

# Strengthening the grower group network in South Australia to deliver RD&E

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**PIRSA**

**Agricultural Bureau**  
of South Australia Inc.  
PATHWAY TO IMPROVEMENT



International Agriculture  
for Development  
*securing global food prosperity*



**BACKGROUND**



# BACKGROUND

1. Review and assess grower group operations and R,D&E capacity.
2. Identify the critical success factors for maximising adoption of innovations.
3. Identify group tools, resources and approaches that can be shared across the network.
4. Identify strategies to help groups achieve greater impact.
5. Provide guidance to future industry needs and investment priorities.

# THE STUDY

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1. Some 18 focus group discussions.
2. From Minnipa to Naracoorte and across to KI.
3. Involving 80 participants.
4. In excess of 50 hours of focused discussions.
5. Transcripts from FGD > 60,000 words.





**A  
CHANGING  
ENVIRONMENT**



# A rapidly changing extension environment

1. **Withdrawal of State Govt Funding.**
2. **Some support provided through NRM Boards.**
3. **Ag Bureau perceived to be 'less relevant'.**
4. **Farming systems groups, consultants and agribusiness have helped to fill the void.**
5. **Increasing investment by RDCs into extension.**

# Characteristics of a typical farming systems group member

1. Positive attitudes towards farming into future.
2. Manage on-farm risks carefully, willing to try new practices once proven locally.
3. Willing to share information locally with others.
4. Enjoy social aspects of belonging to a local group.
5. Invest time wisely into attending events.

**UNDERSTANDING  
THE  
EXTENSION  
PROCESS**

# Extension process is often over-simplified

1. Large variance in understanding across groups.
2. 'Piecemeal approach' focusing on specific issues rather than a 'farming systems approach'.
3. Risk of issues selected on personal interest rather than a genuine need amongst the groups.
4. 'Top down' projects with little consultation is a real issue and is not 'farmer driven'.
5. Need to move beyond the 'show and tell'.

# Successful extension approaches

1. High performing groups have a comprehensive strategic plan.
2. Strategic plan provides the guidance for implementation and justification.
3. Groups adopt an integrated 'farming systems approach', integrated crop-livestock and value chain considerations.
4. Consideration to targeting specific farmer profiles; a market segmentation approach.
5. Are able to demonstrate impact through sound M&E activities.

# Strategic Planning

## Barossa Improved Grazing Group - Strategic Plan

Financial Years 2019-2021

**Vision:** Resilient landscapes and land managers

**Mission:** To improve farm grazing systems



Research, Development & Adoption	Partnerships	Communication & Engagement	Capability
Partnering with organisations, delivering locally specific RD&A projects targeted to benefit Barossa land managers	Developing relationships with key stakeholders	Targeting communication and engagement to enable behaviour change to improve farm grazing systems	Developing the capability of BIGG to ensure its continued effectiveness for members, funders and partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual member survey identifies members' needs (ideas, projects, delivery, communication)</li> <li>Year's projects identified</li> <li>Invest in and deliver high quality projects that benefit members and partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual partner survey</li> <li>Identification of current funders, research partners and collaborators on their future needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A responsive communications plan is developed (members: delivers key messages; partners: delivers key outcomes)</li> <li>Identify two new communication pathways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New BIGG governance model</li> <li>Funding covers recurrent costs</li> <li>M&amp;E funding and expertise found</li> <li>Facilitators have clearly defined roles/ goals which are reviewed</li> <li>Target 35-50y Barossa land managers</li> <li>Develop relationships with 18-35y Barossa land managers</li> <li>Collaborative project application submitted</li> </ul>

# **A SENSE OF LOCAL IDENTITY**

# Importance of local identity

1. Groups 'add value' to local communities in terms of lifting profitable production; economic impact.
2. Groups fulfill important social outlet for support.
3. A sense of community identify underpins the group; only the group name changes periodically.
4. Many Ag Bureau groups have transitioned to farming systems groups in recent years.
5. All groups are challenged with declining rural populations, larger farm sizes.



# COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

# Community leadership

1. **Successful groups have outstanding governance and leadership qualities.**
2. **Cross-over leadership to other organisations in the community (school, sporting, CFS).**
3. **AgEx and groups help build leadership capability (incl young farmers); benefits all in the community.**
4. **This represents an area of 'market failure' and argument for greater support from government.**
5. **Hart Graduate Internship program an excellent model warranting duplication.**

**WHAT MAKES  
GROUPS  
SUCCESSFUL?**

# What makes groups successful?

1. Opportunity to conduct on-farm trials & demo's.
2. Independent source of credible & unbiased info.
3. Ability to deliver 'flagship events' (Expo's Field days).
4. Serve as a gateway for new farmers to adapt and access new technologies and practices.
5. Support farmers and families in tough time; RUOK?

**WHAT  
WORKS  
WELL**

# What works well

- 1. Adopting a 'hub approach' to support and service local farmer group needs and activities (UNFS).**
- 2. Maintaining accurate membership databases, complementing targeted use of social media (MSF) & constantly seeking feedback from members (SPAA).**
- 3. Developing clear 'value propositions' in terms of what groups want to achieve and represent (BIGG).**
- 4. Manage financial risks, make hard decisions (MSF).**
- 5. Actively engage young and less experienced farmers and women in group activities and Boards.**

**COMMUNICATING  
WITH IMPACT**

# Communicating with impact

1. Increasing challenge with info overload.
2. Information from multiple sources, conflicting advice, 'fake news'.
3. Relying on Twitter alone is fraught with danger; the science of agriculture is complex.
4. Challenge is to go beyond awareness, to create behavioural change to support adoption.
5. Some groups taking a strategic approach to identifying how best to communicate with maximum impact.



1. NO TILL ISN'T THE ANSWER: No till has been sold on the premise it involves less cultivation, uses less diesel, retains soil residues and builds organic carbon levels. While this may be true, it is at the expense of the time honoured tradition of waiting for a season break, the multiple benefits of repeated cultivation, and the known advantages from sowing



2. INTER ROW SOWING IS A CONSPIRACY: While it looks impressive, and we have appeared to be strong advocates for the practice - recent evidence unearthed by Bulla Burra leads us to believe that inter row sowing has been introduced by global technology companies only as a means to justify and sell expensive autosteer technology. While most

**THE EO**

# The important role of the Executive Officer

1. **A high performing EO = a high performing group.**
2. **Key role in project management, communications, relationship management, supporting the Board.**
3. **The EO works for the Board. The Board needs to manage and support the EO.**
4. **EOs provide guidance and recommendations, the Board makes the decision and takes responsibility.**
5. **The EOs require a forum through AgEx to develop their skills and capabilities and strengthen their support network.**

**MISSING  
IN  
ACTION**

# The imperative to increase participation by women

1. Participation by women in group events 5-25%, mainly dominated by industry staff.
2. Shared and informed decision-making in the farm business is a key desired outcome.
3. Higher rates engagement linked to generational change, AGKI a fantastic example.
4. Tailored training (SPAA/UNFS, WoTL) requiring flexibility in delivery.
5. AgEx has a pivotal role to help facilitate the process and change attitudes.



## National Farmers' Federation

March 8 at 9:07 AM · 🌐



Happy International Women's Day! 🦊 T ♀ and what a day to address ag's "women problem"! 👩 Women comprise 41% of the agricultural workforce but only 18% of management roles and 2.3% of CEO positions. 👩 Apply for the Diversity in Agriculture Leadership Program and help us fix that stat! 👉

[#IWD2019](#) [#balanceforbetter](#) [#diversityinag](#)

# Supporting young and less experienced farmers

1. Younger members in leadership; > enthusiasm, provide fresh ideas and attract more participants.
2. Other on-farm commitments make it more difficult for them to volunteer time.
3. Engaging younger group members in coordination & leadership roles assists in group leadership succession planning.
4. Providing technical training is an important element; Young Guns, Hart programs.
5. AgEx has a role in supporting such training.

# Been farming long?

We're inviting **early careers farmers** (with 0-8 year's experience) interested in **learning new skills** or **refreshing their knowledge** to register for this **8 part workshop series**.

Each **half day** workshop will be a mix of **lecture style sessions** in the Hart shed and **practical work** to back up what you've learnt, plus a **road trip**.



Feb  
27

## 'Cereal disease'

*Marg Evans, SARDI*

Root and foliar diseases; what to look for in the paddock (plant symptoms & ID), soil sampling for Predicta B testing.

Aug  
14

## 'Insect identification'

*Helen Brodie, SARDI Entomology*

How to identify the insect you've found, how crop damage can help you ID the culprit, insect groups.

Mar  
20

## 'The business of farming'

*Barry Mudge, farmer & consultant*

The two businesses of farming, profitability, gross margins, costs of production and risk vs return.

Sep  
4

## 'Road trip'

*visit 3 Mid-North farms*

Managing different soil types and environments, crop rotations, stubble management, seeding equipment and finding the right enterprise mix.



**BUILDING  
TRUSTING  
RELATIONSHIPS**

# Building trusting relationships

1. **Successful groups put time into building relationships with stakeholders including funding bodies.**
2. **Two-way communication informing funders of the achievements and demonstrated impact is critical.**
3. **Some frustration with RDCs changing direction as to who and how they communicate with grower groups.**
4. **Poor communication within and between grower groups and AgEx relating to exploring project collaboration results in a breakdown in trust.**
5. **The answer: improve communication at all levels; develop a collaborative team spirit; follow recent examples for joint NLP funding bids .**

**INNOVATION**  
**THE**  
**MISSING**  
**LINK**

# Innovation – the missing link

- 1. No recognised process or approach to supporting on-farm innovation for grower groups.**
- 2. Many groups introduce innovative practices and technologies, but in piece-meal fashion.**
- 3. Opportunity to develop on-farm innovation platforms to capitalise on ingenuity and creativity.**
- 4. A need to lift the vision of groups; to identify the opportunity to significantly advance farming systems productivity, sustainability and profitability.**
- 5. AgEx has a major role to play to support the development of innovation platforms across the grower group network.**

# What role can AgEx and the grower group network play?

1. Support the development of Innovation Pathways at the grower group level.
2. Build and extend what grower groups do best; provide structure to the innovation process and approach through Innovation Platforms.
3. A process of setting targets and goals; innovative systems thinking; opportunity assessment of forward thinking technologies; on-farm R,D&E.
4. Developing expanded networks, partnerships, project collaboration.
5. Influencing policy, securing funding.

## Developing a shared vision for the agricultural innovation system



### **CLIMATE CRISIS CARRIES RISK AND REWARDS FOR SA**

**INNOVATE TO SURVIVE** Hundreds of people gathered at the University of Adelaide on Monday night for an update on climate risks and opportunities, in a world teetering on the edge of enormous change.

# DAWR Strategic Recommendations

- 1. Strengthen the extension and adoption of innovation by enhancing farming systems groups.**
- 2. Create an avenue for agricultural innovation system participants to contribute to national priority setting.**
- 3. Create communities of regions with similar characteristics to network locally and internationally.**
- 4. Build capability to better inform decision-making and increase the speed of innovation and adoption.**



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Agriculture  
and Water Resources**

**Department of Agriculture  
and Water Resources**  
**Cultivating a shared vision  
for agricultural innovation**

Agricultural Innovation—A national approach to grow Australia's future. Following a collaborative stakeholder engagement process, Ernst and Young have developed the shared vision for agricultural innovation.

# RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

*work in progress!*



# Recommended actions

- 1. AgEx to spearhead training and capacity building in**
  - a. Extension and innovation systems development**
  - b. Group governance, leadership and communication**
  - c. Strategic social media use (market segmentation)**
  - d. EO to EO mentoring and capacity building**
- 2. AgEx to support groups in the process of consolidating group resources (where sought).**
- 3. AgEx to lead and strengthen collaborative group project funding, building on from NLP efforts.**
- 4. AgEx to strengthen key customer relationships to demonstrate group achievements and impacts.**
- 5. AgEx to lead the Innovation Platform initiative supporting on-farm innovation and adoption.**

# THANK

**Mallee Sustainable Farming**  
12 March at 9:08 am · 🌐

Good morning session on understanding soil types and constraints, tyre design and ripping depth.  
#malleesustainablefarming #agrivision #malleecma #sandysoils #deeripping #agriculture



**WoTL**  
March 11 at 3:20 PM · 🌐

WoTL has partnered with a number of organisations under the Weather the Storm program to combat drought. Last week women from Minyip participated in the program.

**Mid North Young Guns** shared this  
February 28 at 9:21 AM · 🌐

The positive feedback from past participants at the workshop's last week were no different. We get these emails.

Our neighbours in the Barossa are holding a conference on March 21 in Nuriootpa. Just wanted to say what a fantastic group of ladies attending shared a range of ideas around integrating livestock and cereals, sheep and soil testing.

Tickets are \$30 and can be purchased here: [http://www.biggsouth.com.au](#)



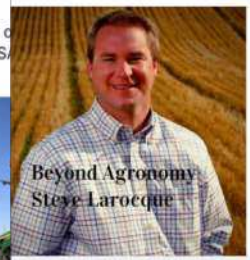
THU, MAR 21  
**BIGG Conference 2019: Thriving into the Future**  
25 people interested

★ Interested

**LEADA (Lower Eyre Agriculture)** added an event.  
February 20 · 🌐

Come and meet Steve Larocque and his wife as they visit the area and so we've invited Steve to present about 7.30pm.

Steve is an independent crop advisor based in the Barossa. As owner of Beyond Agronomy, he provides advice on crop production, timing, technology and equipment around the world from Ukraine to Kenya.



**Northern Sustainable Soil**  
1 hr · 🌐

Hi All,

All running to plan with setup for our next event. Please head north of Mundoorra South. See you soon!

**Lucerne Australia**  
March 10 at 6:00 PM · 🌐

Last week we held LA's second State of the Industry on a bus and tour around each other. It was another great day with everyone sharing information and ideas. Here are some photos of what we shared ideas.



# YOU!