



**AG EXCELLENCE
ALLIANCE INC**

ANNUAL REPORT

MARCH 26TH 2013

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

How many farming systems groups will there be in 10 years' time? Including some state and national groups like SANTFA, the Advisory Board of Agriculture / Ag bureau and Partners in Grain, there are 14 farming systems groups in SA at present.

Groups have to maintain their relevance to farming communities to remain viable. Effective successful groups deliver the latest relevant up to date information on time using a range of delivery mechanisms. They provide technical information in easy to understand formats. They provide a mechanism for farming communities to address regional issues and participate in research programs that address issues at the state and national level.

These groups are driven by volunteer committees. Some groups have full time staff, some part time but few if any have the resources they really need to carry out these important roles as effectively as they might. In most cases, staff are paid out of specific project funds and so when the project finishes, so does funding for that staff member.

So the pressure stays on the committee to continue the job. Some committee members have served their farming systems groups on a volunteer basis for over 10 years.

Operating this way is not sustainable. Burnout is inevitable. Energy levels drop, jobs don't get done on time. The extra effort required to make things happen properly isn't there and when that happens, groups struggle to survive.

There are things we can do to maintain input and enthusiasm. Successful groups run their organisations as a business. They have paid staff. While all farming systems groups are not for profit organisations, they need to make "profit" from projects to sustain their businesses which provide services to the farming community.

The next challenge is to find suitable skilled people to run these businesses. Therein lies our biggest challenge. The skills required to run farming systems groups are huge. Organising field days, publications, finding sponsors, writing funding proposals, providing reports to funding organisations, managing meetings and personalities on committees, forming the organisations strategic plan and sticking to it are skills that are learnt. Very few individuals have all the skills required to do this.

Agriculture is already short of skilled, qualified people to do the jobs required. A recent review suggests there are jobs for 5000 university graduates in Australia every year. Our current turn out of university students is 800 per year.

There is one thing we can all do to maintain enthusiasm in the people that volunteer and are paid to work in our groups. That is - say thank you. Acknowledge and attribute the efforts accordingly. The opportunity to learn a new skill is also a good way to maintain enthusiasm and drive.

The Ag Excellence Alliance faces the same challenges as all other farming systems groups across the country. We have been fortunate to gain funding for our support roles to allow us to function. Our mission is to support the farming systems groups within the state in achieving their targets and goals by providing support services to the groups. Our committee is made up of some incredibly talented people. Our combined skills allow us to on behalf of farming systems groups across the state, access national funding, coordinate national and state projects, provide professional development through training programs for farming systems group members and staff. We also play a significant role in ensuring that farming systems groups are recognised by governments and funding bodies for their importance in delivery of new technology and sustainable farming practices to the farming sector.

By working together, we can overcome the shortage of skills across the state to function and perform the tasks required of farming systems groups. By sharing the limited resources, we can achieve some great outcomes. The Ag Excellence Alliance has demonstrated the benefits of a collaborative approach to groups across the state. There is no doubt that some of the projects that are undertaken by the groups would not have occurred had Ag Excellence Alliance not existed to initiate and drive them. The growth in the number of projects we have developed as a team that serve the farming communities across the state over the last few years is enormous.

There are several experienced members of the committee that are stepping down this year. They have worked tirelessly on behalf of the farming systems groups. They will continue to contribute to agriculture in their region in different ways in the future. To these people, I say thank you. Your passion and commitment in your roles on the committee of Ag Excellence Alliance have been outstanding.

They are retiring to avoid burnout. This is a healthy thing to do.

To our existing and continuing committee members, I also say thank you. I can honestly say I have enjoyed my time as chairman over the last three years and have looked forward to meetings and functions in my time in the role. I have done so because of the great companionship, vision and drive of members of the group.

May the good work continue under the guidance of our new chairman and committee.

Bill Long, Chairperson

Ag Excellence Alliance Inc



EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

The Ag Excellence Alliance (Ag Ex) has had another successful and busy year. Special thanks goes to Mandy Pearce as Administration Manager for her tireless work in keeping the operations of Ag Ex functioning in a highly effective and efficient manner. Thanks also goes to our outgoing Chairman, Bill Long for his strong and passionate leadership over the past three year, and to this year's committee for their ongoing support and input to the effective functioning of Ag Ex. Please take time to read this report, which has been aligned with the goals of the Ag Ex strategic plan.

1. To build capable, innovative and effective grower groups delivering innovation and practice change.

The 2013 State Forum and Grower Group Awards has been supported by a GRDC Industry Development Award that has assisted representatives from the WA Grower Group Alliance to attend. DEWNR, EPNRM and ANLNRM have also provided support for this year's forum.

Ag Ex has continued its communication activities with the generous ongoing support from Mellor Olsen. This includes the monthly Stock Journal page for grower groups, the bi-monthly e-news, the bi-monthly e-diary as well as regular updates of news items and videos releases on the Ag Ex blog.

The Ag Ex web site has been upgraded as part of the "Social Media in Agriculture" project. The web site is now a responsive and interactive site, with users able to submit content (videos, news items, event dates), link to Ag Ex social media (blog, Facebook and Twitter) and view content equally as effectively on smart phones, tablets and laptops/desktops.

Five new policies were developed in 2012/13. These were; Sitting Fees and Reimbursement, Project Management, Grower Group Event Promotion, Grower Group Relationship, Executive Committee.

Ag Ex appointed an executive team in 2012/13. The team members were drawn from the committee and are Trent Potter, Ian McFarland, Bill Long, Mark Stanley and Mandy Pearce. The executive team are an important adjunct to the committee, providing a forum for discussion and decision making without the need for the whole committee to be involved.

2. To develop effective and efficient collaborative programs and projects within and across regions.

Ag Ex ran a “Future Programs, Funding and Project Opportunities” workshop in August 2012. Grower group representatives were able to learn about upcoming funding opportunities and issues and opportunities for projects were identified and prioritised. The workshop clarified opportunities that are the domain of grower groups and broader projects that could be led by Ag Ex or other statewide groups and who will be taking the lead with project development to minimise duplication.

Ag Ex currently has 14 projects on its books with support from a range of funders. In this way Ag Ex reduces its reliance on any one funder and so is able to plan for the future with greater confidence.

Ag Ex responded to the DAFF Carbon Farming Initiative Outreach & Extension Program with a project submission on farm risk planning and carbon accounting.

Ag Ex has also responded to other funding calls over 2012/13 with the Caring for Our Country Business Plan, Caring for Our Country community grants, the State NRM community grants and community grants with the NYNRM Board, EP NRM Board and the AML NRM Board. Ag Ex has responded to the DAFF Community Landcare Grants in March 2013 with four projects; university student placement, trial design & evaluation training, snail management / remote sensing, and leadership training.

Ag Ex is managing the delivery of the SA component of the DAFF Action on the Ground project “Farmers leading and learning about the soil carbon frontier” in partnership with Harm Van Rees from Crop Facts Pty Ltd.

Ag Ex has sponsored two State NRM funded community projects on behalf of the Stockport and the Halbury-Whitwarta Ag Bureau branches.

Ag Ex has a service delivery contract with Ag Consulting to deliver a leadership program for women in agriculture. The funding is from PIRSA.

In partnership with ORM Communications Ag Ex will deliver the SA component of the GRDC funded “Improving grower and industry adoption of new electronic technologies” project in the 2013/14.

3. Integration of natural resource management and production of grower groups and NRM programs

Ag Ex was represented at the “Improving NRM Connections” forum conducted by DENR to determine improved mechanisms for NRM to connect with community and industry. The key message from the Minister was that NRM needs to be front and centre of community, and that it needs to be delivered through trusted and capable organisations and groups.

Ag Ex completed a review of the Regional Landcare Facilitator role that Michael Richards currently fills with Ag Ex on behalf of the Northern Yorke NRM Board. The review has been forwarded to DAFF and the NY NRM Board for their consideration. Michael continues to provide a strong presence in the Northern Yorke region, acting as

a key conduit between production focussed grower groups and NRM, and ensuring links with research and development organisations are actively maintained.

Ag Ex attended a workshop PIRSA conducted for training providers to look at innovative ways to raise the business and risk management skills of the farm sector in light of the reform to the National Drought Agenda. PIRSA is working with DFEEST, the Primary Industry Skills Council and Agri Food Skills Australia to determine and effective ways to engage farmers in this training. Federal and state government funding through “Skills for All” present an opportunity for farming systems groups to pursue options to engage with grower groups to provide suitable training models.

Ag Ex was invited to present to the NRM Council in March 2013, along with representatives from the main commodity groups that will be part of the new Primary Industries Council structure to replace SAFF. At the presentation Ag Ex highlighted the pathways to engage with the farming sector through grower groups and the farm adviser networks.

Ag Ex made a written submission to the Parliamentary Committee on Sustainable Agriculture and a follow up presentation to the committee by Bill and Mark in Parliament House. The committee welcomed the presentation by Ag Ex and indicated further dialogue would take place.

4. Ag Ex is well connected and influencing decision makers and funders.

The Ag Ex strategic plan was finalised in May 2012 and published in June 2012. This a five year plan (2012 to 2017) with four goals and a number of outcomes identified for each of the goals. This document will be reviewed each year by the committee to assess its progress.

The development of the Ag Ex communications plan commenced this year and will be completed in 2013/14.

A sponsorship policy and plan is proposed to be prepared to better manage Ag Ex’s sponsorship opportunities. This will be progressed in 2013/14.

Ag Ex was represented at a range of events over 2012/13. These included the Year of the Farmer event in Rundle Mall hosted by PIRSA, the Eyre Peninsula Field days in the PIRSA tent with LEADA, the GRDC Adviser Update in Adelaide and the Hart Field Day.



Mark Stanley, Executive Officer

Ag Excellence Alliance Inc

HISTORY

Ag Excellence Alliance Inc (Ag Ex) was formed in 2005 in response to a need to provide support and engender collaboration amongst the established and emerging broad acre farming systems groups across the state. The emergence of these groups was, in part, a response to the withdrawal of funding for extension services by the state government and also through the drive and desire by local farming communities to take charge of their RD&E agendas. In its early stages, Ag Ex also identified areas across the state where there were gaps in group representation. This led to the formation of Northern Sustainable Soils in the Northern Yorke Peninsula and the Lower Eyre Agricultural Development Association on the lower Eyre Peninsula. From its beginnings as a single project-driven group funded through the National Landcare Program, Ag Ex has now expanded its influence and operations, managing a range of projects from a diversity of funders that contribute to the sustainability of farm businesses across the state through close collaboration with, and support for farming systems groups.

Past Chairs:

Jeanette Long

Mick Faulkner

STAKEHOLDERS

Farming System Groups

- Advisory Board of Agriculture
- Agriculture Kangaroo Island
- Eyre Peninsula Agricultural Research Foundation
- Hart Field Site Group
- Lower Eyre Agricultural Development Association
- Lucerne Australia
- Mallee Sustainable Farming Systems
- MacKillop Farm Management Group
- Mid-North High Rainfall Zone
- Northern Sustainable Soils
- Partners in Grain
- SANTFA
- SPAA Precision Agriculture Australia
- Upper North Farming Systems
- Yorke Peninsula Alkaline Soils Group

Funders & Sponsors:

- Caring for our Country
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry
- Department of Environment, Water & Natural Resources
- Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology
- GRDC
- Mellor Olsson
- Northern & Yorke NRM CFOC

STAKEHOLDERS (CONT...)

Natural Resource Management Boards

- Adelaide Mount Lofty Ranges NRM Board
- Eyre Peninsula NRM Board
- Kangaroo Island NRM Board
- Northern & Yorke NRM Board
- SA Murray-Darling Basin NRM Board
- South East NRM Board

Key contractors:

- Ag Consulting
- Agrilink
- Growing Solutions
- Mike Roberts Communications
- Missing Link Media
- Regional Connections
- Rural Solutions
- TAFE SA Regional
- Woof Media
- Yeruga Cropping Solutions

VISION & MISSION STATEMENTS

Vision:

SA's broad acre farmers, through grower groups, have the resources, networks, knowledge and skills to assist in achieving sustainable, resilient and prosperous agricultural industries and communities.

Mission:

Ag Ex supports SA's broad acre agriculture communities by leading innovation and practice change through grower groups, in collaboration with advisors, natural resources management organisations, agribusiness, research and development organisations, Government and education institutions.

CURRENT PROJECTS

Project Name	Funded by:	Start	End
Grain & Graze 2	GRDC/Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry	January 2010	December 2013
Northern & Yorke Regional Landcare Facilitator	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry	July 2010	June 2013
Brome Grass Control	Northern & Yorke NRM CFOC Baseline Funding	July 2011	June 2013
Native Pollination	Northern & Yorke NRM CFOC Baseline Funding	July 2011	June 2013
Young Grower Workshops in the Northern & Yorke region	Northern & Yorke NRM CFOC Baseline Funding	July 2011	June 2013
Social Media Project	Caring for our Country Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry	October 2011	June 2013
Productivity Places Program	Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology	October 2011	February 2014
CFI Communication Activities, Northern & Yorke	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry	Feb 2012	December 2013
Improved communication of N&Y NRM outcomes through the use of social media in the Northern & Yorke region	Northern & Yorke NRM	March 2012	December 2013
Women in Leadership - THE NEXT STEP	Primary Industries & Regions SA	June 2012	June 2013
Strategic directions, communication and integration of sustainable agriculture in NRM	Department of Environment, Water & Natural Resources	July 2012	June 2013
Farmers leading and learning about the soil carbon frontier	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry - Action on the Ground	August 2012	March 2015

STAFF MEMBERS

Michael Richards:

Michael is the Regional Landcare Facilitator for the Northern & Yorke NRM Region, and has been in this position since September 2009.

Debbie Gray:

Debbie has been employed by Ag Ex since July 2012, and provides administrative support to Michael Richards.

Mandy Pearce:

Mandy is the Administration Manager for Ag Excellence, having been with Ag Ex since July 2011. Mandy also coordinates the Grain Graze 2 (East South Australia) program.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Current committee:

Bill Long	Chairperson
Mark Stanley	Vice-Chair
Emma Leonard	Committee Member
Gemma Walker	Committee Member
Greg Cock	Committee Member
Ian McFarland	Committee Member
Jeanette Long	Committee Member
Kieran Wauchope	Committee Member
Leighton Pearce	Committee Member
Mick Faulkner	Committee Member
Nicole Dimos	Committee Member
Tony Fox	Committee Member
Trent Potter	Committee Member

Sub-committees:

Finance

Jeanette Long, Michael Richards (staff), Mandy Pearce (staff)

Grain & Graze

Bill Long, Mick Faulkner, Jeanette Long, Mandy Pearce (staff)

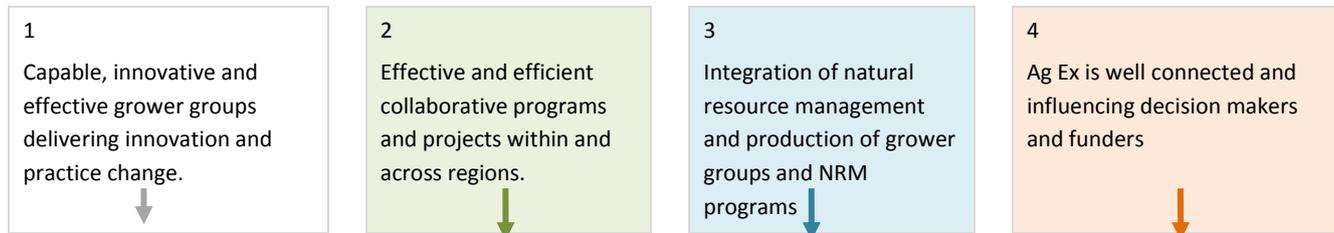
Social Media Project

Bill Long, Mark Stanley, Jeanette Long, Leighton Pearce, Michael Richards (staff), Mandy Pearce (staff)

STRATEGIC PLAN

Strategic Plan updated in February 2012.

Our **GOALS**: *What we work toward achieving*



Our **OBJECTIVES**: *What we can achieve in working towards our Goals*

