLA, FFI CRC, ARID group training, Dairy Australia and South West Development Commission and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

More information at www.apen.org.au or by calling 1800 177 636; or by email to conference09@apen.org.au



SUPPORT FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

APEN obtained support from the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry (under an Australia's Farming Future Next Gen Farmers grant) for 10 young people to attend the 2009 International APEN Conference in Busselton.

The scholarships have been awarded on a competitive basis and include;

- conference registration,
- \$550 towards travel expenses
- access to the APEN mentoring scheme.
- 3 nights accommodation
- APEN membership and

Congratulations to those who were successful out of the nearly 20 quality applications and we hope you enjoy your involvement with APEN.



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry



Fifteenth Annual General Meeting of the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network (Inc)

A0029919P ABN: 81 760 842 687

Tuesday 10 November 2009, 7.30am
Abbey Beach Resort, Busselton, WA

A G E N D A

Welcome: President

Present:

Apologies:

Minutes of the last AGM, Thursday 27 November 2008, 2.00pm DEST by teleconference.

These are available on the APEN website www.apen.org.au/news

Reports,

President's Report:

Treasurer's Report:

Election of Office Bearers

Those positions needing election this year are the NSW, NZ, WA, and Tasmanian Regional Coordinators.

Appointment of Public Officer and Auditor

General Business: Notice should reach the Secretariat, 30 days before (12 October 2009).

Meeting closure



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Being on the APEN Management Committee

Here is some information from Jane Weatherley, who had to resign from the committee because she changed job and moved to Sydney from Hobart:

"I found the role to be a fantastic experience representing Tasmania on the APEN national committee, generating excellent networks and keeping up to date with national extension developments and research ... a great opportunity for someone who is interested in networking and driving professional development opportunities for Tasmanians involved in extension. The role is voluntary and as such it is up to you how much you put into it. However you are never on your own with organising activities, there is support from the Secretariat and also fellow Tassie APEN members.

Ideally you would be involved in coordinating APEN events in your region such as seminars, training events, national APEN roadshows, assisting the Cluster coordinator, participate in APEN Management Committee teleconferences every 8 weeks, participate in a face to face management committee meeting once every year, contribute to the management committee strategic plan through managing one part of the plan portfolios e.g. evaluation.

Generally Regional coordinators are appointed for a duration of 3 years after which you may stand down or get re-elected."

Nominations for the positions of NSW, NZ, WA, and Tasmanian Regional Coordinators are due by COB on Monday 12 October 2009 by fax (02 6056 1967), or mail (APEN Secretariat, PO Box 1239, Wodonga, Vic, 3689). A nomination form is available from the APEN website: www.apen.org.au/news

APEN Editor

Thank you to Dr Christine King who was our Editor prior to taking maternity leave. She has found that due to family and work commitments she is no longer able to be the APEN Editor.

Hence we are calling for expressions of interest for this role. The role is voluntary and the editor receives 10 copies of each issue of ExtensionNet for their use.

The Editor is an officer of the APEN Management Committee appointed by the Management Committee.

Please contact Roe at the APEN Secretariat 02 6024 5349 or on info@apen.org.au if you are interested.

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.

Dr Philip Thomas



Philip Thomas is a Principle Research Fellow in the School of Business, Economics and Public Policy at UNE.

Philip's research to date is in managing multidisciplinary research projects working closely with primary producers (fishermen, farmers and scientists), in collaborative R&D involving international partners. This research has involved examination of nutrition, production techniques and cold chain conditions on product quality characteristics of aquaculture seafood utilising sensory and chemical assessment techniques. This experience in multidisciplinary applied research and the application

of that research to industry, lead to Philip's current position focused on innovation to adoption strategies within the Primary Industries. The aim here is to meet a substantial innovation adoption need in Australian agribusiness/primary industry R&D through research expertise within UNE, NSW DPI and external collaboration.

David Evans



David Evans has worked at the coalface of Australian innovation and technology commercialisation for more than 25 years.

He was co-founder and CEO of University Partnerships (now UNE Partnerships), a commercialization company of the University of New England, where he worked on changing the culture of a rural/regional university, established a new business in fee-paying distance education and established technology commercialisation (in addition to ABRI's BreedPlan). Projects covered animal genetics, animal nutrition, cattle identification, geophysical instruments and medical equipment.

He was appointed Managing Director of UniQuest, the commercialization company of the University of Queensland, in 1994. At UniQuest in association with Professor Paul Greenfield, he radically changed UQ's approach to innovation management, installed technology commercialization facilitators/managers in each of the major faculties in a hub-and-spoke structure and helped to create a culture in which improvements in basic research and commercialization went hand in hand. He was responsible for negotiating the deal between UQ's Professor Ian Frazer and CSL to commercialize the human papilloma virus vaccine which became Gardasil, a blockbuster drug for prevention and treatment of cervical cancer. Gardasil produced royalties for UQ/UniQuest of \$44 million in 2007.

In 2000 he co-founded and became the inaugural CEO of Uniseed, Australia's first pre-seed venture capital fund formed as a joint venture between UQ and the University of Melbourne. While at UniQuest and Uniseed he raised \$30 million of equity capital to advance commercialization programs.

The innovations he introduced at UQ are now recognized widely as setting the standards for others to follow in university commercialization and innovation management.

He set up his own independent innovation management company, Atlatl Management Pty Ltd, in 2003. In this capacity he worked on behalf of five Australian universities to re-structure the Australian Stem Cell Centre and provided commercialization strategy assistance to the University of Adelaide and the University of Tasmania. In this period he was Chairman of the Commercialization Committee of the Australian Stem Cell Centre, a Director of Anutech (the commercialization company of ANU) and a Director of IMBcom, the commercialization company of the Institute for Molecular Biosciences at UQ.

In 2004 he was invited to become Managing Director of Magnetica Limited, a spin-off company from UQ commercializing superconducting MRI (medical imaging) technology. During part of his time with Magnetica, he was also Chairman of Redflow Technologies Limited, a Brisbane-based technology company with revolutionary green energy storage technology.

His formal qualifications are BE (Civil) UNSW; MS (Engineering-Economic Planning) Stanford; MA (Economics) Stanford; PhD (Engineering) Stanford; Fellow of the Institution of Engineers, Australia. He is also a member of the Long Now Foundation, San Francisco.

Emalyn Loudon



Emalyn's current position is Manager, Technology Transfer & Adoption with Australian Pork Limited (APL), the pork industry's national representative body providing R&D, marketing and policy services to producers and the pork supply chain.

Her role involves the dissemination of research outcomes from both APL and the Pork CRC's R&D programs. Emalyn works closely with APL's 'Industry capability & technology transfer' Specialist Group, Research & Innovation team and the CRC's program leaders in developing and implementing an annual plan for technology transfer and adoption activities.

Prior to her appointment in Canberra, Emalyn spent six years with a producer funded not-for-profit organisation, Pork Industry Training (WA), coordinating training for piggery stockpeople in WA. Her interest in the pork industry stems from working in piggeries while studying for a Bachelor of Agribusiness (Farm Management) at Muresk (Curtin University). After a brief stint with the Department of Agriculture & Food WA's Grains Program she moved back into the pork industry to take up the training role.

The pork industry in Australia is relatively small but innovative and driven to maximise production efficiency, making this a very rewarding role. Emalyn has enjoyed expanding her networks on a national level since joining APL and moving from sunny Perth to freezing cold Canberra!

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

Michelle Smith	<i>NSW</i>
Penny Cooke	<i>NSW</i>
Judy Bellati	<i>SA</i>
Ken Henry	<i>SA</i>
Marg Watters	<i>Vic</i>
Meredith Hartley	<i>Vic</i>
Steve Vallance	<i>Vic</i>
Nicole Kennon	<i>Vic</i>
Cinzia Ambrosio	<i>Vic</i>
Gabby Ellis	<i>NT</i>
Sue-Ellen Shaw	<i>WA</i>
Danielle Park	<i>Vic</i>
Scott McCoombe	<i>Vic</i>
Cate Mercer-Grant	<i>Vic</i>
Sue Brumby	<i>Vic</i>
Peter Dawson	<i>WA</i>
Megan Meates	<i>WA</i>
David Warburton	<i>WA</i>
Mick O'Kane	<i>Vic</i>
Fay Rola-Rubzen	<i>WA</i>
Emalyn Loudon	<i>ACT</i>
Philip Thomas	<i>NSW</i>
Naomi Thomson	<i>WA</i>
David Evans	<i>NSW</i>

Penny Cooke



Penny Cooke is currently completing a full-time PhD in the School of Education, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga.

Her topic is "The social construction of sustainable development through informal adult education". The study aims to discover new ways to promote the sustainability of rural regions and communities - specifically within the groups who are developing changes in community practice.

Penny was a Social Science Researcher (Institute for Land, Water & Society, Charles Sturt University) between 2004 and 2007 working for Professor Allan Curtis on projects relating to evaluation and social benchmarking of community-based volunteer natural resource management groups such as Landcare.

She has co-authored several reports discussing the implications of the changes in the rural regions on land and water management, and sustainable agricultural practices.

APEN 5th International Conference

Shaping Change in Communities - Dimensions of Excellence

Registrations NOW OPEN (See Page 4)

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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: Rosemary Currie, Christine King.

Layout: Ross Tasker, Snap Printing Wodonga, Victoria.

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

Opinions expressed in ExtensionNet are not necessarily those of the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network (Inc.) unless otherwise stated.

Stories and photos (next edition) due to Editor 30 November 2009