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The Ag Excellence Alliance (Ag Ex) continues to provide value to grower networks across south eastern Australia. A feature of this reporting period has been the launch of Ag Ex's new five-year strategic plan and the forum organised for farming systems groups chairs.

Ag Ex launched its new strategic plan at the Eyre Peninsula Field Days in August last year. A key focus of the new plan is providing value to its key partners, which include Farmers, Funders, Grower Groups and Industry, recognising the important part they all play in engaging rural communities in the validation and extension of industry research and development.

The plan refines the vision of Ag Ex to include all industry networks driving profitable farming businesses across southern Australia through effective development, extension and adoption. The following report focuses on the achievements of Ag Ex in relation to its four new goals.

## **1. Empower, support and up skill Ag Ex members and industry networks**

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

- Increasing the effectiveness of extending sustainable agriculture research by farming systems groups (funded by the National Landcare Program)
- The national paddock survey initiative (funded by GRDC / BCG)
- 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 N&Y 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)
- NY Regional Landcare Facilitator (funded by NY NRM / Australian Govt)
- Ag Ex grower group and stakeholder communications (funded by DEWNR)

I represent Ag Ex on the Northern & Yorke NRM Conservation Action Planning (CAP) committee. The CAP process identifies conservation and land management issues, which are prioritised for action, from which projects are developed and funding sought. An added feature of the process has been the branding of the sub-regions within the region, giving local ownership and identity. The plan is for all industry sectors involved in NRM.

One of the outcomes from the grower group survey conducted during the strategic planning process was the upgrading of the Ag Ex e-events diary to make it more user friendly and more widely promoted as the 'go to' calendar for ag events in SA.

Ag Ex is now hosting the State Soils Acidity Program resources after a request from project convenor, Brian Hughes. This is a good example of Ag Ex providing services to government-led programs, thanks to Kerry. Find the resources at <http://agex.org.au/project/soil-acidity>

## **2. Facilitate collaborative technical, business, environmental and social project development**

Ag Ex was party to several project applications and partnership proposals over this reporting period:

- David Miron, University of New England, approached Ag Ex to give provisional support for a CRC bid for Smarter Farming

- Michael Richards submitted a project application to SAGIT, “Evaluation of novel spray applications to control pest snails”
- Rural Solutions SA requested Ag Ex support for the an AWI project application, “Triple R Wool Producers (Risk, Response, Resilience)”
- Greg Cock raised the possibility of Ag Ex becoming involved in the Commonwealth funded “Farming Together Program” being managed by the Federation University. The program, however, did not directly align with Ag Ex priorities.
- Stephen Loss, GRDC, approached Ag Ex to provide support for a project bid on profitable pastures proposal. The focus will be on the low rainfall areas of SA, Vic, NSW and WA and to the Commonwealth R&D for Profit program, being led by the CSIRO, SARDI and Murdoch University.

### 3. Advocate for the role played by grower groups and industry networks

Ag Ex led and was involved in a range of initiatives that were aimed at supporting grower group networks.

- Grower Group Chairs Forum held in February 2017.
- Launch of the new five-year Ag Ex strategic plan in August 2016.
- Involvement in the progress of a national grower group network with the WA Grower Group Alliance, Birchip Cropping Group, CWFS, Farmlink and Southern Farming Systems.
- The WA Grower Group Alliance is coordinating a National Grower Group forum on the 22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2017 to be held in Sydney. The forum theme is *multifunctionality of agriculture and the influence grower groups have on the triple bottom line*.
- The SA Grower Group Survey was conducted in 2016, with the results being incorporated into the new Ag Ex Strategic Plan.
- Ag Ex partnered Primary Producers SA and Livestock SA at the EP Field Days in 2016. Two legacy publications from the *Pathways to Production and Environment* project were launched, along with the new Ag Ex strategic plan.
- Ag Ex had a presence at the Hart Field Day in September 2016, showcasing the Production and Environment Partnerships project.
- Ag Ex was represented at the PPSA / NRM strategic planning workshop held in Adelaide in 2016 where grower engagement in regional NRM was discussed. Ag Ex figured highly in the discussions as a key organisation that was in touch with the needs of group-led groups around the state, and had demonstrated good relationships with NRM.

### 4. Advocate and support the delivery of extension, adoption and practice change

Ag Ex is rolling out the National Landcare Program funded project, ‘*Increasing the effectiveness of extending sustainable agriculture research by farming systems groups*’. The 12-month project has representatives from 12 farming groups involved, up skilling them in extension planning and evaluation. This is a key role identified for Ag Ex to fill in the consultation conducted for the strategic plan and in the *Future Needs* workshop conducted in 2015.

#### Ag Ex Committee

The Ag Ex committee continues to provide enthusiastic and effective support and direction for the organisation. Trent has now successfully completed four years as chair, providing effective leadership and expert guidance to Ag Ex. Krysteen McElroy from the MacKillop group was due to become Chair in 2017/18 however she has moved on from her role with the MFMG and has resigned from the Ag Ex Committee. Agency representation from PIRSA and DEWNR is greatly valued. Kerry Stockman has almost completed her second year as Administration Manager. She has settled well into the role and provides invaluable support to the committee as well as efficiently providing project management support, managing the finances, maintaining the Ag Ex website and managing the social media, e-news and e-events diary.