

Newsletter of the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network Ltd

ExtensionNet



Building Bridges, Inspiring Change: The Power of Extension

Highlighting Collaboration and Inspiration Across Our Vibrant Network

VOL. 32 No. 1

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Reflections on my first year as President
Noel Ainsworth



As I had previously been a Regional Coordinator and then Board Director, so much of the APEN governance and services to members was not too much of a surprise. Facing the reality of the APEN business model and working out what the Board could do better to meet members expectations was the challenge.

People say that offering a perspective in retrospect

is the best way to demonstrate success. Perhaps turning that around and suggesting that reflection can offer the best opportunity for learning and refining strategy is a better way of capturing it.

The activity undertaken by the Board over the past year can be captured under the following three areas.

- Governance: An overdue review of the APEN Constitution, the APEN Strategic Plan and the Committees in operation.
- Services: Using the results of the biennial survey to ensure that a regular program of free and paid services are made available to members for professional development and networking outcomes.
- Delegation, effectiveness and efficiency: Ensure that Committee terms of reference and makeup are updated, the Chairs are empowered and that tasks are moved as appropriate from the Board to individual Committees Chairs to make quick progress.

Despite good progress over the past year, APEN’s business model is still reliant on key Director, member and TAS support to ensure that the myriad of services are delivered to members. This operational risk is mitigated by a mixture of careful attention to delegation, succession and the willingness of individuals to pitch in when needed. Again, the Board will ensure that planning develops a collaborative and agreed suite of services, placing the International Conference in late 2025 as the cornerstone of services over the coming year.

On a personal note, I am also in a full-time role delivering using my extension skills and knowledge. Perhaps many people in comparable roles would be familiar with the saying that if you want something done, give it to a busy person. This means trying to make smart informed decisions and to not procrastinate. Planning times into my diary is the main way I can get APEN tasks done. It also means taking my employer on a journey to understand the win: win nature of the situation. Then ensuring a work life balance, separating work plus APEN, from the family and friends. I see a striking parallel in separating the different parts of my life on LinkedIn and Facebook.

In closing, I would also like to recognise the value that my role in APEN offers my work. It forces me to confront and confirm my biases, re-evaluate and test my approaches, and to expand my networks into new industries and settings. The Board, the Committees and the Regional Coordinators are a fantastic mix of people wanting to be the best of the best in extension and I would thoroughly recommend joining this band of merry change makers.

Editorial

Dr. Pat Hamilton



During the last four years, I have appreciated working with a team to enrich the quality of each issue.



The focus of APEN has always been to work in partnership with extension professionals across Australia and New Zealand. As Stephen Covey says, “An empowered organisation is one in which individuals have the knowledge, skill, desire and opportunity to personally succeed in a way that leads to collective organisational success”.

Noel’s message encouraged me to think about choice of why we join an organisation. Is it for Power? Influence? Networking? Belonging? Professional Development? Building relationships? Linking and Connecting with People? WiiiFM (What’s in it for me? Finding answers? Belonging? The list is endless.

I found my answer in the powerful statement by Toni Cortney:

“[The APEN] organisation is a rich tapestry woven by the story of its people [who are] weaving together many strands of information, insight, knowledge, and wisdom. Over time, people will come and go; they will have roles to play; they will contribute to the current chapters of change, creating their organisation’s story and legacy. Every interaction with someone internally or externally, is adding to the ‘bigger picture’ story.”

Thus, it is the networking for me. The importance of sharing the life experiences of our Members. As Noel, in APEN’s September issue of the eBulletin so eloquently wrote, *“The most valuable element of APEN is its members. The individuality of each member’s life experience means that they continually apply and adjust extension theories, learning with each new activity or an activity in a new setting. This power of the individual member means that we have as much to share as extension theory researchers. Given that each person’s experience becomes another testing ground for ideas and spurs new variants, it reinforces the value of opinions that members can bring to activities such as the APEN Conversations.”*

This issue of ExtensionNet shares with you, aspects of events in the APEN Network: the Board activities; a summary of ExtensionChat; having a voice in APEN Conversations; the recent survey report conducted for AgriFutures Australia by John James (Enablers of Change), Jeff Coutts (Coutts J&R), and Denise Bewsell (Scarlatti); Lilia Jenkins, (Extension Scientist (Cesar) a recipient of APEN’s conference pass, describes her ‘wins’ from Hort Connections 2024., as part of APEN’s Industry Partnership Agreement with Hort Connections, Stephanie March describes her journey with the South Australian Stepping Australian Stepping into Leadership Program; Susie Murphy, *White Industry Development and Innovation Manager Hort Innovation Manjimup WA*, shares the impact of industry development officers for Table Grapes; and what would we do without our Regional Coordinators! Read how they juggle a personal and professional life. Such a wealth of information –as we learn from the past, appreciate the present and grow a dynamic future in our vibrant extension community network.

In March 2017, my first issue of ExtensionNet as Editor, I wrote: *“I am reminded of Mahatma Gandhi’s approach that rather than waiting for change to happen, we need to be the change we want to see – that is, we often need to see beyond the lens to progress our extension work. Leading by example is an important characteristic of most change agents.”*

It is 2024. I am still editing ExtensionNet after eight years. During the last four years, I have appreciated working with a team to enrich the quality of each issue. My deep appreciation to Chrissy Stokes, Morag Anderson, Adrian Englefield and Roe Curry for their enormous support and to Alice Long for bringing a spark to the presentation of each issue. Carolyn Christie and Alice Long have volunteered to take on the editorial role, with support from Sandy Gunter. I wish them all the enjoyment, a little less stress and building an informative newsletter to engage and support our very talented and experienced APEN Members.

APEN has been busy during 2024

APEN ExtensionChat #4

Alice Long

What a fabulous series of workshops, led by Facilitator, Jeanette Long, where I helped in tech support.

In 2024, Extension has never been more complicated and exhilarating. Extension Professionals are being constantly challenged to respond to a complex array of social, environmental, economic, and personal issues.

Strengthening the Future of Extension Practices

In 2024, the challenges faced by extension professionals are more complex than ever, requiring innovative approaches and fresh perspectives. ExtensionChat 2024, a three-part online workshop series hosted by the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network (APEN), brought together 24 extension professionals from across Australia and New Zealand to tackle these challenges head-on. Through rich discussions and hands-on facilitation, participants engaged with practical tools and strategies to elevate their extension work in a rapidly changing world.

At the heart of ExtensionChat 2024 was the need to adapt extension practices to an increasingly complex social, environmental, and economic landscape. The workshops, featuring industry leaders like Jeanette Long, Denise Bewsell, and Heather Collins, encouraged participants to think beyond traditional models and embrace more collaborative, flexible approaches to engagement and facilitation.

Engagement and Collaboration emerged as essential components of effective extension. Participants explored ways to ensure that extension events are not just informative but truly engaging, leading to long-term, meaningful change. A strong emphasis was placed on understanding the needs of the audience—be they farmers, natural resource managers, or community development professionals—and tailoring extension efforts to meet those needs.

One recurring theme was the **importance of peer-to-peer learning**, which resonated strongly with participants. As Dave Smith shared from his experience with the Northern Beef Business program, peer-to-peer groups, where farmers learn from each other, have proven to be one of the most effective models for driving change. This model prioritises real-world knowledge exchange over top-down information dissemination, reinforcing the value of networks and community-driven learning in extension.

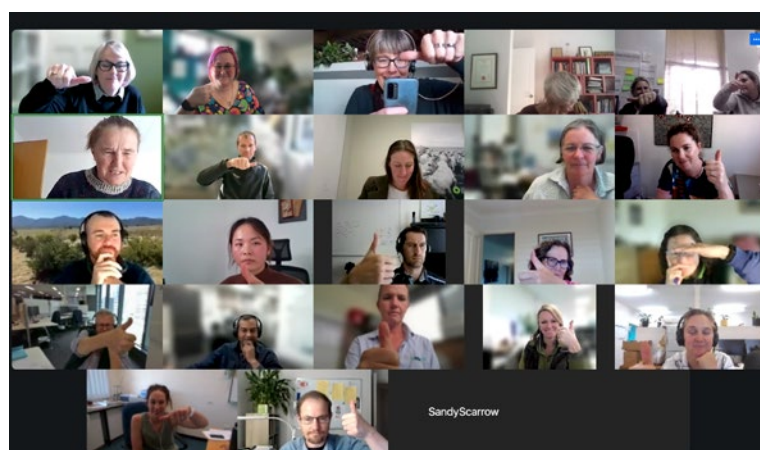
Another critical takeaway was the need for **timing and**

relevance in extension activities. Sarah Thompson, a dairy farmer and experienced extensionist, highlighted the significance of aligning events with the seasonal rhythms of farming life, ensuring that workshops and field days are held when they are most relevant and impactful for participants.

Practical Takeaways for Extension Professionals

- 1. Start with Why:** Successful extension begins with a clear understanding of why the topic matters to the target audience. This focus on relevance ensures that extension efforts are more than just information sessions—they become opportunities for genuine engagement and collaboration.
- 2. Less is More:** Overloading participants with information can be counterproductive. The value of focusing on key insights and allowing time for reflection and discussion were emphasised, enabling attendees to walk away with actionable knowledge that can be applied immediately.
- 3. Facilitation is Key:** Good facilitation, grounded in inclusiveness and creativity, plays a critical role in driving engagement. Techniques like using continuums, ORID methods, and creating opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction are crucial in making extension efforts both enjoyable and effective.
- 4. Adaptability and Flexibility:** Extension professionals must remain flexible, adapting their approaches to the unique needs of different groups. As demonstrated by the diverse range of participants, extension is not a one-size-fits-all endeavour. Tailoring approaches based on the audience's experience, preferences, and context is crucial for success.

The positive feedback from participants reflects the value of ExtensionChat 2024. Participants left feeling “energised,” “inspired,” and “confident,” equipped with new skills and perspectives that could be applied directly to their work. The event not only deepened their understanding of extension practices but also reinforced the importance of building strong, engaged networks across the region.





APEN Conversations

Tune into APEN Conversations for a shared learning experience

Register Now

“Don’t be too scared to have a voice”.

APEN conversations is an opportunity for APEN members to get together for an hour to discuss papers, articles or new ideas and how these may be applied to their work. Because there is always a range of experience in the virtual room, it is a great chance for members to learn from each other.

Since the last ExtensionNet, our SA Regional Coordinator, Sandy Gunter has coordinated three Conversations, supported by the Regional Coordinators (RCs).

In July, Denise Bewsell (NZ) challenged us to share our conversations on the importance of questioning our ideas. Denise took us through structured conversations using the ORID tool (Observation, Reflective, Interpretive, Decision-making). The breakout rooms discussed what were the most type of questions used.; action can be complex, Which questions do we tend to use the most? What questions are we uncomfortable with? What other frameworks are people aware of? Denise was supported by RC ‘tech guy’, Ossie Lang. Once again, the discussions were vibrant and full in lots of sharing.

In August Jeanette Gellard led a conversation on evaluation- exploring the key principles of good evaluation practice, the diverse types of evaluation and how to select and apply the best evaluation

methods that will suit the needs of our ‘clients’, and what tools and techniques are out there that we can tap into. Working across the agricultural and environmental sectors, Jeanette is passionate about building peoples’ capacity to influence decision making processes.

The September Conversations, Getting engagement when things get busy: how to attract an audience, was facilitated by Ossie Lang, Tasmanian Regional Coordinator and supported by Callen Thompson, NSW Nth Regional Coordinator. Ossie’s vey engaging slides on Tactics, Bribery, Promote Early, Get Sneaky and Follow up, inspired everyone to share their ‘techniques’. Some prompting questions for the participants to think about included:

- How do you pitch your information/ subject matter to make it interesting and visible to your intended audience?
- What things do you do to enhance the X factor for people (What’s in it for me)?

[Apology to those who were not there. APEN does not record the sessions, and you have missed out on a very practical toolbox.] Once again, the session was filled with vibrant discussions, lots of sharing, great anecdotes. We had fun!

The next APEN Conversations will bring us together before Christmas.

Ideas and practices around the network

APEN is blessed with a wealth of talented Members who share their skills, knowledge and experiences with us in the following articles.

Australian Extension Capacity and Capability

Dr John James

How many extension practitioners are there in Australia, and what are their skill levels? These are some of the questions addressed in a recent survey report conducted for AgriFutures Australia by John James (Enablers of Change), Jeff Coutts (Coutts J&R), and Denise Bewsell (Scarlatti). This report, commissioned on behalf of all the Rural Research and Development Corporations, sheds light on the current and future needs of the extension system within the Australian agricultural and natural resource management sector. The 392 responses from a wide range of extension practitioners, offer a snapshot of the state of the extension system across the country, helping us understand its strengths, weaknesses, and areas in need of further development. It also serves as a benchmark for those working to enhance the effectiveness of the extension system. The report informs the overarching project, Australian Extension Capacity and Capability: A Map and a Gap Analysis, which is due to conclude by December 2024.

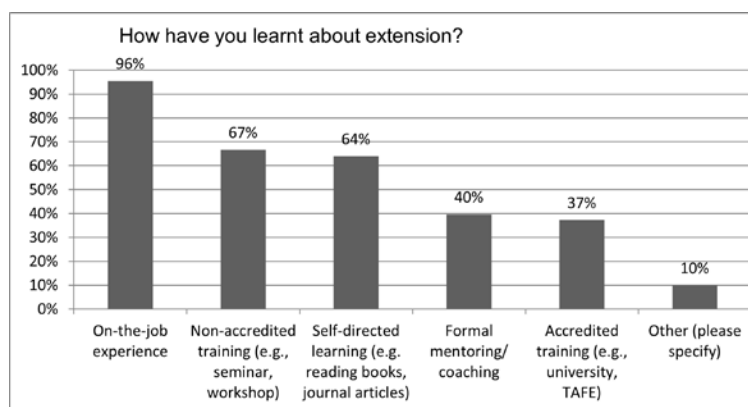
This project is exploring extension capacity and capability. Capacity considers whether there are sufficient professionals working in the extension space to support the needs of the sector now and into the future. On the other hand, extension capability focuses on the skills, knowledge, and abilities required by these practitioners to solve problems, meet goals, and adapt to the evolving demands of the sector. These two concepts—capacity and capability—are integral to the effectiveness of extension services in Australia. It’s not just about having enough people on the ground but also ensuring those individuals possess the right skills and resources to make a meaningful impact.

Extension has evolved from a specific job role into a broad discipline, much like project management, where many professionals—including researchers, policy makers, and academics—are now often required to undertake extension activities alongside their primary duties. This shift reflects the growing need for collaboration within the agricultural sector and beyond to ensure there are people with the right skills and resources.

The survey’s findings reveal several key trends and

challenges within the current extension system. There was a strong theme highlighting the need for more training programs, particularly for new graduates entering the field. Continuous professional development is essential, with respondents expressing a desire for more in-depth training, mentoring, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities. Specific skill areas such as adult learning techniques and knowledge of carbon markets were highlighted as critical for future development. This indicates a growing recognition of the need to equip extension practitioners with specialised skills that align with the evolving needs of the agricultural sector.

Almost all of respondents (96%) learnt about extension through on-the-job experience. Other significant methods include non-accredited training (67%), self-directed learning (64%), and formal mentoring or coaching (40%). Accredited training, such as through universities or TAFE, is also a notable source of learning, with 37% of respondents mentioning it.



The survey results also highlight the importance of improved collaboration and coordination between various organisations, including Research Development Corporations, universities, and the private sector. Respondents mentioned the need for a national extension strategy to foster better integration of efforts across regions and sectors. Such a strategy could play a pivotal role in streamlining the extension system and ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively.

Funding and resource allocation also emerged as major themes in the survey. Respondents expressed concerns about the lack of flexible and long-term funding models that support both capacity building and on-the-ground delivery. Funding should be aligned with practical outcomes and real-world impacts over longer time frames. This highlights the need for a more adaptive and responsive funding framework that can accommodate the dynamic nature of the agricultural sector.

The report concludes with several key implications for the future of extension in Australia. These include the development of enhanced training programs tailored to the needs of extension practitioners, the formulation of a national extension strategy to improve collaboration, the implementation of structured career pathways to attract and retain young professionals, and the advocacy for flexible funding models that support both traditional and innovative approaches. Additionally, there is an emphasis on balancing the use of technology with traditional face-to-face methods in extension practices, recognising that while new tools are valuable, the human element remains critical for building trust and relationships.

The report provides a clear, data-driven understanding of the current landscape of extension capacity and capability in Australia. These insights will guide the development of targeted professional development opportunities and will help extension practitioners advocate for policy changes that support the extension profession. The report's findings will support APEN and strengthen its role as the leading network for extension professionals across the region. If you would like to receive a copy of the report, please contact John James john@enablersofchange.com.au

Hort Connections 2024 – Grow. Connect. Thrive was held on 3-5 June at the Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre (MCEC).

APEN, as part of the Industry Partnership Agreement with Hort Connections, received 2 Conference Access Passes. Our Victorian Regional Coordinator, Sarah Thompson, offered it the first 2 Victorian APEN members who contacted her would be given the passes. The lucky winners were, Lilia Jenkins and Cynthia Mahoney.

Lilia summarised her experience.



“Talk to as many people as you can early on and get some wins under your belt- it sets the tone for the rest of the conference.” My Uber driver shared this advice with me as we arrived at the Melbourne Convention Centre. I must have looked anxious—truthfully, I was. I was excited about the opportunity, but the sheer scale of my first conference as a professional was intimidating.

But my driver’s advice was spot on. Once I scored a few early wins, I felt more confident and ended up learning a lot.

Here are my ‘wins’ from Hort Connections 2024:

The Grass Isn’t Always Greener

I predominately work in integrated pest management (IPM) for broadacre cropping, and there’s a common belief that horticulture has made IPM so much easier. Supposedly, compared to broadacre, the profit margins are higher, the ecosystem simpler, and farmers less risk averse. However, like most generalisations, I found this wasn’t entirely accurate. The people in this sector are just like any other – with their own beliefs, assumptions, and practices, and horticulture faces unique drivers and barriers to practice change, just like broadacre does.

Finding Common Ground

In fact, I found more similarities than differences between broadacre and horticulture.

Firstly, sustainability in food production has shifted from a premium to an expectation for consumers, posing both market opportunities and threats to profit margins and social license.

Secondly, there’s increasing concern around how agricultural chemical regulations, driven by global standards such as those from the EU, could impact export commitments, restrict chemical availability in Australia (particularly pertinent for IPM), and reshape consumer preferences.

Collective Impact

Fortunately, there’s a growing recognition that these challenges are shared across the entire sector, and “cross-industry collaboration” was certainly a buzzword at the conference. Collaboration, of course, is easier said than done given the diverse perspectives, priorities, and approaches involved. But it is almost certainly necessary to address the wicked problems that agriculture faces, such as rising pesticide resistance. Promising interdisciplinary projects were showcased at the conference, and I believe as extensionists, we’ll learn a number of lessons by observing how such collaborations evolve in the coming years.

Perspectives on Extension

Speaking of extension, I had some interesting (and sometimes heated!) conversations about how best to

design and deliver impactful change.

While there are nuances and contributing factors at play here, I like to think that most of us are driven by common goals: supporting producers and improving agricultural practices for the greater good.

Whether or not I agreed with every perspective, I think these conversations are a step in the right direction toward aligning our shared understanding and achieving these goals.

Building Bonds and Networking

And finally, a more personal win was connecting with other early-career professionals.

While working in an industry like agriculture, it's easy to feel overwhelmed, especially among seasoned, established networks (hello imposter syndrome!). Of course, most everyone was welcoming and friendly, but the chance to connect with people who are navigating similar paths, challenges and passions was invaluable. From old university mates, familiar faces from the last APEN conference, and totally new connections; these are the colleagues I'll grow with in the industry— it's reassuring to know we're not alone.

That, and of course, the food was absolutely incredible. But then again, what else would you expect from an agricultural conference?

My sincerest thanks to APEN for the amazing opportunity to attend, and a special thanks to my Uber driver for the unexpected yet incredibly helpful advice!

Lilia Jenkins | Extension Scientist | Cesar

All areas of horticulture were recognised and celebrated at the conference, bringing together members from right across the vegetable, fruit and floral sectors. Hort Connections again proudly showcased exciting new products, services and technologies to help shape the Australian and New Zealand industry – highlighting solutions in agricultural technology, finance, labour, energy and environmental sustainability. 82% of delegates who attended Hort Connections 2024 said they will be coming to Brisbane to attend Hort Connections 2025.

An added bonus - Alice Long, APEN's Communications Coordinator, promoted the event through APEN's LinkedIn, Facebook and eBulletin.

A Fantastic Experience – sometimes you need a nudge to share someone's thanks -In this case, I am sharing Stephanie March's journey.

Background: In September this year, I had the privilege of attending the Graduation of 15 women who were recipients of the South Australian Stepping into Leadership Program, facilitated by Past APEN President, Jeanette Long, Ag Consulting Co, and Sharon Honner, Spectra Coaching, and proudly supported by WoTL and PIRSA.

As an advocate for rural women and girls, over several decades, I have designed, coordinated, delivered and facilitated numerous training programs re leadership training, and mentored many women and girls during my teaching career, and in various roles in organisations, including the Australian Women in Agriculture, the National Women's Coalition, Country to Canberra and now APEN.

I've always believed that great leaders don't set out to be a leader. Most people want to make a difference. They want to lead people in the 'right' direction. Build confidence, create a network, give skills and knowledge (empowerment) to turn ideas into reality to become effective leaders (not busy leaders). People who take their passion and make it happen.

The following article is by Stephanie March, a graduate of the 2024 Stepping into Leadership Program. Stephanie's vote of thanks on behalf of the graduates captured so much of my journey that I asked her if I could publish it APEN's ExtensionNet. Read, enjoy and reflect on her insights. I am sure that your own journey will be enriched.

Regards Pat Hamilton | Director APEN

Here is Stephanie's story...

"When I first joined the Stepping into Leadership (SIL) program, I'll be honest – I didn't know what to expect. I was unsure where I fit as a leader, and what I truly had to offer. But from the moment we gathered for that first workshop, something shifted. I quickly realised this program was exactly where I needed to be, and the timing couldn't have been more perfect. I remember walking into the room, which was filled with incredible women from diverse backgrounds – some of us working on farms, some in agribusiness, healthcare, education, law enforcement, and many of us wearing several hats at once, as rural women often do. I felt incredibly lucky to have been able to meet with a fantastic bunch of emerging leaders. Our 2024 cohort, (the SIL program has been delivered for 12 years – such is the power of a brilliant program),

is made up of mothers, sisters, daughters, volunteers, professionals, and community leaders, often juggling these roles without even noticing the quiet leadership we were already providing.

For me, as someone with a background in occupational therapy and primary education, who has been working full-time on our family farm for the past few years, growing an enterprise across both York and Eyre Peninsulas, as well as being the mother of a child with a rare genetic condition requiring frequent medical care in Adelaide, leadership has always felt like something other people did – something perhaps out of reach, something that required maybe titles or status or something you did when you got older. But this program has shown me that leadership is not about titles; leadership is about showing up, embracing your values, and leading from where you are, with what you have and from where a place of passion and purpose.



Leadership comes from a place of growth. And growth certainly doesn't happen overnight – it takes time, nurturing, and, most importantly, the belief that we have the potential to rise. Like a seed planted deep in the soil, leadership begins underneath the surface. At first, you may not see the progress. It might feel like nothing is happening, like you're stuck or unsure. But with the right environment, with care, support, and a little courage that seed begins to push through, to break the surface, to grow into something bigger and more beautiful than you could have, perhaps, first imagined.

During the program, one of the most profound lessons I learned was from my coach, who spoke about how people sometimes get “stuck in the weeds. As they grow, we get busy, consumed by day-to-day

struggles, caught in the unfamiliar. And there's nothing inherently wrong with being in the weeds – they're part of life, sometimes they serve a purpose. There are even beautiful weeds that exist. But if we truly want to thrive, we need to find a way to break through and blossom as leader. We need to find a way to rise above them.

Leadership, like a growing seed, requires the right environment. Just as a seed needs water, sunlight, nutrients, and care, our growth as leaders needs support, guidance, changes, and, importantly, the belief that we can do more than just survive in the weeds. We can grow tall, bloom and, eventually thrive.

If we think about it: in agriculture, when a plant struggles in a patch of weeds it's not necessarily the end. We might try to use a spray, increase our fertiliser rate, or consider a different crop rotation the following year. With careful attention and nurturing, that plant can grow beyond the weeds and reach toward the sky. This program has done the same for me. It has been the sunlight and nutrients that I needed to push through my comfort zone, to stop making excuses, and to recognise that there is a leader in me waiting to grow. Stepping up and out into space that wasn't already there waiting for me.

Stepping into Leadership has equipped us participants with a wide range of tools for our leadership toolbox. We've gained invaluable skills in handling challenging conversations, mastering negotiation techniques, and harnessing the power of effective questioning. We've also explored diverse learning styles, personalities, and characteristics, and learned how these factors influence team management.

Bringing these skills back to my family farm, my work in health advocacy at the Women and Children's Hospital, and my volunteer roles in the community have already proven incredibly beneficial. I'm certain that each participant has their own powerful examples of how these insights have transformed their own journeys already.

For many of us, stepping into leadership can feel daunting – like we're tangled in the weeds, unsure if we're ready. Yet, with the right support from mentors and coaches, who provide wisdom and care, and by embracing opportunities to stretch beyond our comfort zones, we can break free. We have the potential to bloom and shine, becoming leaders not only in agriculture but in our communities, our families, and even the world. By choosing to be vulnerable, navigate challenges, and stepping into the unknown, we unlock our true growth and potential.

For me, the Stepping into Leadership Program gave me more than just skills or knowledge – it gave me confidence. Confidence to dream bigger, to stop waiting for the 'right' moment, and to take action. Progress over perfection.

It gave me the space to reflect on my values, on what truly matters to me, and to align my actions with those values. It gave me courage to start a project that had been quietly simmering in the background – something I had put off for too long. I realised that the only thing standing in my way was me. This program helped me get out of my own way.

Finally, the Stepping into Leadership Program has been more than just a professional development – it has been a journey of growth, transformation, and discovery. I have learnt that leadership isn't about having all the answers. It's about willing to grow, to learn, to face challenges, and to rise stronger surrounded by a supportive network.

We may start in the soil amongst the weeds, but with the right care, we can all have the potential to bloom, to grow to new heights and continue to reach for the sky – as they say the sky's the limit and this program is the start for many emerging leaders who have stepped up and into this sphere during 2024. I can't wait to watch where people go on their journeys from here.

Regards Stephanie

Stephanie March September 2024. Farm Business Manager, Marbel Ag Founder, Merci Co Consumer Advocate Adelaide Women's and Children's Hospital

Board News

APEN is led by a Board of Directors with diverse backgrounds and experiences.

The Board is supported by five Committees who

- develop/review/refine the Terms of Reference including defining the key objectives
- set dates for meetings
- define priorities for 2024
- develop an action plan
- and implement activities through
 - Governance and Finance | Chair | Roy Murray-Prior
 - Business Development | Chair | Noel Ainsworth
 - Member Engagement | Chair | Nicole Sallur
 - Professional Development | Chair | Peter Long
 - Regional Activities | Chair | Pat Hamilton

Contact details for the Chair of each Committee can be found on the back page of this issue of ExtensionNet.

The impact of industry development officers for Table Grapes

Susie Murphy White Industry Development and Innovation Manager Hort Innovation Manjimup WA

Table Grapes are a growing industry with exports worth \$557M coming not only from Victorian growers but now from QLD and WA. The production has increased by 19% in 2023 to 232,000 tones.

The first industry development project for Table Grape Industry was funded by Hort Innovation in March 2021 for a three-year period. It was delivered by three highly experienced Industry Development Officers (IDO's) employed by the Australian Table Grape Association (ATGA). It was well-received by growers and stakeholders and the project review reported it to be 'a very successful project and well

regarded by the industry. The project team were found to be 'well connected extension team who are 'great communicators,' also 'able to communicate science to grower level' and good at 'listening to grower needs.'

Each IDO brought over 20 years of experience in



Table Grape Industry Development officers Alison Macgregor, Jenny Treeby and Karen Connolly with Hort Innovation's Susie Murphy White and Nicole Dimos Byrnes.

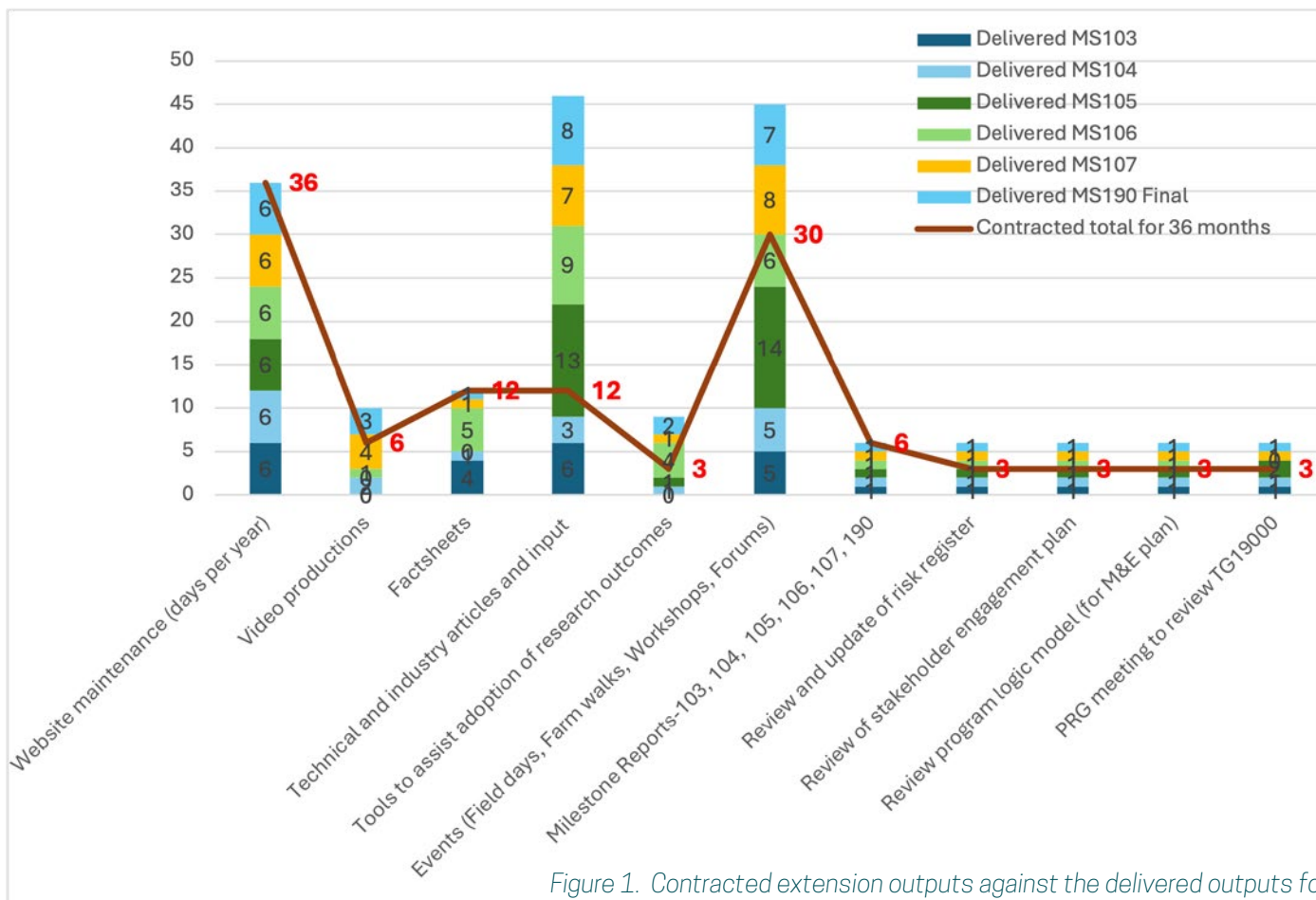


Figure 1. Contracted extension outputs against the delivered outputs for Table Grape industry development project TG19000.

collaborating with growers through different extension roles throughout their careers. Growers were very receptive to the project and the project team

- expanding the reach and engagement with growers
- awareness and knowledge of project activities and
- practice change or intent to change.

With a tag line of ‘delivered nationally with regionally specific content,’ this project reached over eight hundred growers. Based in Mildura the team covered all growing regions; Sunraysia, Riverland, Riverina and travelling across to the Swan Valley and Carnarvon in WA and undertaking grower visits in Queensland each year.

Figure 1. shows the contracted outputs (line) against the delivered outputs (bars). The project team have consistently exceeded in their delivery of extension services and material to industry.

The performance of the project was measured against the practice change and industry development outcomes. This was achieved through the review of documentation, stakeholder interviews, industry benchmarks and grower surveys. Importantly growers who participated in events and workshops expressed satisfaction with the quality and content and an intention in modifying their practices. Interviewees highlighted the quality of activities, industry knowledge of the project team and invited guests and the collaborative approach in involving growers and service providers.

To extend the reach of project outcomes the Industry Development Officers established a Community of Practice (CoP) to engage agronomists, researchers, resellers, agribusiness, and government agencies. This has successfully expanded the reach and engagement with growers on specific topics such as Queensland fruit fly and restricted spring growth. This CoP met online and in person in Mildura creating the network of service providers who can learn from each other and potentially work together on future projects.

Impact and Adoption case study – the value of a Community of Practice

This first project had a significant impact on the industry setting up some great methods of delivery to achieve:

The 2023/24 season had very high pest pressure from Queensland fruit fly. In September 2023 ATGA were very aware of Queensland fruit fly build up and they anticipated high numbers in grapes from mid-December when berries start to soften. The ATGA industry development officers were able to engage with the CoP to expand their reach

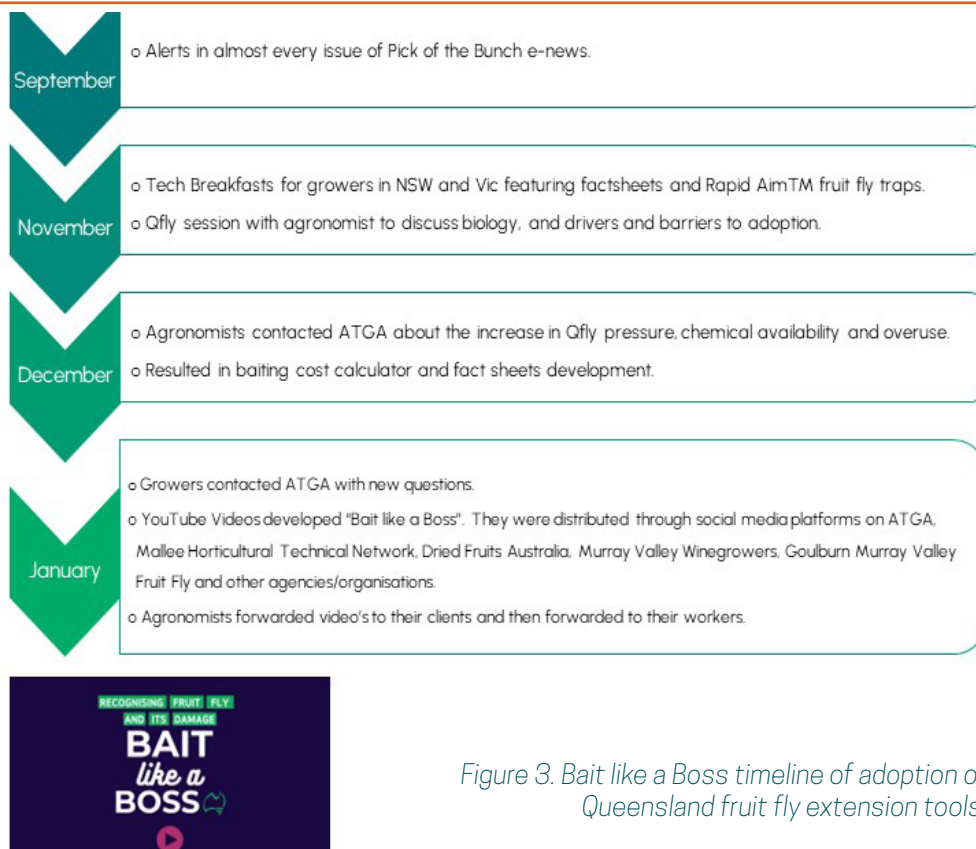


Figure 3. Bait like a Boss timeline of adoption of Queensland fruit fly extension tools.

and engage more growers to reduce the impact of fruit fly stings in the coming seasons' table grapes.

Figure 2. Bait like a Boss timeline of adoption of Queensland fruit fly extension tools.

The Bait like a Boss campaign had been a success with the following metrics recorded.

- High number of views of each video within 48 hours of release
- Evidence of repeat views, shares and saves indicate grower willingness to adopt
- Positive feedback about videos being short (60-90 secs), funny and to the point
- Insecticide used for baiting is now in short supply in Sunraysia and
- ATGA are receiving enquiries about sourcing contractors

The following quotes has been taken from evaluation interviews conducted with growers, managers and agronomists in addition to discussions with the three project team members. The majority surveyed stated, without prompting, that they wanted the program to continue due to the value to growers and industry. The team increased industry cohesion and ensured access to information regardless of background, technical capacity, or geographical location.

- o "The best thing to come out of this is the growers feel like they've got someone in their corner."
- o "The project has delivered very useful and

practical workshops and field trials with the collaboration of industry agronomists to improve the technical efficiency for growers".

- "A very capable project team which has very good trust and engaged with growers".
- "This extension project is the best project the industry has had".

The strong extension and development program allowed growers and a broad stakeholder base to build knowledge, awareness, and skills, and enhance their aspiration to change.

The next project for ATGA has been funded for 5 years TG23001 - De-risking and futureproofing Australian table grape production and will see the industry grow even further.

Regards, Susie

Acknowledgement

Australian Table Grape Association Industry Development Officers – Alison MacGregor, Jenny Treeby and Karen Connolly and CEO Jeff Scott.

Reference

Extension of technologies and best management practices to the Australian table grape industry (TG19000) Final report. Australian Table Grape Association 2024 Hort Innovation | Extension of technologies and best management practices to the Australian table grape industry (TG19000) (horticulture.com.au)

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Meet the 2024 Regional Coordinators



The life of an Extension Officer

Lauren Thornton | Northern Territory RC

Being an extension officer is a privileged position. You are often the trusted local person on the ground, establishing relationships and lines of communication between your organisation, research and end users.

Having someone who has capacity to engage end users on behalf of an organisation is invaluable. This engagement might simply be someone to raise awareness of your organisation, to facilitate an activity,



as a touch point for stakeholders, or to share information about new research. Extension officers have the skills to take complex science to its audience in a digestible way. They are people who can support communications for mass audiences, organise a gear show or shout coffees to a group of people who have shared interests. Extension officers support ideas and issues into RD&E organisations and ensure that research is relevant and useful to its end users from inception. We do this so our stakeholders can use our science and are armed with new information, tools and expertise.

Juggling all the demands on our time is not always easy. I value my personal time and aim to have boundaries around the time that I have for work and the time that I have for my personal life. I am lucky enough to have a flexible workplace that allows me to manage my work hours so I can get my work done when I need to, as well as fulfilling my personal obligations in a remote area.

Regards, Lauren

The Power of Networks

Sandy Gunter | South Australian Regional Coordinator

It's been a busy year so far with lots going on, and so it can be very easy to hunker down and just get on with things. However, getting out there and going to events while mixing with people gives me plenty of opportunity to expand my professional and personal networks. This will pay dividends later on if you are looking to change jobs, build your reputation, expand your clientele or increase your social influence.

There are usually lots of chances to broaden your networks if you think about all the opportunities where you are meeting and mingling with different people. Some valuable networking occasions that I have attended this year include attending the WoTL conference in Hahndorf, undertaking an 8-week leadership course, being part of the APEN Regional Activities Committee, and Co-chairing my employer's Work, Health and Safety committee. Every one of these things has enabled me to meet new people, learn new things and practise different skill sets while broaden my networks and strengthen relationships

Don't forget that you have an extensive network right at your fingertips.

The membership of APEN is diverse and wide reaching across many different sectors. APEN members hold a variety of roles. Some people are new to the field of extension and some people have been practicing for a long time. However, we all share something in common – we are all members of APEN and believe in the value of extension.

If you are looking to expand your network of people, then think about starting with your fellow APEN members.

There are many ways to do this so here are just a few.

- Make contact with your APEN Regional Coordinator. Introduce yourself and let them know that you're keen to connect with other members. They have lists of all the members within their region as well as across the nation. The Regional Coordinator may be able to do a virtual introduction to help you get to know other APEN members in your region or industry sector. If there is enough interest, it might be possible to organise a local meet and greet event where you can speak to people in person.

- Register for the APEN Conversations webinars. These usually occur once a month and are a great way to share knowledge and interact with other members in a short discussion session on different topics. You can even volunteer to host a conversation (with support from someone from the Regional Activities Committee to make sure it all goes smoothly)

- Think about coming along to the bi-annual conference and roadshow events. These events give you access to lots of great speakers, and you can catch up with APEN members from interstate and overseas to share ideas.

- Consider contributing time to one of the many APEN committees and working groups. Your contributions to our organisation will be extremely valued and you get to work with some amazing people.

- Make sure to establish a LinkedIn profile that highlights your skills and experiences, and don't forget to include any professional memberships including your APEN membership. It's a free form of advertising and you'd be surprised how often LinkedIn profiles are searched to find and connect with people.

So, lift your vision and get networking.

Regards, Sandy



Challenges to Manage

Tim Bradley, Sth Queensland RC

I grew up on a farming operation in South-East Queensland where I was exposed to the intricate workings of dairy and beef agriculture from a young age, sparking my enduring passion for the industry. Over the years, I have accumulated extensive experience across diverse agricultural enterprises, encompassing dairy, beef, and fodder production, as well as involvement in agritourism activities.

My professional journey has seen me take on pivotal roles including Farm Attendant and Training Coordinator at the University of Queensland's Gatton Campus. Here, I fortified my practical experience with various diplomas and certifications in agriculture, complemented by my pursuit of a dual degree in Agriculture and Business.

In my present capacity as a Program Coordinator for the Queensland Farmers' Federation, I am deeply involved in supporting 36 early-career agricultural advisors. Together, we are dedicated to spearheading impactful changes in agricultural practices, particularly within the Great Barrier Reef Regions and focusing on improving Reef Water Quality. Additionally, we are championing the integration of digital technologies across wider Queensland, striving to bolster the resilience and advancement of individual farmers and the broader agricultural sector.

My association with APEN commenced subsequent to my attendance at the Launceston conference in November 2023. This experience led to my inclusion in the Regional Coordinators group for Southern Queensland, presenting a privileged opportunity to contribute to this esteemed organisation's initiatives and facilitate events in Queensland. I wholeheartedly encourage those engaged in regional or rural communities and involved in producer-centric endeavours to become part of the APEN community, offering invaluable support for their professional journeys.

A notable milestone in my involvement with APEN was our successful bid to host the APEN International Conference in Brisbane for 2025. As part of the organising team, I am fervently driving the planning and execution efforts, fostering a forum for insightful discussions and impactful collaborations. With "Tech + Extension: A Powerful Partnership for Change" as the theme for 2025, the conference promises to be an



unparalleled platform for industry-wide progress and advancement.

Beyond my professional engagements, I wholeheartedly dedicate myself to managing our small-scale farm in the Lockyer Valley. Here, alongside my wife and 5-month-old son, we undertake the breeding of Brahman Cattle, Hanoverian Horses, and Pygmy Goats. Striving for a harmonious work-life balance, I cherish the moments spent with my family and our beloved animals, recognising the profound importance of holistic well-being amidst my relentless professional commitments.

APEN has undeniably been a remarkable catalyst for my personal and professional growth, offering an invaluable network and a plethora of opportunities for learning and advancement. Should you share a similar passion for progress and development within the agricultural realm, I wholeheartedly advocate for membership within this influential supportive organisation.

Regards, Tim

Building Connections for Change in Extension

Caroline Coppo Nth Queensland RC

I have followed an exciting and varied career path in north Queensland that has always gravitated towards extension, education and community capacity building. Early career, I was a member of the Long Term Reef Monitoring Program at the Australian Institute of Marine Science, responsible for surveying the plants and animals that made up the reef benthos (bottom). I am passionate about the reef but figured if I wanted to make a difference I needed to be on the land, working with people, rather than spending my life documenting reef health. Instead, I went down the path of education and community education, positively engaging with communities to promote learning opportunities and facilitate change. I have loved my journey.

Some of the benefits of being involved in APEN is that there are lots of opportunities to be involved, make APEN even better and extend your network of colleagues and friends geographically and across industries and communities.

I am the APEN Regional Coordinator (RC) for Northern Queensland, sharing the RC role for Queensland with Tim Bradley who takes care of Southern Queensland. Together we work with the other enthusiastic RCs throughout Australia. This year Tim and I collaborated on a bid to APEN to organise the 2025 International APEN Conference and we won the bid!! Tim and I are co-chairs of the Conference Organising Committee, and are looking forward to the exciting year ahead, to make sure the 2025 APEN Conference in Brisbane is the best opportunity for extension people to gather together, learn together, form networks and have fun exploring all the amazing things that are happening in extension.

I am also a member of the APEN Member Engagement Committee, involving other enthusiastic APENers who are working to make APEN even better, such as improvements to the APEN website as a resource for APEN members and as a 'flagship' of what good extension is, and what it can achieve.

I am a life-long learner, always challenging my own understanding and being inspired by others I network with on the learning journey. I have academic



qualifications in science, education, environmental education, corporate governance and NRM as well as extensive cane industry, reef science and NRM experience in the Wet Tropics region. Formal and informal learning opportunities will always inspire me to understand more, to do better, to explore other fields that interest me, but extension will always be the focus for me. I think we can all improve how we 'do' extension and learning more about it will help us all. Extension is complicated. When it is done well it facilitates incredible results!

My passion for learning has led me to my current role with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries (DPI) (which has recently changed from Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF)). As a Senior Project Officer, working in the Integrated Engagement and Capacity Building Project, I am responsible for supporting training opportunities for extension personnel working in the reef space – so my idea of a dream job! As part of the awesome project team, that also helps to build regional capacity by supporting grower groups, we work on increasing the capacity of extension personnel by providing workshops, guides and online learning modules on extension topics.

So to wrap it up ... I am really into making a difference and contributing to the extension community. It is a professional network of inspirational people. It is a network to help you in your role. Be involved in APEN. Contribute to APEN. Network with other members. Attend events. Have fun.

Regards, Caroline.

Finding the balance

Sarah Thompson | Victorian RC



For the past 10 years, I have worked in the dairy industry in a range of extension roles before now coming back to work with my partner James running a 400-cow dairy farm in Kyabram. I am also the APEN Victorian Regional Coordinator and have been a part of APEN for the past 5 years. It's been an incredible journey of growth, development, fun and engaging in wonderful learning experiences whilst meeting the best people. I attended my first APEN conference in Darwin and it was my first exposure to APEN. I remember the feeling like it was yesterday of truly "finding my tribe" and being exposed to people that understood and were passionate about extension. If you get the opportunity to be involved with APEN in any way, I guarantee you'll get so much from it.

In life, we often wear many different hats and have to dedicate our time to a number of important roles. For me, it's being a dairy farmer, being an APEN Regional Coordinator and undertaking consulting work in the dairy industry. No matter who you are or what you do, life is busy for everyone and how you approach it and manage is the key to feeling in control and enjoying it.

Since coming back to work on our farm, I've found the pull greater than ever between what I call inside work and outside work. Outside work is everything that needs

to be done on the farm – and inside work is in front of a computer, undertaking work for clients, meeting with our farm advisors and planning and discussing the business. On the farm, the outside work never stops, it never switches off and things don't fit into nice timeslots or boxes like they did in my previous office-based roles. There is constant unpredictability with the weather, with our animals, with natural disasters and with our pastures and crops.

It is exactly 12 months since I stepped away from my corporate life and back onto the farm and although there's still no controlling the volatility of each day and week – I've found some balance, and I'd like to tell you how.

Firstly, it's about having the right mindset that each day can bring quite literally any challenge to overcome or an opportunity that needs to be jumped on. This mindset includes one that prepares you for the worst yet and hopes for the best as you pull on your gumboots each day. It's a mindset that no matter how big the problem, you and your partner or team will get through it. As someone who liked to always be in control and plan, the farm has taught me that sometimes you need to be ready for anything and to go with the flow.

Secondly, don't stretch yourself too far because it's only a matter of time until you're stretched so far you can't reel yourself back in. For us, bringing on a new full time staff member has brought balance back into our business and our lives. We no longer just make it through the day to day. We get to focus on the big jobs, take time to think and plan and most importantly do things that support our goals and the future. Having good people around you and knowing when you need to ask for support is so important.

Lastly, it's about prioritising time for things that make you happy, that challenge you, that make you feel like you are giving back and that expose you to new environments and people. I roster myself off one day a week and dedicate that day to "inside work". It doesn't mean that things don't pop up and I'm not racing outside at times to help, but it does mean I've created time to dedicate to work that fuels my passions and allows me to think about the big picture, not just what's in front of me.

I hope to see you at an APEN event in the future and if I can provide support to you as one of our valued members, please reach out – I'd love to help.

Regards, Sarah

Lessons from Ireland and Tips for Effective Engagement

Ossie Lang Tasmanian RC

As we emerge from winter, we've been fortunate to have some reasonable rainfall across the state. Dams are now full, and there is a collective sigh of relief after last year's dry season. Some parts (like King and Flinders Islands) were harder hit without the irrigation infrastructure that supports large parts of Tasmanian agriculture.

Earlier in the year, I had the privilege of joining the Dairy Tas team hosting John McCabe from Teagasc. Teagasc is responsible for agricultural RD&E in Ireland, and our session was devoted to extension in Ireland. With Teagasc's vertically integrated structure, they can have ongoing grower groups that remain together over many years. In some cases, new grower groups have formed from the next generation of farmers. As a second-generation extension deliverer with Teagasc, John's insights were invaluable, particularly in discussing how extension had evolved within Teagasc over the years and how they are improving the interactions between the farmers and the researchers, mainly by ensuring that there were close connections with grower groups. While our RD&E landscape is very different, the lessons from Ireland are applicable here: know your community and ensure your delivery meets their needs and timing. John's parting lesson: Make sure there is a tractor in your online videos; they go much better than if you don't!

As things start to get busy in spring, it was timely for our latest APEN conversations session to focus on boosting engagement when things get busy. The session was well attended, and plenty of useful tips were shared amongst the group.

While every extension officer knows that food can make or break an event, there are a number of things to consider as you put together your extension activities that will help your audience engage with the content.

- **Relevance**—This is a critical element, and while it may be evident to you as the deliverer why something is important, you need to be able to articulate this clearly to potential attendees. One key element is matching the event to the seasonal activities you are discussing. One attendee commented that they try to ensure the event delivers value above a day's wage; this provides value for those attending.
- **Local Champions & Crowd Pullers**—Another point discussed was using crowd pullers and local champions as part of your event. Not only will they

provide relevant content, but they will also attract larger attendance. Sometimes, locals can be reluctant to get up in front of peers, so a panel or fireside chat format can help alleviate those nerves and allow you to draw out the essential messages in a more conversational style than if the speaker were to stand and deliver a presentation.

- **The sticky-beak factor** – We all love a sticky beak; you can leverage that when planning an event. Can you visit someone innovative in the area as part of the event? Is there another industry or site that may have similar issues to your industry? While these are options you will need to make sure that your promotions are clear about what the relevance is to your audience.
- **Collaborate**—With several projects often operating in similar spaces, it can seem that you are fighting for audience share with them. Instead of feeling like a competition, you can collaborate with them. Collaboration has several advantages, and the only caution is ensuring the event retains relevance for your target audience.
- **Make it easy**—This starts with your promotion and stretches to the event delivery. Firstly, make it clear what the event is about and why people should attend. Next, lower the barriers for people to attend. Make sure that the timing, length, and location are all suitable for your audience. Finally, with a range of learning styles, it is important to offer as many ways as possible for your audience to access the information.
- **Promote, Promote, Promote!** – While conventional wisdom says you need three touch points, there should be another two or four promotes in this dot point. Some attendees indicated that you may need more than five to seven touchpoints to get people to your event. Another attendee was prepared to spam her audience when necessary! All channels are open to use; phone, text message, email, and social media are all key ways to get the message out; in some cases, an old-school physical flyer could be a great way to share the message. When promoting, as mentioned above, you need to be clear about why the event will be relevant for people to attend.

This quick summary gives a little snippet of the discussion in the APEN conversations. Be sure to watch the APEN socials for details of the next session. Unfortunately, because of our format, we can't record the sessions, so you have to be there to participate!

Pulling off the workboots

Karen Smith | Western Australian

My recent change to full-time off-farm work whilst still being involved in the farm business has meant my time management now needs to be en-pointe at all times! Definitely no ballet slippers for me, but while workboots are easy to pull on and get started on the day, swapping shoes to more office-appropriate footwear, like my new role, requires more careful consideration.

Balancing the resources you have at hand to achieve good management efficiency in your farm business is always front of mind. Farm business management has moved quickly to adopt technology to ensure tasks can be carried out from the office, school carpark or header cab.

As too has general office-based work, boosted by COVID in adoption of cloud-based software, enabling hybrid working environments, coordination of national project teams and on-ground delivery of events to regional audiences, whilst wearing Ugg boots.

But many recent conversations with colleagues, question whether we are mastering the use of all this technology for management efficiency or are we slaves to the 'unique' user interface, cybersecurity and data requirements of each software application foisted upon us or we are choosing to be reliant on.

Our perspective 20 years ago imagining what our future would look like, most of us may have thought our tools would allow more high value work to be completed in the office, and low value work completed autonomously for us while relaxing at home. The reality feels closer to having work integrated within your life balance at all times, blurring the line of workboots, heels and Ugg boots (definitely for home use only).

The task at hand is to really know where to focus my time, enabling technology taming tactics (TTTs) to achieve high value activities and build habits for work. My top tactics at the moment are:

- Using the 'Focus' mode on screen to turn off desktop notifications,
- Adding the Clock to the bottom toolbar to set predetermined timers for specific work (stretch, water, check email)



- Automating email functions using Quick Steps, etc to manage emails and calendar
- Save podcasts for an environmental scan of the industry for daily/weekly car-trips
- Identifying timewasters and setting up strategies to manage.

Being persistent and disciplined on what you are doing and why helps me to focus on identifying the high value activities. Additionally striving for results not perfection is something I continually need to optimise, as that is what the evaluation is for, fixing the process next time round!!

Closing the farm gate at the end of a long day in the dark wearing your good heels always feels uncomfortable, waiting to get a grass seed in between your toes, but I appreciate the opportunity I have to work on both sides of the farmgate.

Would love to know your list of TTTs, feel free to share on the APEN socials!

Regards Karen

Working with Producers and Government

Sue Street | Sth New South Wales RC



Hi, I'm Sue Street and I'm the southern Regional Coordinator for APEN in NSW. I share the role with Callen Thompson, who is the coordinator for Northern NSW and the ACT.

I currently work for the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development as a livestock research officer. My work is in livestock nutrition and production research, and I'm based at the Wagga Wagga Agricultural Institute.

I grew up on a sheep and cattle farm in the Central Tablelands region of NSW, and it is there that I found a passion for agriculture and a love for livestock. I've been very fortunate that agriculture has allowed me to travel not just around NSW, but also to the Falkland Islands. Outside of work you will usually find me out with friends, organising a trip somewhere or with two golden retrievers in tow.

I originally joined APEN when I was working as an extension officer in livestock for Local Land Services in the CT and CW LLS regions. I found that through my membership and the conferences that APEN helped build my facilitation and extension skills that I needed for my job.

Now as a researcher, I use those skills to help communicate within the research teams I am a part of and to communicate to farmers what research is being conducted by the Department. I'm hoping to help bridge the gap between livestock research and our producers.

As the southern NSW coordinator, I hope to help others build their extension skills and use these skills to work with producers.

Regards, Sue

Benefits from Networking

Callen Thompson | Nth New South Wales RC

G'day from Coonabarabran NSW, Australia. My name is Callen Thompson, and I am the APEN (Australasia-Pacific Extension Network) Regional Coordinator (RC) for NSW. I am lucky to share the role with Sue Street, who looks after the southern part of the state while I look after the north.

For those of you I haven't met, I am a partner at AgSTAR Projects, a consulting company that specialises in providing project management and capacity building to government, industry and research and development corporations with a focus on agriculture. When I am not in front of a computer, sitting on a plane or facilitating a group I can be found on a tractor or a quad bike, running our beef cattle enterprise with my wife and business partner, Maria, and our two sons.

The RC group has been asked to share some of the benefits of being involved with APEN. The APEN conference in Launceston has been beneficial to me and my team over the last nearly 12 months. We picked up on the theme of co-designing extension programs with stakeholders and the target audience and from the presentations, we witnessed how successful the projects were when the extension models used were the right fit for the producers targeted.

I am sure that I am not the only one who has been presented with an extension problem and said: "Great, I know how to fix this, let's use the Model."

Or

"I reckon my background as an agronomist and as a farmer myself, has given me plenty of experience to know what farmers need!"

Unfortunately, that doesn't always work because each industry, location and even farmer is different in



Callen and Sue working together

scale, financial position, environment, risk aversion and learning style.

Working with my colleagues at AgSTAR, we have made a concerted effort since November to increase the amount of stakeholder consultation in our projects, including incorporating design thinking and co-design. We have delivered extension plans, training, evaluation and an industry extension strategy in this time and because we have focused on what stakeholders both want as well as need, I think we are getting much better outcomes for our clients.

The benefit that I get from APEN is learning from other extension professionals at APEN events like the conference, APEN Conversations and in a month's time, the APEN Roadshow. Involvement in these events helps me as well as my clients make sure we are getting the best outcomes for Australian producers.

Regards, Callen

Widening your knowledge

In 2024, how many Extension positions based on full time equivalents (FTEs) are there?

In 2005, (ExtensionNet 2005 Vol 12. No.2)-there were more than 4000 extension positions in Australia

If all extension officers are counted, including non-FTE officers, that number may increase by as much as 2000. Of the 4000 or so FTE extension officers, more than 2700 are engaged in the public or public/community sectors.

That's a huge trove of experience to draw on! It's APEN's job to try to bring that expertise together and share it with others.

Extension Practice Resources - AgriFutures Australia

A suite of extension practice resources is freely available online for extension and adoption practitioners working across agriculture.

The resources cover a range of extension topics including extension theories, change management information, practical guides and evaluation guidance. The original suite of resources was curated by the University of Melbourne and Cumbre Consultants and is now collectively housed online by AgriFutures Australia.

This website and resource curation was developed as part of an AgriFutures (previously the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation) project called Extension and Adoption for Australian Farmers and Fishers. A working group of Australian extension experts partnered with AgriFutures, utilising funding from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources as part of its Rural R&D for Profit Programme, in developing the site.

This site will be further developed, with additional

resources added, through a reinvigorated focus on Adoption. We look forward to sharing and connecting with agricultural practitioners across Australia and through the APEN network!

For further AgriFutures resources and publications [click here](#).

Not another survey - the unconference approach

Denise Bewsell & John James [enablers of change - June 2024]

We've recently been hearing how hard it is to get a decent number of responses to a survey. And we've also heard from people who are working on projects where there is reluctance to send out "yet another survey", because they think farmers are feeling over-surveyed. So, we wondered whether survey fatigue is really true and what we might do to overcome it.

Denise and I recently had the pleasure of facilitating the Reef Extension Think Tank in Townsville. We used the unconference approach which reduced the usual conference fatigue by fostering a more dynamic and engaging environment. Unlike traditional conferences with rigid agendas and rather passive one-way presentations, unconferences are participant-driven and flexible, allowing attendees to shape the topics and discussions. The participants reported that they generally appreciated this format, as it promoted more active involvement, stimulated thinking, and encouraged networking. Of course, we used a QR code and built-in time towards the end of the event to gather their feedback (which we mention in today's episode!). [Read the blog](#).

There are so many ways for APEN Members to share their knowledge and experience.

Challenge: show your initiative and send us articles, events and stories.

Celebrating 30 years with APEN

Dr. Pat Hamilton

Everyone has their unique story to share. APEN's story started with a conversation in 1993. The stories kept flowing during the last thirty years. Members told their stories to connect, to link, and to engage with people – and, to inspire and motivate future storytellers as they related their real experiences.

Throughout our lives our priorities shift. Each of the six chapters of APEN's 30 Year History has captured many of the building blocks which have created this history.

In collating this wealth of information, I approached over forty members for their experiences and their perspective of a future for APEN. "Experience has taught us that it is best to move forward when the heart and the head [and the gut] are connected; by saying yes to opportunity and achieving other people to achieve their potential" (Elizabeth Broderick). I thank contributors to the history for the generosity of their time and the inspiring conversations they shared so that we continue to build the organisation and network we want APEN to be.

Now, although APEN's history is ready to be shared, thanks to Roe Currie for her editing and Alice Long for the design, I sit at my desk and understand that once you start a history, it is difficult to know when to stop. I apologise for the omission of the many events that I have not recorded. Perhaps, someone else will continue...

While learning from the past and appreciating the present, the APEN organisation will challenge our networks to be adventurous by creating and shaping the future together. [Click here to read](#)

Warm regards
Pat Hamilton | Editor of APEN's 30 Year history





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: Pat Hamilton

Layout: Alice Long

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

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Reflections on my first year as President

Noel Ainsworth



As I had previously been a Regional Coordinator and then Board Director, so much of the APEN governance and services to members was not too much of a surprise. Facing the reality of the APEN business model and working out what the Board could do better to meet members' expectations was the challenge.

People say that offering a perspective in retrospect is the best way to demonstrate success. Perhaps turning that around and suggesting that reflection can offer the best opportunity for learning and refining strategy is a better way of capturing it.

The activity undertaken by the Board over the past year can be captured under the following three areas.

- Governance: An overdue review of the APEN Constitution, the APEN Strategic Plan and the Committees in operation.
- Services: Using the results of the biennial survey to ensure that a regular program of free and paid services are made available to members for professional development and networking outcomes.
- Delegation, effectiveness and efficiency: Ensure that Committee terms of reference and makeup are updated, the Chairs are empowered and that tasks are moved as appropriate from the Board to individual Committees Chairs to make quick progress.

Despite good progress over the past year, APEN's business model is still reliant on key Director, member and

TAS support to ensure that the myriad of services are delivered to members. This operational risk is mitigated by a mixture of careful attention to delegation, succession and the willingness of individuals to pitch in when needed. Again, the Board will ensure that planning develops a collaborative and agreed suite of services, placing the International Conference in late 2025 as the cornerstone of services over the coming year.

On a personal note, I am also in a full-time role delivering using my extension skills and knowledge. Perhaps many people in comparable roles would be familiar with the saying that if you want something done, give it to a busy person. This means trying to make smart informed decisions and to not procrastinate. Planning times into my diary is the main way I can get APEN tasks done. It also means taking my employer on a journey to understand the win: win nature of the situation. Then ensuring a work life balance, separating work plus APEN, from the family and friends. I see a striking parallel in separating the different parts of my life on LinkedIn and Facebook.

In closing, I would also like to recognise the value that my role in APEN offers my work. It forces me to confront and confirm my biases, re-evaluate and test my approaches, and to expand my networks into new industries and settings. The Board, the Committees and the Regional Coordinators are a fantastic mix of people wanting to be the best of the best in extension and I would thoroughly recommend joining this band of merry change makers.

Editorial

Pat Hamilton



During the last four years, I have appreciated working with a team to enrich the quality of each issue.



The focus of APEN has always been to work in partnership with extension professionals across Australia and New Zealand. As Stephen Covey says, “An empowered organisation is one in which individuals have the knowledge, skill, desire and opportunity to personally succeed in a way that leads to collective organisational success”.

Noel’s message encouraged me to think about choice of why we join an organisation. Is it for Power? Influence? Networking? Belonging? Professional Development? Building relationships? Linking and Connecting with People? WiiiFM (What’s in it for me? Finding answers? Belonging? The list is endless.

I found my answer in the powerful statement by Toni Cortney:

“[The APEN] organisation is a rich tapestry woven by the story of its people [who are] weaving together many strands of information, insight, knowledge, and wisdom. Over time, people will come and go; they will have roles to play; they will contribute to the current chapters of change, creating their organisation’s story and legacy. Every interaction with someone internally or externally, is adding to the ‘bigger picture’ story.”

Thus, it is the networking for me. The importance of sharing the life experiences of our Members. As Noel, in APEN’s September issue of the eBulletin so eloquently wrote, *“The most valuable element of APEN is its members. The individuality of each member’s life experience means that they continually apply and adjust extension theories, learning with each new activity or an activity in a new setting. This power of the individual member means that we have as much to share as extension theory researchers. Given that each person’s experience becomes another testing ground for ideas and spurs new variants, it reinforces the value of opinions that members can bring to activities such as the APEN Conversations.”*

This issue of ExtensionNet shares with you, aspects of events in the APEN Network: the Board activities; a summary of ExtensionChat; having a voice in APEN Conversations; the recent survey report conducted for AgriFutures Australia by John James (Enablers of Change), Jeff Coutts (Coutts J&R), and Denise Bewsell (Scarlatti); Lilia Jenkins, (Extension Scientist (Cesar) a recipient of APEN’s conference pass, describes her ‘wins’ from Hort Connections 2024., as part of APEN’s Industry Partnership Agreement with Hort Connections, Stephanie March describes her journey with the South Australian Stepping Australian Stepping into Leadership Program; Susie Murphy, *White Industry Development and Innovation Manager Hort Innovation Manjimup WA*, shares the impact of industry development officers for Table Grapes; and what would we do without our Regional Coordinators! Read how they juggle a personal and professional life. Such a wealth of information –as we learn from the past, appreciate the present and grow a dynamic future in our vibrant extension community network.

In March 2017, my first issue of ExtensionNet as Editor, I wrote: *“I am reminded of Mahatma Gandhi’s approach that rather than waiting for change to happen, we need to be the change we want to see”* – that is, we often need to see beyond the lens to progress our extension work. Leading by example is an important characteristic of most change agents.”

It is 2024. I am still editing ExtensionNet after eight years. During the last four years, I have appreciated working with a team to enrich the quality of each issue. My deep appreciation to Chrissy Stokes, Morag Anderson, Adrian Englefield and Roe Curry for their enormous support and to Alice Long for bringing a spark to the presentation of each issue. I wish them all the enjoyment, a little less stress and building an informative newsletter to engage and support our very talented and experienced APEN Members.

Celebrating 30 years with APEN

Dr. Pat Hamilton

Everyone has their unique story to share. APEN's story started with a conversation in 1993. The stories kept flowing during the last thirty years. Members told their stories to connect, to link, and to engage with people – and, to inspire and motivate future storytellers as they related their real experiences.

Throughout our lives our priorities shift. Each of the six chapters of APEN's 30 Year History has captured many of the building blocks which have created this history.

In collating this wealth of information, I approached over forty members for their experiences and their perspective of a future for APEN. "Experience has taught us that it is best to move forward when the heart and the head [and the gut] are connected; by saying yes to opportunity and achieving other people to achieve their potential" (Elizabeth Broderick). I thank contributors to the history for the generosity of their time and the inspiring conversations they shared so that we continue to build the organisation and network we want APEN to be.

Now, although APEN's history is ready to be shared, thanks to Roe Currie for her editing and Alice Long for the design, I sit at my desk and understand that once you start a history, it is difficult to know when to stop. I apologise for the omission of the many events that I have not recorded. Perhaps, someone else will continue...

While learning from the past and appreciating the present, the APEN organisation will challenge our networks to be adventurous by creating and shaping the future together. [Click here to read](#)

Warm regards
Pat Hamilton | Editor of APEN's 30 Year history



CELEBRATING thirty years

Learning from the past, appreciating the present, growing a dynamic future in a vibrant extension community



APEN has been busy during 2024

APEN ExtensionChat #4

Alice Long

What a fabulous series of workshops, led by Facilitator, Jeanette Long, where I helped in tech support.

In 2024, Extension has never been more complicated and exhilarating. Extension Professionals are being constantly challenged to respond to a complex array of social, environmental, economic, and personal issues.

Strengthening the Future of Extension Practices

In 2024, the challenges faced by extension professionals are more complex than ever, requiring innovative approaches and fresh perspectives. ExtensionChat 2024, a three-part online workshop series hosted by the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network (APEN), brought together 24 extension professionals from across Australia and New Zealand to tackle these challenges head-on. Through rich discussions and hands-on facilitation, participants engaged with practical tools and strategies to elevate their extension work in a rapidly changing world.

At the heart of ExtensionChat 2024 was the need to adapt extension practices to an increasingly complex social, environmental, and economic landscape. The workshops, featuring industry leaders like Jeanette Long, Denise Bewsell, and Heather Collins, encouraged participants to think beyond traditional models and embrace more collaborative, flexible approaches to engagement and facilitation.

Engagement and Collaboration emerged as essential components of effective extension. Participants explored ways to ensure that extension events are not just informative but truly engaging, leading to long-term, meaningful change. A strong emphasis was placed on understanding the needs of the audience—be they farmers, natural resource managers, or community development professionals—and tailoring extension efforts to meet those needs.

One recurring theme was the **importance of peer-to-peer learning**, which resonated strongly with participants. As Dave Smith shared from his experience with the Northern Beef Business program, peer-to-peer groups, where farmers learn from each other, have proven to be one of the most effective models for driving change. This model prioritises real-world knowledge exchange over top-down information dissemination, reinforcing the value of networks and community-driven learning in extension.

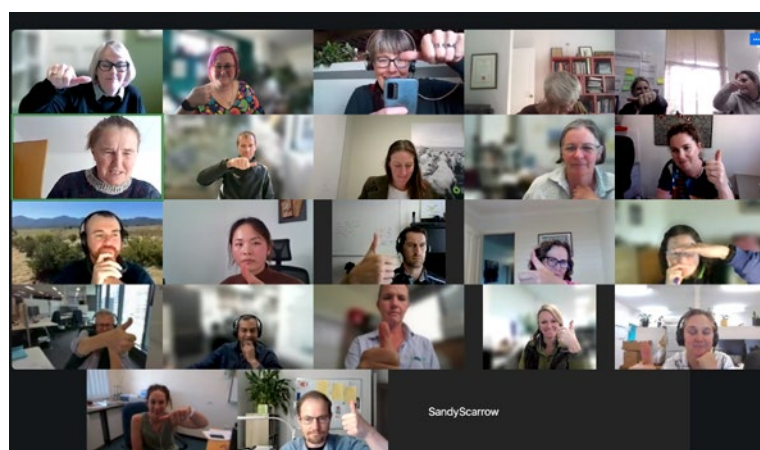
Another critical takeaway was the need for **timing and**

relevance in extension activities. Sarah Thompson, a dairy farmer and experienced extensionist, highlighted the significance of aligning events with the seasonal rhythms of farming life, ensuring that workshops and field days are held when they are most relevant and impactful for participants.

Practical Takeaways for Extension Professionals

- 1. Start with Why:** Successful extension begins with a clear understanding of why the topic matters to the target audience. This focus on relevance ensures that extension efforts are more than just information sessions—they become opportunities for genuine engagement and collaboration.
- 2. Less is More:** Overloading participants with information can be counterproductive. The value of focusing on key insights and allowing time for reflection and discussion were emphasised, enabling attendees to walk away with actionable knowledge that can be applied immediately.
- 3. Facilitation is Key:** Good facilitation, grounded in inclusiveness and creativity, plays a critical role in driving engagement. Techniques like using continuums, ORID methods, and creating opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction are crucial in making extension efforts both enjoyable and effective.
- 4. Adaptability and Flexibility:** Extension professionals must remain flexible, adapting their approaches to the unique needs of different groups. As demonstrated by the diverse range of participants, extension is not a one-size-fits-all endeavour. Tailoring approaches based on the audience's experience, preferences, and context is crucial for success.

The positive feedback from participants reflects the value of ExtensionChat 2024. Participants left feeling “energised,” “inspired,” and “confident,” equipped with new skills and perspectives that could be applied directly to their work. The event not only deepened their understanding of extension practices but also reinforced the importance of building strong, engaged networks across the region.



APEN Conversations

Tune into APEN Conversations for a shared learning experience

“Don’t be too scared to have a voice”.

APEN conversations is an opportunity for APEN members to get together for an hour to discuss papers, articles or new ideas and how these may be applied to their work. Because there is always a range of experience in the virtual room, it is a great chance for members to learn from each other.

Since the last ExtensionNet, our SA Regional Coordinator, Sandy Gunter has coordinated three Conversations, supported by the Regional Coordinators (RCs).

In July, Denise Bewsell (NZ) challenged us to share our conversations on the importance of questioning our ideas. Denise took us through structured conversations using the ORID tool (Observation, Reflective, Interpretive, Decision-making). The breakout rooms discussed what were the most type of questions used.; action can be complex, Which questions do we tend to use the most? What questions are we uncomfortable with? What other frameworks are people aware of? Denise was supported by RC ‘tech guy’, Ossie Lang. Once again, the discussions were vibrant and full in lots of sharing.

In August Jeanette Gellard led a conversation on evaluation- exploring the key principles of good evaluation practice, the diverse types of evaluation and how to select and apply the best evaluation methods that will suit the needs of our ‘clients’, and what tools and techniques are out there that we can tap into. Working across the agricultural and environmental

sectors, Jeanette is passionate about building peoples’ capacity to influence decision making processes.

The September Conversations, Getting engagement when things get busy: how to attract an audience, was facilitated by Ossie Lang, Tasmanian Regional Coordinator and supported by Callen Thompson, NSW Nth Regional Coordinator. Ossie’s very engaging slides on Tactics, Bribery, Promote Early, Get Sneaky and Follow up, inspired everyone to share their ‘techniques’. Some prompting questions for the participants to think about included:

- How do you pitch your information/ subject matter to make it interesting and visible to your intended audience?
- What things do you do to enhance the X factor for people (What’s in it for me)?

[Apology to those who were not there. APEN does not record the sessions, and you have missed out on a very practical toolbox.] Once again, the session was filled with vibrant discussions, lots of sharing, great anecdotes. We had fun!

Bringing Members together before Christmas on Tuesday 3rd December.

“Training: You don’t Know what You don’t Know.” facilitated by Caroline Coppo and tech guy, Sarah Thompson.

Saying “I don’t know”. Is it courageous? “The real superpower isn’t knowing all the answers; it’s knowing how to learn, unlearn, and relearn – on repeat” (Holly Ransome) It is the start of curiosity.

Board News

APEN is led by a Board of Directors with diverse backgrounds and experiences.

The Board is supported by five Committees who

- develop/review/refine the Terms of Reference including defining the key objectives
- set dates for meetings
- define priorities for 2024
- develop an action plan
- and implement activities through
 - Governance and Finance | Chair | Roy Murray-Prior
 - Business Development | Chair | Noel Ainsworth

- Member Engagement | Chair | Nicole Sallur
- Professional Development | Chair | Peter Long

The AGM was held on November 15th. Directors Peter Long and Pat Hamilton were farewelled and thanked for their commitment during the last six years. Olive Hood and Salman Quddus were welcomed as the incoming Directors. Ossie Lang, Tasmanian Regional Coordinator, was farewelled and thanked for being a very valued member of the team.

2025 International Conference plans are well underway. Save the date 14-16th October 2025. Attend the conference in Brisbane. Caroline Coppo and Tim Bradley, Co-convenors, and Beck Burgess, event manager, welcome your support.

APEN Roadshow 2024 'Getting the most out of a mentoring relationship'

"Getting the most out of a mentoring relationship" is based around the value of connection, sharing and learning from others. Mentoring is something we all experience either formally or informally in our professional and personal lives, ensuring we have the skills and understanding of what makes a successful mentoring relationship. The workshop will guarantee it's a worthwhile experience with tangible outcome for both parties.

APEN is excited to be working with AgriFutures to deliver the workshops in SA, NSW, VIC & WA in November. Your Regional Coordinator will be in contact to let you know, the facilitator, date, venue and cost. Look for an email from Sandy Gunter (SA), Sue Street & Callen Thompson (NSW), Sarah Thompson (VIC), and Karen Smith (WA).

[Ed. – the Roadshow have been deferred to 2025, stay tuned for more information about the new dates next year]



The graphic features the Australasia Pacific Extension Network logo in the top left corner, which includes the text 'AUSTRALASIA PACIFIC EXTENSION NETWORK' and 'Extending Horizons'. The central image shows a woman and a man in professional attire looking at a laptop. A large orange box on the right contains the text 'MENTORING PROGRAM'. Below this, details of the program are listed: 'February 2025 | Duration: 9 months (online)', 'Mentees: Build skills, confidence & networks', and 'Mentors: Share expertise & support future leaders'. An orange button at the bottom right says 'APPLY NOW'.

APEN 2025 Mentoring Scheme

Expression of Interest (EOI) for APEN Mentoring Scheme - Mentees and Mentors

APEN is thrilled to announce Expressions of Interest (EOI) for our 2025 Mentoring Scheme are now open and will close on December 18.

We are seeking motivated individuals who are eager to either develop their professional skills as mentees or enrich others by sharing their expertise as mentors.

See website for further details For Potential Mentees and For Prospective Mentors

Ideas and practices around the network

APEN is blessed with a wealth of talented Members who share their skills, knowledge and experiences with us in the following articles.

Australian Extension Capacity and Capability

Dr John James

How many extension practitioners are there in Australia, and what are their skill levels? These are some of the questions addressed in a recent survey report conducted for AgriFutures Australia by John James (Enablers of Change), Jeff Coutts (Coutts J&R), and Denise Bewsell (Scarlatti). This report, commissioned on behalf of all the Rural Research and Development Corporations, sheds light on the current and future needs of the extension system within the Australian agricultural and natural resource management sector. The 392 responses from a wide range of extension practitioners, offer a snapshot of the state of the extension system across the country, helping us understand its strengths, weaknesses, and areas in need of further development. It also serves as a benchmark for those working to enhance the effectiveness of the extension system. The report informs the overarching project, Australian Extension Capacity and Capability: A Map and a Gap Analysis, which is due to conclude by December 2024.

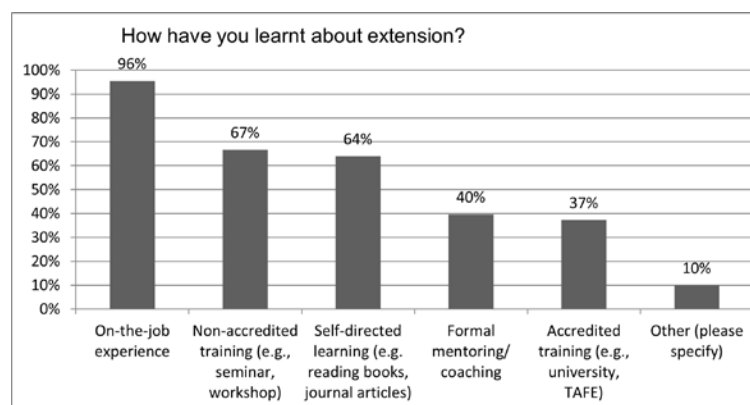
This project is exploring extension capacity and capability. Capacity considers whether there are sufficient professionals working in the extension space to support the needs of the sector now and into the future. On the other hand, extension capability focuses on the skills, knowledge, and abilities required by these practitioners to solve problems, meet goals, and adapt to the evolving demands of the sector. These two concepts—capacity and capability—are integral to the effectiveness of extension services in Australia. It's not just about having enough people on the ground but also ensuring those individuals possess the right skills and resources to make a meaningful impact.

Extension has evolved from a specific job role into a broad discipline, much like project management, where many professionals—including researchers, policy makers, and academics—are now often required to undertake extension activities alongside their primary duties. This shift reflects the growing need for collaboration within the agricultural sector and beyond to ensure there are people with the right skills and resources.

The survey's findings reveal several key trends and challenges within the current extension system.

There was a strong theme highlighting the need for more training programs, particularly for new graduates entering the field. Continuous professional development is essential, with respondents expressing a desire for more in-depth training, mentoring, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities. Specific skill areas such as adult learning techniques and knowledge of carbon markets were highlighted as critical for future development. This indicates a growing recognition of the need to equip extension practitioners with specialised skills that align with the evolving needs of the agricultural sector.

Almost all of respondents (96%) learnt about extension through on-the-job experience. Other significant methods include non-accredited training (67%), self-directed learning (64%), and formal mentoring or coaching (40%). Accredited training, such as through universities or TAFE, is also a notable source of learning, with 37% of respondents mentioning it. The survey results also highlight the importance of



improved collaboration and coordination between various organisations, including Research Development Corporations, universities, and the private sector. Respondents mentioned the need for a national extension strategy to foster better integration of efforts across regions and sectors. Such a strategy could play a pivotal role in streamlining the extension system and ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively.

Funding and resource allocation also emerged as major themes in the survey. Respondents expressed concerns about the lack of flexible and long-term funding models that support both capacity building and on-the-ground delivery. Funding should be aligned with practical outcomes and real-world impacts over longer time frames. This highlights the need for a more adaptive and responsive funding framework that can accommodate the dynamic nature of the agricultural sector.

The report concludes with several key implications

for the future of extension in Australia. These include the development of enhanced training programs tailored to the needs of extension practitioners, the formulation of a national extension strategy to improve collaboration, the implementation of structured career pathways to attract and retain young professionals, and the advocacy for flexible funding models that support both traditional and innovative approaches. Additionally, there is an emphasis on balancing the use of technology with traditional face-to-face methods in extension practices, recognising that while new tools are valuable, the human element remains critical for building trust and relationships.

The report provides a clear, data-driven understanding of the current landscape of extension capacity and capability in Australia. These insights will guide the development of targeted professional development opportunities and will help extension practitioners advocate for policy changes that support the extension profession. The report's findings will support APEN and strengthen its role as the leading network for extension professionals across the region. If you would like to receive a copy of the report, please contact John James john@enablersofchange.com.au

Hort Connections 2024 – Grow. Connect. Thrive was held on 3-5 June at the Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre (MCEC).

APEN, as part of the Industry Partnership Agreement with Hort Connections, received 2 Conference Access Passes. Our Victorian Regional Coordinator, Sarah Thompson, offered it the first 2 Victorian APEN members who contacted her would be given the passes. The lucky winners were, Lilia Jenkins and Cynthia Mahoney.

Lilia summarised her experience.

“Talk to as many people as you can early on and get



Lilia Jenkins | Extension Scientist | Cesar

some wins under your belt- it sets the tone for the rest of the conference.” My Uber driver shared this advice with me as we arrived at the Melbourne Convention Centre. I must have looked anxious—truthfully, I was. I was excited about the opportunity, but the sheer scale of my first conference as a professional was intimidating.

But my driver's advice was spot on. Once I scored a few early wins, I felt more confident and ended up learning a lot.

Here are my 'wins' from Hort Connections 2024:

The Grass Isn't Always Greener

I predominately work in integrated pest management (IPM) for broadacre cropping, and there's a common belief that horticulture has made IPM so much easier. Supposedly, compared to broadacre, the profit margins are higher, the ecosystem simpler, and farmers less risk averse. However, like most generalisations, I found this wasn't entirely accurate. The people in this sector are just like any other – with their own beliefs, assumptions, and practices, and horticulture faces unique drivers and barriers to practice change, just like broadacre does.

Finding Common Ground

In fact, I found more similarities than differences between broadacre and horticulture.

Firstly, sustainability in food production has shifted from a premium to an expectation for consumers, posing both market opportunities and threats to profit margins and social license.

Secondly, there's increasing concern around how agricultural chemical regulations, driven by global standards such as those from the EU, could impact export commitments, restrict chemical availability in Australia (particularly pertinent for IPM), and reshape consumer preferences.

Collective Impact

Fortunately, there's a growing recognition that these challenges are shared across the entire sector, and “cross-industry collaboration” was certainly a buzzword at the conference. Collaboration, of course, is easier said than done given the diverse perspectives, priorities, and approaches involved. But it is almost certainly necessary to address the wicked problems that agriculture faces, such as rising pesticide resistance. Promising interdisciplinary projects were showcased at the conference, and I believe as extensionists, we'll learn a number of lessons by observing how such collaborations evolve in the coming years.

Perspectives on Extension

Speaking of extension, I had some interesting (and sometimes heated!) conversations about how best to design and deliver impactful change.

While there are nuances and contributing factors at play here, I like to think that most of us are driven by common goals: supporting producers and improving agricultural practices for the greater good.

Whether or not I agreed with every perspective, I think these conversations are a step in the right direction toward aligning our shared understanding and achieving these goals.

Building Bonds and Networking

And finally, a more personal win was connecting with other early-career professionals.

While working in an industry like agriculture, it's easy to feel overwhelmed, especially among seasoned, established networks (hello imposter syndrome!). Of course, most everyone was welcoming and friendly, but the chance to connect with people who are navigating similar paths, challenges and passions was invaluable. From old university mates, familiar faces from the last APEN conference, and totally new connections; these are the colleagues I'll grow with in the industry— it's reassuring to know we're not alone.

That, and of course, the food was absolutely incredible. But then again, what else would you expect from an agricultural conference?

My sincerest thanks to APEN for the amazing opportunity to attend, and a special thanks to my Uber driver for the unexpected yet incredibly helpful advice!

Lilia Jenkins | Extension Scientist | Cesar

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All areas of horticulture were recognised and celebrated at the conference, bringing together members from right across the vegetable, fruit and floral sectors. Hort Connections again proudly showcased exciting new products, services and technologies to help shape the Australian and New Zealand industry – highlighting solutions in agricultural technology, finance, labour, energy and environmental sustainability. 82% of delegates who attended Hort Connections 2024 said they will be coming to Brisbane to attend Hort Connections 2025.

An added bonus - Alice Long, APEN's Communications Coordinator, promoted the event through APEN's LinkedIn, Facebook and eBulletin.

A Fantastic Experience – sometimes you need a nudge to share someone's thanks -In this case, I am sharing Stephanie March's journey.

Background: In September this year, I had the privilege of attending the Graduation of 15 women who were recipients of the South Australian Stepping into Leadership Program, facilitated by Past APEN President, Jeanette Long, Ag Consulting Co, and Sharon Honner, Spectra Coaching, and proudly supported by WoTL and PIRSA.

As an advocate for rural women and girls, over several decades, I have designed, coordinated, delivered and facilitated numerous training programs re leadership training, and mentored many women and girls during my teaching career, and in various roles in organisations, including the Australian Women in Agriculture, the National Women's Coalition, Country to Canberra and now APEN.

I've always believed that great leaders don't set out to be a leader. Most people want to make a difference. They want to lead people in the 'right' direction. Build confidence, create a network, give skills and knowledge (empowerment) to turn ideas into reality to become effective leaders (not busy leaders). People who take their passion and make it happen.

The following article is by Stephanie March, a graduate of the 2024 Stepping into Leadership Program. Stephanie's vote of thanks on behalf of the graduates captured so much of my journey that I asked her if I could publish it APEN's ExtensionNet. Read, enjoy and reflect on her insights. I am sure that your own journey will be enriched.

Regards Pat Hamilton | Director APEN

Here is Stephanie's story...

"When I first joined the Stepping into Leadership (SIL) program, I'll be honest – I didn't know what to expect. I was unsure where I fit as a leader, and what I truly had to offer. But from the moment we gathered for that first workshop, something shifted. I quickly realised this program was exactly where I needed to be, and the timing couldn't have been more perfect. I remember walking into the room, which was filled with incredible women from diverse backgrounds – some of us working on farms, some in agribusiness, healthcare, education, law enforcement, and many of us wearing several hats at once, as rural women often do. I felt incredibly lucky to have been able to meet with a fantastic bunch of emerging leaders. Our 2024 cohort, (the SIL program has been delivered for

12 years – such is the power of a brilliant program), is made up of mothers, sisters, daughters, volunteers, professionals, and community leaders, often juggling these roles without even noticing the quiet leadership we were already providing.

For me, as someone with a background in occupational therapy and primary education, who has been working full-time on our family farm for the past few years, growing an enterprise across both York and Eyre Peninsulas, as well as being the mother of a child with a rare genetic condition requiring frequent medical care in Adelaide, leadership has always felt like something other people did – something perhaps out of reach, something that required maybe titles or status or something you did when you got older. But this program has shown me that leadership is not about titles; leadership is about showing up, embracing your values, and leading from where you are, with what you have and from where a place of passion and purpose.



Stephanie March

Leadership comes from a place of growth. And growth certainly doesn't happen overnight – it takes time, nurturing, and, most importantly, the belief that we have the potential to rise. Like a seed planted deep in the soil, leadership begins underneath the surface. At first, you may not see the progress. It might feel like nothing is happening, like you're stuck or unsure. But with the right environment, with care, support, and a little courage that seed begins to push through, to break the surface, to grow into something bigger and more beautiful than you could have, perhaps, first imagined.

During the program, one of the most profound lessons I learned was from my coach, who spoke about how people sometimes get “stuck in the weeds. As they

grow, we get busy, consumed by day-to-day struggles, caught in the unfamiliar. And there's nothing inherently wrong with being in the weeds – they're part of life, sometimes they serve a purpose. There are even beautiful weeds that exist. But if we truly want to thrive, we need to find a way to break through and blossom as leader. We need to find a way to rise above them.

Leadership, like a growing seed, requires the right environment. Just as a seed needs water, sunlight, nutrients, and care, our growth as leaders needs support, guidance, changes, and, importantly, the belief that we can do more than just survive in the weeds. We can grow tall, bloom and, eventually thrive.

If we think about it: in agriculture, when a plant struggles in a patch of weeds it's not necessarily the end. We might try to use a spray, increase our fertiliser rate, or consider a different crop rotation the following year. With careful attention and nurturing, that plant can grow beyond the weeds and reach toward the sky. This program has done the same for me. It has been the sunlight and nutrients that I needed to push through my comfort zone, to stop making excuses, and to recognise that there is a leader in me waiting to grow. Stepping up and out into space that wasn't already there waiting for me.

Stepping into Leadership has equipped us participants with a wide range of tools for our leadership toolbox. We've gained invaluable skills in handling challenging conversations, mastering negotiation techniques, and harnessing the power of effective questioning. We've also explored diverse learning styles, personalities, and characteristics, and learned how these factors influence team management.

Bringing these skills back to my family farm, my work in health advocacy at the Women and Children's Hospital, and my volunteer roles in the community have already proven incredibly beneficial. I'm certain that each participant has their own powerful examples of how these insights have transformed their own journeys already.

For many of us, stepping into leadership can feel daunting – like we're tangled in the weeds, unsure if we're ready. Yet, with the right support from mentors and coaches, who provide wisdom and care, and by embracing opportunities to stretch beyond our comfort zones, we can break free. We have the potential to bloom and shine, becoming leaders not only in agriculture but in our communities, our families, and even the world. By choosing to be vulnerable, navigate challenges, and stepping into the unknown, we unlock our true growth and potential.

For me, the Stepping into Leadership Program gave me more than just skills or knowledge – it gave me confidence. Confidence to dream bigger, to stop waiting for the ‘right’

moment, and to take action. Progress over perfection. It gave me the space to reflect on my values, on what truly matters to me, and to align my actions with those values. It gave me courage to start a project that had been quietly simmering in the background – something I had put off for too long. I realised that the only thing standing in my way was me. This program helped me get out of my own way.

Finally, the Stepping into Leadership Program has been more than just a professional development – it has been a journey of growth, transformation, and discovery. I have learnt that leadership isn't about having all the answers. It's about willing to grow, to learn, to face challenges, and to rise stronger surrounded by a supportive network.

We may start in the soil amongst the weeds, but with the right care, we can all have the potential to bloom, to grow to new heights and continue to reach for the sky – as they say the sky's the limit and this program is the start for many emerging leaders who have stepped up and into this sphere during 2024. I can't wait to watch where people go on their journeys from here.

Regards Stephanie

Stephanie March September 2024. Farm Business Manager, Marbel Ag Founder, Merci Co Consumer Advocate Adelaide Women's and Children's Hospital

The impact of industry development officers for Table Grapes

Susie Murphy White Industry Development and Innovation Manager Hort Innovation Manjimup WA

Table Grapes are a growing industry with exports worth \$557M coming not only from Victorian growers but now from QLD and WA. The production has increased by 19% in 2023 to 232,000 tones.

The first industry development project for Table Grape Industry was funded by Hort Innovation in March 2021 for a three-year period. It was delivered by three highly experienced Industry Development Officers (IDO's) employed by the Australian Table Grape Association (ATGA). It was well-received by growers and stakeholders and the project review reported it to be 'a very successful project and well regarded by the industry. The project team were found to be 'well connected extension team who are 'great communicators,' also 'able to communicate science to grower level' and good at 'listening to grower needs.'

Each IDO brought over 20 years of experience in collaborating with growers through different extension roles throughout their careers. Growers were very receptive to the project and the project team

With a tag line of 'delivered nationally with regionally specific content,' this project reached over eight hundred growers. Based in Mildura the team covered all growing regions; Sunraysia, Riverland, Riverina and travelling across to the Swan Valley and Carnarvon in WA and undertaking grower visits in Queensland each year.

The performance of the project was measured against the practice change and industry development outcomes. This was achieved through the review of documentation, stakeholder interviews, industry benchmarks and grower surveys. Importantly growers who participated in events and workshops expressed satisfaction with the quality and content and an intention in modifying their practices. Interviewees highlighted the quality of activities, industry knowledge of the project team and invited guests and the collaborative approach in involving growers and service providers.

This first project had a significant impact on the industry setting up some great methods of delivery to achieve:

- expanding the reach and engagement with growers
- awareness and knowledge of project activities and
- practice change or intent to change.

Figure 1. shows the contracted outputs (line) against the delivered outputs (bars). The project team have consistently exceeded in their delivery of extension services and material to industry.

To extend the reach of project outcomes the Industry Development Officers established a Community of Practice (CoP) to engage agronomists, researchers, resellers, agribusiness, and government agencies. This has successfully expanded the reach and engagement with growers on specific topics such as Queensland fruit fly and restricted spring growth. This CoP met online and



Table Grape Industry Development officers Alison Macgregor, Jenny Treeby and Karen Connolly with Hort Innovation's Susie Murphy White and Nicole Dimos Byrnes.

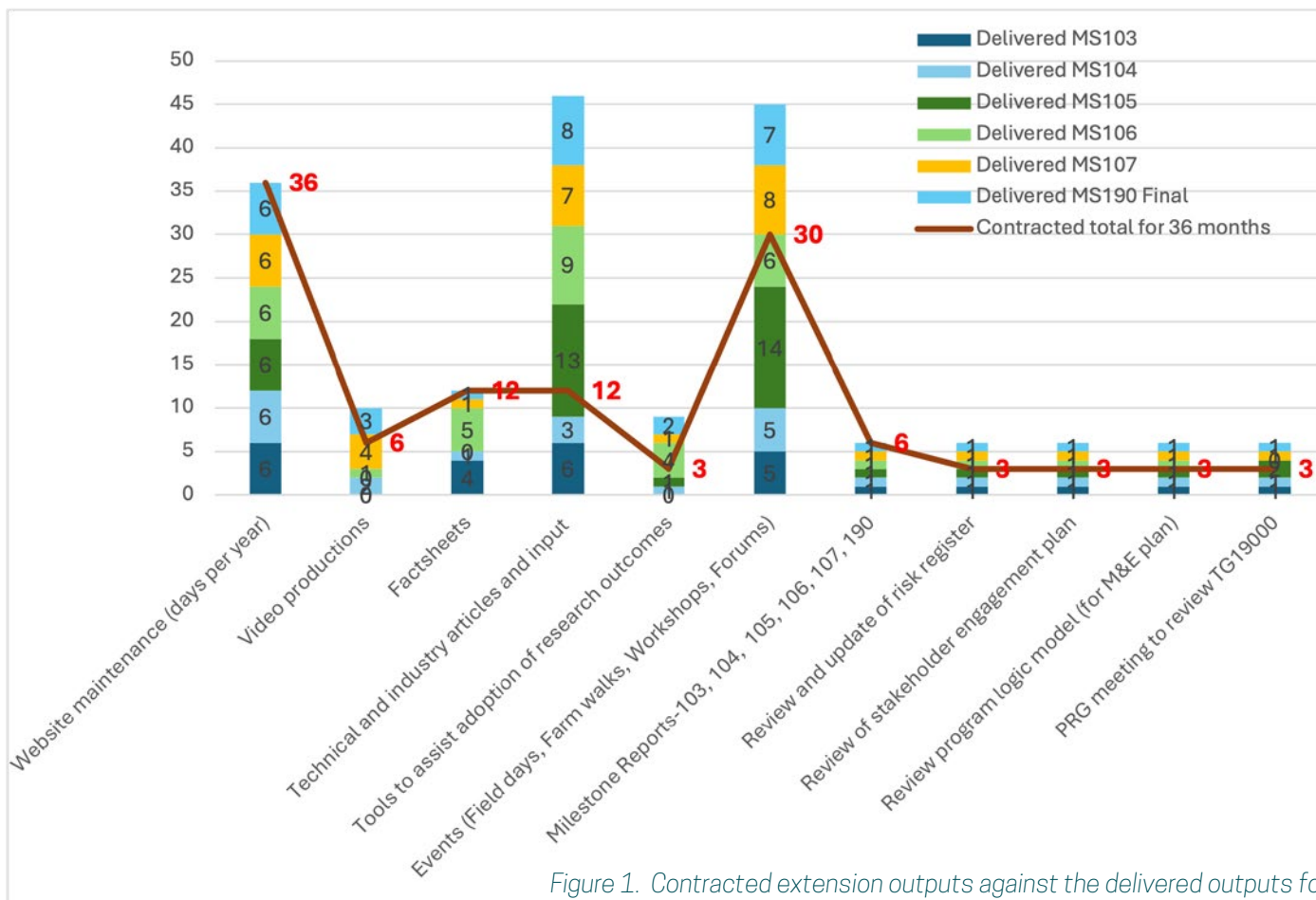


Figure 1. Contracted extension outputs against the delivered outputs for Table Grape industry development project TG19000.

in person in Mildura creating the network of service providers who can learn from each other and potentially work together on future projects.

Impact and Adoption case study - the value of a Community of Practice

The 2023/24 season had very high pest pressure from Queensland fruit fly. In September 2023 ATGA were very aware of Queensland fruit fly build up and they anticipated high numbers in grapes from mid-December when berries start to soften. The ATGA industry development officers were able to engage with the CoP to expand their reach and engage more growers to reduce the impact of fruit fly stings in the coming seasons' table grapes.

Figure 2. Bait like a Boss timeline of adoption of Queensland fruit fly extension tools.

The Bait like a Boss campaign had been a success with the following metrics recorded.

- High number of views of each video within 48 hours of release
- Evidence of repeat views, shares and saves indicate grower willingness to adopt
- Positive feedback about videos being short (60-90 secs), funny and to the point

- Insecticide used for baiting is now in short supply in Sunraysia and
- ATGA are receiving enquiries about sourcing contractors

The following quotes has been taken from evaluation interviews conducted with growers, managers and agronomists in addition to discussions with the three project team members. The majority surveyed stated, without prompting, that they wanted the program to continue due to the value to growers and industry. The team increased industry cohesion and ensured access to information regardless of background, technical capacity, or geographical location.

- o "The best thing to come out of this is the growers feel like they've got someone in their corner."
- o "The project has delivered very useful and practical workshops and field trials with the collaboration of industry agronomists to improve the technical efficiency for growers".
- "A very capable project team which has very good trust and engaged with growers".
- "This extension project is the best project the industry has had".

The strong extension and development program allowed growers and a broad stakeholder base to build knowledge, awareness, and skills, and enhance their aspiration to

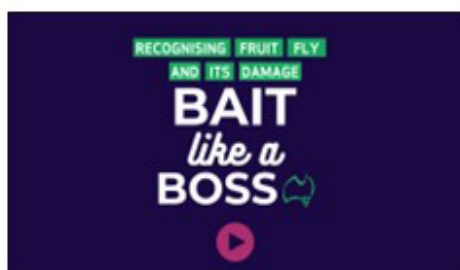
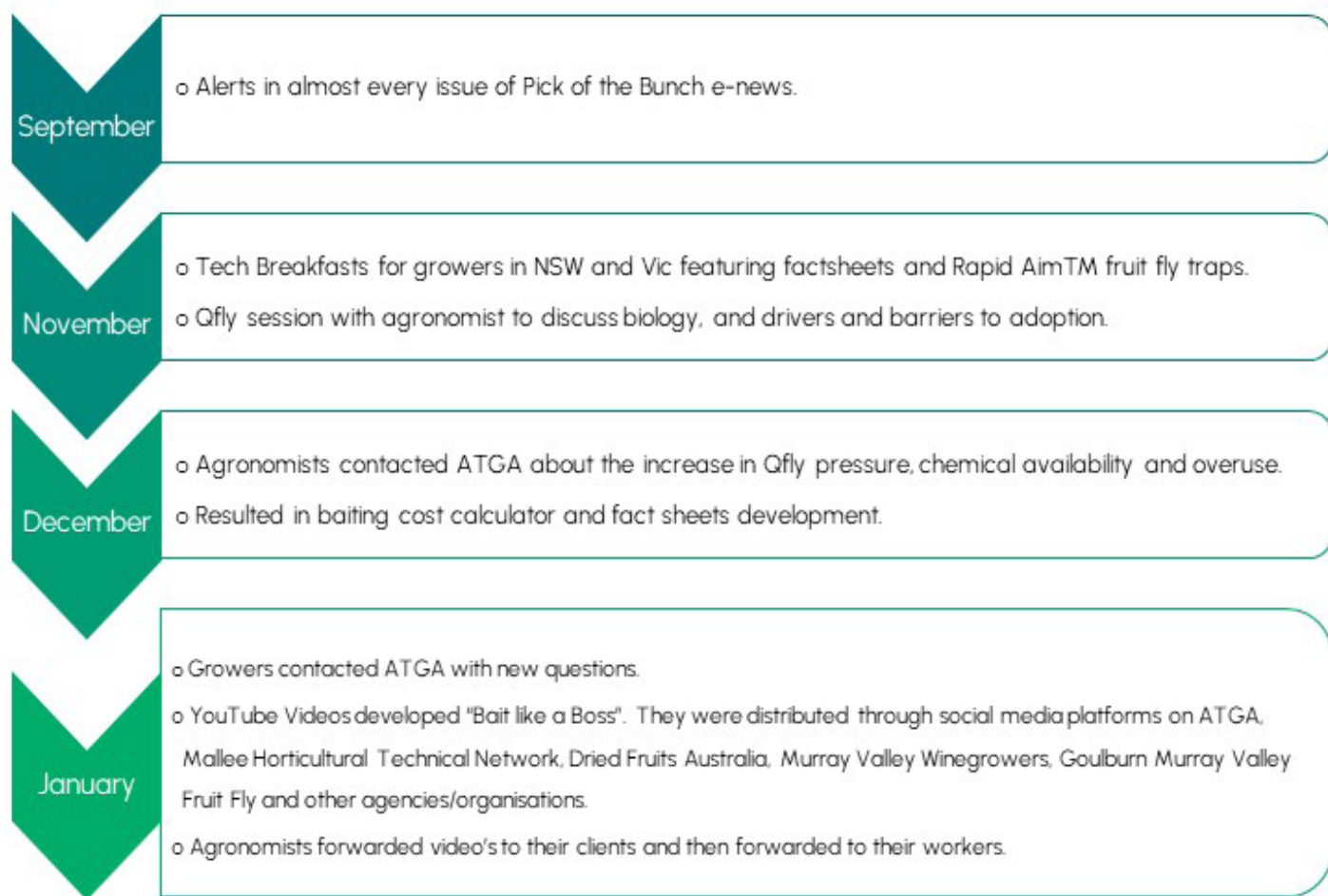


Figure 3. Bait like a Boss timeline of adoption of Queensland fruit fly extension tools

change.

The next project for ATGA has been funded for 5 years TG23001 - De-risking and futureproofing Australian table grape production and will see the industry grow even further.

Regards, Susie
 Acknowledgement
 Australian Table Grape Association Industry Development Officers – Alison MacGregor, Jenny Treeby and Karen Connolly and CEO Jeff Scott.

Reference
 Extension of technologies and best management practices to the Australian table grape industry (TG19000) Final report. Australian Table Grape Association 2024
 Hort Innovation | Extension of technologies and best management practices to the Australian table grape industry (TG19000) (horticulture.com.au)

Independent M&E planning and evaluation of TG19000 – TG19005. RMCG 2024

Meet the 2024 Regional Coordinators



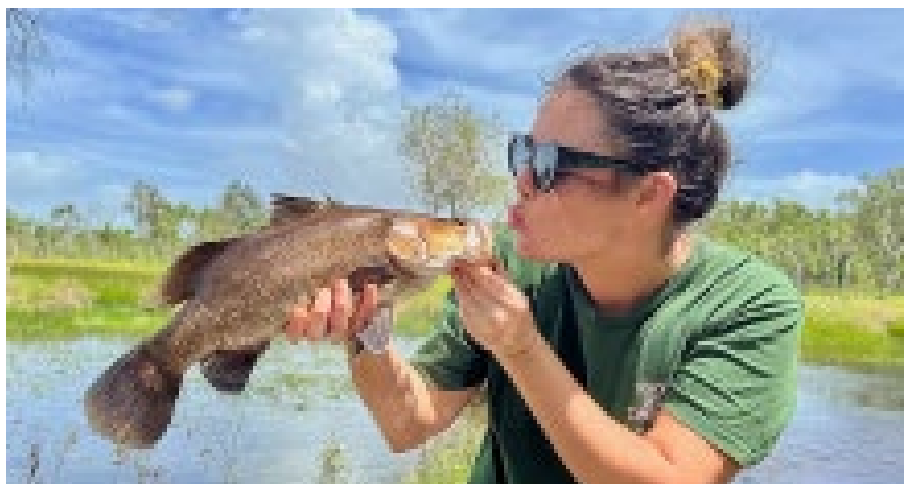
The enthusiastic, motivated, and committed team created opportunities for members to interact online and/or face-to-face through sharing and promoting extension knowledge and skills. “It is great being able to connect with the other RCs across Australia & NZ, knowing who they really are and what they do, hearing each other’s perspectives, how they approach things and sharing the advice – everyone is spread out doing different things, but we come together as a team every couple of months which unites us in supporting APEN’s members.”
- Sandy, SA RC.

The life of an Extension Officer

Lauren Thornton | Northern Territory RC

Being an extension officer is a privileged position. You are often the trusted local person on the ground, establishing relationships and lines of communication between your organisation, research and end users.

Having someone who has capacity to engage end users on behalf of an organisation is invaluable. This engagement might simply be someone to raise awareness of your organisation, to facilitate an activity,



as a touch point for stakeholders, or to share information about new research. Extension officers have the skills to take complex science to its audience in a digestible way. They are people who can support communications for mass audiences, organise a gear show or shout coffees to a group of people who have shared interests. Extension officers support ideas and issues into RD&E organisations and ensure that research is relevant and useful to its end users from inception. We do this so our stakeholders can use our science and are armed with new information, tools and expertise.

Juggling all the demands on our time is not always easy. I value my personal time and aim to have boundaries around the time that I have for work and the time that I have for my personal life. I am lucky enough to have a flexible workplace that allows me to manage my work hours so I can get my work done when I need to, as well as fulfilling my personal obligations in a remote area.

Regards, Lauren

The Power of Networks

Sandy Gunter | South Australian Regional Coordinator

It's been a busy year so far with lots going on, and so it can be very easy to hunker down and just get on with things. However, getting out there and going to events while mixing with people gives me plenty of opportunity to expand my professional and personal networks. This will pay dividends later on if you are looking to change jobs, build your reputation, expand your clientele or increase your social influence.

There are usually lots of chances to broaden your networks if you think about all the opportunities where you are meeting and mingling with different people. Some valuable networking occasions that I have attended this year include attending the WoTL conference in Hahndorf, undertaking an 8-week leadership course, being part of the APEN Regional Activities Committee, and Co-chairing my employer's Work, Health and Safety committee. Every one of these things has enabled me to meet new people, learn new things and practise different skill sets while broaden my networks and strengthen relationships

Don't forget that you have an extensive network right at your fingertips.

The membership of APEN is diverse and wide reaching across many different sectors. APEN members hold a variety of roles. Some people are new to the field of extension and some people have been practicing for a long time. However, we all share something in common – we are all members of APEN and believe in the value of extension.

If you are looking to expand your network of people, then think about starting with your fellow APEN members.

There are many ways to do this so here are just a few.

- Make contact with your APEN Regional Coordinator. Introduce yourself and let them know that you're keen to connect with other members. They have lists of all the members within their region as well as across the nation. The Regional Coordinator may be able to do a virtual introduction to help you get to know other APEN members in your region or industry sector. If there is enough interest, it might be possible to organise a local meet and greet event where you can speak to people in person.

- Register for the APEN Conversations webinars. These usually occur once a month and are a great way to share knowledge and interact with other members in a short discussion session on different topics. You can even volunteer to host a conversation (with support from someone from the Regional Activities Committee to make sure it all goes smoothly)

- Think about coming along to the bi-annual conference and roadshow events. These events give you access to lots of great speakers, and you can catch up with APEN members from interstate and overseas to share ideas.

- Consider contributing time to one of the many APEN committees and working groups. Your contributions to our organisation will be extremely valued and you get to work with some amazing people.

- Make sure to establish a LinkedIn profile that highlights your skills and experiences, and don't forget to include any professional memberships including your APEN membership. It's a free form of advertising and you'd be surprised how often LinkedIn profiles are searched to find and connect with people.

So, lift your vision and get networking.

Regards, Sandy



Challenges to Manage

Tim Bradley | Sth Queensland RC

I grew up on a farming operation in South-East Queensland where I was exposed to the intricate workings of dairy and beef agriculture from a young age, sparking my enduring passion for the industry. Over the years, I have accumulated extensive experience across diverse agricultural enterprises, encompassing dairy, beef, and fodder production, as well as involvement in agritourism activities.

My professional journey has seen me take on pivotal roles including Farm Attendant and Training Coordinator at the University of Queensland's Gatton Campus. Here, I fortified my practical experience with various diplomas and certifications in agriculture, complemented by my pursuit of a dual degree in Agriculture and Business.

In my present capacity as a Program Coordinator for the Queensland Farmers' Federation, I am deeply involved in supporting 36 early-career agricultural advisors. Together, we are dedicated to spearheading impactful changes in agricultural practices, particularly within the Great Barrier Reef Regions and focusing on improving Reef Water Quality. Additionally, we are championing the integration of digital technologies across wider Queensland, striving to bolster the resilience and advancement of individual farmers and the broader agricultural sector.

My association with APEN commenced subsequent to my attendance at the Launceston conference in November 2023. This experience led to my inclusion in the Regional Coordinators group for Southern Queensland, presenting a privileged opportunity to contribute to this esteemed organisation's initiatives and facilitate events in Queensland. I wholeheartedly encourage those engaged in regional or rural communities and involved in producer-centric endeavours to become part of the APEN community, offering invaluable support for their professional journeys.

A notable milestone in my involvement with APEN was our successful bid to host the APEN International Conference in Brisbane for 2025. As part of the organising team, I am fervently driving the planning and execution efforts, fostering a forum for insightful discussions and impactful collaborations. With "Tech + Extension: A Powerful Partnership for Change" as the



theme for 2025, the conference promises to be an unparalleled platform for industry-wide progress and advancement.

Beyond my professional engagements, I wholeheartedly dedicate myself to managing our small-scale farm in the Lockyer Valley. Here, alongside my wife and 5-month-old son, we undertake the breeding of Brahman Cattle, Hanoverian Horses, and Pygmy Goats. Striving for a harmonious work-life balance, I cherish the moments spent with my family and our beloved animals, recognising the profound importance of holistic well-being amidst my relentless professional commitments.

APEN has undeniably been a remarkable catalyst for my personal and professional growth, offering an invaluable network and a plethora of opportunities for learning and advancement. Should you share a similar passion for progress and development within the agricultural realm, I wholeheartedly advocate for membership within this influential supportive organisation.

Regards, Tim

Building Connections for Change in Extension

Caroline Coppo | Nth Queensland RC

I have followed an exciting and varied career path in north Queensland that has always gravitated towards extension, education and community capacity building. Early career, I was a member of the Long Term Reef Monitoring Program at the Australian Institute of Marine Science, responsible for surveying the plants and animals that made up the reef benthos (bottom). I am passionate about the reef but figured if I wanted to make a difference I needed to be on the land, working with people, rather than spending my life documenting reef health. Instead, I went down the path of education and community education, positively engaging with communities to promote learning opportunities and facilitate change. I have loved my journey.

Some of the benefits of being involved in APEN is that there are lots of opportunities to be involved, make APEN even better and extend your network of colleagues and friends geographically and across industries and communities.

I am the APEN Regional Coordinator (RC) for Northern Queensland, sharing the RC role for Queensland with Tim Bradley who takes care of Southern Queensland. Together we work with the other enthusiastic RCs throughout Australia. This year Tim and I collaborated on a bid to APEN to organise the 2025 International APEN Conference and we won the bid!! Tim and I are co-chairs of the Conference Organising Committee, and are looking forward to the exciting year ahead, to make sure the 2025 APEN Conference in Brisbane is the best opportunity for extension people to gather together, learn together, form networks and have fun exploring all the amazing things that are happening in extension.

I am also a member of the APEN Member Engagement Committee, involving other enthusiastic APENers who are working to make APEN even better, such as improvements to the APEN website as a resource for APEN members and as a 'flagship' of what good extension is, and what it can achieve.

I am a life-long learner, always challenging my own



understanding and being inspired by others I network with on the learning journey. I have academic qualifications in science, education, environmental education, corporate governance and NRM as well as extensive cane industry, reef science and NRM experience in the Wet Tropics region. Formal and informal learning opportunities will always inspire me to understand more, to do better, to explore other fields that interest me, but extension will always be the focus for me. I think we can all improve how we 'do' extension and learning more about it will help us all. Extension is complicated. When it is done well it facilitates incredible results!

My passion for learning has led me to my current role with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries (DPI) (which has recently changed from Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF)). As a Senior Project Officer, working in the Integrated Engagement and Capacity Building Project, I am responsible for supporting training opportunities for extension personnel working in the reef space – so my idea of a dream job! As part of the awesome project team, that also helps to build regional capacity by supporting grower groups, we work on increasing the capacity of extension personnel by providing workshops, guides and online learning modules on extension topics.

So to wrap it up ... I am really into making a difference and contributing to the extension community. It is a professional network of inspirational people. It is a network to help you in your role. Be involved in APEN. Contribute to APEN. Network with other members. Attend events. Have fun.

Regards, Caroline.

Finding the balance

Sarah Thompson | Victorian RC



For the past 10 years, I have worked in the dairy industry in a range of extension roles before now coming back to work with my partner James running a 400-cow dairy farm in Kyabram. I am also the APEN Victorian Regional Coordinator and have been a part of APEN for the past 5 years. It's been an incredible journey of growth, development, fun and engaging in wonderful learning experiences whilst meeting the best people. I attended my first APEN conference in Darwin and it was my first exposure to APEN. I remember the feeling like it was yesterday of truly "finding my tribe" and being exposed to people that understood and were passionate about extension. If you get the opportunity to be involved with APEN in any way, I guarantee you'll get so much from it.

In life, we often wear many different hats and have to dedicate our time to a number of important roles. For me, it's being a dairy farmer, being an APEN Regional Coordinator and undertaking consulting work in the dairy industry. No matter who you are or what you do, life is busy for everyone and how you approach it and manage is the key to feeling in control and enjoying it.

Since coming back to work on our farm, I've found the pull greater than ever between what I call inside work and outside work. Outside work is everything that needs

to be done on the farm – and inside work is in front of a computer, undertaking work for clients, meeting with our farm advisors and planning and discussing the business. On the farm, the outside work never stops, it never switches off and things don't fit into nice timeslots or boxes like they did in my previous office-based roles. There is constant unpredictability with the weather, with our animals, with natural disasters and with our pastures and crops.

It is exactly 12 months since I stepped away from my corporate life and back onto the farm and although there's still no controlling the volatility of each day and week – I've found some balance, and I'd like to tell you how.

Firstly, it's about having the right mindset that each day can bring quite literally any challenge to overcome or an opportunity that needs to be jumped on. This mindset includes one that prepares you for the worst yet and hopes for the best as you pull on your gumboots each day. It's a mindset that no matter how big the problem, you and your partner or team will get through it. As someone who liked to always be in control and plan, the farm has taught me that sometimes you need to be ready for anything and to go with the flow.

Secondly, don't stretch yourself too far because it's only a matter of time until you're stretched so far you can't reel yourself back in. For us, bringing on a new full time staff member has brought balance back into our business and our lives. We no longer just make it through the day to day. We get to focus on the big jobs, take time to think and plan and most importantly do things that support our goals and the future. Having good people around you and knowing when you need to ask for support is so important.

Lastly, it's about prioritising time for things that make you happy, that challenge you, that make you feel like you are giving back and that expose you to new environments and people. I roster myself off one day a week and dedicate that day to "inside work". It doesn't mean that things don't pop up and I'm not racing outside at times to help, but it does mean I've created time to dedicate to work that fuels my passions and allows me to think about the big picture, not just what's in front of me.

I hope to see you at an APEN event in the future and if I can provide support to you as one of our valued members, please reach out – I'd love to help.

Regards, Sarah

Lessons from Ireland and Tips for Effective Engagement

Ossie Lang | Tasmanian RC

As we emerge from winter, we've been fortunate to have some reasonable rainfall across the state. Dams are now full, and there is a collective sigh of relief after last year's dry season. Some parts (like King and Flinders Islands) were harder hit without the irrigation infrastructure that supports large parts of Tasmanian agriculture.

Earlier in the year, I had the privilege of joining the Dairy Tas team hosting John McCabe from Teagasc. Teagasc is responsible for agricultural RD&E in Ireland, and our session was devoted to extension in Ireland. With Teagasc's vertically integrated structure, they can have ongoing grower groups that remain together over many years. In some cases, new grower groups have formed from the next generation of farmers. As a second-generation extension deliverer with Teagasc, John's insights were invaluable, particularly in discussing how extension had evolved within Teagasc over the years and how they are improving the interactions between the farmers and the researchers, mainly by ensuring that there were close connections with grower groups. While our RD&E landscape is very different, the lessons from Ireland are applicable here: know your community and ensure your delivery meets their needs and timing. John's parting lesson: Make sure there is a tractor in your online videos; they go much better than if you don't!

As things start to get busy in spring, it was timely for our latest APEN conversations session to focus on boosting engagement when things get busy. The session was well attended, and plenty of useful tips were shared amongst the group.

While every extension officer knows that food can make or break an event, there are a number of things to consider as you put together your extension activities that will help your audience engage with the content.

- **Relevance**—This is a critical element, and while it may be evident to you as the deliverer why something is important, you need to be able to articulate this clearly to potential attendees. One key element is matching the event to the seasonal activities you are discussing. One attendee commented that they try to ensure the event delivers value above a day's wage; this provides value for those attending.
- **Local Champions & Crowd Pullers**—Another point discussed was using crowd pullers and local champions as part of your event. Not only will they provide relevant content, but they will also attract larger attendance. Sometimes, locals can be reluctant to get up in front of peers, so a panel or



fireside chat format can help alleviate those nerves and allow you to draw out the essential messages in a more conversational style than if the speaker were to stand and deliver a presentation.

- **The sticky-beak factor** – We all love a sticky beak; you can leverage that when planning an event. Can you visit someone innovative in the area as part of the event? Is there another industry or site that may have similar issues to your industry? While these are options you will need to make sure that your promotions are clear about what the relevance is to your audience.
- **Collaborate**—With several projects often operating in similar spaces, it can seem that you are fighting for audience share with them. Instead of feeling like a competition, you can collaborate with them. Collaboration has several advantages, and the only caution is ensuring the event retains relevance for your target audience.
- **Make it easy**—This starts with your promotion and stretches to the event delivery. Firstly, make it clear what the event is about and why people should attend. Next, lower the barriers for people to attend. Make sure that the timing, length, and location are all suitable for your audience. Finally, with a range of learning styles, it is important to offer as many ways as possible for your audience to access the information.
- **Promote, Promote, Promote!** – While conventional wisdom says you need three touch points, there should be another two or four promotes in this dot point. Some attendees indicated that you may need more than five to seven touchpoints to get people to your event. Another attendee was prepared to spam her audience when necessary! All channels are open to use; phone, text message, email, and social media are all key ways to get the message out; in some cases, an old-school physical flyer could be a great way to share the message. When promoting, as mentioned above, you need to be clear about why the event will be relevant for people to attend.

This quick summary gives a little snippet of the discussion in the APEN conversations. Be sure to watch the APEN socials for details of the next session. Unfortunately, because of our format, we can't record the sessions, so you have to be there to participate!

Pulling off the workboots

Karen Smith | Western Australian

My recent change to full-time off-farm work whilst still being involved in the farm business has meant my time management now needs to be en-pointe at all times! Definitely no ballet slippers for me, but while workboots are easy to pull on and get started on the day, swapping shoes to more office-appropriate footwear, like my new role, requires more careful consideration.

Balancing the resources you have at hand to achieve good management efficiency in your farm business is always front of mind. Farm business management has moved quickly to adopt technology to ensure tasks can be carried out from the office, school carpark or header cab.

As too has general office-based work, boosted by COVID in adoption of cloud-based software, enabling hybrid working environments, coordination of national project teams and on-ground delivery of events to regional audiences, whilst wearing Ugg boots.

But many recent conversations with colleagues, question whether we are mastering the use of all this technology for management efficiency or are we slaves to the 'unique' user interface, cybersecurity and data requirements of each software application foisted upon us or we are choosing to be reliant on.

Our perspective 20 years ago imagining what our future would look like, most of us may have thought our tools would allow more high value work to be completed in the office, and low value work completed autonomously for us while relaxing at home. The reality feels closer to having work integrated within your life balance at all times, blurring the line of workboots, heels and Ugg boots (definitely for home use only).

The task at hand is to really know where to focus my time, enabling technology taming tactics (TTTs) to achieve high value activities and build habits for work. My top tactics at the moment are:

- Using the 'Focus' mode on screen to turn off desktop notifications,
- Adding the Clock to the bottom toolbar to set predetermined timers for specific work (stretch, water, check email)



- Automating email functions using Quick Steps, etc to manage emails and calendar
- Save podcasts for an environmental scan of the industry for daily/weekly car-trips
- Identifying timewasters and setting up strategies to manage.

Being persistent and disciplined on what you are doing and why helps me to focus on identifying the high value activities. Additionally striving for results not perfection is something I continually need to optimise, as that is what the evaluation is for, fixing the process next time round!!

Closing the farm gate at the end of a long day in the dark wearing your good heels always feels uncomfortable, waiting to get a grass seed in between your toes, but I appreciate the opportunity I have to work on both sides of the farmgate.

Would love to know your list of TTTs, feel free to share on the APEN socials!

Regards Karen

Working with Producers and Government

Sue Street | Sth New South Wales RC



Hi, I'm Sue Street and I'm the southern Regional Coordinator for APEN in NSW. I share the role with Callen Thompson, who is the coordinator for Northern NSW and the ACT.

I currently work for the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development as a livestock research officer. My work is in livestock nutrition and production research, and I'm based at the Wagga Wagga Agricultural Institute.

I grew up on a sheep and cattle farm in the Central Tablelands region of NSW, and it is there that I found a passion for agriculture and a love for livestock. I've been very fortunate that agriculture has allowed me to travel not just around NSW, but also to the Falkland Islands. Outside of work you will usually find me out with friends, organising a trip somewhere or with two golden retrievers in tow.

I originally joined APEN when I was working as an extension officer in livestock for Local Land Services in the CT and CW LLS regions. I found that through my membership and the conferences that APEN helped build my facilitation and extension skills that I needed for my job.

Now as a researcher, I use those skills to help communicate within the research teams I am a part of and to communicate to farmers what research is being conducted by the Department. I'm hoping to help bridge the gap between livestock research and our producers.

As the southern NSW coordinator, I hope to help others build their extension skills and use these skills to work with producers.

Regards, Sue

Benefits from Networking

Callen Thompson | Nth New South Wales RC

G'day from Coonabarabran NSW, Australia. My name is Callen Thompson, and I am the APEN (Australasia-Pacific Extension Network) Regional Coordinator (RC) for NSW. I am lucky to share the role with Sue Street, who looks after the southern part of the state while I look after the north.

For those of you I haven't met, I am a partner at AgSTAR Projects, a consulting company that specialises in providing project management and capacity building to government, industry and research and development corporations with a focus on agriculture. When I am not in front of a computer, sitting on a plane or facilitating a group I can be found on a tractor or a quad bike, running our beef cattle enterprise with my wife and business partner, Maria, and our two sons.

The RC group has been asked to share some of the benefits of being involved with APEN. The APEN conference in Launceston has been beneficial to me and my team over the last nearly 12 months. We picked up on the theme of co-designing extension programs with stakeholders and the target audience and from the presentations, we witnessed how successful the projects were when the extension models used were the right fit for the producers targeted.

I am sure that I am not the only one who has been presented with an extension problem and said:

"Great, I know how to fix this, let's use the Model."

Or

"I reckon my background as an agronomist and as a farmer myself, has given me plenty of experience to know what farmers need!"

Unfortunately, that doesn't always work because each industry, location and even farmer is different in scale, financial position, environment, risk aversion and learning style.



Callen and Sue working together

Working with my colleagues at AgSTAR, we have made a concerted effort since November to increase the amount of stakeholder consultation in our projects, including incorporating design thinking and co-design. We have delivered extension plans, training, evaluation and an industry extension strategy in this time and because we have focused on what stakeholders both want as well as need, I think we are getting much better outcomes for our clients.

The benefit that I get from APEN is learning from other extension professionals at APEN events like the conference, APEN Conversations and in a months'

time, the APEN Roadshow. Involvement in these events helps me as well as my clients make sure we are getting the best outcomes for Australian producers.

Regards, Callen

[As the Chair of the team, for the last four years, I have been privileged to work with such an amazing and awesome team. They keep the wheels turning to engage our members. My deep gratitude, Pat Hamilton.]

Widening your knowledge

In 2024, how many Extension positions based on full time equivalents (FTEs) are there?

In 2005, (ExtensionNet 2005 Vol 12. No.2)-there were more than 4000 extension positions in Australia

If all extension officers are counted, including non-FTE officers, that number may increase by as much as 2000. Of the 4000 or so FTE extension officers, more than 2700 are engaged in the public or public/community sectors.

That's a huge trove of experience to draw on! It's APEN's job to try to bring that expertise together and share it with others.

Extension Practice Resources - AgriFutures Australia

A suite of extension practise resources is freely available online for extension and adoption practitioners working across agriculture.

The resources cover a range of extension topics including extension theories, change management information, practical guides and evaluation guidance. The original suite of resources was curated by the University of Melbourne and Cumbre Consultants and is now collectively housed online by AgriFutures Australia.

This website and resource curation was developed as part of an AgriFutures (previously the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation) project called Extension and Adoption for Australian Farmers and Fishers. A working group of Australian extension experts partnered with AgriFutures, utilising funding from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources as part of its Rural R&D for Profit Programme, in developing the site.

This site will be further developed, with additional resources added, through a reinvigorated focus on Adoption. We look forward to sharing and connecting

with agricultural practitioners across Australia and through the APEN network!

For further AgriFutures resources and publications [click here](#).



Not another survey - the unconference approach

Denise Bewsell & John James [enablers of change - June 2024]

We've recently been hearing how hard it is to get a decent number of responses to a survey. And we've also heard from people who are working on projects where there is reluctance to send out "yet another survey", because they think farmers are feeling over-surveyed. So, we wondered whether survey fatigue is really true and what we might do to overcome it.

Denise and I recently had the pleasure of facilitating the Reef Extension Think Tank in Townsville. We used the unconference approach which reduced the usual conference fatigue by fostering a more dynamic and engaging environment. Unlike traditional conferences with rigid agendas and rather passive one-way presentations, unconferences are participant-driven and flexible, allowing attendees to shape the topics and discussions. The participants reported that they generally appreciated this format, as it promoted more active involvement, stimulated thinking, and encouraged networking. Of course, we used a QR code and built-in time towards the end of the event to gather their feedback (which we mention in today's episode!). [Read the blog](#)

There are so many ways for APEN Members to share their knowledge and experience.

Challenge: show your initiative and send us articles, events and stories.



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: Pat Hamilton

Layout: Alice Long

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