

Monday 9 April 2018

SPECIAL EDITION: Accelerating Precision Agriculture to Decision Agriculture

How much digital technology will transform agriculture, the likely benefits and disadvantages of these technologies and the issues the sector must address to effectively implement a digital strategy are the issues addressed in the Autumn edition of the Australian Farm Institute's quarterly *Farm Policy Journal*.

The papers included in this edition are abridged versions of the project reports produced for the Accelerating Precision Agriculture to Decision Agriculture (P2D) research program. The P2D program, supported by funding from the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, involved all 15 rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs) and was focused on three primary aims:

- *Facilitating the development of digital technology in Australian agriculture.*
- *Fostering the establishment of appropriate legal frameworks, data systems and access to critical datasets.*
- *Identifying the data communications systems required to deliver the benefits of digital agriculture to the Australia farm and agribusiness sector.*

"As digital technology permeates our everyday lives, the technological transformation of agricultural businesses is rapidly escalating," said AFI Executive Director, Mick Keogh. "These papers clearly indicate a cohesive, whole-of-industry collaboration is needed for digital agriculture development, as many of the issues currently impeding digital maturity are common across sectors."

Mr Keogh said a clear theme in the papers was the currently immature state of Australia's agtech adoption in both culture and infrastructure.

"No simple 'silver-bullet' recommendations will optimise the opportunity for digital agriculture to develop to its full potential. Rather, these papers represent an important first step in an extended and broad-ranging process, requiring a continuation of the cooperative effort which was demonstrated across RDCs and industry bodies to produce the research that underpins these findings," Mr Keogh said.

The *Farm Policy Journal* also includes a detailed economic analysis of the farm sector benefits potentially available from digital technology adoption by AFI General Manager Research, Richard Heath. The modelling projects that unconstrained implementation of digital technologies would result in a 25% boost to the value of Australian agriculture (\$20.3 billion increase from 2014–15 GVP) with all sectors benefiting. Areas providing the biggest cross-sectoral gains were labour savings from automation (\$7.4 billion), genetic gains through objective data (\$2.9 billion), closer tailoring of inputs to needs (\$2.3 billion) and enhancements to market access and biosecurity (\$1 billion).

Other key points covered in this *Farm Policy Journal* edition include:

- Based on survey results, more than 50% of farms rely on mobile phone networks for internet access rather than fixed line or satellite services – only 34% of respondents had most or full coverage across the farm, while 43% had little or no mobile coverage at all on the farm. Second-tier providers are utilising different technologies to provide across-farm solutions.

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- The agriculture sector faces a dilemma regarding proprietary rights of data: the more secure and regulated data ownership rights become, the more technology developers will face barriers that reduce their willingness to invest in R&D. Interested parties will need to cooperatively develop an agreed set of standards to facilitate best practice in data governance, rather than focus on data ownership rights.
- P2D recommendations include the establishment of a Digital Agriculture Taskforce for Australia headed by a Chief Digital Agricultural Officer, a voluntary Data Management Code of Practice and a Data Accreditation Scheme, investment to improve rural telecommunications and new investment models including public/private investment.

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