



Research on Rural Extension Agent and Advisor Perspectives of Extension and Innovation Survey of APEN and NZIPIIM members

December 2018 to January 2019

agresearch
āta mātai, mātai whetū



Universidad de la
Cuenca del Plata

Background

Purpose: To understand the point of view of advisors and extension agents in New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific Region regarding their practice, and compare these views with practitioners from countries such as Argentina, Brazil and South Africa

- Part of international research on rural extension agent and advisor perspectives of extension and innovation
- Supported by the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services and the University of La Cuenca del Plata (Argentina)
- In New Zealand Australia and the Pacific Region the survey was led by Dr James Turner from AgResearch, with kind support by:
 - NZ Institute of Primary Industry Management
 - Australasia-Pacific Extension Network

Method

- Pre-existing survey statistically validated for assessing rural advisor conceptions, beliefs and assumptions regarding their role
- Survey sent to over 600 advisors and extension agents in Australia and New Zealand through email newsletters to members of:
 1. Australasia-Pacific Extension Network
 2. NZ Institute of Primary Industry Management
- Survey consisted of three parts:
 1. Sociodemographic questions
 2. 32 items addressing degree of agreement with five topics:
 - a. dialogue and coordination
 - b. diffusion of technologies
 - c. participatory farmer-led extension
 - d. blaming farmers
 - e. self-critical attitude
 3. Questions on:
 - a. levels of action (individual, group, inter-actor, mass media)
 - b. fundamental objectives (productivity, commercial strengthening, wellbeing)
 - c. technological approach (productivist vs. agroecological)

Sample Statistics

Sample origin

	N	Percentage
APEN	51	81.0
NZIPIM	12	19.0
Total	63	100.0

Country

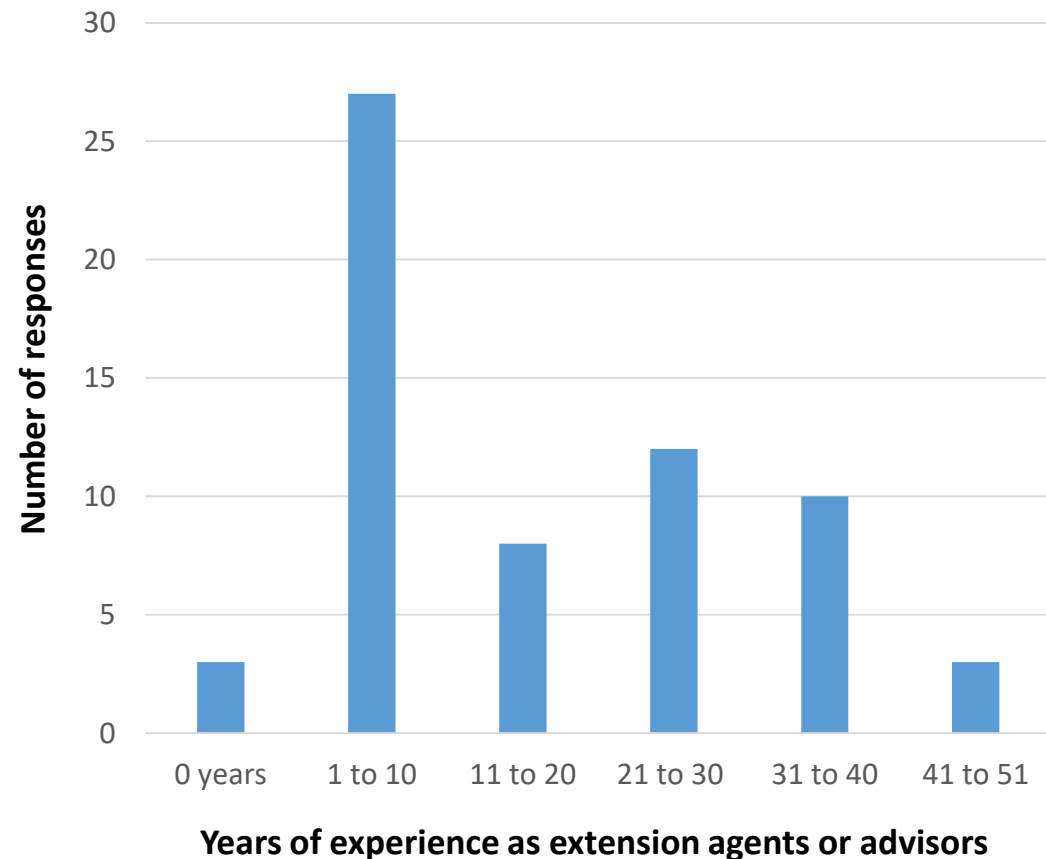
Country	Percentage
Australia	60.3
New Zealand	30.2
Other ¹	8.5

¹ Cambodia, Canada, Fiji, Indonesia, Nigeria, Uruguay

Gender

Country	Percentage
Female	44.0
Male	56.0

Education and Experience



Education level	Percentage
Secondary or High School	1.6
Tertiary Undergraduate Degree	4.8
University Degree	58.7
Master's degree	23.8
Doctorate	11.1

University degree	Percentage
Agricultural Science	55.6
Environmental Science	4.8
Animal Science	4.8
Biological Science	3.2
Education	3.2
Other	28.6

Beliefs about extension & innovation

Survey participants were asked about the extent to which they agreed with 26 items covering five factors reflecting beliefs about extension and innovation

Description of beliefs

Survey participants were asked about the extent to which they agreed with 26 items covering five factors about extension:

- **Dialogue and coordination:** Extension involves dialogue. interaction and/or working together. Interactive process between extensionists and farmers. Innovation a result of coordinated activity and social learning processes
- **Transfer of technology:** Extension and innovation follows a linear process from idea to technology development to transfer to farmers
- **Blaming farmers:** Farmers cannot progress due to being passive. traditionalist and/or expecting handouts
- **Participatory. farmer-led extension:** Demand-driven extension and participation of farmers in extension design and evaluation
- **Self-critical attitude:** Extent to which extension agents are open to questioning their own extension and advisory practices

Factors	Australia	New Zealand	APEN (other)	Argentina	South Africa
Transfer of Technology	2.78 ¹	2.68	3.47	2.99	3.75
Dialogue and coordination	4.32	4.20	4.43	4.34	4.47
Blaming farmers	2.79	2.66	3.27	3.17	3.63
Participatory farmer-led extension	3.55	3.55	3.50	3.90	4.10
Self-critical attitude	3.93	4.12	3.92	4.00	3.65

¹ Mean – 1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = strongly agree

- NZ respondents (c.f. other country respondents) have a slight tendency to disagree with belief that extension involves technology transfer or blaming farmers
- Australian and NZ respondents agree with belief that extension involves dialogue & coordination and is participatory and farmer-led

Preferred methods of extension

Survey participants were asked to rank four methods of extension (individual, group, institutional coordination and mass media) from most to least preferred

Methods	Australia	New Zealand	APEN (other)	Argentina	South Africa
Individual	2.08 ¹	1.89	2.67	2.51	2.18
Group	1.76	1.67	2.17	1.57	1.95
Institutional coordination	2.70	2.61	2.00	2.32	2.43
Mass media	3.46	3.83	3.17	3.61	3.43

¹ Mean – 1 = First preference, 2 = second preference, 3 = third preference, 4 = fourth preference (means nearer to 1 tend to be first preference in most cases, and means tending to 4 tend to be last preferences in most cases)

- Australian and NZ respondents tend to prefer group (followed by individual) approaches, with less preference for institutional coordination (c.f. respondents from Argentina and South Africa)

Professional identities

Survey participants were asked to rank three descriptions of the professional identity of extension agents and advisors from most to least preferred

Methods	Australia	New Zealand	APEN (other)	Argentina	South Africa
A. A rural extensionist is a worker or professional that helps to improve farmers' productive, commercial or organizational practices	1.14 ¹	1.39	1.50	1.64	1.56
B. A rural extensionist helps farmers to increase their wellbeing and improve their quality of life	1.95	1.78	1.50	1.58	1.72
C. A rural extensionist supports farmers so that they are able to overcome situations of injustice and oppression	2.92	2.83	3.00	2.79	2.72

¹ Mean – 1 = first preference. 2 = second preference 3 = third preference (means nearer to 1 tend to be first preference in most cases. and means tending to 3 tend to be last preferences in most cases)

- Australian and NZ respondents identify most strongly with extension agents as professionals that help farmers to improve productive, commercial or organisational practices
- Other APEN and Argentinian respondents identify most strongly with extension agents as professionals that help farmers to increase their wellbeing

Objectives of extension

Survey participants were asked to choose the 3 most important objectives of extension from a list of 10 suggested objectives

Methods	Australia	New Zealand	APEN (other)	Argentina	South Africa
1. Creation and strengthening of farmer organizations.	13.5 ¹	16.7	0.0	56.4	11.6
2. Improving farmers' quality of life by helping them to have access to basic services.	18.9	11.1	50.0	35.5	23.3
3. Strengthening of farmers' productive strategies and livelihoods through the funding of small productive projects.	16.2	11.1	33.3	35.3	30.2
4. Integrating farmers into commercial chains and supporting the commercialization of their products in conventional markets.	13.5	5.6	16.7	34.6	44.2
5. Increasing farmers' productive and commercial knowledge through training sessions.	51.4	44.4	16.7	34.0	48.8
6. Productive modernization aimed at increasing productivity and profitability.	43.2	38.9	50.0	31.6	55.8
7. Protection and management of natural resources.	51.4	55.6	33.3	26.9	30.2
8. Developing entrepreneurial and business capacity.	32.4	50.0	66.7	25	27.9
9. Resolution of productive or commercial problems posed by farmers by means of providing advice.	43.2	50.0	33.3	19.7	23.3
10. Provision of information regarding prices or climate in order for it to be used for decision making.	16.2	16.7	0.0	0.9	4.7

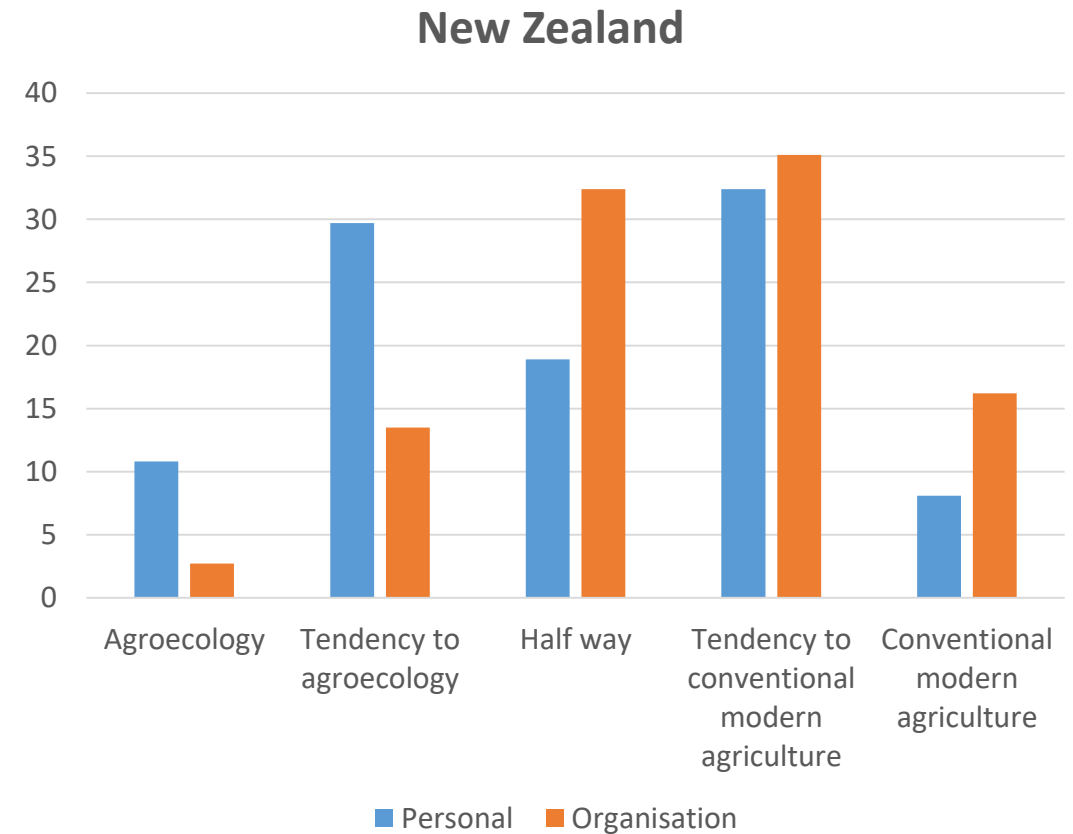
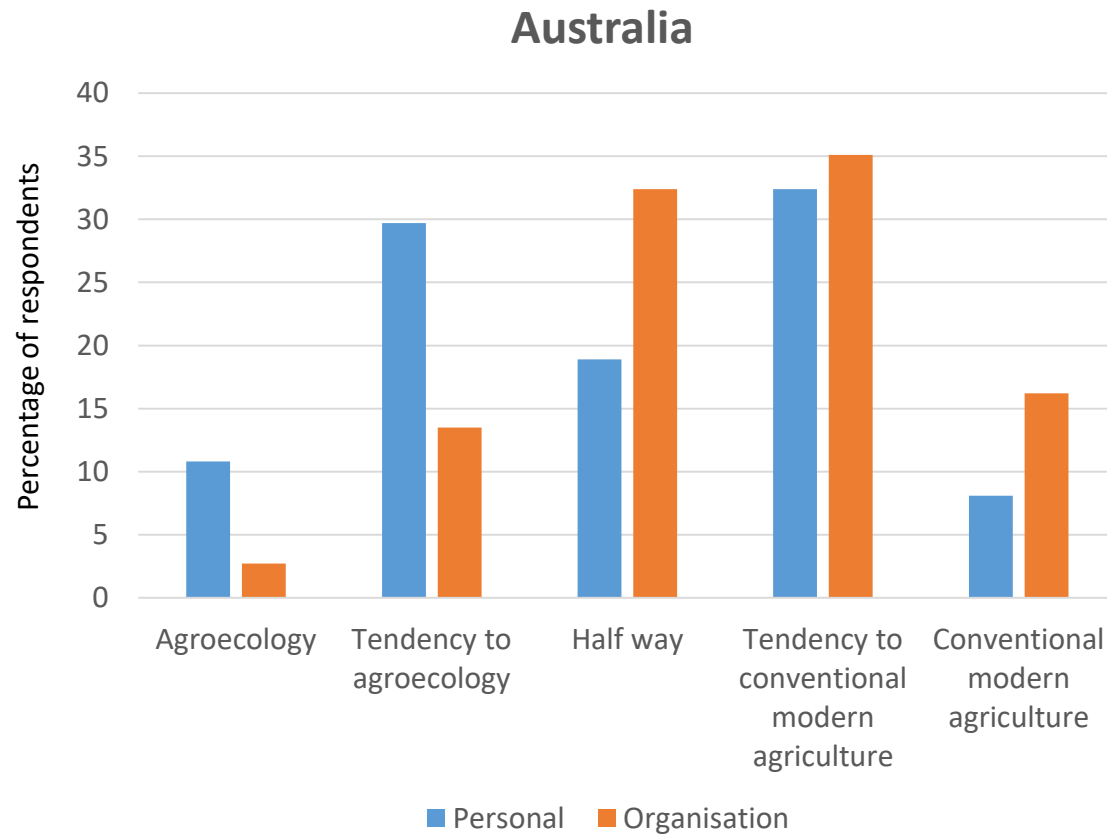
¹ Percentages express the percentage of participants who selected option among the 3 most important

Objectives of extension

- **NZ** extension agents and advisors prioritise “protection and management of natural resources”, followed by “building farm business capacity”, and then “farm productivity and profitability” through: (i) advice, and (ii) training
- **Australian** extension agents and advisors also prioritise “protection and management of natural resources”, followed by “farm productivity and profitability” through: (i) training, (ii) advice, and (iii) modernisation

Personal and organisational productive orientation

Survey participants were asked to choose which agricultural productive model (agroecology vs modern conventional agriculture) best reflects their personal orientation and reflects their organisation's orientation



- Australia and New Zealand respondents are split between a tendency to agroecology or conventional modern agriculture
- Respondents perceive Australian and New Zealand extension organisations as tending towards conventional modern agriculture

Key messages

- Australian and NZ respondents
 - Believe extension involves dialogue & coordination, and is participatory and farmer-led
 - Prefer group extension methods, but also value individual ones
 - Identify most strongly with extension agents as professionals that help farmers to improve productive, commercial or organisational practices
 - View “protection and management of natural resources” as a primary objective of extension, followed by increasing farm “productivity and profitability”
 - Are almost evenly split between a tendency to agroecology or conventional modern agriculture

Contacts

Dr James Turner. Farms Systems and Environment, AgResearch, New Zealand

P: +64-7-838-5230

E: james.turner@agresearch.co.nz

Dr Fernando Landini. CONICET and University of La Cuenca del Plata, Argentina

E: landini_fer@hotmail.com

Thank you to all the individuals who kindly took time to participate in completing the questionnaire as part of this research

