



Ag Excellence Alliance Inc.

Annual Report

April 8, 2016

Chairman Report

Ag Ex Alliance 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 when we first started this journey.

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

The big change in the funding situation for farming systems groups will be the changing funding basis for GRDC projects. The regional validation, extension and communication process will be conducted in 1-3 year projects which hopefully will give groups more project options in the area they are most suited. For these projects, GRDC will approach several possible service providers to quote on a particular project. In future, 1-3 year projects will also be associated with longer-term projects to provide validation, extension and communications of the research outcomes of these projects.

Last year Ag Ex Alliance once again hosted a meeting to investigate relevant issues for growers across our farming systems groups. This meeting was attended not only by SA groups but also representatives from NSW, Victoria and Western Australia. We developed and prioritised a range of issues and then, in small groups, we began to flesh out the processes we would need to follow to develop these into projects and who may be interested in being a part of each project. It was really good to see groups working to develop possible collaborative projects. Ag Ex Alliance is working to further develop these possible projects.

The other part of this planning day was some discussion on the future of farming systems groups and whether there was a place for a national farming systems group body. While the groups were quite evenly split about whether we should go national or not, the wide ranging discussion about this gave us a basis for further consideration of this idea into the future.

Last year we were introduced to the On-line Farm Trials project. Ag Ex Alliance 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 has now been completed and we now have a store of trial results and reports from all groups who were 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.

Late last year the Ag Ex Alliance committee began the process of updating our strategic plan to take us forward for the next 10 years but with particular focus on the next 5 years. 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.

From our current strategic plan we have four main goals. The first goal is to build capable, innovative and effective grower groups. This means groups with effective governance and organisational processes that 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. Ag Ex and the farming systems groups looking at where they have come from and where they need to be in five years' time will strengthen this goal. 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 AgEx is to develop effective and efficient collaborative programs and projects within and across regions. AgEx have achieved through the needs analysis process conducted with farming systems groups, and then targeting projects that can be undertaken by a range of farming systems groups across the state. One thing all groups 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 believe, has been a strength of AgEx 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 AgEx 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 the Australian Government and the R&D corporations. Ag Ex's social media presence and web hub also form an important medium for keeping groups across the state informed.

Trent Potter, Chairman

Ag Excellence Alliance Inc.



Executive Officer Report

Ag Excellence Alliance (Ag Ex) is entering the final year of its current five-year strategic plan. The current plan concludes in 2017. Ag Ex recognises the importance of being responsive and pro-active in times of significant change and so have began the process of developing their next five-year strategic plan (2017 to 2022) with a ten year outlook. A strategic planning day was held in early November with the Ag Ex committee, facilitated by Louise Stock. From this workshop a draft plan is being developed for broader consultation with grower groups, funders and other key stakeholders. A key feature of the new plan will be to focus on providing value to grower groups and associated networks, recognising the important part they play in engaging rural communities in the validation and extension of industry R&D.

Ag Ex Operations

This year saw Mandy Pearce finish her time with Ag Ex as the Administration Manager. Her energy and dedication were pivotal in ensuring the smooth operations of Ag Ex over the previous four years. Whilst she will be missed, Ag Ex has been lucky to quickly fill the gap with Kerry Stockman coming on board. Kerry has quickly picked up from where Mandy left off, and is now providing a great service to the ongoing operations of the organisation. Kerry comes from a family farm in the mid North.

The Ag Ex committee continues to provide effective support and direction for the organisation. Trent has now completed two years as chair, whilst Krysteen McElroy from the MacKillop group is sitting in the wings as Trent's deputy. The last two years has seen a significant shift in committee membership, with a greater emphasis on representation from grower groups. Agency representation from PIRSA and DEWNR is also greatly valued. At our AGM this year we will farewell committee members Richard Saunders, Bill Long, Louise McIntosh, Andrew Curtis and Leighton Pearce. Thank you all for your time and commitment to making Ag Ex the success it has been.

Stakeholder Relationships

Ag Ex continues to develop its relationship with key stakeholders including the R&D corporations.

Ag Ex was represented in a workshop being run by Dairy Australia as part of a cross sector collaboration project involving six RDC's and being funded by the Rural R&D for Profit program. The project is examining private extension provider models with the aim of stimulating private sector extension in Australia to increase returns from R&D.

Ag Ex was represented at the MLA Extension and Adoption workshop conducted in Sydney in October. The workshop produced some good outcomes with representation from all states, both private and government. The new private sector extension network was acknowledged and the need to connect with consultants and grower groups recognised. A team was selected from those present to progress the new MLA extension and adoption model for piloting in 2016.

Ag Ex was also involved in a potential application to the Commonwealth Rural R&D for Profit funding being lead by Curtin University, WA GGA, Farmlink and Birchip Cropping Group. MLA, GRDC and RIRDC

were approached to lead the bid. In the end there were no RDC's willing to take the lead so the bid has been put on hold for the next round of funding. The focus of the project bid was to improve the flexible delivery of extension services to farmers in southern Australia in the 300 to 550 mm rainfall zone, recognising the growing role of private service delivery and not-for-profit farming groups.

Ag Ex has a good relationship with the WA Grower Group Alliance. Ag Ex took part in a national survey of grower groups being conducted by the WA GGA that is examining the history, structure, issues and operations of grower groups. A report will be made available once the project is completed, and should provide good future guidance for groups.

Ag Ex will look to strengthen its ties with the Victorian Grower Group Alliance in 2016.

Geoff Kendell has been appointed as the new VGGA Coordinator and employed by the alliance on a part-time basis.

The ABA has nominated Andrew Kitto from Laura to be the Ag Ex liaison person for the ABA. This is a positive move and should assist in strengthening ties between the ABA and Ag Ex.

Ag Ex has also remained in touch with the developments to progress a concept for a national grower group alliance. This is being driven, particularly strongly, by Di Parsons from Central West Farming Systems (CWFS).

The SA Grains Industry Trust (SAGIT) has initiated a new pool of funds being made available to grower groups for engaging guest speakers at their events. The total pool of funds available for the year is \$50K. Two calls per year are being made however groups are being encouraged to approach SAGIT as the need arises. Ag Ex was asked to promote the funding to groups across the state as they were recognised as having the most effective network for communications. This continues to be a key strength of Ag Ex.

Ag Ex Events

National Future Needs Forum

Ag Ex organised and facilitated the National Future Needs forum for grower groups and key stakeholders in Adelaide on the 17th August, 2015. The forum aimed to attract the key funders of grower group activities to present on their future priorities for RD&E, and for grower groups to identify the issues they thought needed to be addressed for the future of their farming communities. The forum was well represented by grower groups from across southern Australia and the WA Grower Group Alliance. 43 attended the workshop including representatives from MLA, AWI, SAGIT, Sheep Industry Fund, PIRSA, DEWNR and GRDC presenting. 31 opportunities for project development were identified with the top seven being further developed:

1. Innovation in Extension
2. Integrated Farming Systems Project
3. Engaging Youth and Promoting Ag as a Career
4. Robotics and Opportunities for Biotechnology in Agriculture
5. Provenance – Paddock to Plate / Consumer Expectations
6. Support for Landholders to be more Competitive / Resilient Business Managers
7. Water & Nutrition for Cropping & Pastures

Yorke Peninsula Field Days

Ag Ex was a guest in the Northern Yorke NRM pavilion at the Yorke Peninsula Field Days. The first two days were reasonably busy with a constant flow of people coming through the site. Michael Richards, who is contracted by Ag Ex to deliver the Regional Landcare Facilitator role in the Northern Yorke NRM region was also involved, showcasing the project work that he supports across the region. This position is an important link for Ag Ex with NRM, and is a model that could be pursued with other NRM regions.

State Landcare Conference

Ag Ex supported the program development and participated in the State Landcare Conference held in Waikerie in September last year. Kerry and Mandy provided support to the planning committee whilst Linden Masters gave a presentation on the Grains Industry and NRM Working Together project.

Funding and Projects

Ag Ex has responded to Australian Govt, Regional and State NRM and GRDC funding calls this year, with limited success. Funding opportunities have become much tighter and more competitive.

Ag Ex still plays an important role in acting as a project host for unincorporated groups to access funding and conduct activities that provide significant value to local groups.

Ag Ex is again being supported generously by the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources this year not only in support of the forum, but also the communications hub that Ag Ex provides to keep groups across the state informed.

Ag Ex continues to host, manage, deliver and contract projects that meet the ongoing needs of broadacre grower groups across the state. These include:

- Sharing and Telling the Story to Increase On-Ground Outcomes (funded by Australian Government NLP)
- The National Paddock Survey Initiative (funded by GRDC / BCG)
- Enhancing the Farm Resource Base and Profitability through Better Risk Management (funded by BCG / Australian Government NLP)
- Production and Environment Partnerships (funded by GRDC)
- Grain & Graze 3 (funded by GRDC)
- Improved Soil Cover on Erodible Soils (funded by N&Y NRM / Australian Govt)
- Remote Sensing Snail Reproduction & Life Cycle (funded by NY NRM / Australian Govt)
- Healthy Farm Ecosystems contributing to NRM & Food Security in a Changing Climate (funded by N&Y NRM / Australian Govt)
- Women in Leadership (funded by PIRSA)
- N&Y Regional Landcare Facilitator (funded by N&Y NRM / Australian Govt)
- Ag Ex grower group and stakeholder communications (funded by DEWNR)
- Ag Ex Stock Journal grower group monthly page (funded by Mellor Olsson)

In October last year, the Stock Journal that the cost of the monthly grower group page was to increase by over 100%. Subsequently the page has not continued however Ag Ex are in negotiations with Mellor Olsson on how this important service to groups might continue.

Mark Stanley, Executive Officer (strategy)

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, hosting and 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 (ABA)
- Agriculture Kangaroo Island (Ag KI)
- Eyre Peninsula Agricultural Research Foundation (EPARF)
- Hart Field Site Group
- Lower Eyre Agricultural Development Association (LEADA)
- Lucerne Australia
- Mallee Sustainable Farming Systems (MSF)
- MacKillop Farm Management Group (MFMG)
- Mid-North High Rainfall Zone (MNHRZ)
- Northern Sustainable Soils (NSS)
- Partners in Grain (PinG)
- South Australian No-Till Farmers Association (SANTFA)
- Society of Precision Agriculture Australia (SPAA)
- Upper North Farming Systems (UNFS)
- Yorke Peninsula Alkaline Soils Group (YPASG)
- Barossa Improved Grazing Group

Funders & Sponsors

- Caring for our Country
- National Landcare Program
- Department of Agriculture and Water Resources
- Department of Environment, Water & Natural Resources
- Grain Growers Ltd
- GRDC
- Mellor Olsson
- Northern & Yorke NRM CFOC
- Primary Industries and Regions SA

Stakeholders (continued)

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.