



September, 2016

## Newsletter 2: Stimulating private sector extension in Australian agriculture to increase returns from R&D

*Stimulating private sector extension in Australian agriculture to increase returns from R&D* (Enhancing Private Sector Roles in Ag Extension) is a three-year project to develop and test models to build the capacity of the commercial and private sector in delivering extension services to Australian farmers.

The main aims of the project are to:

- Increase private sector engagement with the latest research and industry best practice;
- Make research more accessible to farmers through a more integrated and co-operative extension system;
- Identify barriers to private sector involvement in agricultural extension;
- Stimulate growth in capability of the private sector in agricultural extension; and,
- Build stronger connections between end users and researchers.

This e-newsletter gives an update on progress with our key areas of activity:

1. Review of current approaches to engaging the private sector in different agricultural industries;
2. Determine drivers of demand for extension services (regional forums and national farmer survey);
3. Identify private sector interest in agricultural extension and current practice (regional forums and online survey);
4. Developing approaches to enhance private sector engagement in extension (trials);
5. Extension training modules (professional development opportunities for the private sector); and,
6. Drivers of demand: regional forums (completed).



Four regional forums have been conducted and the outcomes have been previously reported in the last newsletter. This can be viewed at <http://eepurl.com/b4iYxr>

### Drivers of demand for extension services: national farmer survey (in progress)

In collaboration with the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), the project team has instigated a national survey of farmers related to agricultural extension. The survey will find out directly from farmers about how they access and use information, who they trust and rely on to provide information and support, the ways they are connected with research and also any changes they foresee in their information needs. The survey aims to create a national picture of the

Rural Research and  
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Keeping Australian farmers  
at the cutting edge



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needs for extension services and the people and organisations farmers look to or are important in meeting these needs. This is the first time the question of agricultural extension has been considered from a national perspective. This survey will be used to shape future agricultural extension services and will be considered by rural industries and government. The main results of the survey will be available in October, 2016.

**Private sector involvement in agricultural extension - on line survey (in progress)**

To complement the national farmer survey related to agricultural extension, the project team is conducting a survey of agricultural extension providers, including the private sector, in October, 2016. The survey will quantify areas identified from recent forums involving farm advisers and the private sector and gather information related to the supply of services, farm types targeted by service providers, business models of different types of providers and the extent of interest and engagement of the private sector with research and in delivery of extension.

Results from the online survey will be used to analyse how the private sector is engaged in extension networks and identify opportunities for improving the connectivity of the private sector in agricultural RD&E. The surveys will also provide insights into training needs of the private extension sector. It will inform the development of accredited training units.

The survey will allow international comparison of private sector involvement in agricultural extension and farm advisory services, with a similar survey of advisers conducted in an EU study in 2015. The main results of the survey will be available in October, 2016

**Trials of models to stimulate engagement (in establishment phase)**

The project is conducting four trials which will run from July, 2016 to mid-2018. Designed as ‘co-innovation platforms in action’, each trial involves a Rural RDC partnering with a relevant group in the private sector to co-develop a model to address one of the key issues identified by the project. The trials will help build stronger connections between the industry, private sector, researchers and end users.

1. Processor Trial: a ‘problem-based approach’ to connecting farm advisors in the processing sector with industry RD&E.
2. Precision Ag Trial: a ‘technology approach’ to increase the capacity of farm advisers to engage with digital agriculture applications from industry RD&E to benefit producers.
3. Advisory Pathways Trial: a ‘business approach’ to creating career development pathways for new entrants and existing professionals in the agricultural advisory and extension sector.
4. Knowledge Trial: a ‘technical-focussed approach’ to explore ways to improve access to, and engagement with, the latest research, while identifying needs and opportunities to help translate theory into meaningful practice.

Progress update: Trials are currently in the establishment phase, with the intervention phase scheduled to start from early 2017.

**Training (in establishment phase)**

We are currently developing agricultural extension training modules as a professional development pathway for greater engagement of the private sector in key functions in agricultural extension. The training modules will be further developed with input from advisers involved in the trials.

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## PROJECT PROGRESS

### 2015

- ✓ Review models of engagement
- ✓ Establish governance committees
- ✓ Establish expert panel

### 2016

- ✓ Regional forums  
SA, NSW, QLD, VIC
- ✓ Held annual forum with RIRDC
- ✓ On-line surveys  
(farmers completed, advisers occurring soon)
- Establish four trials
  1. Processor Trial
  2. Precision Ag Trial
  3. Advisory Pathways Trial
  4. Knowledge Trial

### 2017

- Run trials
- Training modules  
(two modules per quarter)

**KEY:**

- ✓ Completed
- In progress
- In early stages