

EXTENSIONNET

NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALASIA-PACIFIC
EXTENSION NETWORK (INC)

AUSTRALIA POST APPROVED PP 34763700014

From the Guest Editor

Sue Bestow, Agriculture Western Australia

The sun is shining, the birds are singing, harvest is well under way and the surf is up in the small coastal town of Geraldton WA where I sit and write.

This is my first time editing *ExtensionNet* and may I say that it has been a bit of a trick to fit it in with harvest, and I won't apologise for being a tad late. Anyhow here we go...

This issue has a western focus (no surprise there) looking at what is happening to extension in WA. We take a look at the service that Agriculture Western Australia provides from several angles; firstly a grower's perspective with an article written by wheatbelt farmer Richard McKenna who presents us with how he sees the extension service. We also take a look at how a set of horticulturalists in the

Carnarvon area use our service and how our government agency fits into the wider picture of extension here in WA with an article by yours truly.



Sue Bestow

Finally I would like to encourage others to edit this newsletter as it provides a great opportunity to present people's perspective on extension. Don't slack off, it is easy to do, volunteer now!

From the Chair

Terry Makin

Best Wishes for a Successful Year to All!

APEN held an excellent workshop on monitoring and evaluation in extension in Albury on November 30 and December 1 1995. It was attended by 69 people from around Australia and Steve Howse from New Zealand.

The workshop committee's evaluation showed that the majority of participants found the workshop quite useful, with many participants making very positive individual comments in answer to the question of what they got from the workshop. The networking with old acquaintances and the making of new ones was also a highlight.

The interim committee was very satisfied with the result of its combined first annual general meeting and workshop and believes that it was a significant event that could become a format for future annual general meetings.

First Annual General Meeting
The annual general meeting held at the end of the first day of the workshop attracted 44 people and the new Committee of Management team was elected.

CONTENTS

From the guest editor	1	Extension Networks and Information Systems in WA	4
From the Chair	1	International Forum on Monitoring and Evaluation in Extension	5
Agricultural Extension, A Farmer's Perspective	2	APEN NEWS	6
How much do Horticulturalists use the Government Extension Service?	3	Chapter Roundup	7
		Steering Group	8

The new team is:

Terry Makin, the past interim chairman as **President**,

Peter Davies (Conservation and Lands, Deniliquin NSW), as **Vice President**,

Jane Fisher (Tasmania Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries), as **Secretary**,

Warren Straw (Agriculture Victoria, Melbourne) is **Treasurer**,

Dale Williams (University of Western Sydney) has taken responsibility for the **Editor's** position.

Jo Millar (Charles Sturt University, Albury) and **John Bourne** (CRC for Soil & Land Management, Adelaide) are the **committee members**.

(See contact addresses, phone & fax, Page 8)

After the formal elections, David Beckingsale facilitated a brainstorming session to gain some idea of the issues and directions that those present felt the committee should pursue.

I believe that the successful workshop and AGM shows that APEN is meeting members' professional needs and this is verified by our continuing membership growth.

The new Committee of Management held their first teleconference on December 18.

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION, A FARMER'S PERSPECTIVE

Richard McKenna, Western Australian Grain grower

I am a 30 year old grain grower in Western Australia's Northern Agricultural Region. I am a partner in a family business that includes my wife, brother and parents. Together we sow approximately 3300ha of crops that include wheat, lupins, chickpeas, triticale and Canola.

I consider the Agricultural Extension network available to our operation as being very good. We are able to draw information from a wide range of sources. These include the Western Australian Department of Agriculture Advisers, chemical company sales representatives, farm merchandise store agronomists, private consultants and even the researchers themselves. I do feel however, that this network is being stretched to its limits.

It seems that new technology is being produced at an ever increasing rate. The past few years has seen an explosion in the number of management options available to farmers. They include new crops, varieties, herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, fertilisers and crop establishment methods. The demands put on food production by population growth and rising living standards, combined with the ever present "cost price

squeeze", makes the rapid and continual adoption of this new technology necessary for growers to stay in business. If this "technology explosion" continues I can see that the extension sector of the industry will need to undergo some change in order to maximise the adoption of new technology by farmers as they are finding it increasingly difficult to run their farms while keeping up to date with these new developments.

The traditional off peak periods in the farmer's calendar have been saturated with field days, crop inspections, seminars, grower meetings etc. The situation has developed where farmers are sacrificing hands-on farm work in the so called quiet periods in order to attend these functions and must choose between the many events as they cannot possibly all be attended.

There are several ways in which to help alleviate this problem, such as:

- Broadcasting regional and state seminars to telecentres in local towns. This way they could be viewed by farmers locally, or at their convenience via a video cassette.
- Local seminars and field days/crop inspections could be recorded on video, and made available to farmers unable to attend on that particular day. This could be done within local farmer groups, this not requiring increased input by the extension sector.

- Quality control at extension days. While in general it is very good, there are times and speakers that could improve their standard of presentation. The main areas where improvement is sometimes called for is where too much unnecessarily complicated information is presented in too short a time or where a speaker labours too long on a subject of little interest to the audience.

- It appears that most of the extension professionals have little or no training in extension. Perhaps there should be more opportunities in the educational institutions for students to specialise in Agricultural Extension.

In closing, I must say that I find the people I deal with in the research and extension sectors of the industry to be very dedicated and highly motivated.

The good working relationships that exist between farmers, advisers and researchers has produced an industry that will continue to meet challenges as they arise. I look forward to the future.

How Much do Horticulturalists use the Government Extension Service?

Francis Smit, Muresk Institute of Agriculture
Matt Darcey, Department of Agriculture, Western Australia



Matt Darcey

The Department of Agriculture has, in recent times become increasingly involved in working with grower groups and less with customers on an individual basis. The role of the Department in these groups has been to provide facilitation of group development. Thirty-six per cent of Carnarvon horticulturalists are members of seven operative marketing, crop improvement or business management growers groups. A number of these groups have been established in the last two years. However, some criticism of the Department has arisen from producers not in groups. A survey of growers was then done with the objective to assess the

effectiveness of extension services currently supplied by the Department of Agriculture in Carnarvon, WA.

Thirty per cent of Carnarvon plantations were randomly selected and surveyed by personal interview on their plantation between July 7 and 13 1995. The survey was tested on five plantation owners. In total 48 respondents were interviewed (30.6% of active Carnarvon plantations). Growers were asked their views on the current direction of the Department's extension services, how they might be improved and what services might be required to meet future needs of growers in the Gascoyne.

The major findings of the survey were:

- 79% of respondents use the Department's advisory service.
- 42% of these on average use the service at least quarterly.
- 38% of enquires related to pest, disease and chemical information.
- 28% of enquires related to crop and soil management.
- 83% of growers in groups are gaining benefits from those groups.
- 60% of growers not in groups indicated that they will or might join groups in the future.
- 77% of growers not in groups thought that increasing group work by the Department of Agriculture was a good idea.
- 94% of growers read the Department of Agriculture's quarterly horticultural

APEN is proudly sponsored by

Queensland Dept Primary Industries

Agriculture Victoria

Dairy Research and Development Corporation

information publication
Riverag.

- 69% of growers would use a grower resource centre at night (up to 83% if it was also open during the day).
- 32% of suggested improvements to the advisory service related to the provision of more information.

The extension survey has provided Carnarvon horticulturists with a mechanism to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the current direction taken by the Department of Agriculture, in turn providing the Department with valuable feedback. The results confirm wide usage of the Department's advisory service, an acceptance of the current direction taken by the Department and an indication of growers' future information requirements. Information transfer through group work, the *Riverag* and the establishment of a grower resource centre will maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department of Agriculture's advisory services to their customers.

Extension networks and information systems in WA

Sue Bestow, Geraldton, Western Australia

Agriculture Western Australia is part of a wider network of information providers that work in the state. These include other government agencies, marketing bodies and private firms.

Collectively the extension workers within these organisations, have, as part of their aims, a common thread in the achievement of sustainable agricultural production across the region. The reasons for pursuing this are, of course, different between players.

Increasingly, Australian agriculture is operating within an Agricultural Knowledge and Information System (AKIS). This is seen as the set of organisations and people, and the interactions between them that deal with agricultural knowledge and information. They potentially work synergistically to support decision making in agriculture.

Close integration of the elements of the AKIS is needed if the players are to realise their combined potential. We are seeing an increasing complexity of the knowledge systems which reduces the direct importance of government extension officers. They can take one of two paths, either they become managers of the system, their work therefore becoming more pivotal, or they can be overtaken and reduced to a minor role in a system dominated by private interests. This will depend on the choices of the public service policy makers.

In the past five years there have been several significant changes that have impacted on the information services available to growers. These changes, which are likely to continue, are:

A. Some significant changes to the industry

- The cost price squeeze getting tighter and product quality becoming more important.
- The concept of sustainability has entered more strongly into the farming equation.

B. Changes to government agencies

- Reduction in the overall Government extension services.
- Changes in method of extension, reducing the one to one reactive extension and increasing the proactive, market driven, group extension work.
- Government has become a giver of more specialist advice.
- Increasing use of high technology to deliver information.

C. Changes to private sector

- Increase in the number and level of activity of farm consultants.
- More crop protection products on the market.
- More competitive market place for product sales.
- Resellers are adding product and agronomic advice to the service they provide.

In comparison to five years ago, growers now have a greatly expanded choice of information sources. Consequently, it is possible to interpret these changes as a general lift from a typical linear extension model to a genuine AKIS with many players, knowledge seekers and information sources.

The changes that have occurred so far, have had significant impact on the way in which each player operates in the AKIS and the interactions that occur within this system. As these, and our roles, are still changing we need to monitor change so we can understand the system better and manage change effectively to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the linkages and ultimately the information transfer.

We cannot effectively respond to change unless we consider the entire technology system and our role within it. The Agency has reduced resources, so now more than ever these need to be well targeted to maintain and improve our relationship with growers.

This can be done by utilising the increased level of input of private based information sources to growers. If this is managed well it can be a win - win scenario.

- The Agency wins because we can increase information output as they work via other players in the AKIS.
- Agri-business wins because it has access to information that the Agency has generated to improve its own technical information base and credibility with farmers.

Synergy between players is what we should aim for while minimising the competition between the players in the AKIS. Nurturing the collaborative

approach between private and public extension workers within the AKIS is fundamental to the future of the Agency's extension. It will result in better information flow, better knowledge generation and ultimately better and more informed decisions by growers, leading to better profitability and sustainability.

Further reading:

Roling N. The development of the concept of agricultural knowledge information systems (AKIS): implications for extension.

Van Beek, PGH. Knowledge Systems Management, a new role for QDPI extension in Proceedings of the 1990 QDPI Extension Conference. QDPI, Brisbane.

International Forum on Monitoring and Evaluation in Extension Albury, 30 November - 1 December 1995.

Natalie Hunt, Agriculture Western Australia

I am the Monitoring and Evaluation Co-ordinator for the National Landcare Program in W.A. and I work with many extension officers. Recently I had the opportunity to attend the International Forum on Monitoring and Evaluation in Extension held in Albury.

Peter Van Beek led the forum with Drennan Watson (Scotland), Gerard Muller (Denmark and Netherlands) and Robert Macadam, a systems specialist from NSW. These presenters embodied a wealth of evaluation experience and many participants were keen to hear more from them about specific evaluations they had worked on. This unfortunately, didn't occur and most of the forum was spent in small group workshops discussing the problems associated with evaluation and how to overcome them.

Most of the people attending were extension practitioners. Many expected to draw on the experience of the presenters and learn a set evaluation procedure they could take away and use with their projects and programs. This quickly became an unrealistic expectation as most projects and programs operate differently, and have variable resources allocated to evaluation. However a series of generic questions were outlined that always need to be asked to clarify any evaluation procedure:

What are you going to evaluate? - be very clear.

Who is the evaluation for? - Who contracted you to do the evaluation?

Why are you doing the evaluation?
Drennan Watson outlined three broad reasons why we monitor and evaluate: accountability, diagnosis and learning.

Determine which one/s apply to your evaluation.

What do you want to find out from the evaluation?

Who is going to do it?

Who is going to be involved?

When are you going to do it?

How are you going to do it? - explore all the options and assess the resources you have.

Drennan Watson gave a succinct example clarifying some of the terminology used in monitoring and evaluation. Envisage a dairy farmer, with inputs of labour and feed etc., and outputs of milk, calves and live weight gain, etc. The changes in the farmers' inputs and outputs are **INDICATORS**. Measuring these indicators is **MONITORING**. The "so what does that mean" tests are **EVALUATION**. For example, monitoring the outputs and then deciding if that has been an adequate output is evaluation.

Robert Macadam outlined monitoring and evaluation as a collaborative learning process and

a copy of his paper is available if people are interested.

Contact me, on (09) 369 3960 or at Agriculture Western Australia, 3 Baron Hay Court, South Perth W.A. 6151 for a copy of the paper or for further information about the forum.

Pass on Your

Cover Sheet..

Encourage a Colleague to

Join APEN Today!

APEN NEWS

Themes and issues for the new committee to pursue in the next 12 months were raised by using a brainstorming exercise at the AGM.

The Committee of Management (COM) is setting up **working groups** to progress these issues and some people have already volunteered. Surely there are others of you who were not at the AGM who would like to assist. This is our network and what we will achieve will depend on the effort that we put in and the resources that we can access.

The **key issues raised were;**

1. Improve networking and

communication (23 votes)

2. Broaden membership beyond agricultural extension (21 votes)

3. Conduct a national event every year and conference every 3 years (20 votes)

4. Code of extension conduct (17 votes)

5. Developing chapters - invigorate, resource membership (17 votes)

6. Develop list of journals and publications emphasising extension and case study library 7.

Improve quality of APEN products eg newsletter (15 votes)

The **Committee of Management (COM)** decided at its first meeting to use self managed working groups to achieve some positive outcomes for these issues. These groups will be self managing and are responsible for reporting to the COM and through the newsletter at

least quarterly. They will need to develop their own methods of working as a group, including deciding how best to communicate in the most convenient and cost effective way. They will need to seek their own funds, either from the Committee of Management or by seeking outside sponsorship. All groups will have a convenor although not all have been decided yet. Convenors of the working groups will be responsible for attracting other group members with expertise from the wider APEN network.

The working groups and volunteer members are;

Improving networking and communications - Warren Straw

.....

Membership - Matt McCarthy, John Petheram, Jean Edwards, Dale Williams.

Code of conduct and education, training and competencies - Frank Walker, Frank Vanclay, Bob Macadam, Jane Fisher.

Editorial committee - Dale Williams (editor), Elwin Turnbull, Lee-Ann Monks, Jill Kerby.

National event and conference committee - Committee of Management, Jo Millar convenor.

Reference resources - Jeff Coutes, John Petheram, Bob Gray, Ann Hickey, Lauren Thompson.

Overseas Chapters - Horrie Poussard (convenor), Mark Hickey, Roger Packham and Dale Williams.

The networking and communications group needs volunteers to progress what APEN members consistently reaffirm as one of the most important areas for APEN.

Please contact Terry Makin ((03) 9459 4063 Phone/fax) if you are interested in assisting in the communications group or any of the other groups.

CHAPTER ROUNDUP

South Australia

John Bourne

Five people from SA attended the Forum on Monitoring and Evaluation in Extension at Albury. APEN members Brad Smith and Jill Kerby both found the overseas presentations from Drennan Watson and Gerard Muller challenging and thought provoking.

Hugh Armstrong, former Tasmanian APEN member, now living in Adelaide also attended. Hugh is now local at the Waite Campus at Glen Osmond with the CRC for Viticulture and we look forward to seeing a lot more of him.

Rebecca Lang and Leah Hopton from Primary Industries SA have prepared a summary of major issues from the forum, particularly to assist them in

evaluation of the SA Decade of Landcare Plan.

The APEN/AIAS seminar on "Taking the Information Superhighway into Agriculture and Rural Industries", held at the Waite in November, proved to be an outstanding success, both from a point of view of transferring information and financially. It's not often you have to turn away paying customers from an event like this, but we finally had to limit numbers to 180 (although mail and telephone registrations were considerably greater). The organising committee is now looking at running a further event on "IT" in 1996.

Murray Riverina

John Lacy

Because the APEN Executive decided to hold the International Forum on Monitoring and Evaluation in Extension at Albury we decided to postpone our own workshop on Communication Methods. The organising committee have not yet set a date in 1996 but this will be publicised. Our chapter has now had three meetings including the first meeting which was held on 14 November 1994. At our Communication Workshop we will need to set aside time to plan future activities and meetings. It will also be timely to elect a new chairperson and treasurer for the coming twelve months.

In my travels more and more people have been inquiring about APEN and have signalled their interest in coming to future meetings. However one of the issues for our branch is that we cover a huge geographical area. This is always going to make it difficult for people who have to travel long distances to our meetings. Attendance of people from centres such as Kerang, Echuca, Deniliquin and Griffith has been light. What do we need to do to attract people from these centres? Several options are available which we could perhaps consider at our next meeting.

South East Queensland

Larissa Wilson

The APEN south east Queensland chapter took time to review our 1995

activities at an informal meeting in Brisbane on December 1st. Due to the heat, the scheduled BBQ was cancelled and replaced with a chicken and salad feast in the air conditioned comfort of the BSES (Bureau of Sugar Experimental Stations) function room.

On reflection, it seemed that the information sharing/casestudy approach used for the two workshops (Gatton and Nambour) was highly regarded. In the light of this, future activities may follow a similar format.

Some of our newer members attended and it was lovely to have fresh input into ideas for next year. Members showed interest in continuing to learn from and share skills and knowledge with fellow Queenslanders, as well as looking into the possibility of inviting highly regarded colleagues from elsewhere when opportunities arise. We discussed a desire to broaden our focus out from agriculture, to include other 'extension' areas such as health campaigners and teachers. We also agreed to contact PIN, the Public Involvement Network, with a view to running joint activities.

We are concerned that the 'work' involved in having ideas for, and organising APEN events continues to be left to the same small group of people. For APEN to work effectively as a network, we need new ideas coming in, and we need to share the workload. So if you have any ideas for activities you would like APEN to be involved in please let us (APEN chapter contacts and/or Secretariat) know, and volunteer to help in some way. APEN is your network, and we all want it to operate for your benefit, in the way that you would like.

Tasmanian Chapter

Jane Fisher

The Tasmanian Chapter has been extremely active in the last year. In July, we had a workshop on "Working with the Media", and had our inaugural committee meeting. The new committee have surveyed members to determine what their training needs are.