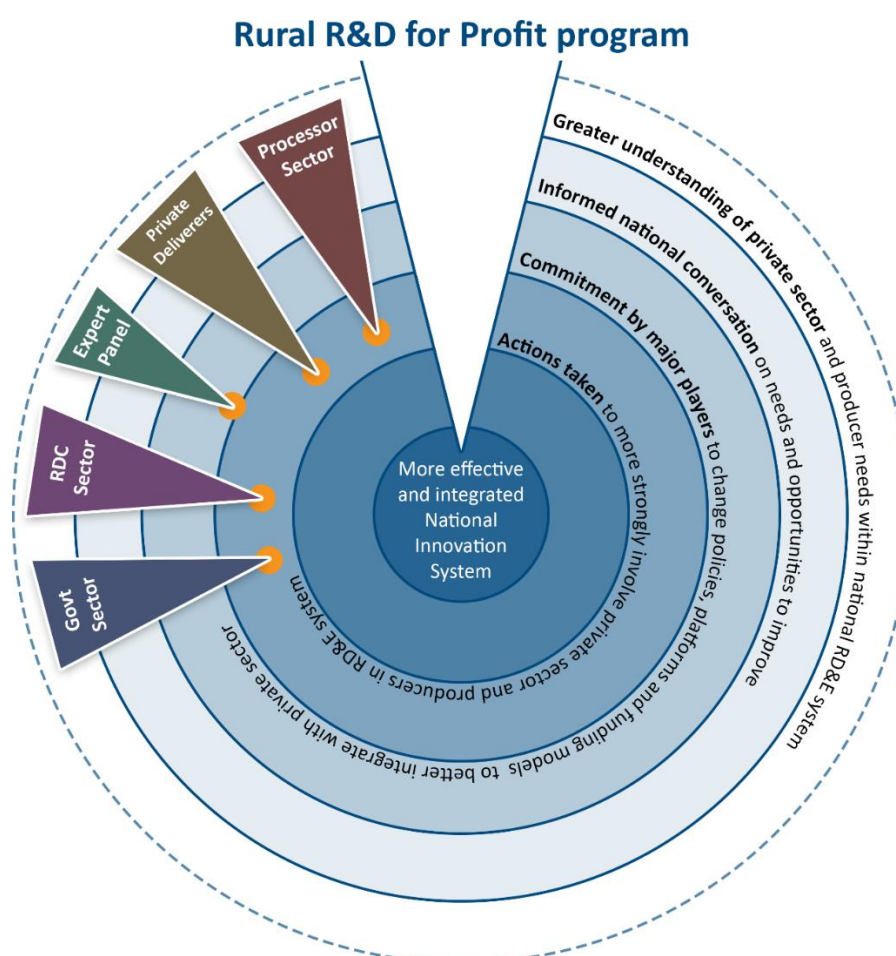




Impact Case Studies

As part of the final evaluation process (early 2018) for the *Stimulating private sector extension in Australian agriculture to increase returns from R&D* project, Coutts J&R undertook four in-depth case studies plus a reflection by expert panel members that focused around the impact pathways described in the final M&E report and illustrated by the diagram below.



About

The stories are told through the perspectives of:

- **RDCs** (Dairy Australia; Horticulture Innovation Australia; Sugar Research Association; Cotton Research and Development Corporation)
- **Government** (Agriculture Victoria; NSW Department of Primary Industries; Commonwealth)
- **Delivery organisations** (Herbert Cane Productivity Services Limited; Rural Solutions SA; JBS Australia; Meridian; South Australia Livestock Consultants/Meg Bell consulting; Sally Martin Consulting/MerinoLink)
- **Processor** (Warrnambool Cheese and Butter)
- **Expert Panel members** (Stephen Coats; Associate Professor Laurens Klerkx; Dr Mark Paine)

The case studies highlight the initial impacts of the project on key components of the RD&E system and importantly foreshadow on-going commitment towards greater collaboration and integration. Each is arranged around the headings of:

- **Engagement and collaboration** – how the organisations in this group engaged with the project, and collaborated with each other
- **New understanding and capacity gains** – what impact their engagement/project outputs/experiences etc had on their increased awareness of issues and opportunities, gaining understanding and capacity to better contribute with respect to better involving the private sector and providing better delivery
- **New processes, services and opportunities** – what actions have been taken to act on the learning from the project – or is planned/potential?
- **Future directions** – including insights into what needs to happen (or is happening), next to build and embed what has come out of the project

Acknowledgments

Coutts J&R would like to thank all those who generously provided their time to contribute to the valuable information contained in these case studies. As a result, we have seen a richer picture of the project's initial and potential impacts on different segments of the RD&E system emerge.

Dr Neels Botha

Dr Jeff Coutts

Amy Samson

Ben Coutts

June 2018

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Australia's oldest dairy processor and project researchers collaborate to improve on-farm services

Summary

As part of the R&D for Profit Private Sector project, Australia's oldest dairy processor, Warrnambool Cheese and Butter (WCB), made the most of its opportunity to collaborate with the project research team (The University of Melbourne, agriculture business consultancy RMCG and Dairy Australia) to improve staff capacity and training. WCB felt that the project was well timed as it fitted pre-planned staff capacity building and training activities and confirmed some of its current ideas. Participating staff responded well to the training modules and used the information to improve their field services through being better equipped and more able to use available technologies and social media.

In addition, there were signs that WCB became further integrated into the RD&E system. The processor acknowledged the importance of being the first RD&E contact for many dairy farmers and the role it could play to encourage on-farm change. WCB found the opportunity to engage with the University of Melbourne to be useful and was keen for the relationship to continue.

Background

Australia's oldest dairy processor, (WCB), had the opportunity to collaborate and engage with a project research team, as a part of the Rural R&D for Profit Private Sector project (the project).

It was primarily involved with the project's trials, specifically Trial 1, which focused on engaging with dairy and meat processors, and facilitating a better understanding of how the processors can best support producers supplying them.



Engagement and collaboration

WCB staff worked closely with the project researchers



WCB staff collaborated with the project trial team in a number of ways, including participating in brainstorming activities and completing training modules. Rowan Ault, WCB's key contact with the project research team said, "One of the benefits (to WCB) of the research project was that it was not very intrusive in our business-as-usual activities, so we were able to make it work around our other priorities that we had to tick off on; it was value-adding to what we were already doing."

Rowan also noted good collaboration around information packaging and packages. Along with all nine of the processor's field officers he participated in the project's survey focused on national advisors. The results were then used by the trial team to help identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in the group's technical skill sets and extension activities. This helped to prioritise which areas would be focused on by the trial team and be of most value to WCB.

WCB field officer, Rachel Alexander, also worked with the project research team in a few brainstorming sessions around identifying those skills most frequently used by field staff. Team members were then able to complete training modules based on their interests and skills gaps. Rachel said she mostly concentrated on change management skills, including how to approach farmers with varying personalities and ensuring she was getting the right message across.

WCB's key role in the dairy industry

Rowan said that WCB has always had a good relationship with WestVic Dairy (Dairy Australia's local Regional Development Program (RDP)) and old government departments when they were operating more extensively in extension. Explaining further, he said that the project had underlined the key role WCB play in the dairy industry: "Since the government play less of a role in research and extension there is a role for processors to work closer with DA to drive some of those improvement on-farm".

Rowan also noted the project had played a role in further growing WCB's relationship with Dairy Australia: "Through the project we have certainly built stronger relationships with the Dairy Australia team in Head Office".

"There is a role for processors to work closer with Dairy Australia to drive some of those improvements on-farm".

Rowan Ault (WCB)

WCB industry networks have expanded and collaboration improved

WCB's industry networks were felt to have been positively impacted as a result of the project. Rachel said that the project has been a topic of many conversations. "We have spoken to other companies and consultants from various backgrounds including the banking sector, agronomy sectors and other field officers about the project".

Simon Adams (WCB) undertook three of the six project training modules and presented at the project Sydney Symposium (2018). He believed that WCB are "probably better integrated with other role-players in the dairy sector" as a result of its involvement.

"There used to be a lot of doubling up of trials and research work in the dairy sector. There is a lot more collaboration between the different parties now to make sure there is not so much doubling up of that sort of stuff."

"I'm more in touch with local R&D than I was a couple of years ago. The project definitely played a role in that".

Simon Adams (WCB)

Better R&D links

Simon said that he was now better linked with R&D. "I am also involved with the local RDP with a couple of discussion groups and breakfast meetings, so I'm more in touch with the local RDP than I was a couple of years ago... I have a lot more contacts through the Uni and local RDP than I had".

Improved industry collaboration is a bonus for farmers

A farmer involved in the project through the national farmer benchmarking survey and interviewed for his views of the field officer role, said their field officer provided him "with the dairy industry employment kit and that he was on the WestVic Dairy Focus Farm".

He felt that collaboration is fine and "better linking field officers to research to benefit farmers is a good idea as long as it doesn't impact on the core roles of the field officers around milk quality, secure pick up and transport and the business of Warrnambool Cheese and Butter."

While pointing out the importance of field officers being good at their core business, the farmer also said: "if they can connect me with industry information and programs from WestVic Dairy and Dairy Australia that's a bonus. I think all field officers should understand the business side of farming".

Expectations around the field officer's role and knowledge however were realistic: "I would love my field officer to understand everything about the industry but that isn't possible. If they can point me in the direction of what I'm after I'm happy, rather than them having to know everything".

New understanding and capacity gains

Cross sector insights gained

Completing the training modules and attending the project Symposium provided Simon with new insights, particularly around other sectors and the similar problems they all faced. "[The project] definitely gave me a better insight into the other sectors that I do not interact with in the day-to-day in different states. There [are] a lot of similarities in the issues in the states in the different sectors".

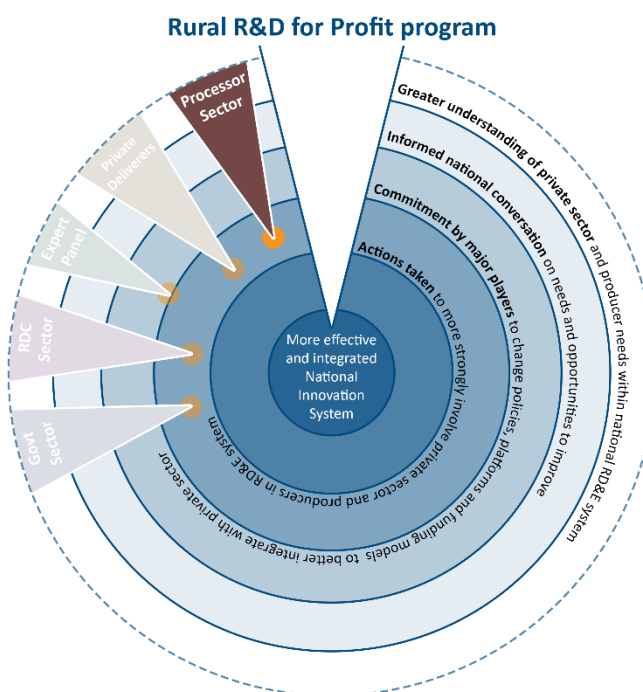
Rowan agreed. He said that WCB grew in its "understanding of other companies involved; to see where they are situated and how they are working towards improving their sectors".

At the industry level, Simon also observed that some other sectors seemed to share their networks and resources better (than dairy). "We don't tend to share our networks across sectors and we don't build them outside our sectors and I think that would be valuable".

Impact of training on advisors

He also said that he noticed how training development impacts on advisors and that the dairy sector appeared to have more training compared to other sectors.

Rowan provided an example when he said there had been improvement in his understanding of different techniques of change management including: "when and how to use them, and why some techniques work on some farms and not on others". He also advocated the importance of the 'packaging idea' where "key concepts and key information is put forward to digest"



WCB capacity has improved

Discovering the skill set the WCB field service team already had at the beginning of the project, was a real eye opener according to Rachel. "It has also allowed us to find gaps within our skills set and grow from them".

Rowan said that team members now had better capabilities benefiting themselves and WCB. "It allowed us to have a broader view on how we work with the company and our clients and what we could do to improve the service we offer."

He felt that the team's capacity and skills for extension work had improved and there had been specific lightbulb moments for one or two as a result of working through the processes. "They have come to realise that they are the key extension contact for a number of our farms. They are realising the role they play on-farm, for a start, and then really see how to improve farms they do work with".

"An overview of our (WCB) entire field service team at the beginning of our involvement was a real eye opener as to the skills set we had already within our team".

Rachel Alexander (WCB)

Improved farmer understanding of industry networks

While a farmer involved in the project explained that most farmers don't necessarily identify their field officer as part of a broader team (outside of the farm), this project has changed his understanding and thinking about a field officer role. The farmer said that they now "think about how my field officer is connected with dairy industry information outside Warrnambool Cheese and Butter". At the farm level, they believed "that a good field officer can be a useful member of the farm team".

New processes, services and opportunities

Building and collaboratively using networks

Simon has already started to build his networks and said he is making better use of his teammates' networks. The team is now using their networks as a whole instead of just individual ones. "[I have] more options now than I did have because I use the rest of my team and their associates".

"My understanding and thinking about a field officer role have changed".

Victorian dairy farmer

Improved skills can mean improved services

Rachel believed that the project has improved WCB services through upskilling the field officers. She feels she now has "the skills set to assist farmers in changes that are necessary" as well as "assisting with farmer discussion groups and being able to contribute ideas and theories I had learnt through completing the project".

Rowan added that over the next year they will look at ways to improve the way information is taken to farmers and the team: "which will improve the service we provide".

Future directions

Closer collaboration with Dairy Australia

Historically, for WCB field teams, collaborating with Dairy Australia to encourage on farm improvements has been an “add on”. Rowan said that this would now be “more engrained” and “part of the business model going forward”.

Growing a relationship with The University of Melbourne

WCB has not previously had a relationship with The University of Melbourne. Rowan said that they needed to identify which areas to move forward with. “I think there is room to grow collaboration with them and look into some practical ways we can collaborate with them”.

Adding structure around sourcing research information

Rowan also believed that some structure could be added around how and where WCB sourced its information: “[For] example by increasing the number of channels we get our research information through”. He described an opportunity to look at new connections beyond the traditional RD&E connections of Dairy Australia and Regional Development Programs.

Better use of technology and social media

Being involved in the project has led Simon to realise that they could use technology better. He particularly noted the possibilities of closed Facebook pages (due to sharing personal data) and a more effective use of Skype. “I have noticed that a lot of the other nutritionists and agronomists and the like have Facebook closed pages.”

He also noted the utility of his iPhone. “My iPhone is my office, I am out on the road looking after farms.” Simon said that all this would help with his services to clients “even to the way I work in my team”.

Cross sector learning and collaboration results in tangible impacts for delivery organisations

Summary

Learning from and interacting with other sectors has resulted in capacity gains and the strengthening/ advancement/development of processes and models for delivery organisations involved in the Rural R&D for Profit Private Sector project. One organisation has designed and implemented a profitable and successful new service as a result of its improved capacity. The business has grown with new staff, new clients and its members are happy to pay for a service “they want”. Organisations who had little prior exposure or experience with extension theory and practice also noted the value found in networking with The University of Melbourne.

While there was a feeling that deliverers could have been more involved in the project’s initial stage, there was a recognition that engagement with the private sector could be challenging due to the variety of advisory delivery models and the day-to-day of a busy operation.

A number of deliverers commented about new understanding gained as a result of the project. One cited the project’s survey results about the ways farmers receive advice, while another described how their “lightbulb moment” during the initial stages of the project contributed to upskilling staff working directly with producers. Participants also highlighted personal capacity gains including one who had learned from the project’s processes itself and broader team approach. Their experience was now impacting on the way their organisation worked. Looking forward, there is a desire to see someone take a lead role in taking the project results forward and keep the conversations going.

Background

Overall, delivery organisations have expressed positivity about offering advisory services to farmers and are developing delivery models as product sale margins are shrinking. Their involvement in the ‘*Stimulating private sector extension in Australian agriculture to increase returns from R&D*’ project at the individual and organisational level has been viewed as a good experience with tangible outcomes.

Delivery Organisations

Rural Solutions South Australia:PIRSA (RSSA:PIRSA)

Meg Bell Consulting/ South Australia Livestock Consultants (SALC)

RMCG

Meridian Agriculture

Elders

Herbert Cane Productivity Services (HCPSL)

JBS Australia

Sally Martin Consulting Pty Ltd

Delivery Organisations

Rural Solutions South Australia:PIRSA (RSSA:PIRSA)

A business unit or consulting arm of South Australia's Department of Primary Industries.

Bruce Hancock, Senior Consultant, was a consultant to the project's Trial 1 which had a dairy and red meat component. He said he appreciated working with Dairy Australia (who he had not yet worked with) and the dairy industry as they always thought the meat industry "may go to the dairy industry model of field officers". Bruce also participated in the adviser survey and said he "tapped a few processors, advisers, consultants and NRM Officers on the shoulder" to participate as well.

Meg Bell Consulting/ South Australia Livestock Consultants (SALC)

A group of independent consultants providing services to the SA and interstate livestock industry.

A private consultant member of SALC, Meg Bell was part of Trial 3, which endeavored to "get young consultants into the industry involving mentors and mentees". She went to three workshops, one in Sydney (included group work with mentors and mentees) and two in Melbourne (the first with mentees only and the second focused on summarising project goals achieved). Due to her South Australian location at the beginning of the project, she ended up using the SALC group she was already networking with as a mentor rather than an individual. Meg said this worked really well with a good outcome. "SALC is a pretty good group, everybody is open to discussion [and] we all have a good rapport with each other". She described the topics being discussed as varying from technical work, to business matters "like charge-out rates and referrals to individuals that may be able to assist with "an issue, project funding or something like that".

"I used the SALC group as a mentor. It went really well, it had a good outcome."

Meg Bell (Meg Bell Consulting / SALC)

RMCG

A private environmental and agricultural consultancy providing advice to government agencies, water authorities, institutions and private sector clients in the fields of environment, water, agriculture, economics and communities.

A consultant working part time for RMCG and with a dairy background, Jacqui Knee was the project officer for Trial 1 (Processor Trial). She described her role as bringing "a farmer's perspective to things. We wanted to make sure things were going to be useful to them". Jacqui said the project was a bit longer than others she had worked on and described it as a great opportunity "to build relationships and work together on the project team".

"The project was a great opportunity to build relationships and work together on the project team for a period of time."

Jacqui Knee (RMCG)

Meridian Agriculture

Consultants that work in the broad acre farming area in medium to high rainfall zones and provide an integrated service from dealing with on-farm research through to financial management.

Chairman of the Meridian Agriculture Board, Jim Shovelton, managed one of the project trials (Knowledge trial). He was positive about the people involved and the meetings that were had. "They highlighted a lot of issues and opportunities. People said how they wanted to be integrated into the RD&E system". He said while the issues were identified as a result of the project, there needed to be some "rubber on the ground" for something concrete to come out of it.

Elders

Australian-based agribusiness company providing products such as livestock, farm supplies and grain as well as financial services to the farming community in Australia and New Zealand.

John Evans had a marginal involvement in the project and attended one of the early meetings to hear about the private sector's involvement. He said that Elders was interested in being more engaged, however as they were busy and the project was not core business, that "would have perhaps relied on us chasing that involvement more". John said there could have been more representation from the farm inputs supply chain at the start. He described the supply chain as the missing bit as there's no established way to involve it in extension work. "From Elders' point of view there is a desire to be involved and a recognition [of the need] to work together".

Herbert Cane Productivity Services (HCPSL)

A private business, funded fifty percent by the growers and fifty percent by the miller.

Lawrence Di Bella attended workshops that were part of the Precision Ag Trial (Trial 2).

JBS Australia

Largest meat processing company in Australia and the largest animal protein processing company in the world – working in food, leather, products for pets, biodiesel, collagen, cans and cleaning products.

Mark Inglis said JBS Australia was involved in the project as it looked to upskill its livestock buyers to connect more with their livestock clients.

Sally Martin Consulting Pty Ltd

A private consultancy business interested in working with both stud and commercial sheep breeders to improve their productivity and profitability.

As well as project officer for the Advisory Pathway Trial (Trial 3), Sally Martin has involvement with several groups actively promoting the sheep industry and agriculture (e.g. MerinoLink Limited - a not-for-profit organisation aiming to facilitate sheep grower's and service provider's links with information, knowledge and research). For the project, Sally looked at mentoring and training new advisors (from University or other areas) moving into the private sector, as well as ways to engage with private sector advisors. She explained that project mentor-mentee relationships were set up in the horticulture and the livestock industries (particularly sheep and dairy). "The trials were about networking and leadership, what I believe are high-level type people skills. We tried to provide them with training opportunities in those areas. That, to me, was the greatest outcome..."

Engagement and Collaboration

Increased collaboration

Bruce (RSSA:PIRSA) said that during the project they collaborated with, amongst others, SALC, Dairy Australia, the University of Melbourne and other consultants like Jacqui Knee. Working with the University and its expertise in rural service and extension, was noted by Bruce to have given him a new network and strengthening his capacity. "I am a better operator for that experience and the contact with the University of Melbourne will be useful going forward."

Mark (JBS) believed that collaboration has increased in JBS' livestock team while also noting that they are only at the start of the journey and it was too early to say. Bruce, said that Mark was critical to the success of what had been achieved. He also said that in his opinion, the experience had increased Mark's confidence "to engage the buyers more in R&D on-farm and the extension of R&D".

"This is a new network that strengthens my capacity, no doubt about it. I am a better operator for that experience."

Sally thought the project had been quite collaborative and had achieved what it set out to. At the last forum she said from her perspective it looked like the "RDCs worked more collaboratively" although thought "they might have done that anyway".

Bruce Hancock (RSSA:PIRSA)

New contacts and networks valued

Meg said she valued the contacts she had made as a result of the project. She described her group as being able to share experiences from different career stages, although noted that none of them were running their own businesses (like her), and many were just out of university, whereas she had been working for around seven years. Meg said, "I am able to contact them in future and know that they are there".

Similarly, Sally felt that the networking opportunities with other industries were enjoyed by those participating in her trial and one of the real positives coming out of the project.

Better integration into the R&D system

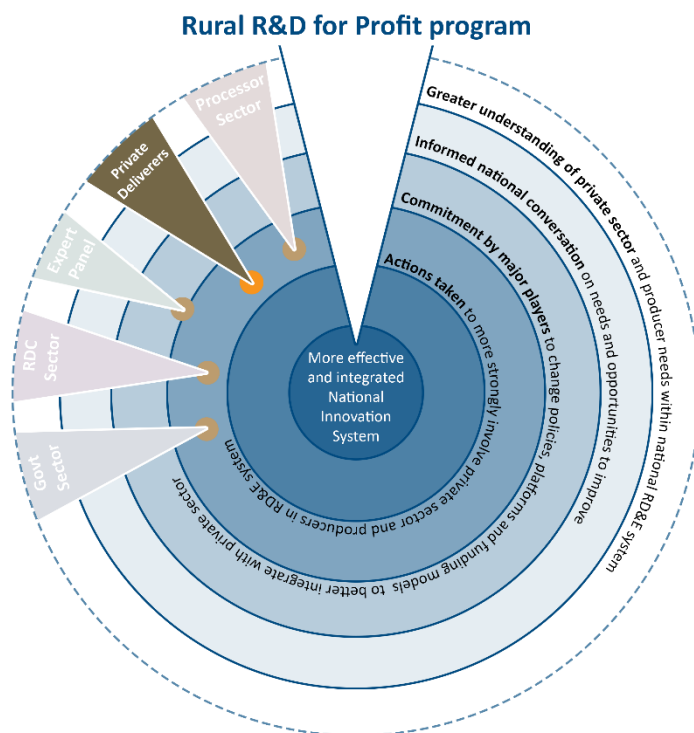
After her involvement in the processor trial (Trial 1), Jacqui said she felt better integrated into the R&D system as she was across "so many different levels". She also said that thinking about where the industry is taking the project's findings next is a great way to further integrate in the RD&E system.

Lawrence also believed that HCPSL were better integrated into the RD&E system. He explained that they are working closely with Sugar Research Australia (SRA) which has contracted them to map trials down the coast. "We are also contracted to work with them on another nitrogen project, so we now integrate some of those into our work program activities".

Learning through collaboration

Lawrence said that he was able to learn from others in the project through collaboration and networking. He found talking about things useful because "it made me think I have to think about this or that aspect".

New understanding and capacity gains



Industry issues highlighted

Jim (Meridian) said that the trial highlighted a few issues for him including a commonly held view that there was minimal knowledge transfer within various disciplines. He said that during the project they dealt with many single operators with fragmented extension skills. "It was better in some industries like the grazing industries in Victoria where it was working moderately well with some real opportunities to improve it."

Agreeing that the project showed the commonalities of extension issues across industries, Sally (Sally Martin Consulting) said that the project played a role in reinforcing what she already knew.

Capacity gains lead to a commercial grower service

Lawrence said HCPSL's capacity had improved. He noted that the timing of the project was good because he had been tasked by the HCPSL board to write a business case for a fee-for-service soil mapping service. "The project helped me to sharpen up the business proposal, the board subsequently approved it and we moved forward from there."

"We are actually doing things on the ground with it".

Going through the step by step thought processes advocated by the project, Lawrence said "made him think". He explained that "it actually has challenged me and gave me a process to work through".

"There needs to be some brokerage, some sort of carriage of responsibility that can make it happen because it's not going to happen on its own."

Jim Shovelton (Meridian)

Clarity around advisory models

Bruce (RSSA:PIRSA) said the project gave him clarity and took some of his ignorance away – as he called it. He cited the survey results as key.

"I guess we've always been an ostrich with our head in the sand and said farmers won't trust that information and they won't use it. But for me, that survey said the farmers were telling us well, they (Elders and Landmark) are the only ones with a district office at the coal face, they are readily available and we can contact with them and we just have to learn to develop the skill to sift out, you know, the technical advice versus the sales which they are offering."

He said that the surveys showed that the farmers are "coming of age and they're gaining confidence in taking advice from those sales people, in all sectors".

Another thing Bruce said he had learned was that there was a mix of different service models. He commented that some governments were still heavily involved in extension on a free service basis while others (e.g. South Australia) are "down at the other end of the chain, with fee-for-service". He said there was also a mixture of private sector models as well.

"The surveys definitely said the farmers are coming of age and they're gaining confidence in taking advice from those sales people, in all sectors".

Bruce Hancock (RSSA:PIRSA)



Capacity gains in sharing R&D information

Mark (JBS) thought a reason they may have been chosen to be involved with the project was because of its activity as a company in the RD&E space while "not many processors are involved in that area". Despite this, he said JBS did not necessarily get that R&D information to their buyers or clients.

Mark told of "the lightbulb moment" when he realised during the project's initial interviews and meetings with the buyers and producers, that JBS were not working with those people, "who are the direct connect to the producers".

The project was a positive experience for Mark. He said, "we had someone from outside rather than us in the room, someone independent of us producing a report. It verified it for us. We sort of knew, the project just brought it to the forefront".

"I suppose at management level we tend to get tunnel vision, or tunnel focused, on what we do. What we have done in this project is probably take a step back and just looked 'outside the square' a little bit. It's funny, you know, but you need that 'jig' to get you up and get you going. The project definitely provided that 'jolt' for us."

Mark Inglis (JBS)



Bruce also highlighted the outcomes for JBS. He explained that the livestock buyers involved now saw a greater role for themselves moving forward as conveyers of information and as directors of traffic to 'people that know'. At the same time, he said that the buyers still felt they needed to upskill their understanding "just a little bit to where they have a level of comfort to talk about things and are comfortable with that intermediary role".

Increased understanding of other industries

Dairy specialist Jacqui (RMCG) appreciated gaining knowledge and experience of the meat industry in particular. "There were people I have never met before which was good; and operating at that processor level was quite interesting. This was a great opportunity to work with them at that level - so I learned a lot with the beef industry being there".

"I really do feel that my knowledge has increased, and my networks have improved."

Jacqui Knee (RMCG)



Increased capacity resulting from project processes

Jacqui also said that the project processes and working in the broader team had impacted on the way RMCG worked. Specifically, she said it had been useful feeding into internal discussions about how they did things and opportunities to do these better.

About her own capacity, Jacqui said: "it is always an experience working with people who work in this way (teamwork), there's always things to learn from that. It has been great to work with the University".

Lawrence (HCPSL) explained his own personal capacity increase and how he is now thinking about things at a management and not just a technical level. "I came in from a technical position into management and the project gave me skills that I did not have before and built my capacity that way." He said that he will use the processes gained from the project to put up other proposals in the future.

For Meg (Meg Bell Consulting/SALC), the project provided her with development opportunities she would not have otherwise had. She said her biggest focus was on improving her time management skills "and saying 'no' to those things that I previously would otherwise have said 'yes' to. I was aware of this but being part of the project probably encouraged me to make more of an effort".

"The project provided me with development opportunities I would not have had otherwise."

Meg Bell (Meg Bell Consulting)



Impacting on peer understanding

Jacqui believed they had an influence on other project participants. "One of my colleagues presented at one of the forums with me and we got an industry organisation thinking about their role in helping consultants, which was great. I think their understanding of what we do has improved because we spoke at the forum".

Understanding and working with commercial timelines

Bruce (RSSA:PIRSA) said a traditional barrier they have faced when working in supply chains was having to "march to commercial time lines and on a short project implementation timeline from the funder." However, "because we know it is what it is", he said that it has been manageable in this project.

"In commercial businesses profitability is number one. You just have to wait your turn and get the timing right for things to be done".

Bruce Hancock (RSSA:PIRSA)



New processes, services and opportunities

Continued upskilling of staff

Mark (JBS) said that while they have done an initial round, they are yet to finish upskilling their buyers to connect more with livestock clients. "In about three weeks' time I'm doing the next component of the project in getting them trained up in that area. We're going to try to get information flow down and get certain things happening."

He explained that they are working on developing regular communications with the buyers to "share my expertise and knowledge of the R&D ... so that they can support stronger engagement with the producers".

Providing further context, Mark said "buyers tend to operate on their own at ground level, so we talk a lot on the phone, but we don't do a lot of face-to-face stuff. They're out there with their clients buying cattle operating in areas, which don't cross over with each other."

Coming together as a group only once or twice a year is one of the things Mark is trying to change. He said he is trying to spend more time with them one-on-one. "Since the survey we have been spending more time, even the livestock managers are spending more time one-on-one with those guys. So that's probably been a change due to the project".

New service in place

Describing HCPSL's new service resulting from the project, Lawrence said "we have purchased a 'DualEM' soil mapping device that can map soils down to almost six meters in the ground. We've got more work than we can handle now. This is great because we can help our members." As noted earlier, HCPSL are also contracted by SRA to map their trial sites.

"The business is stand-alone, it pays for itself now – and this is all new, and we've taken growers the next step, to variable rates technology".

Lawrence Di Bella (HCPSL)

"I am happy," Lawrence said, "our business is really growing. Seven years ago, I had only five staff, I now have fifteen staff. We have been able to hold all our members, we have not lost members and they are very happy with the service. They pay for it but they're happy to pay, they're getting what they want".

New opportunities

Meg (Meg Bell Consulting /SALC) provided an example where one of the mentees took the opportunity to change their job half-way through the project. She said: "I think she was quite unhappy where she was, and she was not quite sure what she wanted to do. Being part of the group and having those contacts probably gave her the courage to work something else out – she might see it differently to me, but that was the impression I got".

Sally (Sally Martin Consulting) also felt that the project offered new opportunities including networking and "thinking slightly differently about how you might approach things".

A new industry partnership

A new partnership between Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) and Elders is looking to co-develop new ways to gather feedback and share targeted research information with Queensland red meat producers to improve on-farm productivity. The program aims to better identify producer needs, as well as new research and development ideas, increase adoption and better engage with innovative producers. The three-year pilot will use Elders' network of seventy-five Queensland-based livestock agents and senior managers to co-develop, establish and evaluate a new research adoption and co-innovation model.

A new initiative

John's role in Elders now, is to manage a new initiative called the Thomas Elder Institute. He said its two-fold objective was "greater involvement in RD&E for example from investing in research right through to commercialisation of new technologies, but also engagement in industry RD&E projects and capability development".

Developed over the last three years and public knowledge, John said this new approach would also give Elders "a greater ability to be involved in RD&E projects in collaboration with both public and other private sector partners".

Explaining further, he said that the Institute was a part of Elders placing more emphasis on its technical services "in terms of positioning itself to provide more technical advice than sales advice from our staff". John said Elders also "established a purely fee-for-service consultancy arm that will be a key component of the ability to deliver projects".

He said the company wanted to see how it could use its network of technically qualified staff across the nation, already dealing with farmers and advising farmers, to be more involved in RD&E. "The idea is that we will leverage what we've got, for example if we need capacity in agronomy or livestock production or finance, we can draw upon Elders existing network to deliver projects. This is a challenge because there is no existing structure or template to make this work."

"There's a balancing act. People's time is not free, so for us to be involved in a project there's got to be some tangible benefit. That could be as simple as people's time being paid for in delivering projects, or other tangible benefits and outcomes for us and our clients".

John Evans (Elders)



Future directions

Someone needs to take a lead into the future

Jim (Meridian) said the project had clearly identified a real need and there is a great opportunity for change, but it needs to be taken further. "It needs somebody to sit down and drive it and get paid for it. The question is how you fund it and the process you take to fund it. Unless there's a commitment to making it happen, it just won't."

Jim felt strongly that a top-down approach would not work. He said he was surprised when participating in small group activity at the project's Sydney meeting, that an RDC person said that all the main organisational players needed to get together. "That's the problem," he said. "It was again establishing this bureaucratic model that would think that it would work from the top down."

Meeting the challenge of employing the right people

According to Mark (JBS) there is an industry wide challenge to employ the right people. He described the mixed skills of the buying teams. "[There are] younger ones with university or ag university degrees, who I imagine will take to an advisory / intermediary type role fairly quickly, and at the other end of the scale there are buyers at the end of their career and may, but not always, look for significant change in their role." He pointed out the younger generation in particular as important "because they are the future face of the company".

Mark also explained that The University of Melbourne training modules of the project unfortunately did not fit their training needs. He said they had been sent modules to look at but none of them suited their team. "Most of the training in the industry and livestock buying is not something the Uni would be involved in. In the industry, most buyers are trained in-house by other livestock guys or people who have been involved in the industry for a while."

He said the role is complex with very specific skills. While Mark said there was some theory and basics that could be taught to a young possible buyer, "the good ones are the ones who have done it for a long time. ... it's 'the more you do the better you get at it'".

Continuing what's been started

Sally (Sally Martin Consulting) wanted to have something in place to facilitate continuity in the mentoring. She suggested that "we could be more actively involved at the graduate level working with universities on this".

Jacqui (RMCG) was keen to maintain contact with some industry people she met during the project. "It would be good to continue conversations with them about the process we used with the processors to use in their industries".

Project Expert Panel reflect on a well conceived project

Summary

Meeting at least three times a year, the Expert Panel was charged with fostering critical reflection over the lifetime of the project (*Stimulating Private Sector Extension in Australian Agriculture to increase returns from R&D*). Overall, Stephen Coats, Expert Panel Chair, assessed the group's contribution as being useful and an important component of the project design and implementation.

Panel members agreed that the project was well conceived and identified real issues within the Australian Agricultural Innovation system. As a result of being involved, members said that they had an improved understanding of dealing with a 'new extension reality' and of what works for the private sector, as well as seeing the value of co-innovation. It was strongly felt that further investment and development of a structural platform was needed to ensure the project continued its legacy and impact.

Background

The Expert Panel was described by Stephen in the final milestone report¹ as "a 'thought leadership group', consisting of leading figures in Australia and Internationally around the private sector role in innovation." He noted its primary purpose as contributing to strategic implementation and design over the lifetime of the project. Specifically targeted for their potential contribution, the seven Panel members' expertise included:

- an internationally recognised understanding of agricultural innovation systems (the RD&E system);
- a track record of agricultural entrepreneurship;
- a strong agricultural policy background; and
- an "on-the-ground" history of the stimulation (through initial public investment) of the private provision of Research Development and Extension (RD&E).

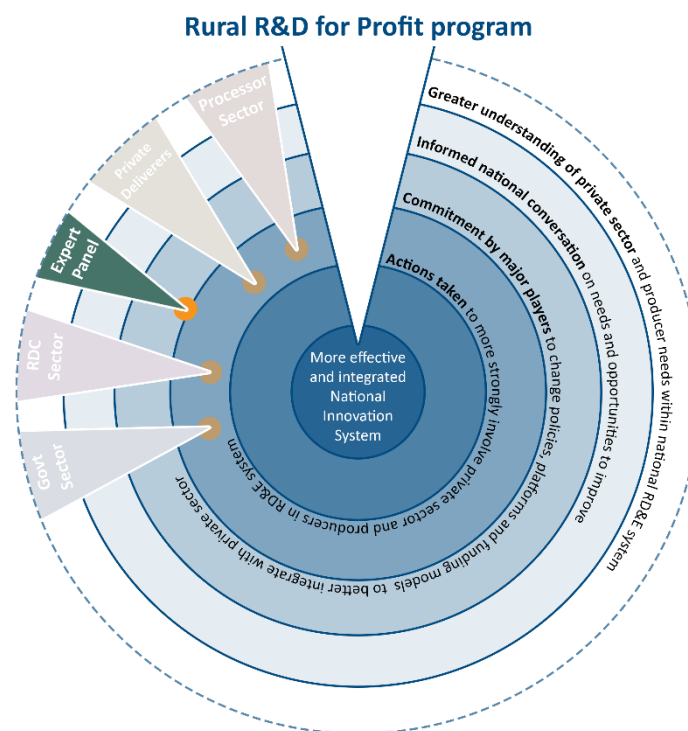
Members providing their reflections of the project include Dr Mark Paine (Strategy and Investment Leader, Business and People, Dairy NZ), Dr Laurens Klerkx (Wageningen University, Netherlands - Agricultural policy, systems, communications) and Mr Stephen Coats, Chair of the Expert Panel (private and public career in dairy extension and communication).

¹ Stephen Coats (2018) Convenor Expert Panel. KPI 5.4 – Report on Outcomes of Annual Expert Panel meetings (Output 5(b)) and cross-sector Annual Forum (Output 5 (d))

Observations around the need for the project

Panel members agreed that the project was well conceived and identified real issues that needed addressing within the Australian Agricultural Innovation System. It was pointed out that not only was better integration of the whole system vital to innovation and profitability, it would also support the appropriate level of functionality and efficiency to deliver improved outcomes to Australian farmers.

It was also noted that costs were escalating within the RD&E structure due to less than optimal operations and inefficiencies of the current innovation system. There was an emphasis on how critical it was for farmers to know how to access and use services in an increasingly complex market, and be provided with the opportunity to see the value of paying for those that suit their business needs.



Project impacts

Improved understanding of dealing with a 'new extension reality'

Laurens (Wageningen University) said that by taking part in the project, he had learned of a considerable diversity in how different states and industries deal with a new extension reality', which relies more on action from the private sector. He noted that some "have already come up with interesting co-innovative arrangements".

Laurens said that Australia was in a "phase of relative turbulence that we've also experienced in Europe after privatisation of extension". Along with other members of the panel, he thought that a new paradigm was being developed in which individual Rural Research & Development Corporations, although preferably collaboratively, would be key players.

Improved understanding of what works for the private sector

Mark (Dairy NZ) believed that the idea of the private sector participating in a co-development exercise was good. He said that the trials were useful in revealing what worked and that hearing it from the voice of the private sector itself, was invaluable in terms of the commitment, co-ownership and the outcome.

Showing the value of co-innovation

Laurens believed the project has shown the value of co-innovation and thought that there were new insights emerging from advanced thinking and action with regard to digital agriculture. While not thinking there were any new major insights yet, Mark said that the project had been the beginning of answering questions about multiple scales, i.e. scaling up a project to the Rural Research & Development Corporation level. For example, were there any new insights from using a cotton/dairy/grains approach? Mark saw that as research for the future.

Continued investment is needed for impact

There was an observation by panel members that because it was difficult to comprehend collaboration between the public and private sectors, it was hard to view as a worthy investment. Without extra funding, Laurens felt that the work from the project could be lost. Panel members agreed that with a strong leader and significant investment, the project could have an impact.

Stephen noted² a need for “continued investment that helps us understand how agricultural innovation systems succeed and fail, here and internationally”.

In terms of applied research, a key question posed by the panel was: “how players in our system, many of whom are currently invisible to key players in traditional systems of organisation, can be recognised, engaged, supported and become collaborative participators (public and private) in innovation”.

Process reflections

More time would have been beneficial

Stephen (Chair of Expert Panel) noted that the Panel’s potential could have been pushed further with member’s skills and knowledge utilised more, if time was less constrained. He felt that more time would have allowed members a greater opportunity to reflect on the insights they shared. Mark also thought that time limitations around meeting length and frequency impacted on the Panel fully delivering on its potential. Mark said that action learning definitely helped the project, but that more frequent critical reflection cycles could have helped.

² Stephen Coats (2018) Convenor Expert Panel. KPI 5.4 – Report on Outcomes of Annual Expert Panel meetings (Output 5(b)) and cross-sector Annual Forum (Output 5 (d))

Next steps

RDCs need to take risks

Mark asked the question around how engaged and willing the Rural Research & Development Corporations would be to seriously consider scaling up and felt that the project could have better shown them that that is their main job. Mark believed the industries needed to take more risk and commit, in their industry strategic areas, to a private-industry extension partnership approach and test whether it performed above the current status quo.

A need for strong professional associations and ongoing capacity building

Laurens said that the private sector needed to develop strong professional associations to be able to form part of decision-making structures. He also said that the private sector needed the brokering capacity to develop co-innovation networks around operational (farm level) and more strategic region/sector level issues.

The panel also identified the need for continued building of advisory skills and capacity in the innovation system, informed by global benchmarking.

Creating a platform and focusing on a structural legacy

Ultimately, the Expert Panel felt that the project needed to create a platform, with appropriate funding and resources, to serve as a focal point for needed discussions, particularly those around a structural legacy.

The development of a narrative that key players could buy into, was felt to be important if the necessary ongoing funding and actions were to eventuate. More specifically, it was believed that a National Working Group on private sector extension and the RD&E system should be established and “service innovation task forces” should coordinate public and private investment, involvement of key players and service design in key or emerging areas (e.g. Great Barrier Reef health, Precision/Digital Ag, Supply chain, processor roles, Professional development pathways).

Stephen recommended that future similar projects should utilise a similar Expert Panel service.



Opportunities for cross sector networks valuable for Rural Research and Development Corporations

Summary

Cross-sector contact is not a day-to-day occurrence for Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs), and those involved in the Rural R&D for Profit Private Sector project have cited its network development opportunities as a valuable outcome. While some said they were well placed to immediately benefit from new networks formed over the project, others were looking towards future collaborations.

While capitalising on project developed processes, services or opportunities may still be in the pipeline for many of the RDCs (timing and staff members involved being a factor), some have specifically identified areas of interest. These include gaining further value from the national surveys and making better use of research outcomes and findings (and ensuring these are used by producers). All RDCs included in this case study said they were able to translate and apply what they learned in the project to their own contexts including an improved understanding of the private sector business model and its need for a value proposition and remuneration.

RDCs are now keen to receive the project learnings from The University of Melbourne, with a number commenting that this would be their key outcome. There was an agreement that the project legacy needed to be conserved. Some felt that using the training modules developed by the project research team (The University of Melbourne and agriculture business consultancy Rural Consultancy Group and/or initiating mentoring could help.

Background

Each RDC involved in the project brought a different perspective and extension experience to the project. The mix of people involved, coupled with each industry's extension context contributed to the unique collaborative environment fostered by the project and were key factors influencing potential impacts.

ruralR&D
CORPORATIONS

Dairy Australia
Sugar Research Australia
Horticulture Australia
MLA
CRDC

RDCs Involved



Dairy Australia

Dairy Australia (DA), along with nine partner organisations, was involved in setting up the Stimulating private sector extension in Australian agriculture to increase returns from R&D (the project) and took the lead from an RDC perspective. Project partners included Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC), Australian Pork Limited, Sugar Research Australia (SRA), Hort Innovation Australia (Hort Innovation), The University of Melbourne, NSW Department of Industry and the Victorian Government. All these partner organisations were members of the project steering committee.

Dairy Australia staff included Ross Bawden, Neil Webster (project level role) and Ian Linley (overall project manager and Trial 1 lead). Neil pointed out that the project was not aiming to 'fix' extension, "we basically saw it as extension evolving".



Sugar Research Australia

Peter Samson from SRA took part in the Precision Ag Trial (Trial 2 - focused on increasing the capacity of farm advisers to engage with digital applications based on industry research, development and extension to benefit producers) with a role to "get people to workshops".

The sugar industry has very little fee-for-service extension with Peter explaining that most of the extension is levy-funded through 'productivity services'. At the beginning of the project, this had created some confusion in terms of defining private sector extension within the sugar industry. In addition, sugar extension has been in transition which has meant that the project's potential impact on operations has been somewhat limited at this stage – although Peter commented: "this may change in the future".



Horticulture Australia

Bianca Cairns, Horticulture Innovation, has been involved in the project (through emails and attending annual meetings) for more than two years. While Horticulture Innovation was not a cash contributor to the project, Bianca saw the benefits of its in-kind involvement and being "kept in the loop just to make sure that as many of the RDCs as possible were aware of what was going on with this approach".



MLA

Serving on the project's steering committee for 12 months as MLA's representative, Renelle Jeffery also led two of the trials after the original leader changed roles. She said Meat and Livestock Australia had worked with Dairy Australia in the past in cattle components and commented that there would more opportunities to work together in the future.



CRDC

Consultants are a key extension audience of the cotton industry explained Warwick Waters, Program Manager of CottonInfo – the cotton industry's joint extension program (a joint venture between Cotton Australia, the Cotton Research and Development Corporation and Cotton Seed Distributors Ltd.) "Every cotton farm has a private agronomist, who helps them with weekly monitoring of the crop. So, it's a bit different to other industries. One hundred percent of growers would pay in the order of one-hundred-and-sixty dollars per hectare for a consultant to advise them."

Warwick was involved with the project from the beginning, from conceptualisation to proposal development, to the management and steering committees. CRDC was also the lead RDC for Trial 2. Warwick said they were "looking at consultants' experience of integrating digital agriculture into services they provide, and collectively working out a process for evaluating or testing new digital agricultural services or tools produced".

Engagement and Collaboration

Furthering industry connections

Dairy Australia was able to make new connections and re-explore established ones according to Ian. He provided examples of connections made through the project from his involvement in Trial 1 (focused on engaging with dairy and meat processors, and facilitating a better understanding of how the processors can best support producers supplying them) including those with the Warrnambool Cheese and Butter Factory (part of the Dairy Division, Australia, of Saputo Inc.) and JBS Australia (a red meat processor).

He explained that Dairy Australia already had relationships with Warrnambool Cheese and Butter but was starting from scratch in a research environment which “enabled some different conversations and some different learnings”.

Further industry and government connections were also facilitated through a consultant involved in Trial 1 outside of the four trial officers (Jacqui Knee, RM Consulting Group (RMCG); Bruce Hancock, Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA); and research lead Nicole Reichelt of the University of Melbourne). Ian said: “[The consultant] was a good asset because he worked with processors across Australia and ran programs with processors”.

“The training modules designed with the private sector has helped to strengthen collaboration and trust between Dairy Australia and the processor Warrnambool Cheese and Butter”.

Ross Bawden (Dairy Australia)



Better connecting farmers and advisers with RD&E

Upskilling advisers through the project was also helping to better connect farmers with RD&E. Ian provided a processor trial example where field officers were better equipped to “signpost” - i.e. refer farmers “to people that have the right information or offer a package of information”. He said there were three main ways farmers benefitted from the project:

1. They were connected to the RD&E system through the regional forums;
2. They had a big input into what the trials were going to be about; and
3. They had the opportunity provide input to how field officers could add value to their business i.e. how they preferred to connect with them.

“Through the processor trial the private sector and farmers have been more engaged in R&D”.

Ian Linley (Dairy Australia)



From a sugar industry perspective, Peter believed that the trial workshops had been valuable and said that he had observed a good interchange of ideas across industries. “The people who went to the workshops got a lot out of that because there was contact with advisers from outside the industry”. He thought that while the project was running, it had “helped with collaboration”.

Building an RDC network

The project also facilitated RDC engagement. Bianca (Hort Innovation) said: "it has been interesting to meet my colleagues, at the other RDCs and discuss topics at the annual forum – topics of extension and just getting research out to growers."

She added that there were benefits in terms of understanding the theory behind the extension approach and in knowing "people who are researchers or practitioners in the extension space, like the University of Melbourne".

Renelle (MLA) and Warwick (CRDC) agreed about the benefits of collaboration. Renelle particularly pointed out the value of the expert panel and the project's research element while Warwick found the project to be a good vehicle for interacting with other RDCs. He added that the RDC contacts made had led to meetings independent of the project to talk about peripheral issues: "which has been good".

Collaboration impacting on strategic planning and opportunities

Warwick said the project "created the opportunity for discussion about other projects and other activities." He felt that it was inevitable that the private sector became involved in that discussion and believed in the cotton context Elders for example would be "a logical inclusion down the track".

The project's expert panel (consisting of Australian and international leaders in the field of private sector roles in agricultural innovation) and extension experts from other industries also provided input to development of cotton's five-year strategic extension plan. This was primarily through a project meeting already attended by relevant people and facilitation of ongoing conversations. Warwick noted that other industries were also thinking about the future of extension and were open for discussion around high level extension issues.

Warwick said the expert panel's views on extension trends to consider as well as their reflections on current cotton extension processes impacted on the industry's thinking in terms of what extension should look like. He said they could then "work back from there to say - to be able to get there, this is our pathway".

"One of the big things coming out of the project is the contact with other industries".

Peter Samson (SRA)



"A key outcome of the project is the ability to work with a range of other RDCs".

Renelle Jeffrey (MLA)



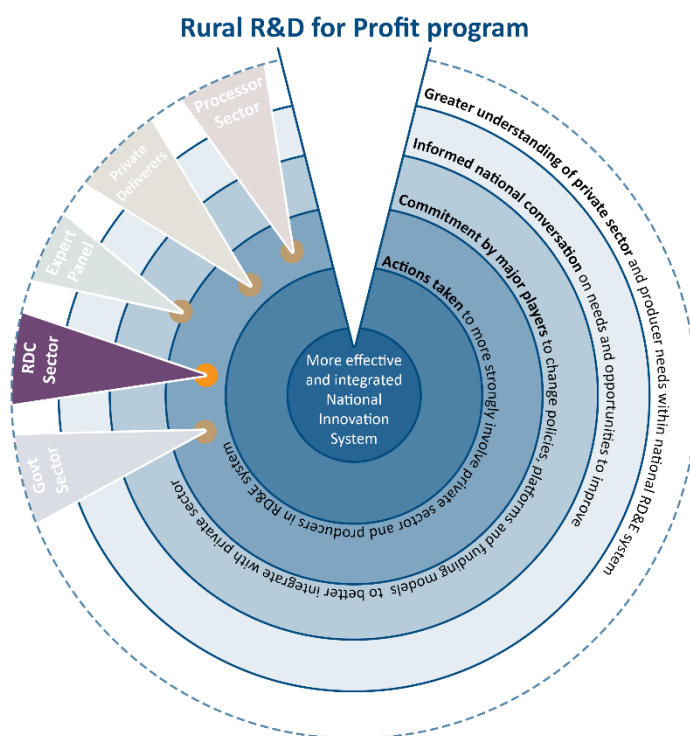
"An interest from an RDC point of view was that if we were looking at research outcomes being embedded into digital agricultural tools, then the way in which they usually get incorporated by service providers is a key factor to their impact, adoption and impact".

Warwick Waters (CRDC)



New understanding and capacity gains

More understanding of the private sector



The timing for the project was right, according to Renelle (MLA). "If it has done anything to contribute to some thinking about how we might actually work with the private sector better, I think that's a great outcome." She said she enjoyed being a part of the project and found it "quite stimulating in terms of some the ideas and thinking coming for the expert panel and I would like to see the opportunities across RDCs continue".

Dairy Australia now has a deeper understanding of the private sector. Ian said this was "mostly through the processor trial, but also the national research surveys, and discussions with the project partners including RDCs and a couple of state governments, and other people involved".

He explained there was an opportunity for Dairy Australia and processors to discover each other's needs and "try to explore how what we're doing could not just be a result for the moment but how it could be embedded in core business and core principles for all of us, so that it is easier for everyone and it becomes part of routine".

Ian noted that there is already interest from other processors in doing things a little bit differently after he had discussed with them with the new learnings.

He also pointed out other sources of learning the project had presented Dairy Australia including:

- the regional forums attended by advisers and producers;
- the "'incidentals' that happen when you work in a partnership to run a project"; and
- Trial 3 – Advisory Pathways Trial: had been interesting for Dairy Australia, specifically "learning about the private sector's approach to career pathways, or how they don't approach it". Ian said they also learned "what other RDCs are doing around supporting the private sector in careers, for example, we brought Meat and Livestock Australia's approach back in here and talked about it".

"It has been beneficial to know some of these people who are researchers or practitioners in the extension space, like the University of Melbourne; it has been good to get to know them and work with them to know the theory behind some of this extension stuff".

Bianca Cairns (Hort Innovation)

A broader extension context

Bianca (Hort Innovation) said the project provided a broader context to understand the approaches of other agriculture industries. "Just the learning across the different sectors brought different thinking to the table". She felt that a high level of impact could be achieved just by "making the thirty horticulture industries more efficient at extension".

Bianca also described changes to her thinking. As a result of her involvement she said she can now look at horticulture in terms of the presence of strong processors "and therefore which industry should maybe have extension happening".



"The dairy sector processor trial has shown that RDCs can actually work with the private sector, for example agribusiness (processors), not only to deliver extension, but also to signpost and help structure a framework that supports farmers well, and they know where to go to get the right information".

Ross Bawden (Dairy Australia)

"We learned that the private sector has an appetite to be more engaged in elements of RD&E but don't have the capacity to do that in terms of time".

"There was a lot of learning (by Dairy Australia) from looking at the intense industries like Sugar and Cotton and the intimate business relationships they have with consultants, which is different to ours".

Ian Linley (Dairy Australia)

New processes, services and opportunities

Technology assessment framework opportunity in sugar and cotton industries

The tool resulting from the precision ag trial was mentioned by Warwick (CRDC) and Peter (SRA) as an opportunity. Warwick said: "The consultants actually developed a technology assessment framework which steps through all the things they need to consider when looking at buying a piece of technology for their business."

He described CRDC's interest in looking at the development of the tool as part of their focus on commercialisation and exploitation of new digital technologies. "They have actually engaged a lean start-up company to coach the organisation on the development of the new digital technology, and this may be one of the products that they look at".

Peter hoped the tool would be useful. "It goes through the steps of how someone decides for example if it's worth buying a drone for use [which] is actually quite a useful thing. The plan is to develop it into an app that can be used. That is a tangible outcome that could be very useful".

Addition to CRDC's extension management committee

CRDC has invited a director from the CCA – Crop Consultants' Association – to sit on the management committee of the industry's extension program. Warwick said the project definitely contributed towards that thinking. "We have always wanted them to be engaged in the program and we want to strengthen that partnership with a collaborative approach and actually involve them in the management of the extension program as well. At this stage they are there in an observer capacity, they sit around the table [and] they contribute towards the discussion. We're feeling our way as to how to formalise that."

Using the extension modules

Using the training modules developed through the project was on the agenda for CRDC and MLA. Warwick said he was quite excited by the eight extension modules developed by the University of Melbourne with some of the modules meeting specific team needs.

MLA plan to use the training modules going forward. Renelle said: "There are quite a few staff that should go through those training modules."

"We also have a program called 'future livestock consultants' and there might be an opportunity to integrate / use those modules with those consultants as well." She explained that at a steering committee level they would need to work out the modules and what they might look like, "but I think there's potential there".

Applying national survey information

Quantitative components of the two national surveys have already been used by Warwick to inform his extension planning. He said he was able to identify areas of strength which they could capitalise on and weaknesses that they could work on for example improving relationships or meeting growers' needs.

Communication of research results

The processor trial has the potential to impact on MLA's communication of research results. As a result of observing its outcomes, Renelle noted: "Meat and Livestock Australia need to do a better job of working out how we set up our research results. We create research reports that are not in a form or format that is good for value chain players to being extension agents on our behalf".

Future directions

Designing projects with the private sector in mind

Warwick (CRDC) described a shift in the cotton industry's approach to project design. He said the CRDC is "working on greater integration of extension into research projects. So rather than picking up final reports and looking for extendable solutions, the shift in the cotton industry is towards integrating extension and adoption right at the very beginning of projects."

Warwick explained this meant that when developing the engagement strategy or an adoption pathway, CRDC wanted to look for where the private sector could be appropriately included "so they're actually linked into research projects".

From a dairy industry perspective, Ross also believed there were opportunities for the private sector to be more involved because "there is a common interest with Dairy Australia and government in the sustainability of agriculture, profitable farmers and social license". While mentioning an existing strategic sustainability framework he felt there was room to do something at an operational level.

"I think there is a challenge about how we engage with those large private sector groups like the Elders. They are definitely motivated to be involved in some things, but they do have a different agenda to industry good. They have a business model that can have different objectives – they're trying to meet shareholder expectations".

Warwick Waters (CRDC)



Formalised and intentional cross sector interactions

Warwick also commented about cross-sector learning. “[It] has worked to a certain extent, but I would like to see it more formalised and intentional, at the moment it is ad hoc. It’s fairly person-based at the moment, so if I was to move on, what strikes me is ‘what’s in place for the next person?’”.

He felt that staff changes could prove to be a barrier because “you’re obviously developing a relationship with a person not with an organisation, staff changes are not ideal”. Ross (DA) agreed, noting the emergence of issues and concerns as a result of people changing roles and requiring handovers during the project.

Bianca (Hort Innovation) agreed there was an opportunity to learn from other industries how they do extension but did not want it too formalised (e.g. a classroom situation).

Further exploration of applying overall project findings

Renelle said MLA were very keen to hear the findings of the project “because we are searching for ways to work with the private sector and stimulate private sector extension.” She said they were meeting with Ian Linley and Ruth Nettle to understand the results and see how they might be applied. “That’s one of the key outcomes for us.”

For horticulture, Bianca said there were some general principles coming out of the project which she believed might be applicable but would have to be “re-badged” to suit the industry.

Warwick believed there was more to be mined from the qualitative section of the national surveys. He said he has already spoken with survey coordinator Prof. Ruth Nettle (The University of Melbourne) about going through this.

“I think a lot of the impact of the project is still to come, because we’re saying across the program, what were the key findings, what are the observations that Meat and Livestock Australia can drive forward?”

Renelle Jeffrey (MLA)

Ensuring the legacy of trial findings

Ian (DA) and Renelle mentioned the importance of retaining and using the findings of specific trials. Renelle noted the value of mentoring (Trial 3 - Advisory pathways) for mentors and mentees. “What we got was a good demonstration that mentoring works. I’d love to see something happen with it because I don’t want it to be just a stand-alone kind of event. I don’t know what that may look like yet”.

In relation to Trial 1 (processors), Ian commented that while the dairy region was generally aware of the project, “there was more work to do with WestVic Dairy who are in the region”. Ian said there was an opportunity to share the findings and learnings with them at the end of the project.

In addition, the professional development modules resulting from the same trail, were seen by Ross (DA) to “hold great promise to support the professional development of private sector field staff and leave a legacy for the project”.

Government values collaborative platform for increasing its understanding of the private sector

Summary

The advisory delivery model in the private sector is changing fast. A reality that is well understood by Government project participants who are looking for effective ways to respond and engage. The 'Stimulating private sector extension in Australian agriculture to increase returns from R&D' project (the project) provided a collaborative platform from which to explore these challenges. Government participants said that the project had increased their understanding of the private sector and its need for remuneration and a value proposition.

The project was viewed as a learning opportunity which could serve as a springboard for developing and implementing new opportunities or services in the future. A number of opportunities for further exploration were identified by Government participants including: meeting the challenge of collaborating with the many different roles within the private sector; a potential need for intermediaries between these roles; and also a need for leadership in developing structures and processes for two-way information flows.

Background

Agriculture Victoria

Agriculture Victoria led the Knowledge trial (Trial 4). Carole Hollier was involved and attended two Sydney workshops during 2018. She said that Agriculture Victoria had up to 18 years' experience with the private sector in some of its sector extension networks. She described one project as including about sixty private sector providers working alongside four or five state government extension people. This project was "delivering and coordinating programs for about five thousand farmers in the region in the livestock industries."

Carole felt it was more efficient working with the private sector than dealing with 50 or 60 government extension staff. She said that the beef and sheep industries paid private consultants to deliver farmer directed programs, but "Agriculture Victoria have very little history in working with the private sector in research". Carole described the gap as falling between the research and development elements of RD&E.

NSW Department of Primary Industries

Geoff Casburn, NSW Department of Primary Industries, joined the steering committee in 2017. He helped organise a few events (e.g. a forum in Wagga) and was involved in a few of the trials. He observed the complexities of the project trying to bring a number of entities together. "Getting to know and understanding the issues of different industries and where people are coming from is the start."

Commonwealth Government

Two staff members from the Commonwealth Government with responsibility for managing projects within the Rural R&D for Profit Program had the opportunity to attend different project events - in addition to reading milestone reports. One joined the initial stakeholder workshop in Melbourne while the other went to the Trial Symposium (2018) in Sydney.

Engagement and collaboration

Collaboration has increased and the opportunity is there for more

Geoff believed that the project provided a platform for collaboration and engagement. He said forums and symposiums held over the three years have successfully improved collaboration, had some outcomes and, “brought industry and the private sector together”. He provided an example of the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) joining the project later, noting it as an important industry player across the country. Geoff said that he had observed good support across the industries: “People see the need and are happy to work together”.

*“People see the need
and are happy to work
together”*

Geoff Casburn (NSW DPI)

Commonwealth staff members highlighted the importance of RDC collaboration. While attending different events, both were impressed at the participation levels and diversity of the stakeholders involved. One said: “It was good to get people together and have the conversation in Melbourne”.

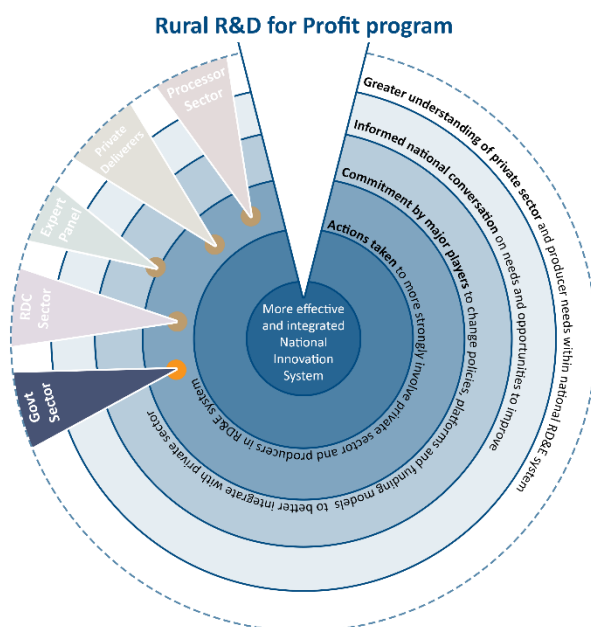
While believing there has been an increase in collaboration and engagement, Geoff said “it’s only the first step that needs to be built on”. Carole agreed. She felt that although some participants were better integrated into the R&D system, these links could still be strengthened.

Identifying opportunities for further involvement, Geoff said there seemed “to be a really strong support for not seeing extension by itself, but as a key part of RD&E”. He advocated for extension officers and advisors being involved in RD&E at the beginning, starting at identifying the problem. Geoff said this is followed by “the planning of the research to ensure the research is fit for purpose, and then planning what the extension channels would be”.



New understanding and capacity gains

Better understanding of engagement gaps with the private sector



At the department level, in addition to improving its understanding of collaboration compared to cooperation, Carole believed that Agriculture Victoria had increased its “understanding around potential gaps in the drivers for non-collaboration with the public sector”. She said her professional understanding of the gaps in engaging with the extension private sector had also improved.

“The [Knowledge] trial has shown we need a better understanding of the different segments within the private sector and how to effectively get to them. We have learned there are capability gaps and different segments in the private sector”.

New information increasing understanding

Carole pointed to the two national surveys as providing good information across industries. She said: “My understanding of how different industries work has improved. Over the three years, obviously people’s thinking has been developing”.

The survey results also had an impact on one of the Commonwealth Government staff members. At the beginning of the project they felt they had limited awareness of the issues, however said that the survey provided them with new ‘eye opening’ insights. They particularly mentioned an increased awareness of the sector’s diversity and the implication of different scales of farming for information delivery. They said: “It seemed as if the large profitable farms saw great value in seeking new information while the smaller farmers appeared to be happier to keep doing what they’ve always been doing”.

A video from the Precision Ag trial shown at the 2018 Symposium was highlighted by the other Commonwealth staff member. They said it improved their understanding of the need and value of the project from the private sectors’ perspective.

“Good information came back from the two national surveys. My understanding of how different industries work has improved”

Carole Hollier (Agriculture Victoria)

Improved collaborative capacity

Carole made the observation that Government and private sector project participants were keen to learn and grow and take advantage of the professional development opportunities. As a result, she felt that people in the project have improved their capacity to work together.

"The training was not in the formal sense but 'opening minds', that sort of training. I think everybody involved in our project have definitely increased their minds and have increased their capacity to analyse and think into the future".

New processes, services and opportunities

Sharing project findings

Geoff was planning a workshop later in June where the findings would be presented and explored. He said this was "a really important part of the project" and expected that by then there would be more outcomes available as a result of the final project findings.

Future directions

Increasing understanding about engaging different parts of the private sector

There is still a key learning to come for Carole. She wants to know: "How do you engage with the sales people and technical people?" For example, she explained that the precision agriculture sector has many technical people associated with their products - be they drones or irrigation systems. The question then is: "Who does an extension service?"

Carole said that the businesses of companies like Elders and Landmark "have changed so much over the last decade [in] that they are hiring university educated and highly experienced people to be their agronomists, be it pastures or crops. In our trial we did not tap enough into that market."

She identified the need within government programs for a "far better understanding of that group because they are actually the dominant group with farmers in Victoria."

A need echoed by a Commonwealth staff member who also commented on the importance of better understanding how best to -support commercial companies deliver extension.

"You can't build relationships if you don't understand the sector or the industry. It's absolutely fundamental."

Carole Hollier (Agriculture Victoria)

The importance of intermediaries in RD&E

The importance of an intermediary type person going forward, particularly relating to coordination, was pointed out by Carole. "If everybody wants co-ordination there is definitively an intermediary role, a coordinator, [who] actually drives it. They can't just be a broker, they have to know what they're talking about."

She pointed out that people most likely already existed in these roles but were not necessarily recognised, particularly in government. "I think we could be better". But she also thought the private sector could be more involved. "There is no reason why the private sector can't be intermediaries or can't put their hands in their pockets to make these happen for example by creating jobs".

More resources to foster the private sector

Geoff felt that the private sector required access to funding. "There is an acknowledgement of the important role they play in the RD&E space and there needs to be more resources going that way." He proposed that part of industry bodies' funding go to fostering the private sector, potentially developing industry/area specific groups, to ensure that key research outcomes are adopted.

Better connecting RD&E with the private sector from the ground up

Additionally, Geoff supported the development of a system with pathways to provide inputs into research from the ground up. "A structure is needed to make the private sector more connected with the RD&E sector." He also pointed out the possibility of synergistic gains. "There is commonality across industries on extension theory training and development in regard to development of your own business."

Believing there is more work to be done, Geoff described a collective industry view of the need for a system that also supports working together outside of extension. He said: "There's a need for more official structures for supporting the private sector in advising and to optimise information and funding flows up and down".

"A structure is needed to make the private sector more connected with the RD&E sector, with pathways"

Geoff Casburn (NSW DPI)



Future RDC collaboration

A Commonwealth staff member commented about the need for RDCs in particular to take in the findings from this project and see how it can help them to best deliver on their role. Both Commonwealth staff members emphasised the value of all RDCs collaborating on this issue into the future.

Further potential from the national surveys and training modules

Carole believed the national surveys' report was "a really powerful document" but felt there was still more that could be analysed - for example "pulling out some key themes".

Geoff commented about the potential of the training modules. "There's room in the training modules for improving business skills and other skills like applying for research grants. Skills about running private extension business and being a consultant".