

Newsletter of the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network Ltd

ExtensionNet



**Dealing with the
unexpected**

"Multi-prongs"

Vol. 30 No. 1

In this issue:

The Presidents Corner

Editorial

The APEN Activities Corner

**2022 APEN mentoring
program**

APEN National Book Club

**APEN's Growing Emerging
Leadership in Rural
Australia & New Zealand**

**Designing the integration of
extension into research
projects**

**What is Psychological
Flexibility and why do I
think it is the #1 tool that
every farmer needs in their
toolbox?**

**Looking for contemporary
extension approaches and
good ideas?**

**The Agricultural Research
Ecosystem in Australia**

**APEN Professional
Membership**

**Meat & Livestock Australia
(MLA) makes a strong
commitment to
sustainability pathways**

**Having interesting
conversations?
Connecting the dots - trees
and fungi**

Contact Details

Guides and Deadlines

The President's Corner

Dr Anthony Kachenko, APEN President

Welcome to another bumper edition of ExtensionNet. In this edition, we draw upon the experience of John James and Denise Bewsell. They share contemporary approaches, good ideas for extension practitioners, and a possible way of designing extension integration into research projects. Wearing my 'non-APEN' hat, I have been actively engaged with this project, and I look forward to your feedback on this article.

Jacob Betros also shares two industry frameworks to demonstrate Meat & Livestock Australia's commitment to sustainable pathways. Several rural industries are actively progressing the sustainability agenda through frameworks, reporting and advocacy work. Sustainability is an important area for extension practitioners to be considered in terms of programs, approaches and opportunities to drive greater sustainability outcomes across rural and regional industries.

Over the last three months, the APEN Board has overseen the transition of APEN's Secretariat function to an organisation called The Association Specialists or "TAS". This change has been a significant undertaking to minimise the disruption to member services. We expect the transition to be complete by our AGM, scheduled for Friday, 21 October, at 12:00 noon AEDT. A reminder to put this date in your diary now!

The APEN Board recently engaged the expertise of an Engagement and Communications Coordinator, Alice Long, to bolster our offering to members. Alice has been working closely with the Board's Stakeholder Committee and TAS on social media and supporting several upcoming APEN events. The APEN Board is working on a face-to-face conference late next year – look out for a Save the Date in the coming few weeks. An event not to be missed following the very successful virtual conference earlier this year.

Feel free to contact me at president@apen.org.au to discuss anything that grabs your eye in this edition of ExtensionNet. Enjoy the read!

Kind regards,

Anthony

Editorial

Welcome to the September 2022 issue of ExtensionNet Vol. 30 No.1 – a milestone – we have reached 30 years!

Each issue of ExtensionNet is a platform for sharing opinions, trends, and the world of extension. Each issue of ExtensionNet aims to capture discussion about key issues that serve to enhance our understanding and professional expertise in extension practices.

As a previous editor of ExtensionNet said,
“Newsletters are part of our stock in trade. They have a lot of influence, and you can blow the trumpet of your own area or interest, modestly of course”.
(Peter Van Beek, 1995)

And so, widen your horizons by reading the impressive Articles from six experienced extensionists. We have drawn on the experiences of **John James** (Tas) and **Denise Bewsell** (NZ) to share some contemporary approaches and good ideas for extension practitioners and a possible way of designing the integration of extension into research projects; the challenge of realistic, relevant research from **Cath Marriott OAM**, CEO Riverine Plains (NSW); **Steph Schmidt** (SA) combines her science and evidence-based knowledge as a psychologist with her lived experience as a farmer to offer a necessary tool to assist the welfare of farmers; **Jacob Betros** (Qld) shares two industry frameworks to demonstrate Meat & Livestock Australia’s strong commitment to sustainable pathways; some curiosity questions re connecting the dots from **Morag Anderson** (Tas). The input from each makes for very informative reading and a look through the world from diverse lenses.

Share Our Activities Corner where we highlight the multi-prongs of APEN’s reach as we engage and empower members to expand their understanding of and share their professional expertise in extension practices – Register for the online & face to face APEN Catchment Symposium in New Zealand. Hosting Engaging Events in the Northern Territory, the National Book Club; the bi-monthly webinars; our Growing Emerging Leadership Project; joining ExtensionChat 2022, sharing the benefits of becoming an APEN Professional Member.

We thank all our contributors to this issue – the generosity of their time and sharing their wealth of ideas and experience are much appreciated. A special appreciation for widening our horizons.

The Editorial Team [Pat, Morag, Chrissy, Adrian, Roe] are delighted to welcome Alice Long as our graphic designer. Alice has made an impressive impact on all our communication channels. We are fortunate to have her.



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The APEN Activities Corner

APEN Directors and Regional Coordinators are constantly asked

- What are the contemporary challenges, trends, and debates in extension?
- How do we communicate these discussions to assist current and future extension practitioners, researchers, policy makers and our grass roots members?

To find solutions

- We tap into the wealth of experience to engage and empower our members
- We work our networks (often calling on special favours)
- Our communication channels reflect the key issues that serve to enhance our understanding and professional expertise in extension practices – these are our platforms for sharing opinions, trends and the world of extension.

Current Activities

New Zealand - two days of enhancing rural communities and catchment groups in enabling change, networking and learning in the fabulous Bay of Plenty, 27-28 September.

Northern Territory - two, one-day workshops on 5 and 6 October 2022 in Darwin to help you engage and communicate more effectively with primary producers in your professional role.

Online -

National Book Club – see article on page five.

Webinars - APEN Webinars are held from 2.00 to 2.45pm AEDT/AEST on the third Monday of every even month. The next one is on 7 October – *Extension for Farmers with Beef & Lamb New Zealand*. Past webinar recordings may be found through the [website here](#) and on the [APEN YouTube Channel](#).

Mentoring Scheme 2022

The APEN Extension skills mentoring scheme is designed as a low-cost peer mentoring system, which will benefit the individuals involved, our discipline and our organisation. The APEN Extension skills mentoring scheme is available to all.

Project - online & face-to-face - *Growing Emerging Leaders* - see article on page six.

ExtensionChat 2022 - Online - we intend to deliver ExtensionChat online, watch this space!

2022 APEN mentoring program

The 2022 APEN mentoring program has seen eight pairs of mentees and mentors participate in the program. The APEN mentoring program offers mentees an opportunity to discuss challenges, opportunities and aspirations in all areas of extension, while receiving advice from their mentor.

The program offers flexibility with on-line meeting times and topics of discussion. As a rule of thumb mentee-mentor catch ups are held monthly throughout the nine-month program.

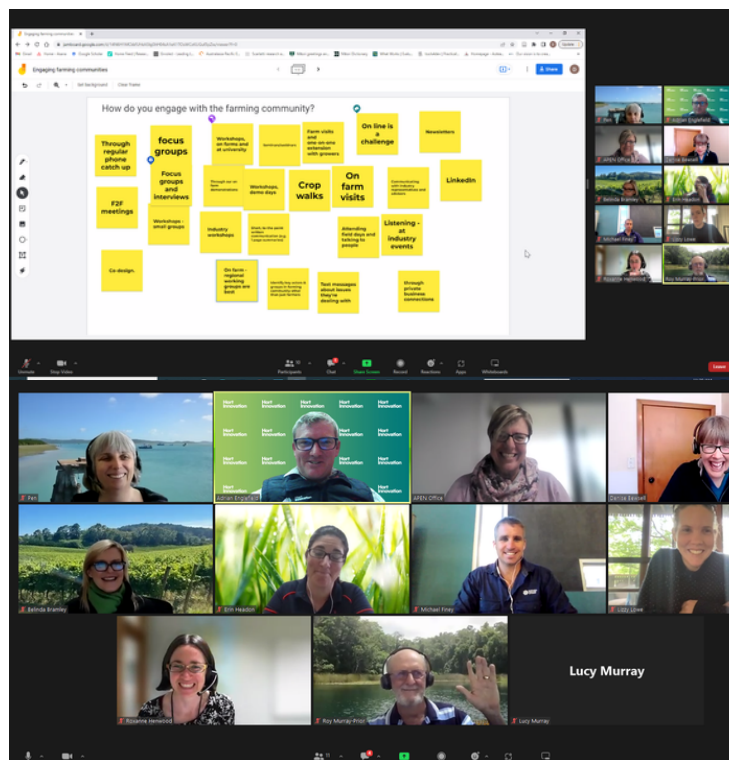
Additional to regular mentoring sessions, 2022 program participants catch for mini-training webinars.

This year the cohort has heard from:

- Jeanette Gellard - Did you make a difference? Evaluating extension activities 11 May
- Dr Roy Murray Prior - Planning extension activities that achieve results 13 July
- Denise Bewsell - Engaging with Farming Communities 14 September (pictured)

A further mini-training webinar will be held on 9 November presented by Adrian Englefield looking at a Theory of Change approach to extension planning, delivery and reporting.

Keep an eye out in ExtensionNet for future APEN mentoring program details and how you can get involved!!! The next cohort will start in early 2023.



APEN National Book Club

Members exchanging concepts and experience

Following a regional book club trial in 2020, the APEN regional coordinators have embarked on the delivery of a series of book club meetings for members during 2022.

Noel Ainsworth, regional coordinator for South Qld is driving the initiative and kicked off the first meeting in March. This followed up on interest in the Elaboration Likelihood model raised at the APEN conference in February.

A small but enthusiastic group of APEN members reviewed Burton's paper and in particular;

- The importance of understanding the position of the recipient and co-design, understanding perceptions and positions so as not to increase barriers, using first person inclusive pronouns such as 'we' rather than 'you' and embarking on a learning journey together
- Messages should target older and younger respondents as they are more likely to change attitudes
- The group discussed the value of the outside expert and the overarching need to understand the local situation
- Appeals to the common good and morality can still encounter entrenched opinions

Of interest was that the group was able to discuss these points in the context of work e.g. importance of co-design in programs with a mix of extension and regulation in agriculture and Natural Resource Management. Personal contexts were also drawn upon to further explore the ELM ideas e.g. conscientious objectors to mask wearing in community/church meetings, and a positive use of calorie intake targets with the cross-fit industry.

Sarah Thompson (May) report

The next book club was hosted by Sarah Thompson (APEN Regional Coordinator for Victoria) and covered the topic of team goal setting.

There was a lively discussion around some key topics:

- Why do we need team goals?
- How can we ensure 'buy-in' with these goals.
- Ensuring that our goals are SMART.
- Some examples of it being done poorly.

“ The more that you read, the more things that you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you will go
Dr Seuss ”



The discussion was really impactful and the shared insights provided considerable benefit to those who attended. As one attendee commented: "We understand how important peer-to-peer learning is for our growers, but often forget how useful it can be for us as extension professionals!"

Ossie Lang (Aug) report

In August Ossie Lang (APEN Regional Coordinator for Tasmania) hosted a small group looked at "How to create a fun but productive work environment". This was following on from the previous book club where we spent some time looking at goal setting and where one of the stated goals was to "have more fun at work".

There was enthusiastic discussion about the topic and in particular around the following key points:

- Who is responsible for a fun work environment and that there needs to be some individuals willing to drive the initiatives that contribute to making work fun
- The Quadruple bottom line model – People, Purpose, Planet and Profit
- Using games a break and ensuring that fun isn't 'forced' fun

As with previous groups the meeting was lively with several anecdotes shared. While a fairly light-hearted topic, it was important none the less and everyone left with some ideas to implement in their own workplaces

APEN members still have two more opportunities to participate in the one-hour book clubs being planned for September and November this year.

Registrations can be made via the [APEN Website](#).

“
**A good leader needs
energy, wisdom &
patience ...
and every so often a bit
of a lie-down**
-Judy Horacek”

APEN's Growing Emerging Leadership in Rural Australia & New Zealand

Congrats to the successful 19 applicants in APEN's Growing Emerging Leadership in rural Australia & New Zealand – funded by the Australian Government.

We welcome the following to our group of future APEN leaders:

- NT: Sarah Hain, Michael Finey;
- Qld – Noel Ainsworth, Caroline Coppo, Jed Sommerfield, Ebony Faichney;
- NSW/ACT: Adrian Englefield, Callen Thompson, Emma Tilley, Sue Street;
- VIC: Sarah Thompson, Kim Price;
- TAS: Ossie Lang;
- SA: Sandy Gunter, Robyn Faulkner;
- WA: Karen Smith, Gemma Longford, Truyen Vo;
- NZ: Robin Barker-Gilbert.

We are disappointed that we could not accommodate everyone – the list was too big!

The Growing Leadership Project came about as a direct result of an initiative of the APEN Board, who not only believed in our members' ability to make a difference through an interactive learning program but also had the vision to connect and advance our members across all sectors of primary production, natural resource management and agribusinesses in one environment.

We are excited, under the skilful facilitation of Jeanette Long (Ag Consulting Co), 19 young men and women are discovering what makes a successful leader; how to unlock their leadership potential; tips and techniques to strengthen their communication skills, deal with conflict resolution, build teams, manage change, influence others, understand the nature of decision-making and lots more. The buzz in the sessions is infectious as we get to know each other and share our needs and dreams.

APEN needs these rising leaders to make a difference in the world of extension as we unharness their energy, their curiosity and encourage them to soar as high as they can to be part of leading our rural communities.

The time has never been better to empower people to be confident, capable, connected, and influential. APEN's emerging leaders are changing the agricultural sector by building their skills and knowledge, developing strong productive relationships, and being supported by their many networks – all to enhance their family life, their community, their career, and their industry. APEN wants a strong voice that is heard and listened to as our industries adapt to change.

The challenge is - it is up to each of us to be persistent – if you believe in it, fight for it so that you can encourage the next generation of leaders into the pipeline of influence.

Designing the integration of extension into research projects

John James & Denise Bewsell

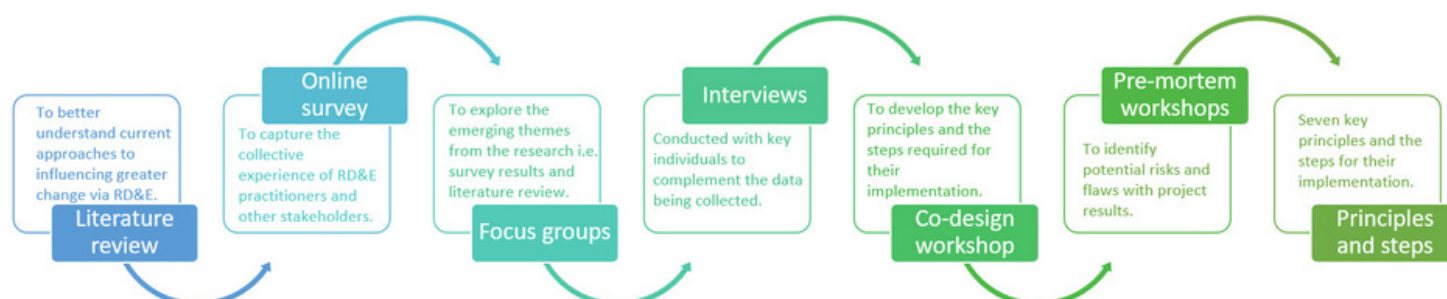
How can we get greater adoption of the outcomes from Research, Development and Extension (RD&E) projects? This question has perplexed us for decades, and it seems there are no simple silver bullets.

It's a complex problem but through the project 'Designing the integration of extension into research projects' we were able to distil seven principles for obtaining greater adoption of outcomes from RD&E.

The project was undertaken by a joint team led by John James (Enablers of Change), Denise Bewsell (Scarlatti) and Jeff Coutts (Coutts J&R). We worked closely with the nine project co-funders: Hort Innovation, Cotton Research and Development Corporation (RDC), Wine Australia, Fisheries RDC, Dairy Australia, Australian Eggs, AgriFutures, LiveCorp, and NSW DPI.

Data was collected from a range of sources – literature, recent RD&E projects, an online survey, focus groups, and interviews – and the emerging themes were then used in a co-design workshop to develop the key principles and implementation steps. Pre-mortem workshops, run with end-users and the project reference group, then helped identify potential flaws and risks so that they could be mitigated. The overall process (shown in the figure below) was undertaken in just six months.

“through the project ‘Designing the integration of extension into research projects’ we were able to distil seven principles for obtaining greater adoption of outcomes from RD&E.”



Dr John James

Dr John James is passionate about enabling change and innovation, and helping others to learn and build their capacity in this area.

John has been heavily involved with the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network (APEN), the professional association for those involved with extension from Australia, New Zealand and beyond. Amongst other roles, he was elected APEN President for five years. He also established the APEN mentoring scheme and is still involved with that today. John was inducted as one of the first APEN Life Members in 2018.

John particularly enjoys using online collaboration tools to complement face-to-face communication. He pioneered the use of webinars in agriculture to connect with a geographically distributed audience. One of John's career highlights was launching the Enabling change and innovation webinar series back in 2012. He now runs a webinar coaching service and would be delighted to help you start using this technology in your work.



This helped generate an initial large list of principles which were then summarised and prioritised. The resultant seven principles are:

- Use a systems perspective,
- Use human-centered design,
- Involve end-users,
- Use an appropriate level of co-design,
- Design for impact,
- Use agile management, and
- Communicate and engage effectively.

Practical steps that project teams can apply to implement the principles were then provided. Recommendations were made for project funders, namely: encourage greater cross-RDC collaboration, use programs of work, refine funding application processes, consider longer project durations, update project documentation, undertake capability building, provide adequate project resourcing, and explore appropriate recognition for end-users.

Recommendations were also made for how this new approach could be piloted in a Phase 2 project, namely:

- Nominate and select Phase 2 participants,
- Develop and trial a facilitated co-learning journey
- Co-design a theory of change for the Phase 2 project
- Develop a detailed implementation guide

- Trial and test different templates,
- Develop a reflective learning process,
- Design and deliver a cross-RDC capability building program,
- Explore processes for greater cross-RDC collaboration, and finally
- Explore appropriate recognition for end-users

Dr John James, the project leader, said that “We came across a number of unexpected challenges, such as engaging with a wide range of people across Australia interested in the project. We switched to online focus groups to help ensure those who were interested could be part of the process. And we quickly learnt that personalised text messages an hour or two before an online activity, as well as reminder emails, meant the busy people we wanted to hear from were engaged and involved in the process!”

John went on to say “We were delighted with the high level of interest shown in this project by RD&E practitioners. We had hoped for 100 respondents for the online survey and were blown away when almost 250 people contributed their thoughts and ideas! That was an unexpected surprise!”

Several RDCs are now considering investing in the Phase 2 project, to help implement and embed the recommendations in their business approaches. The final report should be available soon on the Hort Innovation website.

Denise Bewsell

Denise Bewsell [a New Zealander] loves chocolate! She wishes she worked as a taste tester for Whittaker's Chocolates (Whittaker's if you are reading this, please get in touch!) but instead spends her days helping support facilitators ...with Whittaker's chocolate usually!

Denise works with the red meat sector, supporting facilitators, and helping spread ideas on effective ways of enabling change. Like John, Denise has been involved in APEN. She was the NZ representative for six years and now is an associate editor for the APEN journal – the Rural Extension and Innovation Systems journal.

Denise wants people to have the opportunity to hear more about enabling change – in whatever role they have – so is excited to be involved with this Enablers of change project!



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The three core skills of psychological flexibility (openness, awareness, and valued action) are learnable, teachable, and vital to the ongoing success and viability of agriculture.

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What is Psychological Flexibility and why do I think it is the #1 tool that every farmer needs in their toolbox?

Steph Schmidt

Psychological Flexibility is described as “contacting the present moment fully as a conscious human being, and based on what the situation affords, changing or persisting in behaviours in the service of chosen values” (Hayes, 2013). Okay – but what does that mean to Farmer Jane down the road? In everyday language, psychological flexibility is being open and holding lightly to, our thoughts, emotions and experiences, being aware in the present moment, and taking action based on our values - rather than being hijacked by those tricky thoughts and feelings.

Based on a recently published review of over 54,633 studies – the father of psychological flexibility Steven Hayes stated “Psychological Flexibility is the single most important skill for your mental health and emotional well-being” (Hayes, 2022).

So why is psychological flexibility vital for farmers and the agricultural sector? Uncertainty, unpredictability, workplace stress, financial pressure, loss of control, exhaustion, fatigue, excessive job demands, communication, relationship strain, decision making, adapting to change, substance use, managing stress. These were just a couple of the challenges that came to mind when I think about our life on the farm, and just some of the areas where psychological flexibility can be beneficial. We know that the agricultural sector can be an incredibly rewarding space to work. However, it can also be incredibly challenging. The three core skills of psychological flexibility (openness, awareness, and valued action) are learnable, teachable, and vital to the ongoing success and viability of agriculture.

Steph Schmidt

Steph Schmidt is a psychologist, farmer, wife and mum – but also just a human being trying to navigate her way in the world. Steph is passionate about improving the wellbeing and resilience of rural Australia from the ground up. She combines her science and evidence-based knowledge as a psychologist with her lived experience, paddock tested understanding of life on the land, to bring accessible, simple to apply tools in psychological flexibility to farmers and rural communities.



The Three Pillars of Psychological Flexibility

There are three core pillars to psychological flexibility: Openness (both emotionally and cognitively); present moment awareness (often described as mindfulness); and value-driven action.

Openness:

As humans we are pain averse, meaning we are wired to try to get away from things that are painful or unpleasant. While this makes sense in relation to physical pain and discomfort, when we try to avoid or run from emotional or mental pain – the problems can actually get worse. Building psychological flexibility includes learning how to relate differently to our inner world. So, instead of getting hooked up by challenging thoughts and feelings, or conversely, spending all of our energy trying to avoid and getting away from that inner discomfort – we can learn to unhook from difficult thoughts and change how we relate to them.

One simple example of this is to start noticing your thoughts. Rather than identifying 100% with the thought or feeling (e.g., “I’m not good enough”, or “farming is too hard”, “I can’t handle this”) – we can change the relationship to those thoughts by adding “I’m having the thought that...”. (e.g., “I’m having the thought that I’m not good enough”, or “I’m having the thought that farming is too hard”). The best way to experience this exercise is to have a play with it yourself. So take a challenging or tricky thought that you tend to get hooked on at times, and notice what happens when you add “I’m having the thought that...”. People tend to notice that the power of the thought is taken away, you can see the thought at arms reach.

We can use this same approach to begin to be more open to difficult feelings. Through naming our feelings, we can step out of the usual avoid strategies that we use as humans (e.g., get rid of discomfort or uncomfortable feelings with alcohol, distraction, or try to “think” our way out of them). Naming your feelings can be as simple as starting to notice “I feel anxious”, or saying to yourself “here is anger”, “here is uncertainty” as those feelings show up.

Again, the best way to do this is through practice – exploring how things might be different when you pause and notice your feelings, rather than just getting hooked up by them.

Awareness:

The above openness skills connect directly with Awareness skills. Mindfulness is one aspect of awareness that has become increasingly popular throughout society – and for good reason. Mindfulness has been found to be beneficial across a whole range of areas. As a foundation, being aware in the present moment (or mindfulness) allows us to observe and notice what is happening, non-judgementally, and importantly puts us back in the drivers seat. When we are aware of the present moment, we can step out of the stories in our mind about the past and the future, and instead choose to act in this moment right now, based on what is most important to us.

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Valued-Action

The third and final pillar of psychological flexibility – valued-action, is all about knowing what is most important to you and choosing to take action based on your values, rather than being hijacked by thoughts and feelings. To do this, we need to take the time to actually get in touch with what matters most. To take the time to reflect on who and what matters, and more importantly, to identify who we want to be, and how do we want to show up in the world. Then, it's about starting to take small daily actions towards those values, turning them into daily habits of behaviour, which allows you to move towards those things in your life that give you meaning – even during stressful and difficult times.

What does this look like in action?

As a farmer, wife, mum (and human being), learning and strengthening my psychological flexibility have been the most important skills I have in my toolbox. For me, it is about creating space for regular daily practices – e.g., mindful breathing, or just bringing awareness to my daily habits (having a shower with awareness); being more open and learning to skillfully relate to tough feelings – anxiety, frustration, overwhelm, disappointment – they are all going to show up whether I want them there or not. Learning to hold those feelings lightly, helps me to be able to move towards what matters. So, reminding myself, “who and what matters most to me” and noticing what hooks me as I move towards what matters, then gives me space to take those steps towards what matters – even when it's tough, even when it's hard. And when I do that, I get space to enjoy the little moments, to actually be present with those who matter the most and show up in the world as the person that I truly want to be.

References and Recommended Reading:

You can find out more about Steph and her work ACT for Ag (bringing Psychological Flexibility to farmers and rural communities) at www.actforag.com.au

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Mantra:

Each year I choose a word of the year to keep on track.
For 2022 my word is Simple – and from there I have the mantra of “Move, Be, Do”.

Three steps to keep me on track each day.

- Steph Schmidt



Looking for contemporary extension approaches and good ideas?

John James & Denise Bewsell



How can pre-mortems save your project from failing? Is co-design the same as co-innovation? How do you design a decent survey? These and many other questions related to extension are being answered every week by APEN members, John James and Denise Bewsell over on their Enablers of Change website. They are not only writing blog posts but producing short YouTube videos and podcasts for each episode.

John said “We know different people prefer to consume information in different ways, so we’re using a variety of media to suit their contexts. For instance, for those driving long distances each week, podcasts might be their preference; whereas those needing to quickly find an answer might prefer to skim the blog posts.”

Denise commented “We launched the concept of our Enablers of Change episodes at the APEN conference in Darwin in 2019 and since then we’ve created over 80 episodes on different topics. At first, we released them weekly, but then moved to fortnightly, to make it more manageable. We’ve recently started promoting some of the earlier topics in the in-between weeks, so we’re back to weekly engagement with our followers.”

“It was a bit tricky recording the episodes” John said, “with my being in Australia and Denise in New Zealand, but we tried different things and eventually worked it out.”

Zoom has been both our best friend and at time our nemesis, as we’ve struggled to get suitably high-resolution recordings. We’ve just had to resign ourselves that what we’re doing is better than nothing and hopefully the technology will improve in time.”

“We’ve absolutely enjoyed exploring different topics, as it’s helped improve our own skills,” said Denise. “At first we wondered if we’d be able to do more than 10 episodes, but we’re now nearing 100 and there are still plenty of ideas.”

John commented that they were really pleased with the amount of engagement they’ve received on the various topics. “Our blog posts have received over 500 comments from over 200 people around the world. This helps us stay informed about the latest thinking and contemporary approaches being used across Australia, New Zealand and beyond. We’re delighted to have engaged with people from over 30 countries and to be able to learn from their experiences.”



John went on to say that “We love it’s not just a one-way conversation, but people are adding their thoughts and ideas to ours, so it’s a living conversation.”

If you have yet to do so, explore the topics at www.enablersofchange.com.au/blog/

Make sure to subscribe to the newsletters so you receive the latest updates.



The Agricultural Research Ecosystem in Australia

Catherine Marriott

"If you want to change the outcome, you have to change the investment"
Toby Mac

This quote inspires thought and leads one to pondering the agricultural research ecosystem in Australia. How much money is spent on research that sits in a file somewhere and doesn't see the light of day? We have an opportunity to look at the research investment model to ensure outcomes supervene from that investment.

When designing research, it's important to start with the end in mind. When thinking of developing a research project, consider first, who will use this, how will I communicate the outcomes and who am I best to partner with to get the highest impact?

What is the point of good, robust research if no one knows about it? This question warrants pondering when looking at previous research completed which isn't known about it. This is evidenced by farmer workshops held to help government and Research and Development Corporations (RDCs) with their next round of investment. The questions farmers ask can often not be answered with existing research. It either hasn't been communicated well or hasn't been validated in a certain region. The importance of the validation piece cannot be understated.

There will always be a gap between research undertaken and practice change on ground, this is because not all research yields something beneficial and is not worth extending for obvious reasons. However, the disconnect between locally needed knowledge, research completed and practice change on the ground highlights a challenge with the current research ecosystem and therefore innovation landscape in Australian agriculture.

“the disconnect between locally needed knowledge, research completed and practice change on the ground highlights a challenge with the current research ecosystem and therefore innovation landscape in Australian agriculture.”

Catherine Marriott

Over the last 18 years, Catherine has worked in management, strategic and leadership roles in the agricultural, research and regional development sectors in Australia and internationally. During this time, she has become a proven business leader, communicator and organisational renovator, focused mostly on leadership development, advocacy and delivering innovative solutions for the industries in which she works. Currently the CEO of Riverine Plains Inc, she is passionate about building prosperity in their members through sharing knowledge and skills.



“

To inspire change in farmers, they must want to change and see a reason why. One can't make others change just because one sees it as a good idea.

”

Back in the 90's and early 2000's, government departments, both State and Federal had a wide network of extension staff. These people were connected with their communities, they understood farming, they understood the needs, gaps, and opportunities in the farming sector, and they were connected into the latest and greatest in research. This was an incredible resource that through successive governments has been eroded over the last couple of decades. So how has the gap been filled?

There are organisations across Australia, collectively called Farming Systems Groups, or FSG's who have been working hard to fill this void for their members and the wider agricultural community. They are mostly 'for purpose', member-based organisations who bat above their average when it comes to community connection and imbedding change. They are independent, high integrity, trusted, listened to, and valued by their members; the farmers; the end users of research. Delightfully, there has been a recent rise in the RDCs starting to not only see but utilise the value of these groups from an extension, validation and therefore practice change perspective.

The NFF has a vision for a \$100bn industry by 2030. MLA has a carbon neutral 2030 agenda. If we are to achieve these lofty goals, we need as much relevant research and innovation being implemented as possible. For farmers to engage in the change management process, they first need to be aware of the opportunity, and the risks in not partaking. Knowing that farmers learn from each other, are practical people who like to get out on farm and on the whole, are very intelligent, curious people means information transfer must be well thought. The further the research design happens from the farm gate, the less chance it has of being implemented.

As with any change management practice, there is a bell curve, you will have innovators, early adopters, the majority, late adopters, and laggards. It's important to note that not everyone sits in those categories for all things. Someone who is an innovator with agronomy for example, may be a laggard when it comes to data management. FSG's play a crucial role in helping researchers connect with appropriate farmers to help shape their research. They do this as they are in community, have relevant experience and networks, understanding and their strategic capacity to know who is best on certain topics is paramount.

To inspire change in farmers, they must want to change and see a reason why. One can't make others change just because one sees it as a good idea. By building projects alongside end users, there is buy in and ownership from the start. Imbedded in any project must be a space for farmers to see, share and learn from each other. This is where the validation piece is so important in any extension model. Show don't tell - if you are wanting to create change (and therefore impact) in a timely manner.

Riverine Plains is about to launch small farmer groups, where 12 to 15 local members get together, decide what they want to learn, they will pose questions, challenge ideals, and share concerns and opportunities. Riverine Plains will then facilitate the validation or extension work to address their gaps. Importantly, alongside the experts, there will be other farmers who can share their insights, ideas, successes, and failures on the chosen topic. These meetings will happen with these small groups at least twice a year. The richness of farmer-to-farmer learning cannot and should not be underestimated.

The definition, as I see it, of extension is to de-risk the change management process to ensure innovation is realised. It is important to walk with farmers through the lumps and bumps of new things until implementation is complete. Farmers will often go to a field day, workshop, or school, learn a new skill or about a new technology. They then may take a risk and purchase it or make changes to management, only to get it home and it doesn't work like it did in the shop (or where they saw it demonstrated at a field day). Effective extension takes time and consistency, it takes people. The role of a good Extension Officer is to work with the farmer to adapt the innovation to their farm system to ensure they leverage the value purported.

Although there has recently been change in the way RDCs and Government works with producers through Drought Hubs and grower networks, there is more conscious effort required to ensure investment is shaped to ensure outcomes for end users. To do this, projects need to be built with a validation, extension and adoption phase that is adequately funded. This is where practice change and the resultant impact occurs and without a pointed focus on the later, money will continue to be wasted on things that are nice to know.

APEN Professional Membership

Why become an APEN Professional Member?

That is the question we recently asked the 26 current APEN professional members (APEN-PM). Half of them replied and their answers are probably not surprising:

- Recognition
- Provides evidence of my professionalism and extension capability
- Assist with career aspirations and valued by organisations
- Staying up to date and continuing to improve my skills
- Connecting and widening the extension network
- Promoting extension and supporting APEN

We also asked what APEN could do to enhance the value of its professional membership category and encourage others to join, and the three main suggestions were:

- Include more details about what services APEN-PM's offer on the APEN website
- Exclusive training and professional development opportunities
- More promotion of APEN-PMs to showcase and celebrate them and their expertise

Watch this space for developments.

We have also picked up some suggestions for improving the applications process – so thank you for those. And, if you are thinking about becoming an APEN-PM, hopefully, you will see some improvements soon.

To find out more about becoming an APEN-PM visit the [APEN Website](#)

See the [list of current APEN-PM's](#)

Extension is an educational process



Australian red meat industries make a strong commitment to sustainability pathways

Two industry frameworks demonstrate the Australian beef and sheep industries commitment to sustainability, by tracking performance in priority areas over time.

Jacob Betros*, Manager Beef Sustainability at Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), and Secretariat of the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework sustainability steering group has taken some time out to explain how the Australian red meat and livestock industry has taken the lead by establishing the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework (ABSF), and the world's first Sheep Sustainability Framework (SSF).

Jacob explains: they're both industry-led frameworks that commit industry to a sustainability pathway of best practice and track performance through independent evidence against indicators relevant to:

- Animal welfare
- Environmental stewardship
- Economic resilience
- People, customers and community

Within these key themes, the most critical indicators are defined, and their progress tracked using appropriate metrics and sound data.

The frameworks align to international standards and best practice guidelines, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) as key international sustainability targets and frameworks recognised by export markets, customers and investors.

But how do the frameworks, actually, work?

The frameworks undertake robust and regular 'materiality assessments', to identify and prioritise issues and opportunities.

They assess the significance of sustainability actions arising from industry operations, as well as the influence of these actions on the decisions of customers, investors and stakeholders.

These investigations stand up to the most robust scrutiny of industry's commitments and recognise the requirements of markets, customers, and investors globally for defensible baseline measurements and data to demonstrate commitment and progress.

As pressure to demonstrate sustainability commitment and action escalates, producers, processors and the value chain increasingly rely on the ABSF and SSF to inform their own sustainability commitments, indicators and metrics.

Customers and Investors are looking to reporting frameworks to demonstrate the sustainability commitments of their supply chains to their shareholders and society.

The Australian Beef Sustainability Framework (ABSF) launched its fifth annual update in June 2022.

The Australian beef industry is continuously evolving to be proactive, transparent, and collaborative in demonstrating its sustainability commitments and meeting customer, investor, and community expectations.

As part of that evolution, the industry recognised significant shifts in critical sustainability issues. For example, issues such as industry profitability, carbon, water, animal health and welfare, nutrition, community contribution and biodiversity, are gaining increasing prominence as reflected in the recent ABSF materiality assessment.

This has resulted in a review of the indicators within the ABSF so they can reliably represent the issues that will be material to the livestock industry for the next five years and onwards.



The ABSF 2022 Annual Update provides a platform for industry to demonstrate its sustainability credentials with more robust data, increased contextualisation, and targeted communications, to, more effectively, respond to global market drivers and the requirements of customers and investors.

ABSF Highlights

Some of the notable achievements reported in the ABSF 2022 Annual Update include:

- The Australian beef industry has continued to reduce its net CO2 emissions since 2005, recording a reduction of 58.21% in 2019
- Regular pain relief usage for invasive animal husbandry practices has risen to 35% in 2021, up from 30% in 2020
- 79.6% Natural Resource Management (NRM) regions achieved healthy ground cover thresholds in 2021

The Sheep Sustainability Framework (SSF) released its first annual report in July 2022, following the launch of the framework in 2021.

As part of its evolution, the SSF has now formalised its new Sustainability Steering Group and completed its three-year strategic plan and annual implementation plans. The plan commits to three strategies to propel the SSF forward into its next stage.

These are:

- Impactful stakeholder engagement
- Collection of defensible data and timely reporting
- Continuous improvement of the Framework by keeping abreast of sector issues

The SSF has undertaken a major commitment to collecting and tracking new data, including animal husbandry and welfare practices, national flock lifecycle assessment and national sheep grazing fractional ground cover. This will be critical in evaluating data trends overtime.

The SSF 2022 Annual Report demonstrates the sustainability credentials of the Australian sheep industry with more benchmark data, better contextualisation, and targeted communications. This ensures a stronger response to global market drivers and the requirements of our customers and investors.

The Challenge

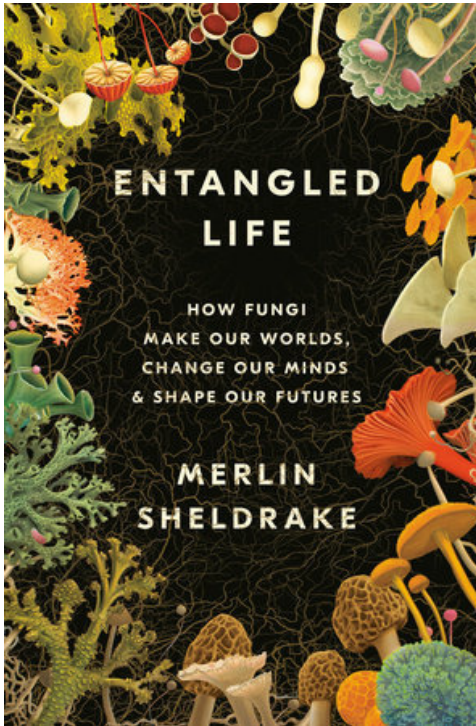
Jacob invites all APEN members and extensionists interested in discussing sustainability and the role extension plays – including through the Australian Beef sustainability framework - to view resources including [case studies](#) and the [2022 Annual Update](#). "As the [Australian Beef sustainability](#) framework secretariat my contact details are available via the website. The latest Sheep sustainability network news and details to sign up for e-news bulletins can be found [here](#)."

** You may remember Jake as the fantastic 2019 APEN Darwin Conference Convenor. It was a conference which ticked all the boxes!*

“

The SSF 2022 Annual Report demonstrates the sustainability credentials of the Australian sheep industry with more benchmark data, better contextualisation, and targeted communications.

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Having interesting conversations? Connecting the dots - trees and fungi

Morag Anderson

What are useful ideas? Where do they come from? How do we find them? Some of the answer, is through connections and discussions. I thought I'd share some things I've come across that I found interesting and potentially useful.

One is from a recent discussion with an agronomist. I've no idea how, but I think we ended up talking about desertification. I mentioned that I'd come across farmer managed natural regeneration (FMNR). Basically it's harvesting wood from trees without killing them. [See World Vision's work here.](#)

While I was trying to find FMNR, I also came across coppicing, pollarding and daisugi. Sometimes the rabbit hole is deep.

Do we practise these skills here in Australia? Are they practised elsewhere in the Pacific region? Are they relevant to the work you do? Is it something we should be doing?

And while we're talking about trees... The most recent book I've read with any science content was 'Entangled Life' by Merlin Sheldrake. It grew out of his PhD and is a meditation on fungi and their role in our world. My major take home from it was that fungi are distributed all throughout the soil and probably act as intermediaries between plants, communicating information and transporting substances including nutrients.

And fungi are one of the reasons low till/minimum till/no till can be successful – you're not disturbing the fungal hyphal connections nearly as much. So, plants have access to the 'information' and nutrients, etc., that fungi can mediate/provide.

The [audiobook is available here](#). He's also been on numerous podcasts and videos, [including one with Michael Pollan](#). Speaking of whom, have you read anything by Michael Pollan? Botany of Desire? The Omnivore's Dilemma? Both authors write densely but have interesting things to say about our biological world and its systems.

Have you looked into low till? Do you know people that practise it?

*Have you had any interesting conversations lately?
Let us know. We'd love you to share your knowledge.*



"30 Years & Flourishing"

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Together we have the power to inspire, connect and deliver on new opportunities and rich experiences that can open doors to innovation and progress while growing global economies and increasing well-being (Tae Yoo)

Guidelines and Deadlines

Submissions should be made in MS Word 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.

Editor: Dr Pat Hamilton

Layout: Alice Long

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

Stories and photos due to the editor November 2022