



# Stimulating private sector extension in Australian agriculture to increase returns from R&D

## Extension Trial Symposium

### Summary outcomes report

PCB Consulting Pty Ltd, March 2018

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## Introduction

Globally, there is a movement towards the privatisation of extension services within the agricultural innovation, or Research, Development and Extension, systems (RD&E systems). In addition, there have been changes in and consolidation of government roles in RD&E. In Australia, the Research and Development Corporations (RDCs) have recognised that these changes and trends are impacting on the RD&E system, including communication and information flows. These changes, trends and impacts require greater understanding and research, particularly of the private sector, to support continued innovation in Australia's primary industries.

The project *Stimulating private sector extension in Australian agriculture to increase returns from R&D* was designed to address the Rural R&D for Profit priority of identifying practical proposals to stimulate private sector extension services, particularly to fill current gaps.

Project partners include the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, University of Melbourne, Meat and Livestock Australia, Dairy Australia, Cotton Research and Development Corporation, Australian Pork Limited, Sugar Research Australia Limited, Horticulture Innovation, NSW Department of Industry, and the Victorian Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources.

The project is comprised of several components including four trials, which are:

### 1: The Processor Trial

Purpose: A supply chain response to RD&E. This trial explored a 'way of working' to improve the skill base and advisory services of processor staff. This trial found that there are opportunities to fill farm service gaps and translate R&D via processor staff.

### 2: The Precision Agriculture Trial

Purpose: Building farm advisory capacity to engage in precision agriculture technology. This trial developed and tested an evaluation framework tool for advisers to use to assess the value proposition of precision agriculture tools. This trial found that advisers saw benefit from collaborating to address this issue and share learning.

### 3: The Advisory Pathways Trial

Purpose: Creating adviser career development pathways using a mentor-mentee model to help new entrants develop professional development plans. This trial found that collaborating to train, network and mentor new entrants provided broader networking opportunities and access to training.

### 4: The Knowledge Trial

Purpose: To improve information flow and access to research by developing a collaborative model for information flows for RD&E. This trial found that collaborative definition of RD&E problems can help to break through barriers (conflicting values and interests) that can stymie collaborative approaches. Overall, the key finding from the trials to date is that improved engagement and collaboration between different areas of the agricultural RD&E system can provide value for all participants in the system, including farmers. The implication of this finding is that RDCs/governments have a pivotal role in supporting/and driving collaboration with private extension providers and supply-chain companies.

In March 2018, targeted people from a range of roles in the agriculture RD&E system participated in an Extension Symposium and Strategic Planning Workshop in Sydney. Both events were designed to:

- Provide an opportunity for trial participants to share their experiences and what they have learned from the trials;
- Provide an opportunity for trial participants and RDE providers and users to reflect on the benefits of the co-development/collaborative approach of the trials;
- Identify benefits, impacts and lessons learnt across all four trials and what this can mean for the RD&E system;
- Identify potential next steps and actions as they arise from cross-trial findings and the Eight Options for Action to maintain the momentum generated for change in the RDE system.

This report documents a summary of the key outcomes from the symposium and workshop. The appendix section of the report contains the raw data collected. PCB Consulting facilitated the symposium and workshop and prepared this report.

## Reflections on the trials

After listening to presentations on each of the trials, participants reflected on lessons learned from the trial experience and findings, the impacts of the trial on participant practice and aspects of the trials that could be adapted into practice.

### Lessons learned from the trials

- Cross-sector collaboration can/does work
- Culture change is required for collaboration, across collaborators, organisations, and individuals – this requires an extension specific strategy
- There is a key role for a facilitator for effective cross-collaboration
- Collaboration needs:
  - People
  - Resources
  - Common focus
  - Incentives
  - Shared issue
- In these trials the timeframe constraints made it necessary to use established networks to fast-track the trials. How can we connect to others not in established networks?
- The trials offered the opportunity to tap into shared critical needs and interests (and we may need to pay for time to do this).
- People have different needs within an overarching agenda, these specific needs and how the link to the overarching agenda should be made explicit to keep thinking, learning and action in a bounded reality

### Impacts on practice

- Broadening and building our networks
- Using collaborative approaches to help to manage complexity
- Need to look for commonalities across industries/sectors
- Higher level impacts on industry has been more targeted research and faster information flow
- Link people to generate diversity of thinking and innovative ideas
- Fund the extension role in projects/programs - RDCs need to build this into R&D projects; and build in a capacity building aspect into all R&D projects
- Our capacity to collaborate has been strengthened because of participating in the trials

### Aspects we can adapt into our practice

- Taking more of a program approach - although mini projects can be effective, a program approach is needed to attract ongoing funding and integrate action for greater impact
- Sole traders need critical mass to participate in program work
- Stronger integration of extension and adviser professionals in research conception and design
- Adaptability of the “digital agriculture evaluation framework” - potential for the tool to be used in other ways – broader context/aims
- Utilising the key success factors of collaboration, i.e. shared interest, benefit, ‘skin in the game’, etc. for cross-sectoral work
- Thinking more about how to engage and connect people outside existing networks
- Importance of developing clear incentives/value proposition for getting people involved
- Ensure opportunity for capacity building is built into RDC projects

## Options for Action

Another component of the project has been to review the relevant international experience. This review has identified that to address the challenges and optimise the opportunities privatisation of extension services provides, the following options for actions are both required and represent the minimum institutional and investment arrangements that need to be made.

Participants at the symposium reviewed the Eight Options for Action, ranked them in terms of high, medium or low priority, and made some additional suggestions and identified one new option for action. Below is a summary of the discussion, more details are contained in the appendix of this report.

Options for Action	Priority ranking (H, M, L)
1. We need: Incentive and funding arrangements which support coordination amongst advisory networks, public-private collaboration and diversity of delivery.	High priority
2. We need: Public-sector involvement in the understanding and support of private and commercial advisory systems, including international exchange.	High – medium priority
3. We need: Expanded knowledge of the motivations for innovation system engagement by the private sector in developing new approaches to collaboration with other advisors and other members of the value chain (RD and E and beyond)	Medium priority
4. We need: A better understanding of comparative systems for maintaining and growing appropriate advisory skills and capacity	High – medium priority
5. We need: Studies of complementarity of different advisory methods and their use of tools	Medium – low priority
6. We need: Better knowledge of the dedicated advisory sub-systems serving segments of farmers	Medium priority
7. We need: Models of engagement around regional and international advisory services—their formation and practices with respect to our Agricultural Knowledge Information System	Medium priority
8. We need: A commitment to patient funding and effort	High – medium priority
9. (NEW) We need: To act on the learnings from the trials and the project and share with RDCs.	High priority



## Practical and tangible steps to progress the Options for Action

Participants at the symposium selected six of the Options for Action for further discussion and exploration. Discussion focused on identifying key practical and tangible steps to progress these options for actions. Participants chose to discuss options 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 9 only.

Below is a summary of the discussion, more details are contained in the appendix of this report.

Options for Action	Practical and tangible steps to progress
1. We need: Incentive and funding arrangements which support coordination amongst advisory networks, public-private collaboration and diversity of delivery.	<p>Approach (A) Establish a national cross-sector working party - to explore models for more efficient use of funding and for greater involvement/engagement of the private sector (more public-private collaboration)</p> <p>Approach (B) Community of interest model (if no funding is available) – to build on the interest in these trials; socialise the findings and expand trial participant networks into a “community of interest” network</p>
2. We need: Public-sector involvement in the understanding and support of private and commercial advisory systems, including international exchange.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Initiate a forum with RDCs, governments, private actors with a lead role in extension – Forum could explore: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Encouraging competition among private sector to stimulate best practice.</li> <li>b. Role of government in policy and governance.</li> <li>c. Opportunity to create efficiencies in RDC funding via collaboration between government and private advisory services.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. RDCs to allocate funds for national extension coordination effort</li> </ol>
3. We need: Expanded knowledge of the motivations for innovation system engagement by the private sector in developing new approaches to collaboration with other advisors and other members of the value chain (RD&E and beyond)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Incentives for engagement and extension components incorporated in project guidelines. This acknowledges the extension contribution by: resourcing the extension component; and enabling extension to have input on the decision making and project design.</li> <li>2. Pilot or case study to explore motivations for involvement and engagement in the innovation system - including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement in the R&amp;D components enables advisers to better deliver the extension and builds their technical credibility</li> <li>• Involvement in project teams with different skills enables learning opportunities (from team)</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
4. We need: A better understanding of comparative systems for maintaining and growing appropriate advisory skills and capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stocktake of relevant activities already underway or available</li> <li>• Clarification of career pathways for extension and adviser professionals.</li> <li>• Explore how we offer opportunities for professional development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Secondments/interning/placements/swaps.</li> <li>○ Identify value proposition for small traders</li> <li>○ Mentoring opportunities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
6. We need: Better knowledge of the dedicated advisory sub-systems serving segments of farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case studies of growers and grower groups and the ecosystems operating around them – map the advisory subsystem and identify gaps and strengths</li> <li>• Identify practical and effective engagement models between RDCs and the extension and advisory service providers for discussing and shaping research priorities and RD&amp;E investments</li> </ul>
9. We need: To act on the learnings from the trials and the project and share with RDCs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document trial findings in plain language</li> <li>• Identify options to more effectively link extension &amp; advisers to research conception</li> <li>• Establish working group of trial participants and partners to carry the learning forward (in practice).</li> <li>• RDCs establish community of interest and practice to explore the trials further</li> </ul>

## Actions and next steps

Participants at the strategic planning workshop identified several key actions and next steps for the project including ongoing collaborative actions, actions to complete the current project, as well as action to maintain the momentum generated by the project. More details on the actions identified are included in the appendix of this report.

### Ongoing collaborative actions

Ongoing activity and collaboration	Who
Establish an Extension manager network from within the RDCs – a “coalition of the willing” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide some leadership within the RDCs on the thinking generated by this project</li> <li>To explore: What is the legacy from this project?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project Steering Group</li> <li>Each RDC member on the steering group to investigate how to progress this into their own organisation</li> </ul>

Next Project – Potential Focus areas	Who
Explore and develop co-innovation model – integrated knowledge system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do we drive change in the system to co-innovate in each industry?</li> <li>Identify the market failure and the impact this has on innovation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RIRG team and Ian Linley</li> <li>Expert panel</li> </ul>
Human capacity building for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Farming systems groups</li> <li>Sole private or consultants’ collectives</li> <li>Graduate development</li> <li>Agri/reseller sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steering Committee</li> </ul>

### Key actions to complete the project

Key actions or areas of work to complete /wrap up the project	Who
Final project report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey results and trial results</li> <li>Document risks of collaboration and management options.</li> <li>Statement/discussion on market failures and economic impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RIRG team and Ian Linley</li> <li>Peter to complete Cost Benefit Analysis</li> </ul>
Develop the ongoing Business models for the products that have been developed from the project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training modules</li> <li>Precision Ag. Evaluation framework</li> <li>Business case framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steering Committee</li> </ul>
Trial write-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trials need to provide details on the practice change in adviser service offerings and the impact on the client (farmer)</li> <li>Provide details on the business models (not just the trial process!) explaining what works and why?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RIRG team working with trial teams</li> </ul>
Eight Options for Action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reformulate them as outcome statements</li> </ul>	Stephen Coats and the Expert Panel

### Actions to maintain the momentum generated by the project

Actions to maintain the momentum generated	Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Put together a compelling synthesis document and presentation:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key results and learning</li> <li>Impact</li> <li>Key principles and practices</li> </ul> </li> <li>Use the document to garner industry-based support for ground-truthing the key principles and developing industry relevant actions</li> </ul>	RIRG team
Trial participants to continue as “Communities of Interest” or “Communities of practice” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop process to operationalise project learnings using outcomes of trials</li> <li>Develop process to upscale the trials; bring in others; use the process to explore other topics or industries</li> </ul>	Trial participants

