



EXTENSION AND DELIVERY SUCCESSES

PROJECT PARTNERS



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry



Future
Drought
Fund



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Effective extension is central to helping farmers adopt new practices.

Extension is not just about sharing information—it's about helping people build the skills, confidence, and motivation they need to make change. Good extension starts with the people in the room. It recognises that farmers already have knowledge and experience, and creates space for them to build on that and explore how new practices and ideas might work on their own farm.

As part of the De-risking the Seeding Program, the 14 participating grower groups received extension and facilitation training led by Jeanette Long, from Ag Consulting Co, a facilitator, trainer and coach with extensive experience in agricultural extension and adult learning. Jeanette's training focused on enhancing the capacity of grower groups to design and deliver effective extension activities that drive practice change for dry and early seeding. For more insights into Jeanette's approach to extension training, listen to her podcast at: <https://sadrighthub.com.au/extension-training-to-build-capacity-in-sa/>.

Participants were encouraged to explore new approaches to extension. The first workshop provided a strong foundation for the project, giving farming systems groups the chance to connect, share ideas, and clarify the broader goals. Each group developed an extension plan tailored to their local context, with many noting the value of the process—not just for this project, but for future work. The skills built through the workshops are expected to strengthen the quality and impact of extension going forwards.

The following points are key takeaways from the training.

What Makes Good Extension?

Start with purpose

Good extension begins with a clear purpose. Before designing any activity, be clear on the change you want to support. What outcome are you aiming for—and what would success look like for the farmer? Put yourself in their shoes and ask: What's in it for them? Rather than focusing on what you want to say, focus on what the farmer needs to know, feel, or do differently. This shift in perspective helps ensure extension activities are designed around real, meaningful practice change.

Understand the audience

Farmers differ in more than just enterprise type or location. Age, gender, experience, values, and mindset all influence how people engage with new information and decide whether to try something new. Even within the same community, some will be innovators, others more cautious. And sometimes the key audience for extension isn't the grower—it might be a trusted advisor, an administrator, or someone else who influences decisions.

Before designing an activity, take time to understand your audience. Farmers bring a wealth of lived experience and existing knowledge. Go in with curiosity. Ask what they're doing now, what's working, and where they'd like to improve. The goal is to build on the knowledge and experience already in the room, not to start from scratch.

Prioritise facilitation over presentation

Change rarely comes from long presentations or a flood of data. It's more likely when people have time to process what they've heard, talk it through with others, and consider how it might work on their own farm. Extension activities should prioritise discussion and reflection—not just content delivery. Even in formal settings, short presentations followed by structured conversation (for example, 20 minutes of content and 20 minutes of discussion) are often more effective than back-to-back speakers. Use facilitation techniques to draw out thinking, encourage participation, and keep people engaged. Most adults learn by doing, reflecting, and interacting—not by being talked at. Small groups and practical conversations consistently lead to more meaningful change than large events with packed agendas.

Use peer-to-peer learning

Farmer stories are often more powerful than expert advice. When growers hear from someone who has tried a practice or tool, it feels real and relevant. Let farmers speak first, then use technical experts to top up knowledge gaps as needed. This approach keeps the conversation grounded in practice and encourages others to see how new ideas might work on their own farm.

Be practical/address real barriers

Lack of adoption is rarely just about missing information. Practical constraints like finance, time, machinery, or confidence often play a bigger role. Good extension helps people identify these barriers and work through them. The KASA framework (knowledge, attitude, skills, and aspirations) can be a useful tool. It shifts the focus beyond knowledge, helping uncover gaps in motivation, skills, or capacity that may be limiting change.

Designing for Impact

The most effective extension isn't about delivering more—it's about delivering what matters. When activities are practical, well-timed, and focused on real barriers, they create space for learning and confidence to grow. Peer conversations, targeted knowledge, and good facilitation make the difference between hearing new information and actually using it.

What our partners are saying:

“Capacity building training with Jeanette Long was highly valuable for both this project and other projects going forward.”

Naomi Scholz AIREP

“The training in extension and facilitation has improved my project delivery and presentations. It has given me the tools to be able to get people engaged with the content.”

Caroline Keeton, Farmlink

“It was helpful planning the project with Jeanette, demonstrating how to work through project aims, audience, and planning with other staff. This is something Hart have continued with in other projects.”

Rebekah Allen, Hart

“This is so indulgent.... We need to do this for all our projects, to be able to spend 2 days to focus on the development of one project is so good.”

Sandy Kimber, Hart

“The participatory approach to the project development allowed farmers to be involved with the planning and development of the project right from the start which gave them buy in.”

Grace Hosking, BCG

Corrigin Farm Improvement Group

Key messages

- Simple, visual tools like sticker boards can make evaluation more engaging for farmers than traditional surveys.
- Low-friction methods like sticker boards reduce survey fatigue while still giving groups reliable data to guide extension activities.

When the CFG team noticed farmers were fatigued by traditional evaluation surveys, they trialled a hands-on alternative at one of their paddock walks: a sticker evaluation. Instead of filling out paper forms, growers placed coloured stickers on large boards to indicate their views—before and after the event—on seeding practices, herbicide safety, and confidence in applying new knowledge.

The boards featured a mix of questions designed to gauge changes in knowledge, understanding, awareness, and intent to act. Participants were asked to reflect on how confident they felt in the concepts presented, whether they understood the information, and how likely they were to apply it in practice.

Stickers were colour-coded to reflect both the participant's background and the timing of their response—growers vs. industry, and before vs. after the crop walk. This allowed the team to compare how different groups responded, and whether their perspectives shifted throughout the event. The dartboard (Figure 1) used concentric circles ranging from “very likely” in the centre to “not likely” on the outside. Another board (Figure 2) used a sliding scale to assess knowledge, understanding, and awareness from “low” to “high”.

The evaluation was tied to a demonstration site assessing deep sowing and herbicide safety, showing farmers how sowing depth interacts with moisture and herbicide rates.

The result? Clear, visual, and immediate feedback. According to Joy Valle, CFG executive officer, the visual format made analysis easy and gave the team a reliable sense of how farmers were responding to the information.

Farmers preferred it too, finding the activity was more engaging, more inclusive, and better suited to paddock events than a traditional survey. The approach encouraged participation and prompted useful conversations between growers—something paper surveys rarely achieve.

For CFG, this kind of low-friction, field-based evaluation fits the way their growers prefer to engage. ‘We’ve recently started a member survey,’ Joy said, “and the biggest feedback was that they prefer to just go out to the paddock, have a look at something, and discuss it there,

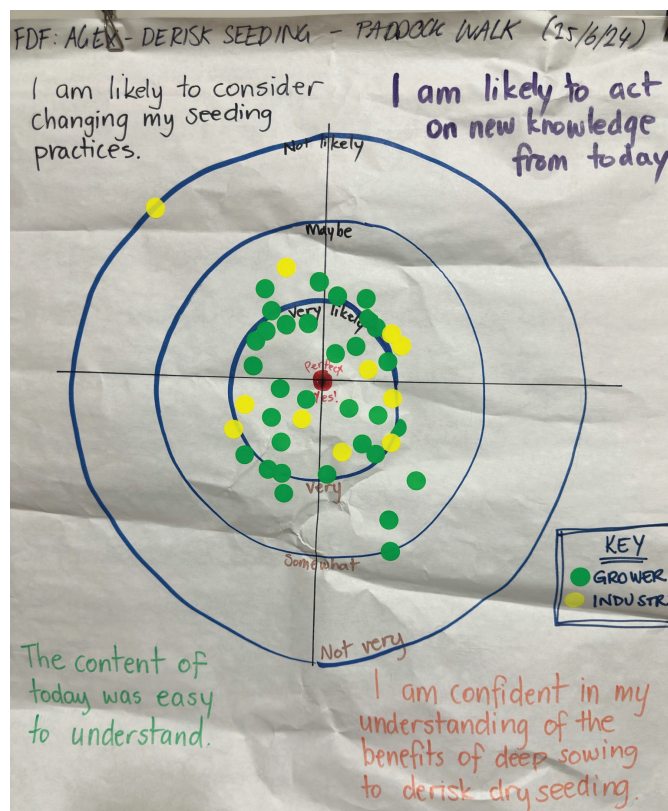


Figure 1. Dartboard evaluation

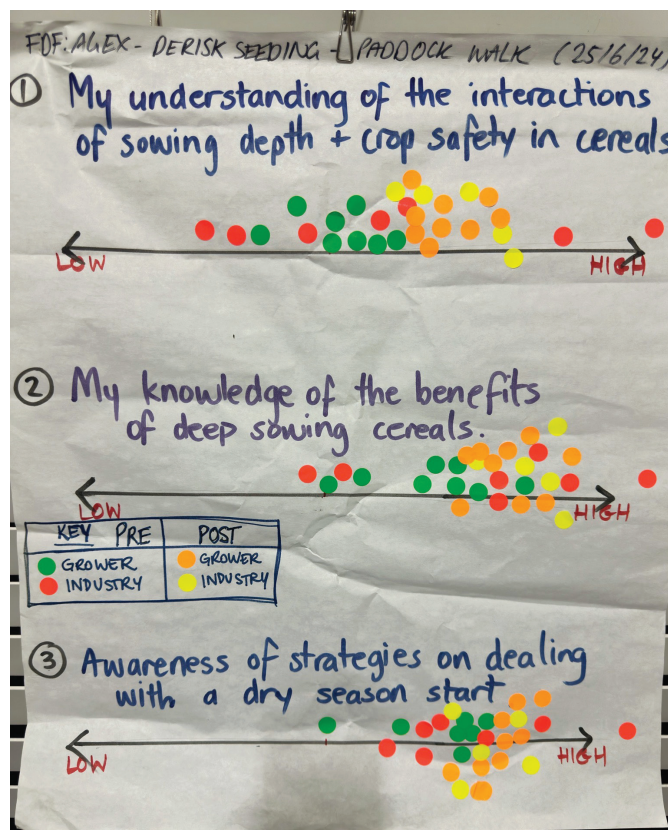


Figure 2. Sliding scale evaluation

rather than read a report or be told about something they can't see.'

CFG plans to keep using sticker-based evaluation tools where practical—especially in the paddock—and sees them as a low-barrier way to collect meaningful data that farmers actually enjoy providing.

Facey Group

Key messages

- Farmers are more willing to engage when surveys are delivered as natural conversations, rather than formal forms or questionnaires.
- Ride-along discussions not only gather better information but also strengthen relationships.
- Conversations in the paddock can spark new ideas and reveal on-farm practices and needs that wouldn't surface in a standard survey.

In 2023, Facey Group trialled a new way of engaging with farmers. Rather than sending out multiple surveys, they joined farmers in the header during harvest.

The approach was born out of a simple reality: farmers are tired of surveys, and Facey had several to run at once.

"The idea came from the knowledge of how much farmers hate surveys, and how many we need to do," Tina said.

Planning the ride-alongs took time. Simply taking multiple surveys into the header wouldn't make for useful conversation. Instead, they combined all the survey content into a single document, removed duplicated questions, and reordered the questions so they flowed naturally. The final result was more of a guided conversation than a standard survey.

Conversations often lasted more than an hour, allowing the team to capture thoughtful, considered responses—something that's nearly impossible to achieve through paper or online surveys.

Farmer thoughts

Farmers responded positively to the ride-along approach. Some asked for photocopies of their responses, saying the conversation helped them reflect on how they make decisions—particularly around key risk areas like nitrogen application and sowing timing. The process was a useful review of their own practice.

Farmers also appreciated that the process didn't feel like an intrusion. Talking while harvesting felt natural, and many saw it as part of Facey's role—checking in with and listening to their members. Farmers felt heard, and the method strengthened the group's connection with its members.

Impact on the project

Speaking directly with 26 farmers gave Facey a clearer understanding of the challenges they were facing. The in-person format allowed for broader, more detailed conversations than any form or tick-box survey could.

The conversations often went beyond the original project questions. Farmers shared what they were experimenting with on their own farms, raised issues they wanted more support on, and suggested areas where they'd like to see future research. This gave Facey Group a better feel for what was happening on the ground, and confidence that their chosen demonstration sites and trial topics reflected what the group actually needs.

There was also an unintended benefit: some of the farmers who took part hadn't attended Facey events before, but started turning up after the ride-along conversations. Being invited to contribute personally seemed to increase their interest and involvement.

Reflections on the method

Facey Group plans to use the ride-along approach again. It proved useful not just for gathering information, but for having deeper conversations—about what's working, what's not, and where farmers see opportunities. It also gave the team a chance to hear about farmers' own trials and ideas, and to check in on how people were going more broadly—not just as survey participants, but as members of the group.

That said, it's not something that can be rushed. Designing the conversation took time, and the conversations need to take place when farmers have time to talk while still working, like during spraying, seeding, or harvest. One interview even happened while a farmer was loading grain.

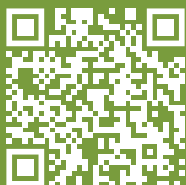
Facey Group still uses traditional surveys when needed, but the ride-along approach showed the value of making time for more personal, face-to-face conversations.

"It's great that Facey Group is spending time to get this feedback, I feel like the project will take into consideration how my farm operates and be more relevant to the area".

Feedback from Facey harvester discussions.



Tina Astbury (Facey Group; right)
interviewing farmer Ken Martin (left)



The project, “*De-risking the seeding program – Adoption of key management practices for the success of dry and early sown crops*” was led by Ag Excellence Alliance. It combined research and on-farm experience to support earlier and more strategic sowing decisions to build drought resilience. The project draws on the expertise and local knowledge of fourteen grower groups across the grain producing regions of South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia. Scan the QR code to find out more.

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