



Ag Excellence Alliance Inc

Annual Report

March 31st 2015

Chairman's Report

This is the 10th year of operations of Ag Excellence Alliance (Ag Ex). 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. These issues are just as important, if not more important, today as they were 10 years ago.

Ag Ex and several farming systems groups have undertaken strategic planning exercises over the past few years and Ag Ex again looked at our plan this last year. 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.

One major issue that faces all farming systems groups and Ag Ex in future will be the increased uncertainty of funding sources with Federal government funding sources being cut. This will make us all much more reliant on a smaller funding bucket and may increase competition between all groups. Ag Ex hopes, however, that it will have the opposite effect of bringing all groups together to coordinate proposals and undertake joint projects to the benefit of all groups.

What have we been doing in the past year? We received funding to present several workshops on trial design, management and trial analyses. We presented these in April and October last year. The aim of these workshops was to assist farming systems groups to do an even better job of undertaking research and development projects and we had Roger Lawes from CSIRO in WA and Beverley Gogel from Statistical Analysis for the Grains Industry (SAGI), based in Adelaide. These workshops were very well received and showed what could be done to improve our trials. One additional result of these workshops was further discussion with SAGI about analysis programmes and this is being taken further. Hopefully we can get analysis programmes that will work better than we currently have and they will be a reasonable price.

Another project has been the writing case studies course that began 30 March 2015. The aim of this is to give practical training to groups so that our case studies can be clear and concise and get the immediate attention of readers. As part of this project Deanna Lush will be training the group but also giving one on one training for case studies we write.

The last project I want to discuss is the On-line Farm Trials project. Ag Ex hosted project managers from Federation University and members of farming systems groups in SA to talk about involvement in the on-line farm trials project. This project will store trial results and reports from all groups who are interested in putting their data on the system. It is searchable and will help anyone interested in chasing particular trial results to increase productivity and sustainability of their farming enterprise.

If we look at the four main goals of Ag Ex, 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 three 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 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 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) has had another productive year. Mandy Pearce maintains the operations of Ag Ex, ensuring it functions in a highly effective and efficient manner. Trent Potter completed his second year as chair, providing leadership and direction for the organisation. The committee members continue to provide a critical sounding board and direction for the operations of Ag Ex, and all do so on a voluntary basis.

Ag Ex has now been operating for ten years. Regional RD&E and natural resource management continues to evolve. Grower groups still play a highly significant role in farmer driven, local level validation and extension of research.

This report has been aligned with the goals of the Ag Ex Strategic Plan. Ag Ex is now three years into five year plan.

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

Ag Ex take its governance responsibilities seriously, maintaining 12 policies which direct its functions, develops a 12-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 2014/15 has been Trent Potter, Ian McFarland, Bill Long, Gemma Walker, Mark Stanley and Mandy Pearce. The executive team is an important adjunct to the committee, providing a forum for discussion and decision making without the need for the whole committee to be involved.

The GRDC is again the major supporter of this year's forum through an Industry Development Award. In addition, Grain Growers Limited, PIRSA, DEWNR, Natural Resources SA Murray-Darling Basin, Natural Resources Eyre Peninsula and Natural Resources Adelaide & Mount Lofty Ranges are supporting 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 on the Ag Ex blog.

Ag Ex continues to be active on social media via its Facebook page and Twitter. These platforms provide an effective method for Ag ex to cross promote grower group activities and Ag Ex products and project outcomes.

Eyre Peninsula Field Days

Ag Ex participated in the Eyre Peninsula Field Days in 2014 with a site in the PIRSA pavilion. This proved to be highly effective in raising the profile of Ag Ex due to the range of stakeholders present in the site.

LambEx conference

Ag Ex supported the national LambEx conference in Adelaide in July with a display site. The presences of Ag Ex demonstrated that Ag Ex is committed to all aspects of broad acre farming – not just the grains industry.

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

Ag Ex currently has sixteen 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. Summaries of these projects are provided below:

Natural Resources Northern & Yorke

Natural Resources Northern & Yorke has continued their contract with Ag Ex to maintain the Regional Landcare Facilitator position, with Michael Richards filling that role. In addition, Natural Resources Northern & Yorke has contracted Ag Ex to deliver three further projects on ecosystems management in a changing climate, remote sensing of snails, and improved soil cover on erodible soils.

Better NRM outcomes through increased capacity of Farming System Group

The Community Landcare project aims to build the capacity of farming systems groups 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. This project concluded in March this year.

Farm for Prophet – Enhancing the farm resource base and profitability through better risk management

This is a Landcare Innovations project in partnership with the Birchip Cropping Group and the CSIRO, being led by Tim McLellan from Birchip Cropping Group and Harm van Rees. The project is in its second year, and involves development and testing of an integrated decision making tool bringing together a range of current decision support tools. The project will engage with grower groups once the new tool is ready for testing in the middle of the year.

National Paddock Survey

This is a GRDC funded project in partnership with the Birchip Cropping Group and the CSIRO, and is being led by Harm van Rees. It involves the intensive monitoring of 240 paddocks across the grain growing regions of Australia to determine yield limiting factors in a range of cropping environments. Thirty crops are being monitored across SA.

Grain & Graze 3

This is a GRDC funded project and follows on directly from G&G 2. The project is being led by Cam Nicholson, and is focusing on risk management and decision making in the farm business.

eXtension

This pilot project is being led by ORM from Bendigo, and is a flow-on project the Electronics Technologies project that Ag Ex was involved in last year. The project is trialling whether the eXtension model developed in the United States has value for the Australian grains industry. It has commenced with two Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) funded projects that have a specific and applied focus on the fields of crop nutrition and field crop diseases. The pilot is testing the potential of on-line systems to enable collaboration, facilitate the creation of virtual learning communities and promote knowledge exchange and technology adoption via closer and more immediate levels of engagement across the Australian grains sector.

Training Farming Systems Groups in Trial Design & Evaluation

This is a Community Landcare project and is being led by Mark and Trent. This project concluded in March. Four workshops were conducted, two workshops in April 10 with Roger Laws from the CSIRO on trial design, and two in October with Dini Ganesalingam and Bev Gogel from Statistical Analysis for the Grains Industry (SAGI) on trial analysis. In addition there are now a number of support resources available on the Ag Ex web site. As a result of this project there are moves afoot with the support of SAGI to provide greater support to independent researchers and grower groups in trial design and analysis.

Women in Leadership

This highly successful program, led by Jeanette Long, is supported by PIRSA and is in its third year of operation. The project support women over twelve months to develop new networks and advanced leadership skills to enable them to take on greater roles in their communities.

Farmers leading and learning about the soil carbon frontier

Funded by the Carbon Farming Initiative, this Action on the Ground project is its final year. The project is led by Harm van Rees and has engaged farming systems groups across the state to become involved in trial work and paired paddock analysis to gain a greater understanding of soil carbon.

Production and environment partnerships

This GRDC funded project is being led by Jen Lillecrapp and is in its second year. The project is working with NRM organisations in SA, Victoria and NSW to increase their understanding and capacity to extend grains industry technologies and practices that have both a profitability and environmental outcome. The project is bridging the gap between grains industry research and extension and NRM personnel.

Telling your story – developing writing skills

This project has been funded by the National Landcare Program with support from Ag Ex Mallee Sustainable Farming Inc. The project is providing an opportunity for those involved with grower groups to be mentored by AgCommunicators' Deanna Lush, former editor of the Stock Journal,

in developing writing and media skills to tell their group's story and get it published. The project commences with a workshop prior to this year's Ag Ex forum.

On Line Farm Trials portal

Ag Ex facilitated a meeting between SA grower groups and project staff from the Federation University to discuss involvement in the Farm Trials portal project being funded by the GRDC. The portal is designed to be an interactive portal for hosting trial results from grower groups across the country. Ag Ex is working with the university to work out how best to engage with SA grower groups to begin the process of loading historical trial data.

Ag Ex has responded to a range of funding calls over 2014/15 with the National Landcare Program, Regional NRM bodies, GRDC and the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal.

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, some of these are reflected in the project described above.

Regional NRM workshops

DEWNR has supported Ag Ex to deliver regional workshops with NRM organisations to develop their staff's skills in working with the farming community. Jeanette and Bill Long have delivered these workshops.

Apps book update

DEWNR and Natural Resources SA Murray-Darling Basin has supported Ag Ex to update the popular Apps book put together by Mandy and Leighton Pearce. The Apps book is also now available on the Ag Ex website as an interactive online version that can be continually updated as new apps come on line and old one are upgraded.

State Landcare Conference

Ag Ex is again supporting the 2015 State Landcare Conference being organised by the Landcare Association of SA and to be held in the Riverland later this year.

Landcare Association statement of common purpose

Ag Ex is working with the Landcare Association of SA in developing a statement of common purpose. This agreement is not binding, but will identify opportunities for mutually beneficial support and promotion.

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

National Grower Group Collaboration

Ag Ex has been actively working with grower group alliances in Western Australia and Victoria, as well as larger regional groups in NSW (Farm Link and Central West Farming Systems) and

Victoria (Birchip Cropping Group), to address issues facing grower groups and examining the need for a national grower group network.

WA Grower Group Alliance (WA GGA)

Ag Ex partnered with the WA GGA in developing a proposal to industry to support leadership development in grower groups across Australia. So far the proposal has not gained support.

Ag Ex is also working closely with the WA GGA to develop relations with SAGI to identify ways in which grower groups can be better supported in trial design and analysis.

PIRSA

Ag Ex is continuing dialogue with PIRSA regarding the New Horizons project. PIRSA are supporting the grower group awards in 2015, and are continuing to support the Women in Leadership program.

DEWNR

DEWNR, through Tim Hermann's influence, have continued to support Ag Ex in 2014/15. This has included support for Mandy's time to manage Ag Ex communications and organise the forum, support for the update of the apps book, and support for the NRM engaging with farmers workshops being ran by Bill and Jeanette Long.

GRDC

Ag Ex has been having ongoing discussion with the GRDC for support of grower group activities in SA. Suggestion of support include:

- Engaging all groups in the On Farm Trials portal program
- Further role out of the trials design and analysis training
- Supporting the Ag Ex communications strategy - broadening the scope to include R&D being done by resellers, private consultants
- Support for the annual Ag Ex forums - invitations to grower group from NSW and Vic.
- Working towards to a Southern Region Grower Group support network
- Chair / EO support network, meeting to discuss issues and opportunities
- Develop WHS policies (requirements of legislation)

Goyder's Line Sustainability Hub Agreement

Ag Ex has signed an MOU with the Goyder Line Sustainability Hub. This hub is a regionally driven community cooperative and regional network that showcases and incubates research, regional business and adaptive rural living practices in the Yorke and Mid North Region of South Australia.

It acts as a research generator, industry cluster, knowledge exchange and sustainable education platform - a catalyst for driving research investment and sustainable business growth in a challenging economic environment. Ag Ex commitment is to assist in generating ideas and providing input into initiatives which the hub identifies as priority issues.

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 (Society of 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
- 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
- Brackenlea Partners
- Growing Solutions
- Linden Masters Consulting
- McCallum Agribusiness Consulting
- Regional Connections
- Rural Solutions
- 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
Innovative monitoring to improve snail control and increase soil protection	Caring for our Country Sustainable Environment and Sustainable Agriculture stream	July 2013	March 2015
Training farming systems groups in trial development, management and evaluation	Caring for our Country Sustainable Environment and Sustainable Agriculture stream	July 2013	March 2015
Farmers leading and learning about the soil carbon frontier	Department of Agriculture	August 2012	March 2015
Better NRM outcomes through increased capacity of FSG (aka Growing Leaders)	Caring for our Country Sustainable Environment and Sustainable Agriculture stream	July 2013	March 2015
Northern & Yorke Regional Landcare Facilitator	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry	July 2014	June 2015
Building communication skills of NRM workers and farmer groups	Department of Environment, Water & Natural Resources	July 2014	June 2015
Women in Leadership	Primary Industries & Regions SA	June 2014	June 2015
Enhancing the farm resource base and profitability through better risk management	Department of Agriculture (Landcare Innovations Project, led by Birchip Cropping Group)	July 2014	March 2016
Grain & Graze 3	GRDC (through Southern Farming Systems)	January 2014	December 2016
Delivering multiple benefit messages - A partnership with NRM (aka Production & Environment Partnerships)	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
Sharing and "telling the story" to increase on-ground outcomes	National Landcare Program (through Mallee Sustainable Farming)	February 2015	June 2016
The national paddock survey initiative	GRDC (through Birchip Cropping Group)	July 2014	July 2019

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

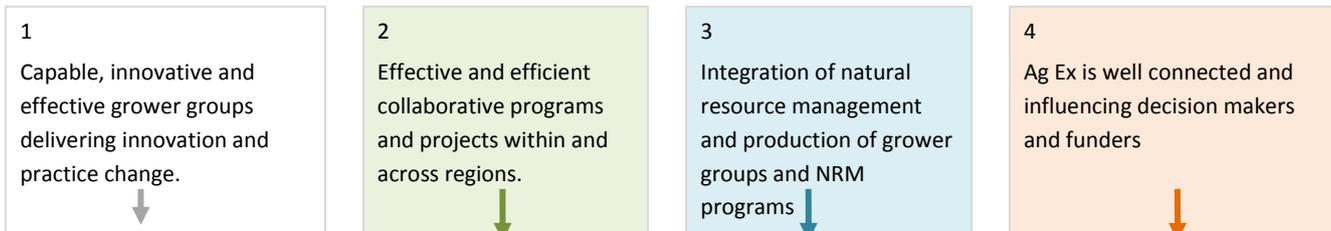
Current committee:

Trent Potter	Chairperson
Mark Stanley	Vice-Chair
Jeanette Long	Treasurer
Darren Arney	Committee Member
Andrew Curtis	Committee Member
Bernadette Lawson	Committee Member
Bill Long	Committee Member
Krysteen McElroy	Committee Member
Ian McFarland	Committee Member
Louise McIntosh	Committee Member
Leighton Pearce	Committee Member
Sarah Noack	Committee Member
Richard Saunders	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*

