

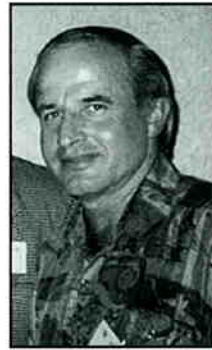
AS I sit down to write this, my third Chairman's letter to you, I am struck by several key thoughts.

- This is the first newsletter sent directly to the 454 of you who have replied signifying that you believe in what we are trying to do, and want to be involved in APEN in some way.

- What we are aiming to do for ourselves is what we are normally trying to do for our clients; that is, improve the way we work and the outcomes that are possible. We want to effect change in the extension profession and in the way the world perceives us. If we can see ourselves in this context, then it seems to me to make our tasks clearer. This is an area that we are supposed to be knowledgeable about. Can we change the change agent?

- This is the make or break time for APEN when we must now concentrate on forming the branches out in the regions of Australia. Peter Van Beek is working hard on a draft constitution that will be out with the interim regional management groups by the time you have received this newsletter. You can get a copy from them. I will be following up these groups to get feedback about how you are forming up

By
**TERRY
MAKIN**
*Chairman, Interim
Steering Committee,
APEN.*



APEN is for anybody involved and interested in this process. The broader its base, the more effective APEN will be. Extension is about knowledge and learning. It is fundamental to the development of rural Australia. The principles and theory involved in the processes of change are just as critical to improving an Aboriginal health program and the conservation of our soil and water quality, as they are to improving an agricultural production system. I believe that by sharing our experiences, knowledge and research from our various programs through our network we can strengthen all of our programs.

Let's make it happen

and what else we need to be doing to ensure the successful gestation of our new baby.

What is extension?

WE are getting feedback that this is an "Aggies" organisation. Some people are concerned that we follow a narrow and old fashioned view of extension. It is a very strong view of the steering committee and the interim core working group that extension is seen in the broadest context: as facilitators of change in rural Australia. (We cannot think of a term that encompasses all of these things better than extension - nor has anybody else).

We want to create a learning organisation for our members that is based on fulfilling our needs. We all need to be involved to ensure that we have an input in the directions APEN takes. Like any good extension program, individuals need to be involved in the planning process to have ownership.

I want to thank the Victorians who provided much of the material for this newsletter. It is heartening to see the increased emphasis that their department is giving to extension and the focus of their direction. This direction fits closely with the findings of APEN's December planning workshop and Peter Van Beek's article on the new extension in our first newsletter.

Breaking new ground in landcare extension

AGROUP of farmers in south west Victoria has broken new ground in landcare extension by developing and running an ambitious program which is solving land degradation and lifting farm productivity.

The early success of the five-year Woody Yaloak Catchment Project has been driven by farmer enthusiasm, community involvement, corporate sponsorship and a return to one-to-one extension.

The project is unique in Victoria because it represents the first time:

- Land degradation has been tackled over an entire catchment;
- A landcare project has attracted a major corporate sponsor;
- A landcare extension program has been developed and run by local farmers.

The catchment

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Project covers the 12,000ha along the Woody Yaloak



Rob Velthuis from DuPont with Linton farmer Tim Cooke at a weed control information night.

River which flows from Ballarat to Cressy. The area has 150 farmers, six active landcare groups and produces wool, livestock and crops worth more than \$20 million a year.

The Catchment's land degradation problems include rising salinity and silt levels in

the Woody Yaloak River; gully, stream and tunnel erosion; rabbits; and weeds such as furze and spiny rush.

Management plan

In 1992, farmers in the region realised they needed a coordinated approach to tackling land degradation.

With support from the Victorian Farmers Federation, Greening Australia and Department of Agriculture, a committee headed by Pittong farmer Kevin Knight spent a year developing a detailed plan for the area under the slogan "productive catchment management".

Their approach to solving land degradation, while improving farm productivity, centred on rabbit eradication, tree planting, establishing and maintaining deep rooted perennial pastures and wide community involvement.

THE recent release by the Department of Agriculture of its report on the implementation of the Field Based Services Review, heralds a new commitment to agricultural extension in Victoria.

Plans are in place to lift the performance of extension in the Department and to focus more carefully on high impact projects that will contribute to the economic and sustainable development of Victoria's agricultural industries.

Key features of the Department's new approach to extension are:

- Emphasis on a project approach aimed at the economic development of agricultural industries and overcoming land and water degradation problems.
- Commitment to continued funding of extension projects largely from Government and industry sources, rather than by fee-for-service.
- Growth in extension programs to be funded largely from non-Government sources.
- Focus primarily on projects that are mostly of public benefit.
- Close working relationship with farmers and other extension providers. Farmers are to "own" the extension projects.
- Industry development projects to be large and mostly delivered statewide.
- Projects aimed at overcoming land and water degradation to be regionally-focused with strong involvement by local community groups.
- Commitment to ongoing employment of a large group of senior, experienced extension leaders covering the major agricultural industries and country locations.
- Back-up by a large pool of other extension staff.

New life for extension in Victorian agriculture

By
MICHAEL TAYLOR
*Secretary
Department of
Agriculture, Victoria*



- Commitment to upgrading the skills of extension staff through appropriate post graduate training and extension methodology research.
- Ongoing annual cadetship program for undergraduates in Agricultural and Veterinary Science.

- Annual recruitment of new graduates to enter a two year in-service training program and progression to extension and other positions.
- Contracting out of parts of extension projects to the private sector (e.g. flood disaster situation).
- Integration of all DAV extension with that of other providers through the Property Management Planning framework.
- Appointment of a senior manager to oversee the extension functions across the Department.

These features of our new approach to extension should ensure substantial improvements in the performance and achievements of our extension projects. Recognition of this will be indicated by an increased rate of adoption of new worthwhile technology in Victoria and increased financial support for extension projects.

The appointment of Bruce Muir (Regional Manager South West Region) to oversee the extension function in the Department is an indication of our commitment to extension and to an ongoing evolution of the function. This role parallels that of the Chief Scientist for research functions.

Breaking new ground in landcare extension

From Page 1

"The action plan and annual targets took nearly 12 months to develop but reflect how we want to solve our problems," Kevin said.

"We are encouraging the productive options to control land degradation - it's obviously what farmers want."

Funding

The plan was the basis for attracting funding and the corporate sponsorship of Alcoa which gave \$145,000 in 1993 and \$85,000 in 1994 for use in an incentive program for pasture sowing, tree planting, rabbit eradication and bulldozer work.

Other assistance and financial support has come from National Landcare Program, Greening Australia and the Departments of Conservation and Natural Resources, and Agriculture, two local Shires, merchandise agents, fertiliser, soil testing and chemical companies.

The committee also levies farmers in the project to employ two part-time extension officers who provide advice, coordinate the rabbit eradication program, hold information sessions and run field days.

The first year's results are testimony to the farmer-led approach to extension according to Kevin.

Results

"More than 60 farmers joined the project in 1993 and sowed 1540ha of perennial pasture, planted 25,000 trees, established 25km of direct tree seeding and significantly reduced rabbits throughout the catchment," he said.

"Alcoa's support lets us provide some financial assistance so farmers can have a go and experiment with new techniques with reduced financial risk."

But money was not seen as the sole reason for farmers being reluctant to sow pasture, plant trees and control rabbits.

"One-to-one extension advice is essential so new ways of sowing pasture and planting trees can be discussed in the paddock," Kevin said.

"Our approach relies on 'local politics' and wide community involvement to encourage education, participation and build confidence. It gives farmers the opportunity to exchange ideas and see each other's achievements through field days, information sessions, technical notes and a local newsletter."

For more information contact Cam Nicholson, Woody Yaloak Project Officer on 052 523 8600.

ExtensionNet

This newsletter is produced at the request of participants of the Australia-Pacific Extension Conference held at Surfers Paradise in October 1993. It is the official newsletter of the AUSTRALASIA-PACIFIC EXTENSION NETWORK.

For further information, please contact the members of the Interim Steering Committee in the relevant country or state (see back page).

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MOST farmers in the Bainsdale area in Eastern Victoria each year, about lambing time, get out the poison baits in an effort to protect their new born lambs from foxes. The Bainsdale farmers usually do this on an individual basis or as part of a small neighbourhood group.

With an better understanding of the widespread movement of foxes, it is easy to see why highly localised action was having only limited success. Foxes in Victoria are declared pest animals and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) has always been involved in advice to farmers and in the preparation and sale of baits.

The formation of LandCare Groups has brought new opportunities for pest plant and animal control on farms. Last autumn, a local Landcare Group decided to run a fox control program on a more extensive group basis. While the result was a much higher lambing percentages for the area, there were still losses due to migratory foxes moving through from untreated properties and subsequently filling the void left by the poisoned foxes.

This year the Landcare Group decided to approach adjoining groups and conduct a coordinated control program. The program began in December 1993, when a speaker from the manufacturers of the Fox-Off bait was asked to address a joint DCNR and Landcare Group meeting on baiting techniques. From this discussion the enthusiasm began to grow and DCNR was approached to organise a coordinated baiting program on a major scale.

Increasing awareness

By February 1994, other Landcare Groups had called meetings of their own members to discuss a coordinated program to increase awareness and gain support. DCNR officers talked at these meetings on such issues as the density and habits of foxes and the effect they have, not only on new born lambs, but also on native birds and animals.

By now 4 Landcare Groups were supporting the program, together with the local Shire Council. To improve the program further non-landcare group members of the community had to become involved, or at least aware of the program. Newspaper articles began in early February to increase the community's awareness of the problem and the need to have a large coordinated program for it to be successful.

Newspaper articles began by introducing

What is required of a successful group extension program ?

- A Project
- A high level of communication
- Change or acceptance
- Some commitment
- Coordination
- Successful outcome

When you can combine all of these with an issue that also has an enforcement flavour and the result is still positive, you can be assured that your program was successful.

By
LAURIE NORMAN

*Catchment Coordinator
Department of Conservation
and Land Management
Bairnsdale Vic*

the habits of foxes, their movements, the numbers that could be expected and their effect on wildlife. This portrayed the fox as being a real pest and not a soft and cuddly native animal as some people thought.

Articles appeared in the newspaper on a weekly basis, together with advertisements outlining the proposed coordinated program.

Eventually following a month of media saturation, including newspaper articles and radio interviews the date for the baiting program was set. Properties were selected with specific times set aside for DCNR staff to sell prepare and sell bait,

and demonstrate the method of setting the baits.

At the end of the day, thirty one farmers had attended the selected baiting stations and in the following week another thirty five new farmers had called at the DCNR office to purchase bait supplies.

60 farmers now involved

In about three months, over sixty farmers have become involved in a major coordinated program. I put this down to good extension techniques:

- identification of a problem (in this case by the community group),
- good communication skills (guest speaker, involvement of other Groups, media use),
- committed Group members and DCNR staff and
- a program that was seen to be successful.

The end result is expected to be an ongoing annual effort by an increasing number of community members - both rural and urban - to tackle fox control.

Group extension for effective fox control



The Beef Manager Program ... now and in the future



By

MIKE HALLS

National Coordinator,
Beef Manager Program
Department of
Agriculture, Victoria

THE beef herd is highly interactive, with many factors affecting herd productivity. Also, there is no easily identifiable measure of profitability or efficiency. For this reason, many beef producers appear to have conflicting production and management aims, and have been slow to adopt improved management practices or even to perceive there is potential to improve the productivity and profitability of their herds.

The Beef Manager Program

The Beef Manager program was developed to overcome these difficulties by bringing farmers together in groups, to discuss and learn about the management of their beef herds, and their farms.

The Beef Manager program in Victoria involves 12 groups - at Hamilton, Warrnambool, Ballarat, Colac, Warragul, Leongatha, Maffra, Benalla, Seymour, Alexandra, Mansfield, and Albury/Wodonga. Groups are made up of 12 to 15 beef producers who have commercial-sized herds of at least 100 cows. Each group is led by a suitably trained Beef Officer and supported by other technical staff, as appropriate.

At Albury/Wodonga the Beef Manager Group is run jointly by Brian Cumming of NSW Agriculture and Jenny Lawless, Department of Agriculture, Victoria.

In South Australia, two independent farmer groups, largely coordinated and run by the farmer members, have been operating successfully for about 2½ years, with the support of Max Schleuniger of the Department of Primary Industries.

In Tasmania, one group of beef producers near Launceston has been organised and led by consultants, and another group at Smithton has formed with the support of the Beef Improvement Association of Australia (BIAA) branch and Department of Agriculture Beef Officer, Jim May.

Opportunities for Beef Manager in the Future

There is now the opportunity to expand Beef Manager from a pilot project, largely organised by officers of the Department of Agriculture, to an industry-based program

for southern Australia. If the groups were run by farmers rather than by Department of Agriculture beef officers, not only could more groups be run but they could also be more broadly based.

For example, meat processing and exporting companies are now keen to establish forward supply contracts with beef producers to supply cattle of required specifications on a consistent basis during the year. Discussion groups of suppliers could be formed to develop the herd management options required to achieve the desired products. Working in groups is more effective than



Members of the Warrnambool Beef Manager Group discuss pasture renovation.

individual farmers working in isolation.

Beef Manager groups organised and run by farmers would require adequate resourcing to be sustainable, and to enable them to provide high quality technical and financial information to their farmer members. They would also require coordination and leadership for group to group interaction, for planning and for further development.

The strategies for the Beef Manager program in the future could include:

- The formation of 30 to 40 Beef Manager groups in southern WA, southeast of SA, Victoria, Tasmania and southern NSW,

perhaps with the involvement and leadership of the BIAA branches in southern Australia.

- Training of farmers leading Beef Manager groups in group facilitation skills.

- The development of a financial analysis service for members of Beef Manager Groups, and other graziers, so that they can receive relevant, detailed, and timely physical and financial information about the productivity and profitability of their herds, flocks and farms.

- The formation of an executive committee to provide leadership, direction and resources to Beef Manager groups in all states. The membership of the executive committee could involve all key groups in the Beef Manager Program, and be industry based.

The success of the pilot Beef Manager program has demonstrated that beef producers value discussing herd and farm management with other producers, and will consider management changes if there is a clear demonstration of benefits to them. There is now the opportunity to expand Beef Manager to achieve greater productivity improvement for the industry.

FROM THE EDITOR

The final

CONTRIBUTIONS to this issue came from Victoria under guidance from Warren Straw, Victorian Department of Agriculture, and Terry Makin, dairy farmer and chairman of APEN.

The authors work in two departments, a university, as a private consultant, and as a farmer. The articles cover policy, research, group extension across state and organisational boundaries, soil and land care, information management and electronic mail, catchment projects, industry transition, productivity, and extension methods.

This issue shows how diverse the areas are where extension is used, as well as how much extensionists have in common, regardless of where and for whom they work. It will help to counter pressures from people with a single vision of extension, or who try to corner the extension market for their own particular purpose. These contributions, plus the 116 Victorians who have joined APEN, clearly show that extension in Victoria is alive and well. Thank you to the authors and to Warren and Terry.

IN southern Australia crop check groups have united farmers and their advisors in a common cause, raising crop yields and profitability through a systematic scrutiny of all current knowledge.

In Victoria, MEYCheck, short for **m**aximum **e**conomic **y**ield, is the most ambitious interactive information exchange ever attempted with grain farmers. The reasons are obvious: for farmers battling depressed grain prices a rational and systematic approach to every crop management decision is the only way to raise profitability and stay in farming; for the Department of Agriculture, battling the erroneous impression that it had withdrawn from a direct working relationship with farmer clients, it has been one path on the way back.

The notion of utilising group involvement on paddock walks to see the outcome of good and poor decisions and anticipate the next step traces back to the "3 tonne club" approach of the 1970s. What is new about MEY, which could also be spelled out as "meeting every yardstick", has been the determination of the instigators Harm van Rees (formerly of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources), Peter Ridge (a former farm consultant at Donald) and east Wimmera farmer Roy Postlethwaite to use the awesome number crunching ability of computers to translate paddock data collected by the participants (probably 1500 farmers in 1994) into meaningful, timely decision advice.

MEY is built on the principle that a sustainable agriculture is only meaningful if it generates high gross margins. It emphasises four biological issues:

- Maximising water use - in terms of long term soil care it is imperative that soil conditions are right for crop roots to extract as much of the available sub soil moisture as possible.
- Nutrient audits - maintenance of soil fertility is an important concept; nutrients removed in grain must be replaced.
- Effective weed, disease and insect control.

Making the most of MEYCheck

By
IAN SMITH

Senior Industry Officer (Field Crops), Victorian Department of Agriculture, Bendigo

● Minimum tillage to maintain soil structure. MEY is about attention to detail. The activities follow the season: pre-sowing decisions based on soil analyses (later checked against tissue analyses) to match crops to paddock fertility; then inspections and data entry at crop establishment, early tillering, late tillering and flowering.

These inspections provide a timely analysis. If weeds are more prevalent than expected, why? What action would be appropriate to minimise their effect? Anticipation or purposeful intervention is emphasised as the way to a planned rather than a chance outcome.

If there was ever any truth in the old chestnut that useful information languished

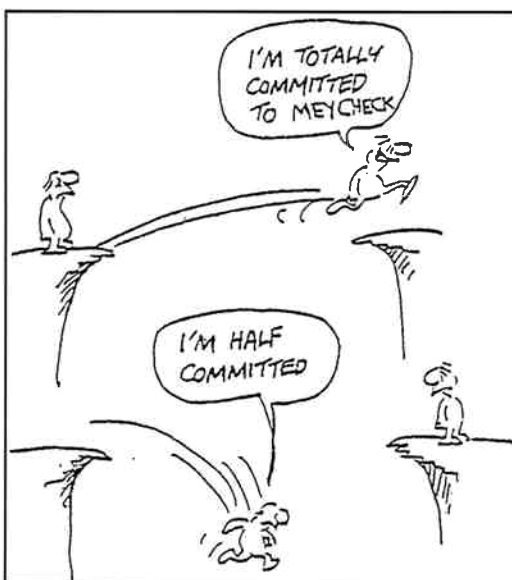
in filing cabinets because it was "ahead of its time", it died with the arrival of MEY. The sense that information gives greater control turns MEY farmers into knowledge boa constrictors. One of the strengths of the program is that it can subject any snippet of information to intense scrutiny in the report back to participants.

Timely reporting with full comparative analysis based on gross margin rankings with attention to particular interests (currently wheat yield and protein) is a major exercise in logistics.

The major computer interpretation program was devised and is maintained by staff of the Centre For Land Protection Research in Bendigo. The need for subsidiary programs draws in other officers.

This autumn, Bruce Ramsey, the Department of Agriculture's agronomist for the Avon-Richardson catchment, faced the prospect of interpreting and mailing out the results of soil analyses on 150 paddocks. His solution was to call on the computer skills of a Bendigo colleague who devised a sub program to handle the data presentation, and in so doing saved several weeks' work.

Farmers have written of MEY that it gives them "support, encouragement, knowledge and power" and "a more complete picture". With DAV and DCNR committing more staff to service the demand, and these officers challenged by their clients to know and utilise the latest technologies, the same is true for those working for the same goals from the other side of the fence.



With apologies to Tandberg.

lap in establishing APEN

So far 454 people have joined APEN: Western Australia 31, South Australia 55, ACT four, Northern Territory 23, Tasmania seven, New South Wales 69, Victoria 116, Queensland 116, New Zealand 11, and other overseas 22. The office of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science will be contracted to do most of the administrative work. However, APEN will remain totally independent from the AIAS.

The process of establishing the network is going well, albeit slowly because

consultation takes time. A draft constitution has been sent to the members of the steering committee for their comment and endorsement. The draft is based on the Associations Incorporation Act 1981. After endorsement we will establish the network in Melbourne.

Once the Network is established, regional chapters can be initiated. The current members of the Steering Committee in each region need to form Interim Regional Management Groups. They then ask endorsement

to form a chapter under the APEN (INC) umbrella and to use its name and constitution. The chapters can choose their own boundaries and are not restricted by state or national boundaries. They also will have their own funds, which includes \$10 per member from the membership fee.

After four or more chapters will have elected office bearers, they nominate members of the permanent Network Management Group. Following election, this new group will replace the current core working party.

Meeting of the Burramine SoilCare Group. The SoilCare program has provided a framework for local farming communities to work together in implementing the change to sustainable farming systems.



Crop SoilCare in north east Victoria

TRADITIONAL cropping systems in North East Victoria have relied heavily on cultivating soils. This has resulted in poor soil structure, erosion, low organic matter, and low biological activity. Each year crops and pastures suffer from poor drainage and waterlogging, poor emergence and root growth, low soil fertility and soil acidity.

The overall objective of the SoilCare program was to assist farmers to identify soil problems that are limiting crop productivity and to adopt cropping systems that overcome these problems and improve crop productivity and profitability. The program was developed as a joint initiative by the Department of Agriculture and Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. SoilCare has been operating in the Goulburn and northeast region of Victoria since 1989. Funding for SoilCare was provided by NSCP and the Sustainable Development Strategy of the Victorian Government.

The program was conducted on three levels:

- 1) A locality level that focused on SoilCare discussion groups and farmer-driven demonstration areas, supported by research trials to assist in the interpretation of results;
- 2) A wider farming community level that integrated other extension and research activities into the SoilCare program; and
- 3) A regional level with a broader focus for extension activity, which supported the locality level.

By

**CATHY BOTTA,
KRIS PANAGIOTOPOULOS,
MAURICE INCERTI,**
Department of Agriculture

BRUCE SONOGAN
*Department of Conservation
and Natural Resources.*

A market research survey into the farmer attitudes and perceptions about soil degradation and current cropping practices was conducted by the School of Agriculture and Forestry, Melbourne University, at the start of the project. This survey was repeated in 1992 to determine the extent to which the SoilCare program had changed farmers' attitudes and understanding of soil degradation and to what extent this was translated into changes in cropping practices.

Attitudes

During the course of the SoilCare program farmer perception of the seriousness of poor soil structure was heightened. One third of SoilCare group members believed SoilCare had increased their awareness of better soil management techniques and had made them aware of the effects of their practices on the land.

The most significant change in attitude concerned cultivation practices. In 1989, minimum tillage was favoured over direct drilling but in 1992, farmers had more favourable attitudes toward direct than minimum tillage.

Practices

Almost one-third of SoilCare members were able to nominate specific changes they had made to their farm management as a result of the SoilCare program. The mean number of cultivations used to sow crops was reduced and stubble was retained over a larger crop area. An increase in the percentage of the total cropped area sown to broadleaf winter crops indicates adoption of balanced rotations.

The high and continuing participation rate through out the Goulburn and Northern Region and continuing demand for the formation and support for groups provides further evidence that group discussions and demonstration are supporting change.

The SoilCare program has provided a framework for local farming communities to work together in implementing the change to sustainable farming systems. Groups have become increasingly responsible for their own running, setting their own directions programs and meeting agendas. Most groups have broadened their focus to include a range of topics such as pastures, agroforestry, organic agriculture and others. Some groups have become Landcare groups integrating the wider community goals into their planning and development.