A view from APEN –
The Australasia-Pacific Extension Network

Austin McLennan, APEN President
AFI Agricultural Innovation Systems at the Crossroads Conference
29-30 May, Canberra, ACT
Extension at the Crossroads – Are we there yet?
Aims:

To provide an APEN perspective of the future of agricultural extension services in Australia, and what the system should look like by:

• Considering some recent reviews of agricultural innovation systems overseas: UK and NZ
• Challenging some unfounded assumptions about private sector capacity
• Pointing out three broad areas of concern related to:
  • Perceptions about extension and its role
  • System design issues
  • Extension skills
• Making some specific recommendations to industry and government.
• Welcoming the language of “Agricultural Innovation Systems”
Mind your language!…it affects how you think

- R&D
- RD&E
- Agricultural Innovation Systems
Defining Extension

• “Extension is the process of enabling change and innovation in individuals, communities and industries involved in the primary industry sector and with natural resource management.” (SELN 2009)

• While extension seeks to improve communication and information flow between industry, agency and community stakeholders, it is primarily concerned with building capacity for change” (SELN 2009)
Two views of the future?

UK - “Too much unusable research”

NZ - “Hyper Privatised”
• “The challenge for the 21st Century is to produce more while impacting less.

• “However, the agricultural R&D pipelines in the UK – including the extension services required to transfer new knowledge and technologies onto farms – have been allowed to weaken over the past 25 years...

• “Growth in UK agricultural productivity is now lagging.... (and) must be addressed.

APPGSTA, November 2010
Prof. David Leaver
“While funding for basic research has remained substantial... the progressive withdrawal of public spending for applied agricultural research has **significantly reduced the UK’s capacity to innovate and translate relevant basic research into practice.**

“The focus must shift from the UK being a ‘world leader in basic research’ to the UK becoming a ‘world leader in basic research AND its translation into practice’

An extension challenge?
• “The important question is whether... the necessary scientific expertise and infrastructure is in place to link science with practice and practice with science.

• “This will vary considerably across agricultural sectors and enterprises. However the change of public sector funding of agricultural research over the past 25 years has adversely affected the research translation capacity in most technology areas.”

Failure in translation, or the wrong research agenda to start with?
“Government should clarify what it expects from CRIs”

• “A CRI is not a normal business, established in response to a market opportunity. Rather, CRIs were established in response to a market failure, and the resulting lack of private sector activity in the areas in which CRIs operate.

• “…too much focus on the commercial return to the CRI rather than the economic and other returns to New Zealand from CRI research. “This emphasis encourages CRIs to deliver $1 million in profit to their bottom lines rather than $100 million to New Zealand as a national benefit.”
Government should provide funding for CRIs to meet the expectations set

- A major problem is short-term contestable funds ... The resulting uncertainty makes it difficult for them to operate strategically.

- “.., more effort into their relationship with the (funding source) than end-users of their research... Can impede effective technology transfer, which requires strong relationships and continual dialogue.

- “Technology transfer activities may (be needed) long after a particular project has ended. The costs associated with ensuring that research contributes to national well-being do not stop when the contract funding stops.
CRIs need a focus on technology and information transfer

• “CRIs...conduct their research to produce maximum benefit for New Zealand. **CRIs can be successful only if they make their research findings widely available and useful.**

• **“Need variety of methods to transfer technologies and ideas** to different types of users...Success depends on focussing on what end-users need and are capable of adopting, and on taking a creative approach...

• **“Advisory visits, open source information, publishing popular books directed at the general public, and staff secondments are all examples of effective technology transfer mechanisms.”**

“**The CRI Taskforce recommends that Government identify technology transfer as a key responsibility for all CRIs.**”
E capacity missing in both systems

Where was the private sector E?
Issues with relying on private sector E

• **Private sector realities:**
  – Can provide tailored, efficient advisory services
  – Need a swift return on effort
  – Less likely to be involved in issues where long term system-changes required.
  – Business viability dependent on client/farmer density.
  – Variable linkages with R&D - often legacy linkages

• **System issues with increased privatisation of E:**
  – Strengthen or weaken national innovation capacity?
  – Drivers/incentives for private businesses to take up E around innovation and change?
  – Dependence on competitive government grants?
Public/Private partnerships

“The private sector will develop in response to commercial opportunities available to them, irrespective of what we might think should happen” (Pannell & March 2013)

Therefore...

Partnerships cannot be assumed

Must be intentionally developed, negotiated and nurtured.
• Public-good activities remain a primary responsibility for DPIs
• Industry-good activities co-funded by industry bodies and DPIs
• Private-good activities (increasingly) undertaken on a user-pays basis

Private sector vital - not a solve-all
The Future:
Three broad areas of concern

1. How Extension and its Role is Perceived
2. System Design
3. Extension Skills
I suppose I do extension but I don’t call it that. I call it...

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<thead>
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<th>health promotion</th>
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<td>capacity engagement</td>
<td>implementation</td>
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<td>communication</td>
<td>industry engagement</td>
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<td>community development</td>
<td>industry liaison</td>
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<td>land protection – facilitation and education</td>
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<td>leadership &amp; coaching</td>
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<td>practice change</td>
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<td>research</td>
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<td>volunteer community / industry engagement</td>
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<td>policy development</td>
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<td>political lobbying, facilitation</td>
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<td>project management</td>
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<td>regulation</td>
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APEN, 2009
1. How extension is perceived

• Perceptions are important!

• ‘Extension' is challenging to define

• Complexity exists - must be acknowledged

• Simplistic models of extension unlikely to succeed in longer term: need a system-wide approach

• How extension is perceived by government and industry will determine how (or if) it is organised and resourced.
2. System design - some examples

- **Sugar Industry Example**
  - BSES Extension staff cut
  - “PEC” Group retained within BSES
  - Former BSES staff retained by industry (mills etc.)
  - Net effect:
    - No reduction in extension $$$ spend (for now)
    - Weakened institutional/industry capacity
    - Reliance on (flawed?) assumption that agribusiness will fill the gap.

- **NSW Example – ‘Local Land Services’**
  - Looks like a commitment to extension
  - Structural separation of Extension from Research
3. Required Diversity in Extension Skills
- some examples

• “IPM workshops for growers and consultants – lessons for R,D&E”¹

• “Innovative Service Delivery – a case study of new directions for the Victorian DPI”²

• “Eliciting New Zealand hill country farmers’ decisions to participate in a voluntary soil conversation strategy”³

1. Charleston, Miles and Brier, 2011.
1. A more intentional approach to extension by stakeholders

“Everybody’s business soon becomes nobody’s business”

The forgotten ‘E’
2. A reconceptualization of extension as the process for managing multi-directional information flows within an innovation system

“Not one-way”
“Not even two-way”
“Multi-directional / Multi-channel”
The How and the Who – i.e. Systems and People
3. Recognition of capacity building as a separate cross-sectoral strategy within the National RD&E framework

How is it capacity building any less of an issue for our primary industries than issues to do with weeds, water and soil?
4. Resourcing of an academically-based Centre of Excellence or Professorial Chair in Extension and Advisory Systems
5. Improved access to post-graduate and VET opportunities for development of specialist extension skills
6. The critical importance of developing public/private sector partnerships to realise synergies.
7. Careful structuring and integration of E within and across institutions
8. Greater consideration of the role of non-R&D related E

Collaboration brings corporate performance to family farming
By joining their businesses and applying a set of governing principles, Luxton growers John Gladigau and Robin Schaefer have gone from farming 4000 to 9000 hectares

By Emma Leonard

What started as an experiment in part of an NAB's farming and business coaching project has turned into a new business model for two Mallee-based family farming businesses.

Established in 2009, Bunda Brown is an innovative, collaborative farming venture entreating between South Eastern Wheat and John and Robin Gladigau. In the mid-2000s, John and Bernwyn bought 200 hectares, planting 100,000, and ran 650 sheep on the property, near Loxton, South Australia. With tightening margins and increasing costs of production, John realized that he needed to expand the farm or be swallowed by someone else expanding it. He was a big proponent of the idea, but no one wanted to listen to it at the time. I know it worked because that was the only way the farm could be maintained, while at the same time implementing efficient and profitable business practices, John says.

In 2010, the two farmers got their hands on the Bunda Brown Scholarship, awarded to successful collaborative ventures. The program provides young, aspiring farmers with the opportunity to learn from experienced and successful farming businesses. The scholarship has helped Bunda Brown to expand its operations and attract new farmers to the region.

R&D not the only source of innovation
9. Development of new institutions and ways of working together in a pluralistic delivery environment
10. Issues of how extension and its support systems are resourced must also be considered.
Agricultural Extension: Is the system dying or is a new model evolving?

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www.apen.org.au