



TRANSFORMING AG

Technology Shaping How We Grow

FORUM & AWARDS

PROGRAM



3 AUG
2026

Marion Hotel, Mitchell Park | Adelaide, South Australia

#AgExForum2026

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Welcome to AgExForum2026, Ag Excellence Alliance's biennial forum bringing together growers, researchers, advisers, industry leaders and innovators from across South Australia to share ideas, strengthen connections and explore the technologies shaping the future of agriculture.

This year's theme, Transforming Ag | Technology Shaping How We Grow, recognises the rapid pace of technological change across our industry. From artificial intelligence and data-driven decision-making to precision agriculture, automation and genomics, technology is creating new opportunities to improve productivity, profitability and sustainability. Equally important is ensuring these innovations deliver practical value for farming businesses and the communities they support.

Today's program has been designed to encourage fresh thinking, challenge ideas and inspire practical action. Through keynote presentations, real-world case studies and interactive discussions, AgExForum2026 provides an opportunity to learn from industry leaders, connect with colleagues and explore the opportunities shaping the future of agriculture.

Grower groups continue to play a vital role in connecting research with practice, building local capability and supporting the adoption of innovation across South Australia. Ag Excellence Alliance is proud to champion this work by fostering collaboration, strengthening partnerships and creating opportunities for growers, advisers and industry to learn from one another.

On behalf of the Committee, I extend my sincere thanks to the Ag Excellence Alliance staff and Committee for their ongoing dedication and commitment to supporting grower groups across South Australia. I also thank our speakers, sponsors and partners for their valued contribution to AgExForum2026, and to you, our delegates, for being part of today's event.

I encourage you to make the most of today's conversations, embrace new ideas and enjoy the opportunity to connect with colleagues from across the agricultural sector.



A stylized, handwritten signature in dark blue ink, appearing to read 'Leighton Wilksch'.

Leighton Wilksch
Chair, Ag Excellence Alliance



Grower groups continue to play a vital role in connecting research with practice, building local capability and supporting the adoption of innovation across South Australia.

9.00am – 9.45am | Registration

Preparing for the Day Ahead

Connect with growers, researchers, advisers and industry colleagues over morning tea before a full day of practical insights, ideas and discussion.

Opening the Conversation

Beck Burgess

Forum Facilitator | Beck Burgess Consulting

Introducing the day's theme and setting the scene for discussions exploring how technology is shaping the future of Australian agriculture.

Growing Capability Across South Australia

Mark Stanley

Executive Officer | Ag Excellence Alliance

An overview of Ag Excellence Alliance's current priorities, partnerships and projects, highlighting how South Australia's grower groups continue to build capability, strengthen collaboration and accelerate the adoption of research and innovation.

Keynote Presentations

Shiny Tools Don't Grow Profit – Smart Decisions Do

David Jochinke

Farmer | Leader | Advocate

Technology only creates value when it supports better business decisions. David explores the policy, market and industry trends shaping Australian agriculture, challenging delegates to focus on innovation that delivers measurable commercial outcomes.

From Strategy to Action: A Fireside Conversation

Dave McKeon

Head of Thomas Elder Sustainable Agriculture

Dave McKeon and David Jochinke discuss how today's challenges and opportunities translate into practical business decisions, sharing perspectives from both agribusiness and farming.

11.15am – 11.30am | Morning Break

Technology in Practice

Redesigning Broadacre Farming for the Future

Jock McNeil

Farmer | Nuffield Scholar | Smimac Farming

Precision agriculture, machinery optimisation and automation are reshaping broadacre farming. Jock shares practical examples from his farming business, together with insights from his 2026 Nuffield Scholarship.

Breeding Smarter: Genetics Driving Better Decisions

Alison Henderson

Owner & Stud Master | Baderloo Poll Merinos

Discover how genomics and practical stockmanship are working together to improve breeding decisions, productivity and long-term profitability within a modern sheep enterprise.

Technology Shaping How We Grow

Connecting the Dots: Turning Farm Data into Better Decisions

Ed Scott

Soil Consultant | Soil & Land Company

Modern farming generates more data than ever before, but its value depends on how it is connected and applied. Ed explores how improving data interoperability can support better decisions, greater efficiency and stronger on-farm outcomes.

12.30pm – 1.30pm | Networking Lunch

Innovation & Collaboration

Collaboration Driving Innovation: The ChatBCG Story

Gabe Davila

Head of Sales | Caitlyn AI

Alicia Mason

Extension & Communications | Birchip Cropping Group

Discover how Birchip Cropping Group and Caitlyn AI collaborated to develop ChatBCG, demonstrating how artificial intelligence can strengthen extension, improve access to research and support better grower engagement.

The Future from Here: A Fishbowl Discussion

Beck Burgess

Forum Facilitator | Beck Burgess Consulting

This interactive fishbowl discussion brings together growers, advisers, researchers and industry representatives to build on the day's conversations, explore different perspectives and identify practical actions for the future of agricultural technology adoption.

3.15pm – 3.45pm | Afternoon Break

Looking Ahead

Beyond the Technology: Shaping the Future Together

Jeanette Long

Director & Facilitator | Ag Consulting Co

Explore the opportunities, challenges and capabilities needed to support successful technology adoption across South Australian agriculture in this collaborative workshop.

Closing Remarks

Bill Long

Farmer | Consultant | Chair AIR EP

Bill reflects on the day's key insights and conversations, encouraging delegates to consider the practical actions they can take to strengthen innovation, collaboration and technology adoption beyond AgExForum2026.

5.30pm | Forum Concludes

Continue the Conversation

AgExForum2026 Awards Dinner

Concluding the day, the Ag Excellence Awards Dinner celebrates excellence and recognises outstanding achievements across South Australian agriculture.



DAVID JOCHINKE | Farmer | Leader | Advocate

David “DJ” Jochinke is a third-generation dryland mixed farmer from Victoria’s Wimmera region. He is a highly respected agricultural leader with extensive experience in farmer advocacy, most recently serving as President of the National Farmers’ Federation. He is the immediate past President of the Victorian Farmers Federation, a board member of Skillinvest and Wimmera CMA, and the current Independent Chair of Grampians Wimmera Mallee Tourism. DJ also contributes to numerous regional and industry committees across agriculture, emergency services and rural development.



DAVE McKEON | Head of Thomas Elder Sustainable Agriculture

David McKeon is Head of Thomas Elder Sustainable Agriculture at Elders Ltd, where he leads innovation across research and extension, AgTech, sustainable agriculture and carbon farming advisory services. With a family farming background in Western NSW, David is passionate about the role innovation can play in ensuring sustainable farm production and agribusiness in Australia. As a recognised agribusiness leader, his previous roles include CEO of GrainGrowers Ltd, senior management positions with the National Farmers’ Federation and the Australian Government Department of Agriculture. David currently serves as Chair of Agribusiness Australia and as an Independent Director of Grain Producers South Australia.



JOCK McNEIL | Farmer | Nuffield Scholar

Jock McNeil is a mixed farmer from Loxton in South Australia’s Northern Mallee, helping manage a diversified farming business spanning broadacre cropping, livestock, irrigated wine grapes and lucerne hay production. Driven by a passion for continuous improvement, Jock is focused on identifying practical opportunities to enhance productivity, profitability and resilience through precision agriculture, machinery optimisation, soil and crop management, and emerging technologies. As a 2026 Nuffield Australia Scholar, he is researching how broadacre cropping systems can be redesigned through strip-till farming, precision application technologies, automation and other innovations to unlock new frontiers in production, profitability and long-term resilience.



ALISON HENDERSON | Owner & Stud Master, Baderloo Poll Merinos

A fifth-generation sheep producer from the Mid North of South Australia, Alison has been farming for more than a decade after beginning a career in customer service within local government. She completed a Bachelor of Agricultural Production and Management through the University of New England while working across all aspects of the family mixed farming enterprise before specialising in the sheep enterprise and establishing Hendowie Poll Merino Stud in 2021. While building the stud, she also operated a sheep pregnancy scanning business, working with producers across northern South Australia. In 2024, Alison purchased Baderloo Poll Merino Stud, which she now owns and manages with seasonal support from family. Passionate about the future of the industry, she combines new technologies with visual classing to breed productive, resilient Merinos that will inspire current and future generations.



ED SCOTT | Soil Consultant, Soil & Land Company

Edward Scott is a soil consultant at Soil & Land Company, working with farmers and agribusinesses across Australia to improve productivity, profitability and sustainability through practical, data-driven decision making. With more than a decade of experience spanning soil science, precision agriculture, digital agronomy and natural capital projects, Edward specialises in helping growers turn data into practical management decisions and adopt technologies that deliver measurable on-farm outcomes. He is passionate about ensuring technology creates real value for farming businesses.

Technology Shaping How We Grow



GABE DAVILA | Head of Sales, Caitlyn AI

Gabriel Davila is Head of Sales at Caitlyn AI, bringing more than 14 years' experience across the technology and agricultural sectors. Gabe studied Mechatronic Engineering at the University of Technology Sydney and has built a career at the intersection of technology and industry, helping organisations understand not just what technology can do, but how to put it to work. At Caitlyn AI, he works with agricultural research organisations, RDCs and grower groups across Australia and New Zealand to help unlock the value of research and get it into the hands of the people who need it most. He has led AI projects with organisations including Meat & Livestock Australia, Australian Pork Limited and FarmLink Research.



ALICIA MASON | Senior Manager, Extension & Communications, Birchip Cropping Group

Alicia Mason is Senior Manager – Extension and Communications at Birchip Cropping Group (BCG). With a background spanning agriculture, communications and digital technology, she is passionate about turning agricultural research into practical information that growers can easily access and apply on farm. Alicia works closely with researchers, advisers and industry partners to improve knowledge sharing, support the adoption of innovation, and ensure research translates into practical outcomes that strengthen farming businesses.



JEANETTE LONG | Director & Facilitator, Ag Consulting Co

Jeanette Long has spent her career building the skills of people who work in and with agriculture. Through Ag Consulting Co, she delivers training programs, coaches individuals and facilitates conversations that move things forward for farm families, organisations and rural communities. Her work spans facilitation and extension skills, succession and business planning, and leadership development with rural women. She was the inaugural Chair of Ag Excellence Alliance and a past President of APEN and Partners in Grain SA. Her qualifications include a Master of Business Administration (Agribusiness), Bachelor of Applied Science in Agriculture, Graduate Diploma in Education, and Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment. She is a qualified facilitator and coach.



BILL LONG | Farmer, Consultant & Chair, AIR EP

Bill Long is a highly respected South Australian farmer, agricultural consultant and industry leader with more than 35 years of experience in broadacre farming, agronomy, research, extension and farm business management. As Chair of Agricultural Innovation & Research Eyre Peninsula (AIR EP), Bill is widely recognised for connecting research with practical on-farm outcomes and building the capability of farmers, advisers and agricultural organisations.



Beck Burgess | Forum Facilitator | Director, Beck Burgess Consulting

Beck Burgess (Langhorne Creek, South Australia) is an agricultural facilitator, conference program curator and farm business consultant. As Director of Beck Burgess Consulting, she works with producers, industry and government across Australia to deliver farm business planning, strategic facilitation and extension programs that support confident decision-making. With a background in livestock production, agribusiness and extension, Beck has curated programs for many of Australia's leading agricultural conferences. Passionate about connecting people and ideas, she creates engaging conversations that strengthen businesses and the broader agricultural industry.

AGEXFORUM2026 AWARDS

Celebrating Excellence in South Australian Agriculture

The AgExForum2026 Awards celebrate the people, grower groups and emerging leaders whose dedication, innovation and leadership continue to strengthen South Australian agriculture. This year, Ag Excellence Alliance is proud to welcome the Grains Research and Development Corporation as the new sponsor of the GRDC Grower Group Award, strengthening support for South Australia's grower group network. We also welcome the Agricultural Bureau of South Australia as a new Awards partner, alongside Ag Institute Australia, reflecting our shared commitment to recognising excellence and supporting the next generation of agricultural leaders.

From 5.45pm | Agbyte – Pre-Dinner Drinks & Canapés

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GRDC Grower Group Award

The GRDC Grower Group Award recognises a South Australian grower group that has demonstrated outstanding leadership, collaboration and impact through research, development and extension. Proudly supported by the Grains Research and Development Corporation, the award celebrates the vital role grower groups play in driving innovation, building local capability and delivering lasting benefits to growers and regional communities.

Presented by SHARON STARICK | Chair | Grains Research and Development Corporation



Ag Excellence Alliance Perpetual Award

The Ag Excellence Alliance Perpetual Award recognises an individual who has made a lasting contribution to South Australian agriculture through outstanding service, leadership and commitment to the grower group network. It celebrates those whose passion, knowledge and dedication have strengthened grower groups, supported agricultural communities and left an enduring legacy for the industry.

Presented by LEET WILKSCH | Chair | Ag Excellence Alliance



Jim McColl AIA Young Consultant Award

Named in honour of Dr Jim McColl, a pioneer of private farm consulting in Australia, this award recognises an emerging agricultural consultant who demonstrates excellence, professionalism and a commitment to supporting farmers and advancing the consulting profession. It celebrates Jim's enduring legacy of leadership, innovation and developing the next generation of agricultural advisers.

Presented by CRAIG DAVIS | Past Chair | Ag Institute Australia | South Australian Division



ABSA Sustainable Agricultural Scholarship

The ABSA Sustainable Agricultural Scholarship supports the next generation of agricultural leaders by investing in their personal and professional development. It provides an opportunity for a young South Australian farmer to undertake further study, a study tour or a special project that strengthens their knowledge, leadership and contribution to sustainable agriculture.

Presented by MATT WARD | Director Biodiversity Science, Coasts & Information | Department for Environment and Water

Grower Groups



- 
 Agricultural Bureau of SA
- 
 Agricultural Innovation & Research Eyre Peninsula
- 
 Agriculture Kangaroo Island
- 
 AgriTech Meetup South Australia
- 
 Barossa Improved Grazing Group
- 
 Buckleboo Farm Improvement Group
- 
 Fleurieu Beef Group Inc
- 
 Fleurieu Farming Systems
- 
 Hart Field Site Group
- 
 Grasslands Southern Society
- 
 Lucerne Australia
- 
 MacKillop Farm Management Group
- 
 Mallee Sustainable Farming
- 
 Mid North High Rainfall Zone
- 
 Murray Plains Farmers
- 
 Northern Sustainable Soils
- 
 Society of Precision Ag Australia
- 
 Upper North Farming Systems
- 
 Women Together Learning
- 
 South Australian Livestock Consultants

ANNUAL REPORT

Prepared by Mark Stanley, Executive Officer, Ag Excellence Alliance

Building Stronger Networks & Delivering Greater Impact

The 2025–26 financial year marked a significant milestone for the Ag Excellence Alliance (Ag Ex)

Building on its role as South Australia's peak network for grower groups, Ag Ex strengthened its position as an independent leader, trusted connector and delivery partner across agricultural research, development, extension and climate resilience.

Throughout the year, the organisation remained focused on its purpose of providing independent leadership, strengthening collaboration and connecting growers, researchers, industry and government to deliver practical outcomes for farming communities. Guided by the 2022–27 Strategic Plan, Ag Ex continued to expand its capability, influence and impact while ensuring grower groups remained central to agricultural innovation and practice change.

Delivering Against the Strategic Plan

Strategic Priority 1 – People & Structure

Building organisational capability

As Ag Ex continued to grow, considerable effort was invested in strengthening the organisation itself. Staff capacity increased to eight contracted professionals supported by a network of partner organisations delivering specialist project outcomes. This growth has positioned Ag Ex to manage increasingly complex multi-partner projects while maintaining strong support for member grower groups.

A major achievement during the year was development of an Ag Ex Executive Officer Transition Plan, ensuring leadership succession, organisational continuity and long-term sustainability. Regular team planning meetings also improved coordination across project delivery, communications and organisational development.

Key outcomes

- Expanded organisational capability
- Improved governance and succession planning
- Enhanced internal collaboration
- Increased capacity to manage major national projects and partnerships.

2025–26 at a Glance



20

South Australian grower groups supported



8

contracted staff delivering core services



20

partner organisations involved in project delivery



\$13.18m

active project portfolio



Nationally significant leadership in drought resilience, climate adaptation and agricultural extension



Expanded partnerships with government, research organisations and industry.

Strategic Priority 2 – Grower Groups

Strengthening South Australia's Grower Group network

Grower groups remain the foundation of Ag Ex's work.

During the year, Ag Ex continued to support a diverse statewide network representing broadacre cropping, livestock, mixed farming systems, precision agriculture and regional agricultural innovation.

The Executive Officer Network continued to mature, providing valuable peer learning, professional development and networking opportunities. The annual EO Forum equipped participants with practical skills in governance, contracts, membership engagement and organisational leadership.

Ag Ex also coordinated extensive consultation with grower groups to inform the future governance of the South Australian Drought Hub. This ensured producer perspectives were clearly represented in future planning and reinforced the important role grower groups play in connecting research with on-farm adoption.

Key outcomes

- Stronger collaboration across the grower group network
- Practical governance and leadership resources developed
- Increased recognition of grower groups as trusted extension partners
- Greater producer input into strategic industry initiatives.

Strategic Priority 3 – Advocacy & Partnerships

Building influence through collaboration

Ag Ex significantly expanded its influence across the agricultural sector during 2025–26.

The organisation represented the interests of South Australian grower groups through active participation in the SA Drought Hub Institutional Management Committee, PIRSA Drought Advisory Group, National Drought Forum and numerous industry working groups.

Partnerships with organisations including the University of Adelaide, CSIRO, SARDI, GRDC, Flinders University, SAGIT and the Future Drought Fund continued to grow, allowing Ag Ex to influence project design while ensuring extension and adoption remained central to research investment.

These partnerships have strengthened Ag Ex's reputation as a trusted organisation capable of bringing together researchers, industry and farming communities to deliver practical outcomes.

Key outcomes

- Stronger advocacy for grower groups
- Increased recognition of Ag Ex nationally
- Expanded research and industry partnerships
- Improved opportunities for collaborative project delivery.

Strategic Priority 4 – Climate Resilience

Turning research into practical outcomes

Climate resilience remained the largest area of organisational activity during 2025–26.

Ag Ex played a leading role in delivering projects focused on drought preparedness, low-emissions farming systems, regenerative agriculture, climate-smart soil technologies, early and dry sowing, extension capability and farmer adoption.

Major milestones included commencement of the STRAP long-term trials, continued delivery of the Low Emissions Intensity Farming Systems (LEIFS) initiative, expansion of Climate Smart Soil Technologies and the successful Scaling Success funding application, securing \$2.7 million to improve adoption of early and dry sowing practices across southern Australia.

Together, these projects demonstrate Ag Ex's evolution from supporting networks to leading nationally significant agricultural innovation programs.

Key outcomes

- National leadership in climate resilience
- Long-term demonstration and trial sites established
- Major new funding secured
- Improved connections between research and farming practice
- Greater capacity to support climate adaptation across regional communities.

Looking Ahead

Ag Ex enters 2026–27 as a stronger, more capable and increasingly influential organisation.

Priorities for the coming year include implementing the Executive Officer transition, delivering the Communications Strategy, supporting the next phase of the South Australian Drought Hub, and continuing to lead nationally significant projects in climate resilience, drought preparedness and agricultural extension.

By remaining independent, collaborative and firmly connected to its statewide grower group network, Ag Ex is well positioned to continue helping South Australian agriculture respond to emerging challenges while creating new opportunities for growers and regional communities.

Summary

The 2025–26 year demonstrated Ag Ex's continued evolution from a coordination body into a highly respected organisation delivering leadership, collaboration and practical impact across South Australia's agricultural sector. Through strengthened organisational capability, a thriving grower group network, influential partnerships and nationally recognised climate resilience initiatives, Ag Ex continues to play a critical role in ensuring research, innovation and investment translate into real benefits for growers and regional communities.



AgExcellence ALLIANCE

Linking Grower Networks

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