



**AG EXCELLENCE
ALLIANCE INC**

ANNUAL REPORT

MARCH 18TH 2014

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This is the 10th Ag Excellence Alliance Forum and begins the 10th year of operations of Ag Excellence Alliance. While this is a great milestone to celebrate, several of the Farming Systems Groups have been in existence for a much greater time than this, for example Hart celebrated their 31st annual field day in 2013. This is not surprising as Ag Ex came into existence to support SA's broadacre agriculture communities by leading innovation and practice change through grower groups, in collaboration with advisors, NRM organisations, agribusiness, research and development organisations, government and education institutions.

The farming systems groups have a good relationship with funders and farmer members and their reputations have been increased by the way in which projects have been developed, managed and extended to farmers and consultants. In these days of reduced government spending in extension, these groups are now seen as primary extension providers and to maintain, or preferably improve this, we have to become even more professional in the way we work.

As this is my first report as Chairman I started thinking about this by reading Bill Long's report from 2013. Bill recognised the volunteers in all the organisations that are represented here and it is absolutely true that without these volunteers, none of the farming systems groups or Ag Excellence Alliance itself would still be operating today. We need to recognise the contributions these volunteers have made to all groups but also not expect the same people to stay in these roles for ever. Burnout is a significant problem for all groups and we need to maintain the vigour of all committees by encouraging new committee members who can bring in new ideas.

Ag Ex and the farming systems groups have to become even more professional in the way we operate into the future. Several farming systems groups have undertaken strategic planning exercises over the past few years and Ag Ex intends to do likewise at the first committee meeting after the AGM. We all need to look at our key strengths and weaknesses and set out how we need to operate in the next five years to make even more of the base that has been established over the past 10 years.

If we look at the four main goals of Ag Excellence, the first goal is to build capable, innovative and effective grower groups. This means groups with effective governance and organisational processes who can develop, manage and deliver projects that address the key needs of industry, regions and communities. It also means that grower groups have sustainable funding models. This goal will be strengthened by Ag Ex and the farming systems groups looking at where they have come from and where they need to be in five years' time. Just standing still is no way for any of us to progress. We all need strong business models based on a well-developed strategic vision.

The second main goal of Ag Ex is to develop effective and efficient collaborative programs and projects within and across regions. We have tried to do this by the

project planning workshop with farming systems groups two years ago and getting projects funded that can be undertaken by a range of farming systems groups across the state. One thing we all need to improve to make this even more effective is the communication between all groups, so that we are sharing knowledge and possible projects rather than competing with each other.

Goal three is to support integration of natural resource management and production through grower groups and NRM programs. This, I think, has been a strength of Ag Ex in assisting the bringing together of these groups in facilitated workshops to look at what issues are held in common. The new GRDC funded project “Delivering multiple benefit messages - a partnership with NRM” which is being delivered through Ag Ex is a great example of this integration of production and NRM.

The last main goal is to strengthen communication and to influence decision makers and funders. This forum is a key way in which the farming systems groups come together to show what they do and to get messages to key decision makers and also funding bodies like GRDC. Another key strength of many of the people who are members of Ag Ex or farming systems groups is their involvement in a range of committees that prioritise and determine research and extension programs and communicate these issues to funding bodies such as GRDC.

As we begin the 10th year of Ag Ex Alliance I would like to publically acknowledge all of the members of the committees who have worked diligently over that time frame. They have brought together a very wide range of skills that have helped to set up the farming systems groups to where we are today. The challenge is to now further develop both Ag Ex and the farming systems groups by defining where we need to be into the future and setting up even more improved business models for all groups so we are not just standing still but continuing to deliver innovation and practice change for the agricultural community.

Trent Potter, Chairperson
Ag Excellence Alliance Inc



EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

The Ag Excellence Alliance (Ag Ex) continues to play an important role in supporting farming systems groups across the state. Mandy Pearce keeps the operations of Ag Ex functioning in a highly effective and efficient manner. Our new chairman, Trent Potter, has settled into his role and is providing leadership and direction for the organisation. The committee members are critical to the ongoing function and success of Ag Ex. They provide a critical sounding board and direction for the operations of Ag Ex, and all do so on a voluntary basis.

Ag Ex is entering its tenth year of operation. The changing scene of regional RD&E and natural resource management has prompted Ag Ex to conduct a comprehensive review of its short and longer term plans following this year's forum.

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.

Governance is high on the agenda of Ag Ex. Ag Ex maintains 12 policies which direct its functions, develops a twelve month cash flow budget, provides project profit and loss statements at all committee meetings, and maintains a conflict of interest register.

The Ag Ex executive team for 2013/14 has been Trent Potter, Ian McFarland, Bill Long, Gemma Walker, 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.

This year's forum and grower group awards have again been supported by a GRDC Industry Development Award. In addition, GrainGrowers Limited, DEWNR, NYNRM, EPNRM and ANLNRM have supported for this year's forum.

Mellor Olsson continues to support the communication activities of Ag Ex. 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 underwent significant upgrades this year to improve the functionality and look as part of the Social Media in Agriculture project. Whilst the social media project has been completed, there are still more videos to come on-line over the coming months.

YP Field Days

Ag Ex supported its own site at the Yorke Peninsula Field Days in 2013, organised by Michael Richards. Rural Solutions SA, the Social Media Project, Michael's stock water demonstration, the CFI Extension and Outreach project, the Yorke Peninsula Alkaline Soils Group, GRDC, GrainGrowers Limited, and Rural Training were on the site.

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

Ag Ex currently has twenty new and continuing projects on its books with support from a range of funders. Some of these projects are being led by Ag Ex whilst others are in partnership with a range of different organisations. In 2013/14 two large projects came to a completion, the Social Media in Agriculture project and the Grain and Graze Two project.

Michael Richards in his role as Regional Landcare Facilitator for the Northern Yorke NRM regions has attracted funding for a range of short and longer-term projects addressing snail control, weed management and farm ecosystems.

Below are brief summaries of the new projects that Ag Ex has become involved in this year:

Better NRM outcomes through increased capacity of Farming System Group: The Community Landcare project aims to build the capacity of FSG by delivering training to support the members in taking on leadership roles, allowing for long-term succession planning to occur, and ultimately leading to stronger and more effective farming systems groups.

Holistic Farm Decision Making: This is a Landcare Innovations project in partnership with the Birchip Cropping Group and the CSIRO. It is being led by Tim McLellan and Harm van Rees from BCG. The project involves the integration and testing of an integrated decision making tool bringing together a range of current tools.

National Paddock Survey: This is a GRDC funded project in partnership with the Birchip Cropping Group and the CSIRO. It is being led by Harm van Rees. It involves the intensive monitoring of 200 paddocks across the grain growing regions of Australia to determine yield limiting factors in a range of cropping environments.

Grain & Graze 3: This is a GRDC funded project and follows on directly from G&G 2

Northern Yorke Regional Landcare Facilitator: Ag Ex has signed a twelve month contract to supply the RLF services for the Northern Yorke NRM Board. Michael Richards is again fulfilling this role.

Electronic Technologies Project: This is a national project funded by GRDC and managed by ORM. Mandy and Mark are involved in the delivery of the project in SA and sit on the national project committee led by Gavin Beever from ORM. Two farmer workshops are planned for SA in Murray Bridge on April 7 and Minnipa on April 8 to be led by Pru Cook from Victorian DEPI.

Trial Design & Evaluation Project: This is a Community Landcare project and is being led by Mark and Trent. Two workshops are planned for April 10 in Murray Bridge and

April 11 in Kadina with Roger Lawes from the CSIRO leading the technical presentations.

Ag Ex has responded to a range of funding calls over 2013/14 with the Caring for Our Country Innovations Grants, Caring for Our Country community grants, the State NRM community grants and community grants with the NY NRM Board, EP NRM Board and the AML NRM Board.

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

Ag Ex supports a range of initiatives to create stronger links between NRM regions and farming groups across the state.

Regional NRM workshops

DEWNR again supported regional sustainable agriculture / NRM stakeholder workshops again in 2013/14. Jeanette Long and Sharon Honner facilitated these.

Northern Yorke Regional Landcare Facilitator

Michael Richards continues to fill the Regional Landcare Facilitator role with Ag Ex on behalf of the Northern Yorke NRM Board. Michael provides a key conduit between production focussed grower groups and NRM, and ensuring links with research and development organisations are actively maintained.

State Landcare Conference

Ag Ex supported the State Landcare Conference held in November 2013, and organised by the Landcare Association of SA. Mandy represented Ag Ex on one of the conference planning sub committees, whilst I made a presentation about the Social Media in Agriculture project.

Grains and NRM Partnerships

This is a new project funded by the GRDC aimed at developing stronger links between technical providers in the grains industry with NRM organisations in southeastern Australia. Jen Lillecrapp has been contracted to lead the project. The project is partnering with Mallee Sustainable Farming, the Eyre Peninsula NRM Board, Northern Yorke NRM Board, the Murray Darling NRM Board and CMA's in western Victoria and NSW. The project will run for three years.

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

Ag Ex continually keeps in contact with key stakeholders to ensure the views of grower groups are being heard and that opportunities for collaboration and support are captured. Ag Ex is continually being approached by a range of organisations wanting to tap into the grower groups networks or to utilise the Ag Ex communications network. Some examples include the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, a philanthropic organisation looking to invest in sustainable agriculture; Digital Farm TV linking the Ag Ex videos to their web site at www.digitalfarmtv.com; WA Grower Group Alliance are

continually sharing information and resources with Ag Ex; a range of other organisations in publicising events and resource.

Primary Producers SA

Ag Ex has had ongoing discussions with Rob Kerin and Amy Williams from PPSA to discuss working relationships between the organisations. A paper was prepared for PPSA outlining the opportunities for working with Ag Ex.

PIRSA

Ag Ex has had ongoing discussions with PIRSA regarding the New Horizons project. A proposal was put to PIRSA outlining how grower groups and independent advisers' role might be engaged in the project. A presentation was made to the project management committee in January, outlining the proposal prepared by Ag Ex. The will be part of the funding submission being put to the Commonwealth Government by PIRSA.

Ag Ex has been asked to sit on a PIRSA drought technical committee that will evaluate the current tools and technologies for drought decision making, which in turn will help to develop the South Australian Drought Policy.

Ag Ex has had various conversations with Rural Solutions SA about their role in delivering regional consultancy services, and the development of joint project initiatives. Rural Solutions want to increase their regional presence and believe they can add value to the development and delivery of regionally based projects.

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

Bill Long

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
- Department of Environment, Water & Natural Resources
- Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology
- GrainGrowers ltd
- GRDC
- Mellor Olsson
- Northern & Yorke NRM CFOC
- Primary Industries and Regions SA

STAKEHOLDERS (CONT...)

Natural Resource Management Boards

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

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
Productivity Places Program	Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology	October 2011	February 2014
Northern & Yorke Regional Landcare Facilitator	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry	July 2013	June 2014
New Electronic Technologies	GRDC (through ORM Communications)	July 2013	June 2014
Strategic communication and integration of sustainable agriculture in NRM	Department of Environment, Water & Natural Resources	July 2013	June 2014
Women in Leadership - Emerging Leaders	Primary Industries & Regions SA	June 2013	June 2014
Better NRM outcomes through increased capacity of FSG (aka Growing Leaders)	Caring for our Country Sustainable Environment and Sustainable Agriculture stream	July 2013	December 2014
Grain & Graze 3	GRDC (through Southern Farming Systems)	January 2014	December 2014
Innovative monitoring to improve snail control and increase soil protection	Caring for our Country Sustainable Environment and Sustainable Agriculture stream	July 2013	December 2014
Training farming systems groups in trial development, management and evaluation	Caring for our Country Sustainable Environment and Sustainable Agriculture stream	July 2013	December 2014
Farmers leading and learning about the soil carbon frontier	Department of Agriculture	August 2012	March 2015
Holistic Farm Decision Making	Department of Agriculture (Landcare Innovations Project, led by Birchip Cropping Group)	July 2014	December 2015
National Paddock Survey	GRDC (through Birchip Cropping Group)	2015	2017
Delivering multiple benefit messages - A partnership with NRM	GRDC	February 2014	January 2018
Healthy farm ecosystems contributing to NRM & Food Security in a changing climate	Northern & Yorke NRM CFOC Baseline Funding	November 2013	June 2018
Improved soil cover on erodible soils	Northern & Yorke NRM CFOC Baseline Funding	November 2013	June 2018
Remote Sensing Snail Reproduction & Life Cycle	Northern & Yorke NRM CFOC Baseline Funding	November 2013	June 2018

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.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

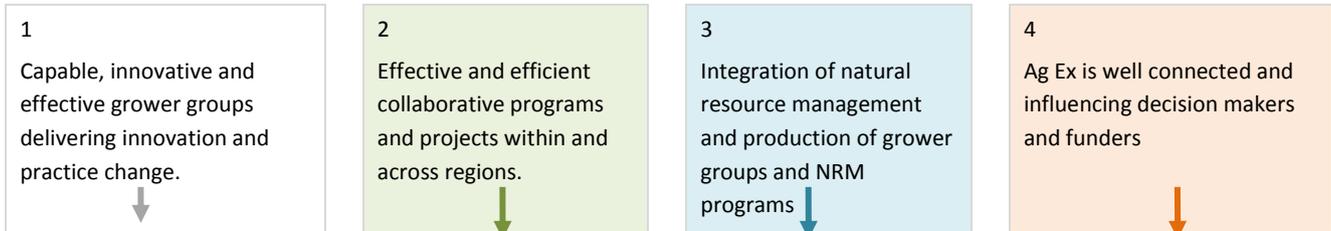
Current committee:

Trent Potter	Chairperson
Mark Stanley	Vice-Chair
Darren Arney	Committee Member
Greg Cock	Committee Member
Nicole Dimos	Committee Member
Tony Fox	Committee Member
Emma Leonard	Committee Member
Bill Long	Committee Member
Jeanette Long	Committee Member
Ian McFarland	Committee Member
Louise McIntosh	Committee Member
Leighton Pearce	Committee Member
Gemma Walker	Committee Member

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*

