



Ag Excellence ALLIANCE

Linking Grower Networks

2024 Forum report

Future Farming | Turning Trends into Practice

The [Ag Excellence Alliance](#) Forum is held every second year as a public event that encourages interaction between grower groups and representatives across government, industry, RDC's and research organisations.

The 2024 Forum theme, 'Future Farming | Turning Trends into Practice' had a focus on emissions management and the use of technology to aid farm sustainability.

Attendees heard about global and local sustainability pressures, were engaged in table discussion on mobilisation and learned about the practical impact of emissions management on agricultural practices.

A workshop session dedicated to considering the role of grower groups in managing emissions is captured by this report.

The Forum was attended by ~90 people, with 14 of 19 Ag Ex member grower groups represented.

The Forum was supported by sponsorship from GRDC, the Department of Primary Industries and Regions, the SA Drought Hub, AgriFutures, SAGIT, the Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board, Northern and Yorke Landscape Board, Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board and GPSA.

It was also delivered with funding support from the Commonwealth of Australia through the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water under the Carbon Farming Outreach Program in collaboration with the Grower Group Alliance.



**GROWER
GROUP
ALLIANCE**
Together we grow



Keynote Speakers



Cathy McGowan AO

Chair | AgriFutures Australia

Cathy came to national attention when she won the seat of Indi as an independent in 2013. The community backed her again in 2016. In 2019 Indi made Australian political history when Dr Helen Haines was elected as Indi's second, community independent. During her time as a politician Cathy actively worked in Parliament supporting agriculture and rural communities particularly the future drought fund and policy around regional development.

In 2019 she was awarded The Accountability Round Table award for political integrity and in 2022 The Australia Financial Review named her as one of the top 10 'covert' power players and No 2 cultural leaders in Australia.

Before she was in politics Cathy had a long and productive history within agricultural industries, leading the Women in Dairy Project, Women in Horticulture, Women in Wool, and supporting many grains projects, as well as study tours to Ireland and the US.

As chair of the board of AgriFutures she plays a leading role in the agriculture research and development. She is an Officer in the Order of Australia, a Churchill fellow and lives very happily on her farm in the Indigo Valley in NE Victoria.



Prof Andy Barr

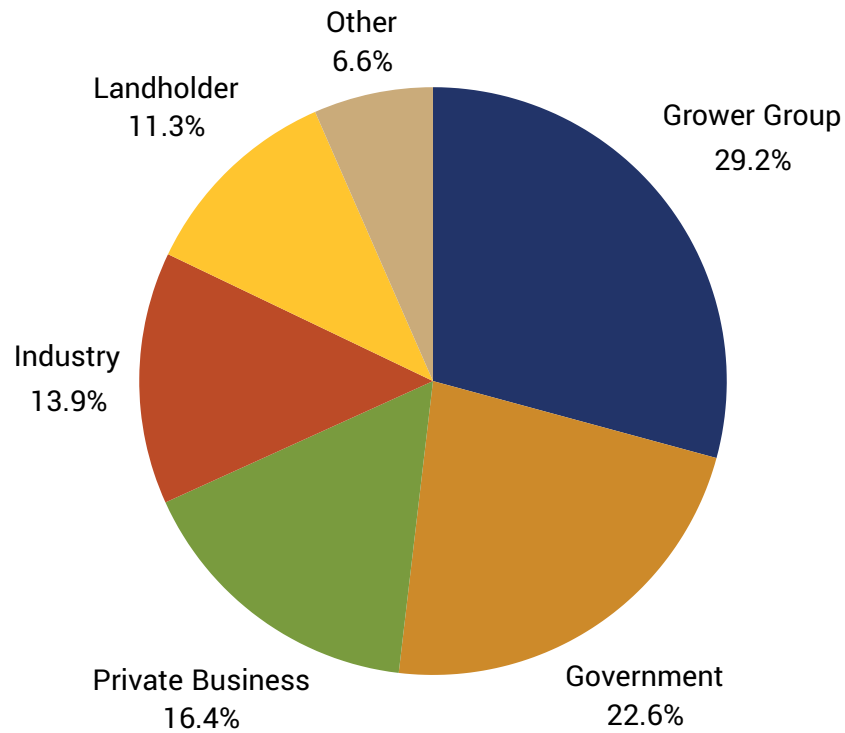
Chair | South Australian Grains Industry Trust

Andrew was raised on a mixed enterprise farm in the lower north of South Australia. He completed his bachelor of agricultural science in 1976 and a PhD at the University of Adelaide in 1994. He worked for 27 years as a plant breeder in the South Australian Department of Agriculture / SARDI, University of Adelaide and Australian Grain Technologies including leading the SA Barley Improvement program from 1994-2003.

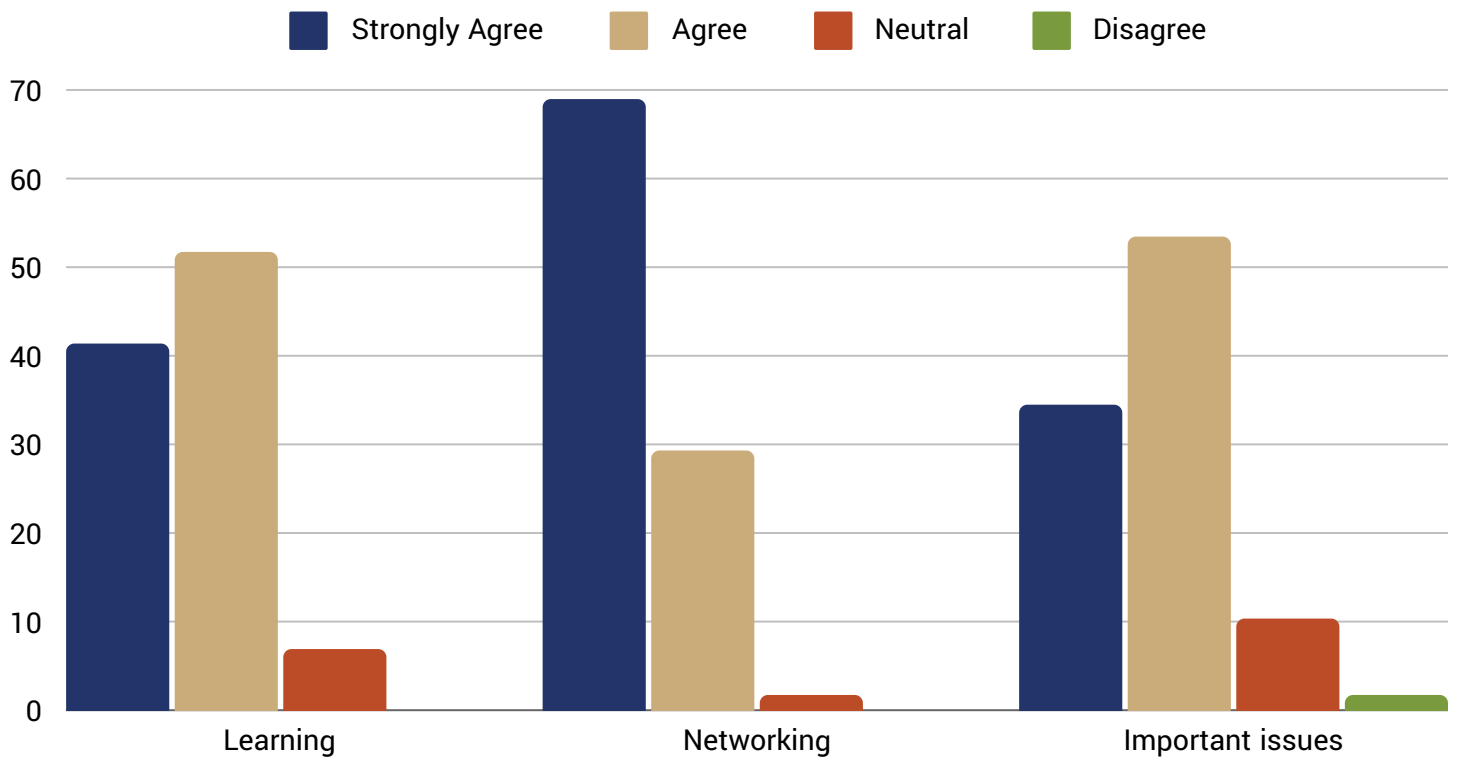
Since 2003, Andrew has returned to the family farm, growing bread and durum wheat, canola, malt and feed barley, oaten hay, lentils, peas, faba beans and chickpeas. Andrew continues his interest in agricultural R&D by hosting a range of research trials on farm, board roles with CIMMYT, GRDC (past) and AEXCO and SAGIT (present), and consulting to public and private sector plant breeding programs.

Demographics and forum feedback

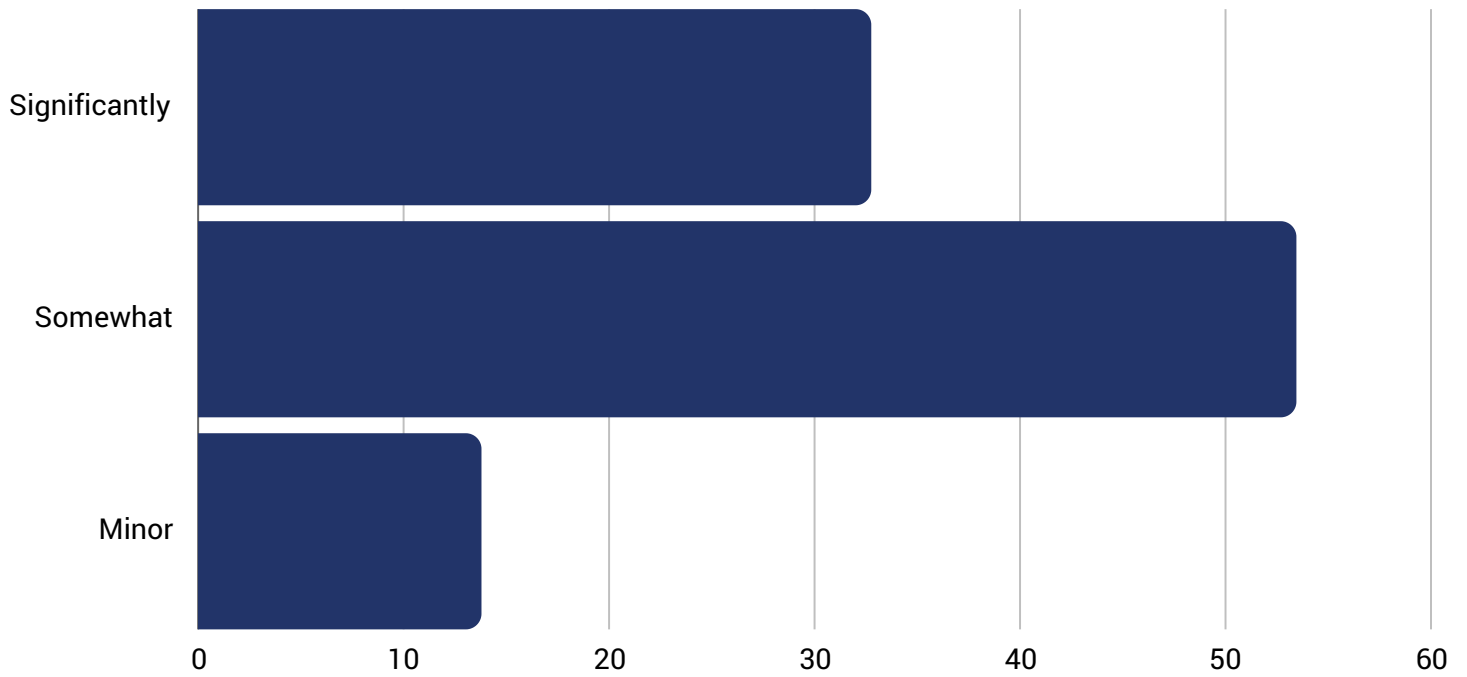
Forum attendance:



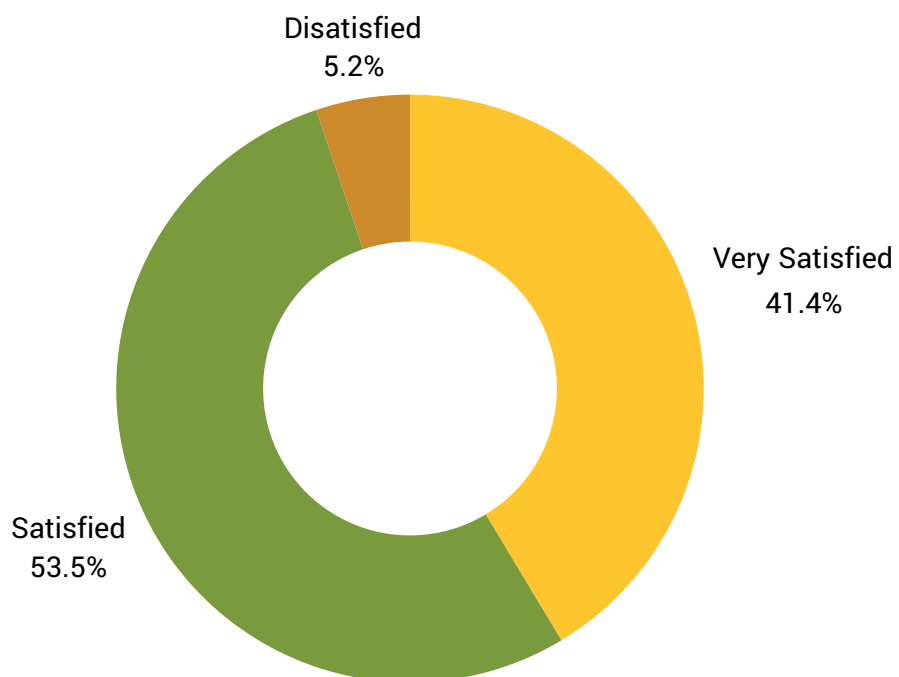
Opportunities were provided for:



Knowledge and understanding of emissions management were increased:



Satisfaction with the quality of content:



Workshop outcomes: “What is the role of grower groups in managing emissions?”

The workshop was run by organising forum attendees into small groups to discuss and collate responses to the following questions. ChatGTP was used to compile the responses.

Overall, the workshop highlighted the pivotal role of grower groups in advancing emissions management practices, while also outlining the challenges and next steps needed to realise their full potential in this space.

Key Insights

- **Grower groups are well-placed to lead the charge in emissions management due to their deep community ties, collaborative networks, and localised expertise**
- **There are significant gaps in knowledge, tools, and consistent messaging that need to be addressed for groups to be fully effective in this area**
- **The future of emissions management within grower groups hinges on improved coordination, capacity building, and strategic collaboration across the sector**
- **There is a strong desire for tangible demonstrations of collaboration rather than just intentions**
- **There is recognised importance of private sector involvement in emissions reduction**
- **The focus should be on practical, production-linked outcomes rather than just supply chain pressures**
- **Future vision: imagining a future where rural groups achieve net zero and the role they would play in that transition.**



Q1 What are the grower groups currently doing well?

Collaboration and Networking:

- Strategic partnerships: grower groups work closely with stakeholders such as Landscape Boards, SARDI/PIRSA, and other groups, facilitating joint projects and regional initiatives
- Cross-group collaboration: groups cooperate with others across regions and sectors, ensuring a unified approach and wider impact on agricultural practices
- Connecting farmers: they serve as a bridge between farmers, researchers, and advisors, enhancing access to expertise and resources.

Trust and deep engagement:

- Building trust: grower groups have successfully established trust within their communities, which is crucial for driving adoption of new practices and technologies
- Understanding growers: they focus on truly understanding the specific needs of growers in their region, allowing for tailored advice and interventions
- Responsive to local Issues: groups are quick to address region-specific challenges, delivering relevant, timely support.

Localised expertise and research:

- Local validation: groups conduct research and extension activities that are highly localised, ensuring findings are directly applicable to the communities they serve
- Neutral information source: they are respected for providing balanced and neutral information on potentially contentious topics
- Innovative approaches: grower groups explore alternative farming methods and innovative solutions, enabling their ability to lead in areas such as soil carbon and emissions management.

Community and social connections:

- Social cohesion: grower groups foster strong community ties by creating spaces for interaction and mutual support, which is vital for knowledge exchange and farmer engagement
- Learning spaces: they organise events such as peer-to-peer learning sessions, workshops, and demonstrations, offering farmers a safe environment to explore new ideas
- Engaging younger farmers: initiatives to involve younger farmers and next-generation leaders are key in sustaining agricultural communities and practices.

Advocacy and leadership:

- Policy influence: grower groups provide input at state, regional, and local levels, influencing agricultural policies that reflect farmers' real needs
- Leadership development: they value governance and leadership training, preparing the next generation of community leaders
- Extension and adoption activities: groups lead the charge in extending research findings to practical applications, turning theory into action.

Innovation and responsiveness:

- Innovation hubs: grower groups attract experts and speakers who bring fresh insights and global perspectives to local farming communities
- Flexibility: they demonstrate agility in responding to shifting challenges, such as seasonal variability, ensuring relevant support is always available
- Funding and investment: groups are adept at attracting investment and funding from multiple sources to drive impactful projects.

Q2 What do you see as the opportunities for groups in emissions management?

Information dissemination and education:

- Trusted networks: grower groups have the trust of farmers, making them ideal channels for delivering complex emissions information in an understandable format
- Tailored education: they can educate farmers using region-specific examples and practical case studies, helping demystify emissions management
- Role of leaders and early adopters: identifying and empowering local leaders can drive awareness and adoption of emissions practices through peer influence.



Collaboration and co-design:

- Research and co-design: groups see opportunities to co-design research projects with growers, identifying gaps and collaboratively developing solutions.
- Cross-sector partnerships: engaging with stakeholders like supply chains, banks, and industry bodies provides an avenue for widespread adoption and economic alignment
- Leveraging existing projects: tying into existing carbon projects and working with established initiatives, such as those led by Landscape Boards and other stakeholders, is key to scaling impact.

Practical support and tools:

- Emissions calculators and tools: grower groups can help farmers navigate complex tools, ensuring these resources are relevant, easy to use, and regionally tailored
- Case studies and demonstrations: groups can offer tangible examples through field days and workshops to help farmers see the practical benefits of emissions management
- Supporting implementation: providing support and translating research into actionable steps are critical roles grower groups can play.

Funding and investment:

- Access to funding: grower groups can tap into various funding sources, including government and industry grants, to finance emissions-related projects
- Economic motivation: there is an opportunity to frame emissions management in terms of profitability, linking reduced emissions with cost savings and increased productivity.

Leadership and advocacy:

- Advocacy and influence: grower groups can advocate for clearer policies and practical programs, ensuring they align with growers' realities and capacities.
- Industry alignment: engaging supply chain participants and industry leaders allows grower groups to be conduits for emissions validation and reporting, ensuring coherent messaging and standards.

Q3 What are the gaps for groups in emissions management?

Methodology and tools:

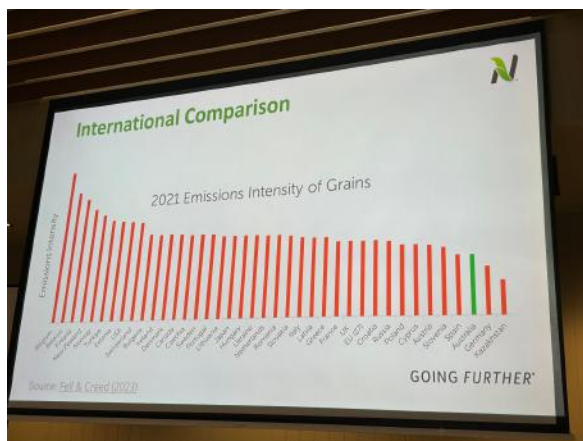
- Lack of consistent tools: having agreed methodology for calculating emissions to avoid confusion. Simple, standardised tools that are applicable across industries are needed
- Knowledge gaps: uncertainty exists around how to measure various emissions (e.g., methane, nitrogen and related practice changes), how to increase soil organic carbon, and the reliability of current calculators
- Research needs: research gaps include how emissions affect smaller industries, the use of lime on acid soils, and how to develop actionable strategies for emission reductions.

Knowledge and resources:

- Expertise shortage: there is a lack of experts who can provide one-on-one support, making it difficult for farmers to get personalised guidance
- Resource constraints: grower groups are stretched thin in terms of funding, personnel, and time, affecting their capacity to address emissions comprehensively
- Clear communication: there is a need to sort through the overwhelming amount of information and provide clear, credible guidance that farmers can trust.

Communication and coordination:

- Inconsistent messaging: groups are challenged by the lack of coordinated communication across different projects, leading to mixed messages
- Engaging reluctant farmers: reaching out to those who are sceptical or resistant to change remains difficult, with efforts needed to bridge the gap between early adopters and late adopters
- Coordination across levels: better coordination at national and state levels is essential for streamlining communications and ensuring consistency.



Market and policy uncertainty:

- Evolving policies: frequent changes in policies and market demands create uncertainty, making it hard for grower groups to keep their advice relevant
- Market signals: farmers are unclear about the market rewards for emissions management, leading to reluctance in adopting these practices without clear incentives
- Understanding drivers and value proposition: there is a gap in understanding what truly motivates farmers, beyond compliance, to engage in emissions management.

Engagement and inclusivity:

- Demographic targeting: more tailored messaging is needed for different demographics, including women and younger growers, to ensure wider community buy-in
- Inclusivity challenges: engaging all community members, especially those who are not members of grower groups, is key to achieving broader impact.

Q4 What's something you will follow up or do after today?

Participants expressed a range of intended actions, including:

Learning and capacity building:

- Self-education: participants plan to educate themselves further on emissions management and explore how they can support their members
- Training and demonstrations: there is interest in organising or attending training sessions, including "train the trainer" workshops to cascade knowledge within their communities.

Collaboration and networking:

- Outreach to stakeholders: plans include reaching out to grower groups, local councils, and industry bodies to establish partnerships and align efforts on emissions management
- Engaging experts: connecting with experts and leveraging projects led by organisations like SARDI and Landscape Boards are seen as crucial next steps.

Practical implementation:

- Introducing emissions reduction tech: some participants aim to bring emissions reduction technologies into their existing activities, making these tools more accessible to growers
- On-farm audits and projects: initiatives include conducting farm audits, trialling calculators, and embedding carbon measurements into ongoing projects.

Community and policy engagement:

- Advocacy and policy influence: participants are looking to engage in conversations about carbon neutrality, advocating for clear policies and practical guidelines for growers
- Embedding carbon into business models: the goal is to incorporate carbon considerations into day-to-day farm management and align these with broader community objectives.

Research and project development:

- Collaborative projects: participants are keen to explore joint projects with other grower groups, focusing on emissions-related research and filling knowledge gaps
- Utilising funding opportunities: exploring new funding streams to support emissions initiatives and R&D is a key priority.

