



SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GROWER GROUP SNAPSHOT

20 24



The SA Grower Group Snapshot provides the latest data on the influence of grower groups across the state in driving adoption of new and emerging technologies and practices through applied research, development and extension. These results illustrate the significant value the grower group network provides to key stakeholders, including funders, government, industry organisations and RD&E providers.

As well as demonstrating the value and reach of the grower group network, the 2024 survey assists in identifying gaps in knowledge, capacity and training required by grower groups.

The coverage and dynamics of farming systems provides an opportunity to be more pro-active, increasing new and creative opportunities to drive ground-up RD&E.

The most recent 2016 survey was undertaken by Ag Ex, and featured results from 16 farming systems groups. This number has grown with 19 groups participating in the 2024 survey. This is due to a number of new groups formed, and others being dissolved:

- Yorke Peninsula Alkaline Soils group (YPASG) and SA No-Till Farmers Association (SANTFA) have dissolved
- EP Agricultural Research Foundation (EPARF) and Lower Eyre Agriculture Development Association (LEADA) have merged to become Ag Innovation and Research Eyre Peninsula (AIREP)
- Partners in Grain (PinG) has evolved to become Women Learning Together (WoTL)
- New groups include Fleurieu Farming Systems, Murray Plains Farmers and SA AgriTech Meetup
- Other groups also since supported by Ag Ex include the Fleurieu Beef Group, Buckleboo Farm Improvement Group and Grasslands Society of SA.

Breakdown of group membership

	2024	2016
Producers	4496	4532
RD&E Partners	277	
Sponsors	305	241
Agribusiness	662	
Independent Consultants	340	
Associates		366*
Other	4630	121
TOTAL	10,710	5,260

* Consultants, agribusiness, RD&E partners

Although the number of producer members remains consistent, it was identified that there is now a significant 'other' network including email subscribers, students and stakeholders. This wider network was not acknowledged in this question in 2016.

The grower group network (including Ag Ex) employs 24 full-time equivalent positions, an increase of 9.5 since 2016. Significantly, five groups indicated they do not have employees, relying on volunteers and contractors for project work delivery.

83% of groups contract their field work, (seeding, spraying and harvesting externally), an increase of 10% compared to 2016. Over half of the groups seek external expertise for trial design and analysis and project delivery, similar to 2016. Other services sought externally on a lesser scale include project management, reporting funding submissions, communications and marketing.

14 groups indicated they have a current strategic plan, and 12 maintain governance policies. Less than a third have communication and risk management plans, almost none have a succession or research and extension plan. Some groups indicated they have developed a conference plan and a stakeholder engagement plan.



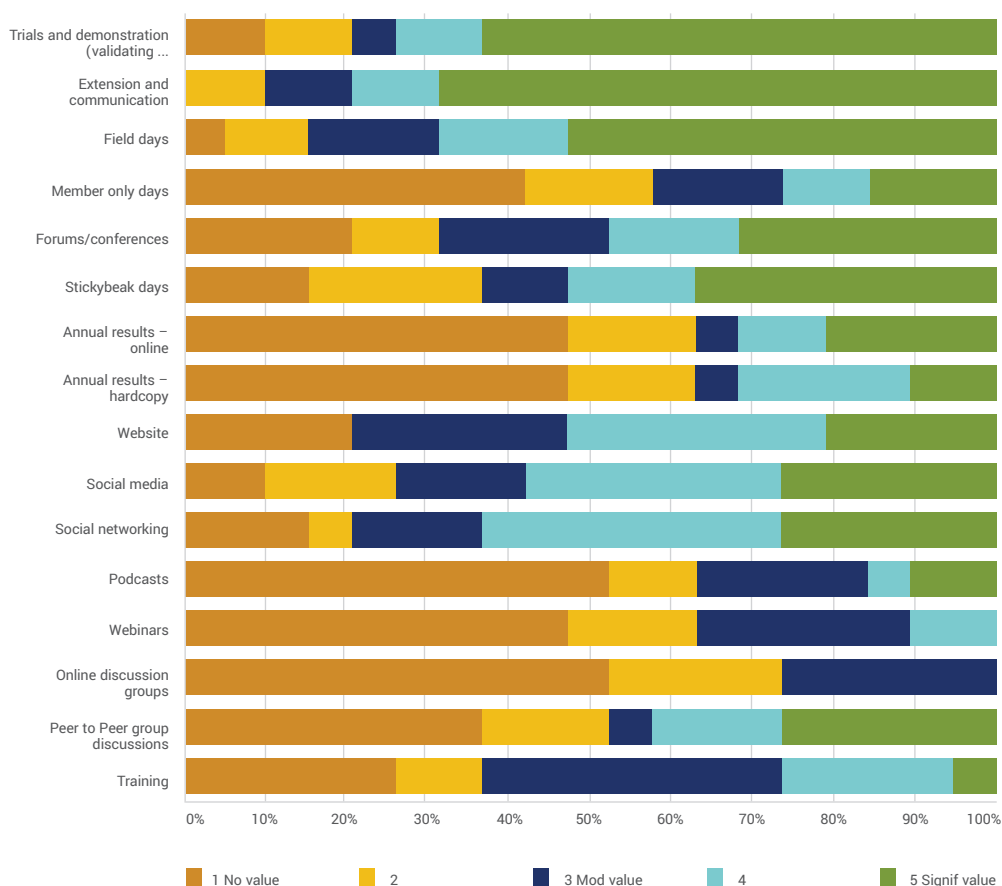
Geographic area covered by the grower group network

Groups were asked to indicate the local government areas where they believed they have influence. The results signify that all rural local government areas in the state are represented by one or more grower groups. The SA Ag Bureau still has significant coverage with 42 bureaus with varying degrees of activity. These groups are mostly locally focused and have a smaller membership compared to farming systems groups. Several farming systems groups incorporate local bureaus and other smaller groups in their operations. Best reflected by the Barossa Improved Grazing Group which incorporates Koonunga and Angaston Ag Bureau, Dairy Discussion Group, North Rhine Sheep Group and Mount Pleasant Sheep Group.

The majority of groups focus on mixed farming systems RD&E, with a mix of livestock, pastures, crop and hay production. Lesser groups focus on professional development, hobby farms, horticulture and lucerne seed production.

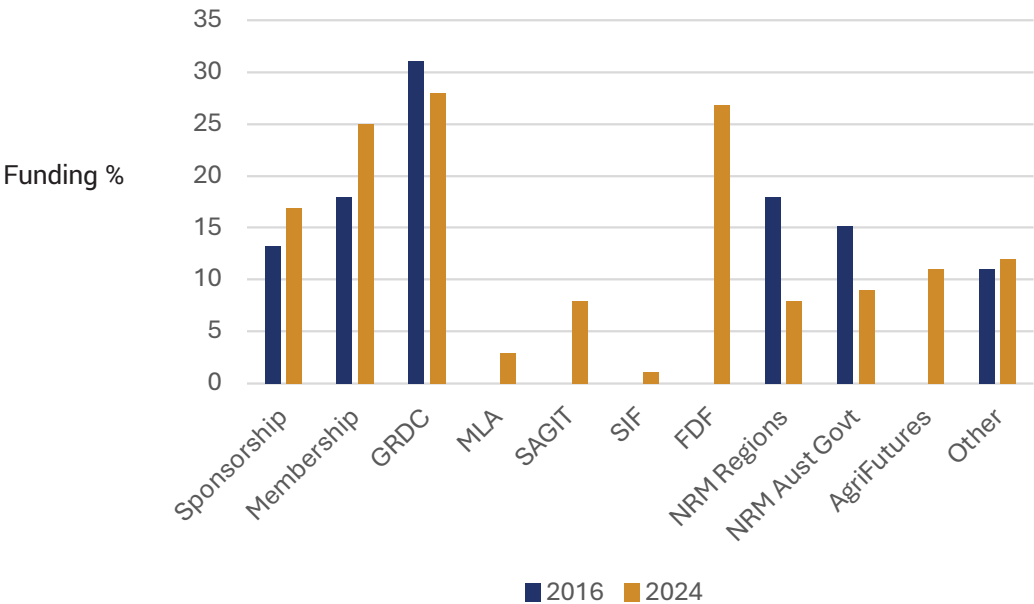
Value groups provide to members and local farming community

Trials, demonstrations, extension and communications remain the primary focus of the grower group network. Field days and sticky beak days were the most popular extension events, with over 50% valuing peer to peer discussion groups. The value of social networking rated highly at 80% and online discussion groups, webinars, and podcasts rated less at 40%, while social media (Facebook, X, Instagram) rated well. Annual result books, both on-line and hard copy, rated poorly with two thirds of the respondent groups.



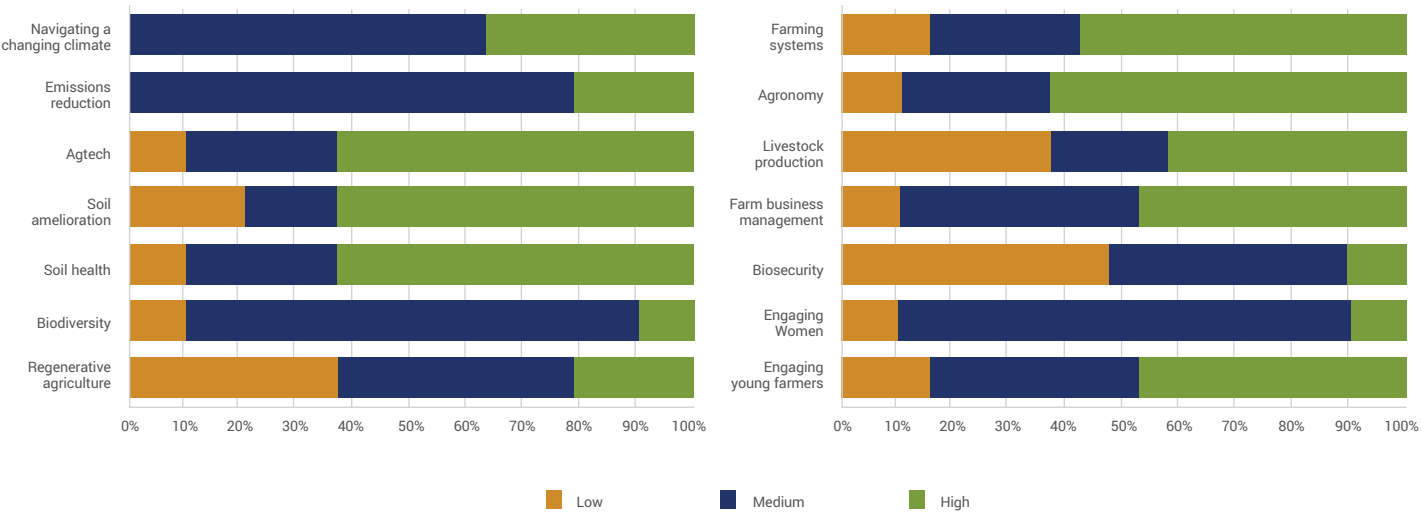
Funding Mix

The below chart compares the difference between funding sources from 2016 to 2024. The most significant change occurred with the introduction of the Future Drought Fund (FDF), ordering just below the highest ranked Grains Research Development Corporation (GRDC). Some groups now source funding from a larger number of industry RD&E organisations. Funding from the regional and Australian Government natural resource sector has decreased significantly since 2016. There has been some growth in funding derived through membership and sponsorship.



Key RD&E priorities

Climate change shows as a clear priority for all groups, with agtech, soil health and farm business management closely following. Also ranked highly was the priority to engage young farmers and farming systems.



Project management and delivery skill gaps in groups

Most groups indicated their organisations have the skills to manage projects, with only some gaps identified.

These included monitoring and evaluation; extension planning and facilitation skills; project design, financial management and risk management.

Where skills gaps exist, some groups outsource these, e.g. communications and marketing.

Networking and communications focus for Ag Ex

Groups identified three areas where Ag Ex should focus its efforts – its involvement with the SA Drought Hub, Biennial Forum and the National Grower Group Collective. The EO network was also rated highly along with ag sector leadership and advocacy to government and industry. Fostering relationships between groups was also mentioned as an important area for Ag Ex to lead. The awards, e-news, calendar of events and website rated well however are considered less of a priority with some groups.

Operational barriers facing group

Accessing suitably skilled staff, securing appropriate and ongoing funding, and engaging volunteers on committees and boards were the three highest priority barriers facing the operations of grower groups. The funding made available through the Future Drought Fund resulted in a lower score in 2024 compared to 2016.

Other barriers identified included:

- Attracting new and younger members
- Demonstrating value to the grower – groups are busy focusing on the ‘doing’
- Taking on too many activities results in less focus on communicating achievements, with recognition of having to compete for growers’ attention
- The high cost of servicing a large geographic coverage for some groups
- Finding time for planning new and collaborative RD&E initiatives.

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Ag Ex can play a massive role in bringing together the groups who want to communicate & work together.



Strengths of the grower group network

In 2016, groups identified their main strengths as:

- Groups are farmer driven from the ground up, garnering respect within their communities
- There was sufficient access to researchers
- Many groups highlighted that they had strong relationships with stakeholders
- Well connected to state and industry bodies.

In 2024, this is no different. Farming systems groups have become the primary research and extension arms for agriculture across regional South Australia, driven by farmers, for farmers. Grower groups continue to be the 'innovation brokers', bringing farm advisors, researchers, regional NRM organisations, resellers and farmers together. They provide much of the local/on-ground information and support 'soft-infrastructure' that farmers seek, assisting industry and government in achieving their goals.



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For more detail on the findings of the Grower Group Snapshot, contact Ag Ex at admin@agex.org.au



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