



Maximising the Connection between Research, Development and Extension Providers and Agribusiness

by Gordon Stone & Associates

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Foreword

Earlier work has pointed out that although agribusiness is a key emerging conduit for information delivery to growers, little strategic engagement appears to exist between agribusiness and research and development (R&D) providers, including research and development corporations (RDCs). This project aimed to create a management system to facilitate general RDC interaction with a cross-section of agribusiness in order to facilitate the transfer of research, development and extension (RD&E) information through agribusiness to growers. This was replaced with the concept of establishing a single agribusiness access point to R&D outputs via the interactive FarmPlus Information Repository.

Methods and settings for agribusiness and R&D providers to collaborate so as to maximise the adoption of R&D outputs by growers will be for growers' benefit, for specific industry benefit, for community benefit and for global food security and resource sustainability.

This study demonstrated that agribusiness advisers make up a significant information conduit to growers and yet that conduit has not yet been used strategically by the R&D community. It concluded that the use of the FarmPlus model of an interactive Information Repository is a way to commence RDC and agribusiness engagement using a tangible product.

A one-year Implementation Phase is proposed in order to commence strategic engagement between key R&D senior managers and their counterparts in key agribusiness sectors. The purpose of this phase is to commence communication, measure success of the FarmPlus model and determine other communication methods to secure longer-term engagement.

This project was funded through the Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building in Rural Industries which is made up of the research and development corporations: Australian Wool Innovation; Cotton Research and Development Corporation; Dairy Australia; Grains Research and Development Corporation; Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation; Horticulture Australia Limited; Land & Water Australia; Meat & Livestock Australia; Murray-Darling Basin Commission; Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation; Sugar Research and Development Corporation; and the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

This report is an addition to RIRDC's diverse range of over 1800 research publications which can be viewed and freely downloaded from our website www.rirdc.gov.au. Information on the CVCB is available online at <http://www.rirdc.gov.au/capacitybuilding/>.

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I also acknowledge the input of company agribusiness agronomists and private consultant advisers who provided data on which these project findings are based. A number of growers also provided their input – usually in conjunction with their adviser – in a roundtable setting in a paddock, in a shed or at the kitchen table.

Finally I also acknowledge Adrian Davis and Brendan Fox, directors of FarmPlus, for being prepared to engage vigorously with the CVCB Agribusiness Working Group in order to create an Information Repository that would meet the needs of the R&D sector as well as their agribusiness clients – and of course, ultimately meet the needs of growers.

I draw attention to the commercial-in-confidence information of Appendix 7 – The FarmPlus Business Plan on page 66 of this report.

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August 2008

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Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|---|
| AANRO | Australian Agriculture and Natural Resources Online |
| APEN | Australasia-Pacific Extension Network |
| AWI | Australian Wool Innovation |
| CRCs | Cooperative Research Centres |
| CRDC | Cotton Research and Development Corporation |
| CVCB | Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building |
| DA | Dairy Australia |
| DAFF | Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry |
| FFICRC | Future Farm Industries CRC |
| GRDC | Grains Research and Development Corporation |
| HAL | Horticulture Australia Ltd |
| IP | Intellectual Property |
| KPIs | Key Performance Indicators |
| LWA | Land & Water Australia |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MLA | Meat & Livestock Australia |
| NRM | Natural Resource Management |
| NSW | New South Wales |
| R&D | Research and Development |
| RD&E | Research Development and Extension |
| RDCs | Research and Development Corporations |
| RIRDC | Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation |
| ROI | Return On Investment |
| SRDC | Sugar Research and Development Corporation |

Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| Foreword | iii |
| Acknowledgements | iv |
| Abbreviations | v |
| Executive Summary | vii |
| 1. The Project Objectives | 1 |
| 1.1 Project Overview | 1 |
| 1.2 Primary Aims of this Project..... | 4 |
| 1.3 The Project Objectives and Key Elements | 5 |
| 1.4 Personnel | 7 |
| 1.5 Project Methodology | 7 |
| 2. Project Outputs | 10 |
| 2.1 Data Gathering | 10 |
| 2.2 Data Outputs..... | 11 |
| 2.2.1 Outcomes from Grower Surveys..... | 11 |
| 2.2.2 Outcomes from Agribusiness Surveys | 15 |
| 2.2.3 Grower segmentation findings | 22 |
| 2.3 A Management System or Not? | 22 |
| 2.4 Fostering RDC to Agribusiness Engagement..... | 26 |
| 3. Outcomes and Conclusions | 30 |
| 3.1 Discussion | 30 |
| 3.2 The Appropriate Information Repository | 32 |
| 3.3 Key Issues | 34 |
| 3.4 The Implementation Phase | 38 |
| 3.5 Conclusions | 41 |
| Bibliography | 44 |
| Reports and Papers | 44 |
| Articles | 44 |
| Appendices | 45 |
| Appendix 1: Project Milestones and Performance Indicators..... | 45 |
| Appendix 2: Project GANTT Chart..... | 46 |
| Appendix 3: Survey pro-formas seeking data from agribusiness / growers | 47 |
| Appendix 4: Baseline understanding of RDC engagement with agribusiness..... | 51 |
| Appendix 5: Summary of surveys conducted with growers and agribusiness advisers..... | 53 |
| Summary of surveys conducted with agribusiness | 56 |
| Appendix 6: Stages and steps of the CVCB agribusiness project – 2007/8..... | 63 |
| Appendix 7: FarmPlus Business Plan - 3 March 2008 | 66 |
| Appendix 8: Year 1 Update and Proposed Project Direction | 67 |
| 1. The Project | 67 |
| 2. Project aim..... | 67 |
| 3. Findings to-date..... | 68 |

Executive Summary

What the report is about

Earlier work has pointed out that although agribusiness is a key emerging conduit for information delivery to growers, little strategic engagement appears to exist between agribusiness and research and development (R&D) providers, including research and development corporations (RDCs). This project aimed to create a management system to facilitate general RDC interaction with a cross-section of agribusiness in order to facilitate the transfer of research, development and extension (RD&E) information through agribusiness to growers. This was replaced with the concept of establishing a single agribusiness access point to R&D outputs via the interactive FarmPlus Information Repository.

Who is the report targeted at?

This report will be helpful to the wide Australian agriculture community. In particular, it is targeted at agriculture research, development and extension (RD&E) providers (including agricultural research and development corporations) and agribusiness in order to facilitate the transfer of research, development and extension (RD&E) information through to growers.

Background

This longitudinal project for the Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building (CVCB) was undertaken over a three year period and concluded in May 2008. It resulted from recommendations arising from previous work by Stone (2005) which reported that:

- within five years agribusiness would be the key information supplier, consolidator and adviser to growers
- it is important to engage all RD&E providers including cooperative research centres (CRCs), universities, state agriculture departments, etc. to facilitate the role of agribusiness in capacity building
- limited access to cutting edge data and innovative practices, through agribusiness, was one of the key impediments facing growers.

Stone's earlier work pointed out that, although agribusiness is a key emerging conduit for information delivery to growers, little strategic engagement between agribusiness and research and development (R&D) providers – particularly the research and development corporations (RDCs) – appears to exist. This is demonstrated again through this report though improvement is evident.

Aims/objectives

The objective of this project was to create and test a strategy for future interaction (Management System) to facilitate the transfer of R&D information and outputs through agribusiness, to growers. The purpose was to foster a strong connection between agribusiness and providers of RD&E information – to generate benefits for growers – through the supply of timely, cutting-edge R&D outcomes to assist them in the globally competitive market.

Methods used

The method used for this project was: to gather data by consulting with RD&E providers, agribusiness and growers about their information needs; using that data and three case studies to canvass a likely interaction process (or Management System); determining a series of protocols to set up such a strategy; field testing and confirming that system; and reporting to stakeholders accordingly. It was proposed that an appropriate strategy would encompass a range of extension activities such as meetings, field days, training, newsletter, open forums, etc.

The expected project outputs were:

- i. a report of the current and future interaction of agribusiness and RD&E providers (a baseline understanding)
- ii. documentation and use of the case studies as practical and test examples of how this interaction could and will work
- iii. documentation of any qualitative or quantitative changes, effects and outcomes experienced by the stakeholders as a result of the project
- iv. the engagement of the key stakeholders: through a newsletter that outlines the innovations
- v. two Agribusiness Capacity Building Open Forums
- vi. a strategy for the process of interaction through the proposed Management System that is valued by users and facilitates a stronger connection.

A range of key issues emerged from the early data gathering phase of the project that required further investigation and informed future project considerations:

- Early on in the project the proposed case studies became problematic due to drought and personnel issues and it became obvious they would not provide the outcomes originally proposed. This required substitution with a more rigorous and intensive survey process of growers and agribusiness advisers.
- Outcomes from the agribusiness surveys indicated that additional segmentation of growers was required to effectively categorise the diverse range of growers into groups – this added to the data from Stone’s work in 2005. Further segmentation of the agribusiness sector was also necessary to ensure comprehensive identification.
- Engagement of these two target audiences by the RDCs would encompass knowledge of how agribusiness and growers seek their information delivery. Data from the surveys indicated that grower respondents preferred that the agribusiness sector acts as the direct conduit of information, from R&D providers to them (as their grower clients). They also generally preferred ‘snapshots’ of information to be provided directly to them rather than detailed research reports or statements.
- Outcomes from the surveys identified that there was a perception of a lack of interaction and understanding between RDCs and agribusiness and vice versa. When the project began there was little initial strategic engagement between RDCs and agribusiness, and few immediate plans to do so – although during the project: Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) commenced and delivered on a strategic interaction with agribusiness; Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) continued to refine its engagement planning and delivery process; Land & Water Australia (LWA) and Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) commenced minor strategic engagement and elected not to continue; and Dairy Australia (DA) and Future Farm Industries CRC (FFICRC) continued their strategic engagement (whilst DA diverted considerable resources to drought management) and both CRDC and Horticulture Australia Ltd (HAL) engaged with the FarmPlus Information Repository.

- It became evident that greater understanding of the key drivers of growers and agribusiness which dictate how they ultimately ‘do business’, would be required. There were differing terms of trade used by agribusiness and RDCs that would need to be understood and recognised. There were significant cultural constraints to engagement which slowed the project process – and this later necessitated establishment of a CVCB Agribusiness Working Group to facilitate an understanding of key issues in order to move forward.
- Most importantly, it emerged during the project that the matter of connection between agribusiness and providers of RD&E information was a secondary issue – it became apparent that the primary issue is information delivery and understanding the factors that affect that delivery from R&D providers to agribusiness. The key issue, it appeared (for all parties) – RDCs, agribusiness and growers – was access to, and delivery of, information in formats that were relevant to the target audiences.

As a result of the data analysis and these issues emerging, the project process was reviewed and altered from the original planned methodology. The notion of a structured Management System, designed to achieve the objectives of the project, was substituted with an investigation into methods to facilitate access and delivery of RD&E information via agribusiness.

A formal group – the CVCB Agribusiness Working Group – was set up in April 2007 and convened its first meeting in May 2007 to carry forward the project process in the final one-year project phase. Development of an appropriate central Information Repository became the focus of future discussion and exploration. Such a model would preferably link with the existing Australian Agriculture and Natural Resources Online facility (AANRO) and the specific delivery processes of the RDCs. The commercial entity ‘FarmPlus’, which was being established to support access by one of the national agribusiness companies to provide ‘one stop shop’ access to technical information including R&D outputs – was canvassed as a suitable model. The subsequent engagement of FarmPlus raised questions about how interactions with AANRO should be facilitated and could be mutually beneficial. It was determined that direct RDC-agribusiness engagement could only be commenced once these issues were addressed.

Results/key findings

Key findings from the project are reported below:

- At project commencement only two of the R&D providers – the Salinity CRC (Cooperative Research Centre for Plant Based Management of Dryland Salinity – now the FFICRC) and Dairy Australia – had relatively formal strategic links with agribusiness. This suggests that engagement of RDC and agribusiness was limited. At project conclusion four of the R&D providers had developed or were close to developing strategic links with agribusiness, while another three had moved towards such links.
- The relatively low level of ‘operational association’ demonstrates a level of perceived difficulty of RDCs in undertaking RDC-agribusiness relationships. The changed level of ‘desire for association’ that occurred during the project would be regarded as a positive step in development of strengthened RDC-agribusiness relationships.
- Both agribusiness and RDCs seek strategic engagement with each other – there simply needs to be a purpose for that engagement. Support and use of the FarmPlus model as an interactive Information Repository – which could provide a central point for information access and feedback from information users, primarily focussed on agribusiness – proved to be a reason to engage.

- The agribusiness and grower market place is highly segmented. The RDCs are equally segmented and they generally operate in sector-based silos. Identification of the diverse segments and groups is necessary to achieve effective delivery of RD&E. It may be expected that market forces will dictate that agribusiness advisers will focus their attention on the more innovative, profitable and motivated clients. These grower groups, the most successful, the professionals, corporate and peri-urban growers are highly responsive and profitability focussed and expect – and are prepared to pay for – cutting-edge, relevant R&D information in a refined form – although transaction costs are critical.
- Growers saw the work of R&D providers as being relevant to them – though there was some criticism of MLA, AWI and LWA as being distant and disconnected from them. This contrasted with their view of GRDC, which was generally positive and also RIRDC, which was valued.
- There is a disparity between the R&D provider culture and the agribusiness culture and this influences how their interaction is best managed. This is suggested by RDC perceptions that R&D outputs (accessed by agribusiness) are used primarily for ‘agribusiness to make money’ – which is at odds with perceptions that growers (their levy payers) are encouraged to make money from implementing R&D outputs on farm and for industry good. This issue reinforces the importance of determining and agreeing to the transaction terms of trade when RDCs and agribusiness collaborate or ‘do business’. Understanding and acknowledging the terms of trade and common ground between agribusiness and R&D providers are key factors in building the relationship.
- There is also a cultural barrier between how agribusiness and grower clients do their business – related to differing focus on profitability vs. accountability. These barriers need to be further understood in order to foster improved engagement.
- The delivery of information (including R&D findings) and its synthesis into ‘take home’ messages and decision support advice to facilitate grower practice change is a key need for RDCs, for agribusiness, and for the ultimate client of both ... the growers. This provides a ‘common ground’ and an impetus for change.
- It is apparent that agribusiness has a strong desire to engage with R&D providers and can be a strong feedback mechanism – particularly in association with FarmPlus.
- The concept of a central Information Repository is a motivation for meaningful engagement between RDCs and agribusiness.

This project concluded at the end of May 2008. Investigation into the FarmPlus model – in which CRDC, HAL and CRT became engaged during the project – and a mutually beneficial engagement with AANRO – is ongoing. A series of Conclusions that support the key findings are reported:

1. The FarmPlus model is a key platform for information delivery of R&D outputs to growers via agribusiness.
2. The FarmPlus model and AANRO have greater mutual value to agribusiness and to RDCs when aligned and linked.
3. An Implementation Phase is needed to actually engage RDCs formally with agribusiness.
4. An RDC-agribusiness roundtable forum is the next step in RDC-agribusiness engagement, which would focus on best uses of FarmPlus and how to deliver outcomes of cross-RDC projects.

5. Pooling of funds to go into FarmPlus is a key element of the next phase of engaging with FarmPlus, as long as those funds are appropriately managed on behalf of the participating RDCs and FarmPlus delivers specified outcomes.
6. An appropriate management function, such as the continuation of the current project, is an appropriate manner of ensuring the RDC and FarmPlus relationship develops in a structured and accountable way.
7. A robust accountability and evaluation function ought to be built into future management of the RDC and FarmPlus relationship.
8. The management function would need very clear agreed terms of reference to guide it.
9. The RDC and FarmPlus relationship is dependent on engaging RDC Executive Directors, Chairs and DAFF.

Implications for relevant stakeholders

While this process is not without risks, it is a key platform for R&D providers to more effectively deliver R&D outputs to levy payers/tax payers. It is a way to bring agribusiness and R&D providers, particularly RDCs, 'into the (one) tent' to better service grower information needs – and provide added feedback into future R&D priorities. It is an opportunity to create a one stop shop or conduit process for information and access to R&D outputs and to support grower practice change through access to cutting edge information.

Recommendations

To fulfil its objectives, it is recommended that the CVCB Agribusiness project builds upon these outcomes and moves into an Implementation Phase to formally engage with agribusiness.

Factors relevant to the proposed implementation phase are:

- Cross-RDC projects identified in Table 3 form a sound basis for investigating RDC-agribusiness engagement, including access to the FarmPlus Information Repository.
- An RDC-agribusiness roundtable forum could be activated once the Information Repository and suitable collaborative cross-RDC projects are confirmed
- These both form valid reasons to commence a formal RDC-agribusiness engagement process
- A series of immediate steps to finalise key issues regarding the suitability of operations of FarmPlus to meet RDC accountability and management parameters are to be finalised by 30 June 2008
- An Executive Manager, DAFF sees the RDC-FarmPlus collaboration as being a useful and timely way of facilitating information delivery to growers via agribusiness and sees it meeting current federal government policy perspectives.
- A further one-year Implementation Phase in 2008/9 would be valuable to secure the engagement of agribusiness with RDCs using the FarmPlus model.

It is anticipated that such an Implementation Phase will include:

- a proposed roundtable to commence communication
- confirmation of the FarmPlus business plan
- activation of arrangements between a group of the RDCs – CRDC, HAL, FFICRC, LWA, RIRDC and GRDC, who have expressed an interest in FarmPlus – along with FarmPlus itself
- development of terms of reference for delivery of FarmPlus as a product across that group of RDCs – and possibly the FFICRC

- monitoring success of the outcomes against agreed objectives – through gateways at 3, 6, 12 and 18 months
- using FarmPlus as a driver for engagement with agribusiness ensuring it meets their needs.

It has therefore been proposed that the CVCB agribusiness project should continue for one more year until the implementation phase is completed.

1. The Project Objectives

1.1 Project Overview

Context of this study

The objective of this project is to facilitate and improve agribusiness extension of research, development and extension (RD&E) information. Stone (2005), recognised agribusiness as a *'key conduit to facilitate the delivery of levy funded knowledge and information from RDCs and other R&D organisations, to growers'* – the importance of this being further reinforced during this study. This project establishes a practical outcome of an experimental central Information Repository – a central hub for information access, which serves the needs of stakeholders and feeds back into RDC and agribusiness priorities.

The following expresses the rationale behind this project from the project leader's point of view:

- 'The \$500m rural research and development corporation (RDC) sector represents all major farm industries using farm production levies and matched government funding ... and 14 RDCs undertake R&D which has driven innovation and development of rural businesses, communities and the national economy under the guidance of the individual industries and government research priorities.
- The R&D sector believes it is necessary to find new ways to spearhead Australia's \$35b farm sector as changing economic, climatic and environmental threats loom ... and agribusiness companies through their valuable farmer-relationships are ideally placed to support these developments.
- Creation of rural RDCs involved formal agreements between industries and government, and since 1992 the agribusiness sector had broadly remained 'outside the tent' when it came to establishing frameworks to convey information generated by R&D to the customers of agribusiness (and RDCs) – the growers.
- Research has found some industries and some agribusiness companies have established good working relationships. This approach has been to the benefit of some producers and some agribusiness companies, but not necessarily to the whole industry.
- Agribusiness does not well understand how to directly find and use the information generated by industry R&D efforts. Furthermore, growers are looking for their information from a very wide range of sources, and are not always confident their search result is based on the latest information.'

In addition, Julian Cribb – in his article in *The Australian* newspaper on 2 April 2008 – laments that *"Australia has a science flood but a knowledge drought. Large parts of our science moulder in the yellowing leaves of journals, never to be delivered, never to be used."*

He further states: *"In the unceasing quest for knowledge, each year Australian scientists carry out more than 12,000 individual research projects, more than half of them funded by the public. However, in the combined public announcements of the universities and science agencies, only about 1,200 outcomes are reported. Or, put another way, we invest roughly \$12 billion a year on discovering new knowledge and perhaps \$250 million on promulgating it. We highly value knowledge in a scientific journal article but accord little value to its transmission to the wider society or to users."*

Stone (2005) reported that *"access to, interpretation of and application of a smorgasbord of information, at an holistic business level, categorise successful growers. The vital role of agronomists, consultants and some accountants is to facilitate that process. In many cases, because of their professional ability, the role of agribusiness is to interpret and make relevant new technology, ideas and concepts, so farmer business people can make the best decisions about application of relevant technology."*

Stone (2005) defines agribusiness as: *"a person or organisation that generates income from the sale of a product or service or both, which facilitates the decision making of a farmer or land manager"*: He further states: *"agribusiness is used as a general term to encompass – companies who sell products or services to growers, independent consultants who advise growers about agronomic practices or business management – and companies that supply products for resale (resellers). For the purposes of this project it excludes*

bankers, accountants, trainers, machinery dealers, associations, government-funded organisations, and non-agronomic product suppliers”.

This study sets out to develop a method of, and setting for, agribusiness and R&D providers to collaborate so as to maximise the adoption of R&D outputs by growers for their benefit, for specific industry benefit, for community benefit and for global food security and resource sustainability. For that reason the focus of this report is canvassing how this might be achieved in an applied setting and on considering how to get both RDCs and agribusiness ‘into the tent’ to address the very issues raised by Cribb. It focuses very little on citing references from other workers.

The role of agribusiness as the information conduit

Stone (2005) confirmed the emerging role of agribusiness as a key two-way information conduit between growers and institutional R&D providers. In this study agribusiness is further regarded as being an ‘information consolidator’ as well as being an adviser and conduit. Similarly, farmer innovation is further confirmed as driven by access to cutting edge data and practices – developed as a result of R&D (Stone, 2007).

Stone (2005) reported that agribusiness in all its forms is driven by farmer profitability and capacity building is a key to business survival. Stone noted that the top 20% of growers are almost completely reliant on agribusiness for their information and decision making. Most of these leading growers concentrate on managing the business, whilst leaving much of the agronomic/ production work to their agribusiness advisers and farm manager/contractors. This is commonly the case in the grain, dairy and horticulture industries, in particular.

The leading growers in the meat and livestock, wine and sugar industries are similarly reliant on their agribusiness advisers. These leading growers are prepared to pay for high quality advice. One case grain grower study Stone refers to generated a \$200,000 profit windfall and attributes that profit to his use of key advisers.

The middle group of growers are increasingly using agribusiness, but are price focussed, whereas traditional growers (bottom 20%) are resisting the change to the use of agribusiness. Stone reported consensus amongst project respondents that the continued withdrawal of government ‘no cost to the growers’ extension support will continue. The risk of such a policy is less profitable growers may have access to information which is less relevant or of reduced quality. He reported consensus that growers who currently do not pay for advice will not hear about innovations in productivity or resource management and are expected to exit the industry.

Accordingly, Stone (2005) concluded that agribusiness will become the primary information and capacity building conduit in the near future. He argued that agribusiness is the most crucial component in building capacity of growers to benefit from R&D work.

In terms of understanding the current advisory and information processes operating with agribusiness, Stone gave insights into this process with the ‘Advisory Hub’. A summarised version of the Hub is shown below in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *The Advisory Hub*
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Maximising the effectiveness of information transfer from agribusiness to growers

RDCs, Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs), etc. are highly significant R&D providers/funders and industry influencers. Stone (2005) identified a low or weak connection between agribusiness and the RDCs (and many other R&D providers) and recommended that rapid action be taken to redress that situation.

Stone (2007) summarised trends in public and private extension that indicate:

- Increasingly, growers are seeking highly competent advisers, as their businesses become more complex and demanding. This can be in response to consumer demands for sustainable production methods, organic foods, high quality and safe foods, etc.
- Agribusiness is the main detailed information source and adviser for growers in the broadacre industries – although more so in the grains, horticultural and dairy industries, than the meat and livestock industries.
- Conventional information and communication activities prime the farmer to ask questions of their adviser. What happens next is critical.
- Some growers spend considerable time seeking out detailed information, though the majority seek ‘snapshots’ of information from which they use to frame detailed questions to their advisers.
- Advisers are expected to rapidly access complete answers to those questions – including highly technical data, actions required on the ground in the paddock, the implications of these actions (including to the end product) and other farmer experiences to support the practical ‘take home messages’ coming from these technical sources.
- Advisors are well placed to provide targeted, relevant information to their clients but are driven by making a living from the advice.
- Within the agribusiness and farmer groupings there is considerable variation in terms of needs, expertise and interest.
- Such groupings – or target audiences – have to be considered separately in terms of determining how best to interact with them and meet their specific needs. This means that the traditional ‘scatter gun approach’ of information delivery is no longer relevant, or appropriate, in terms of agribusiness advisers. This must lead to consideration of market segmentation – of both growers and of agribusiness.
- Reduced input costs, income production, sustainability and profits must therefore be the key drivers for RD&E programs so these outputs can be passed on. However for growers, key drivers may not always be just financial – increasingly family or corporate business issues or natural resource management are key considerations.
- Agribusiness, growers and state agencies are quite time poor. Agribusiness often nominates quite defined numbers of days allocated to professional development and is unable to allocate more.
- It is common for agribusiness companies, including consultancies to have sales targets/income thresholds allocated to personnel that guide their work and inform their decision making.

Stone (2005) reported the following key impediments to maximising the effectiveness of agribusiness in extension:

- rapidly accessing highly relevant and innovative technical information to be extended to growers (to assist their decision making in the highly competitive global market place)
- ageing staff and lack of staff succession
- inexperience of the fewer younger staff that are available.

Stone’s 2005 project aimed to assist the R&D community to better understand the agribusiness community. It aimed to create a baseline understanding, and canvassed strategies for the transfer and adoption of the

information from RD&E providers to growers via the agribusiness advisory sector. The focus of these strategies was to assist individual agribusiness advisers in their daily activities.

The connection between RD&E providers and agribusiness

Stone (2005) reported how farmer innovation is driven by their access – via agribusiness – to cutting edge data and practices.

In this current study Stone has further defined the role of agribusiness into four key functions:

- Access the needed information for growers – as a conduit
- Consolidate it for use by growers (and themselves) – as an information consolidator
- Interpret or facilitate the interpretation of the information on that particular farm, region or industry setting – as an adviser
- Help the farmer consider the implications so the farmer can apply the information – as a decision support mechanism.

Stone (2005) also discussed observations by some in agribusiness who see themselves as a conduit to growers and playing a key role in facilitating decision making. They believe firstly they should have a role in RD&E priority setting. Secondly, they believe they can act effectively as a conduit from growers back to the priority setting process of industry R&D funding bodies. These two observations are further supported in the current study project for which this report is prepared. This creates a fifth function – a feedback mechanism.

While these findings were largely directed to RDCs, Stone (2005, 2007) reported they can be directed to other organisations that undertake R&D work using public and industry funds. These include principally – CRCs, state departments of agriculture and other agribusiness. He noted the importance of RD&E providers gaining robust feedback/priority setting information and the value of agribusiness in supporting this.

As a result of his findings through the 2005 CVCB project and based on his Recommendation 3 and 6, Stone recommended that the RDC/agribusiness link be strengthened and that the CVCB take a leadership role. Stone noted that the advisory processes for agribusiness to operate effectively are largely in place. However a key impediment for agribusiness is the ready access to relevant robust scientifically based information.

Therefore the first key issue this current project investigated was how best to facilitate the efficient access – by agribusiness – to the key contemporary information required to facilitate farmer decision making.

The second key issue was to consider the most appropriate delivery mechanisms/methods to ensure that the information is provided in the most useable and readily accessible form to agribusiness. This led to the key research question of whether a Management System can be developed to adequately support this process?

1.2 Primary Aims of this Project

The objective of this project was to establish and test a Management System to facilitate the transfer of R&D information and outputs through Agribusiness, to Growers, (whilst) maximising the connection between those R&D providers and Agribusiness in the process.

In summary, this project provides the opportunity to:

- Further understand how RD&E providers currently connect with agribusiness and vice versa – and more importantly how this is proposed to occur in future
- Determine how to maximise this interaction in order to benefit and support growers as the primary beneficiaries of this data – by determining and recommending a means for doing so using the agribusiness sector as the connection mechanism
- Consider how to systematise this process and maximise its effectiveness in terms of: defining the information needs; facilitating delivery of the information (using the most effective methods); ensuring accessibility of this information (so it is available when needed) and the feedback mechanism – so that

R&D work (undertaken by RD&E providers) can be assured of meeting on-ground needs of users, and RD&E providers can be assisted in priority setting – through some form of a Management System.

Outcomes

The expected outcomes proposed for this project at the time of conception were:

- A baseline understanding of the current status of agribusiness/RD&E provider interactions across a wide spectrum
- A detailed assessment of three case studies proposed to be used during the project
- Development and trial of a proposed Management System to facilitate closer interaction between RD&E providers and agribusiness
- Engaging a variety of agribusiness/RD&E providers and stakeholders in the project to maximise awareness and implementation of the Management System and report the findings of the project.

1.3 The Project Objectives and Key Elements

This project ran between August 2005 and May 2008. See Appendix 1 for project milestones and performance indicators and Appendix 2 for project GANNT chart.

The research revolved around: consulting with RD&E providers and agribusiness about their needs; using that data and three case studies to set up a strategy to facilitate adoption by growers (a Management System); determining a series of protocols that would support the proposed operation of the Management System; conducting a field test; implementing the Management System; confirming the efficacy of the system; and reporting to stakeholders.

The aim of this project was to research and answer four key questions:

1. What are the agribusiness information needs that RD&E providers can supply?
2. How can the information that is needed be best supplied/accessed?
3. How can an RD&E advisory, priority setting and feedback model be established which will satisfy the needs of growers, agribusiness and RD&E providers?
4. Can this be widely implemented?

The Specific Project Objectives were to:

- Gain a baseline understanding of how RDCs and RD&E providers currently connect with agribusiness and how RD&E providers propose to connect with agribusiness in future
- Explore how to maximise the interaction between RD&E providers and agribusiness, as agribusiness becomes the main future extension and capacity building conduit
- Collaborate with RD&E providers to implement agreed case study projects – where agribusiness would be a high priority conduit/facilitator/contributor
- Evaluate the initial relationship between RD&E providers and agribusiness
- Assess and report on the key success factors that would characterise a strong RD&E provider-to-agribusiness link, through a model or Management System.

Issues surfacing throughout the project are reported below.

The case studies

Three case studies that were using or would use agribusiness as a capacity building tool were proposed to be researched to understand the research questions. These case studies were:

1. The dairy industry of Victoria – facilitating stronger connections between workers from the Dairy Australia ‘Taking Stock’ program and advisers.

2. Connecting the grains industry more strongly with agribusiness – collaborating with Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) initiatives.
3. Landmark and salinity – collaborating with key stakeholders to address salinity issues on-ground in key sites via trials, involving stakeholders, and using agribusiness advisers in determining and implementing farmer based salinity management strategies.

Personnel responsible for these case studies agreed to allow investigation of their RD&E provider/ agribusiness connection processes during the project.

The Management System

The strategy for interaction via the Management System (and associated protocols) was expected to facilitate successful engagement between agribusiness and RD&E providers.

It was expected to jointly meet the needs of RD&E providers and agribusiness in terms of:

- agribusiness information needs
- access to agribusiness information and delivery
- feedback processes
- RD&E priority setting.

Throughout the project it was considered important to work with a variety of agribusiness and RD&E providers to maximise awareness and implementation of the Management System and project findings.

Assessing change across the project

The three case studies were to provide an objective measure to gauge whether the project activities were having the desired effect. Accordingly, a low-level evaluation project process – called the Change Assessment System – was to be established.

Initially the Change Assessment System was planned to provide baseline data on the perceptions by agribusiness and growers of delivery of RD&E and the connection with RDCs. It was then to be used to monitor and report on change during the project via a web survey process as the primary evaluation tool.

1.4 Personnel

The consultancy Gordon Stone and Associates conducted the project with the Director, Gordon Stone, being the principal researcher undertaking the majority of the project work. The other researcher was Dr Jeff Coutts, Director, Coutts J&R Pty Ltd. Dr Coutts was responsible for managing the Change Assessment System, which proved problematic as will be outlined below.

The project was to be monitored via regular contact with the CVCB Executive Officer, John McKenzie. Key Stakeholders were identified: growers as ultimate users of R&D outputs; agribusiness as a key conduit to growers; RDCs as primary strategists and funders of rural RD&E; and the federal government as a key funder through the RDCs.

Members of the CVCB Agribusiness Working Group represented GRDC, LWA, CRDC, RIRDC, HAL, MLA, DA and SRDC, with general interest from AWI. Varied levels of involvement of each of the RDCs characterised the Working Group, though a number were consistent members making strong regular contributions.

1.5 Project Methodology

Stone's 2005 CVCB project provided a recent baseline understanding of the role of agribusiness in capacity building. This current study used the following methodology to address his recommendations regarding the establishment of some form of Management System that would operate in 'real time'.

Developing a baseline

Key personnel representing the major RD&E providers were proposed to be surveyed to gain a baseline understanding of how RD&E providers and agribusiness interact, by one of several methods:

- i. Face-to-face meetings with senior program managers of the major RD&E providers and agribusiness
- ii. Phone interviews of senior program managers
- iii. A web survey process to gather additional information from project staff and other RD&E providers.

Steps (i) and (ii) were expected to gain the primary qualitative and quantitative data, while Step (iii) was to capture additional data. The survey process was designed to avoid duplication. However it proved more effective to use a mix of Steps (i) and (ii).

The RD&E provider staff were interviewed and asked four simple open questions:

1. What is the value or otherwise of an R&D provider connection with agribusiness?
2. What is your current connection with the agribusiness sector if any?
3. What is your proposed future connection if any?
4. What view do you hold about the value of some form of information management process?

For the reasons outlined below, it also proved necessary to directly interview both growers and agribusiness advisers. Appendix 3 illustrates the survey pro-formas used to seek data from agribusiness and growers.

The Management System

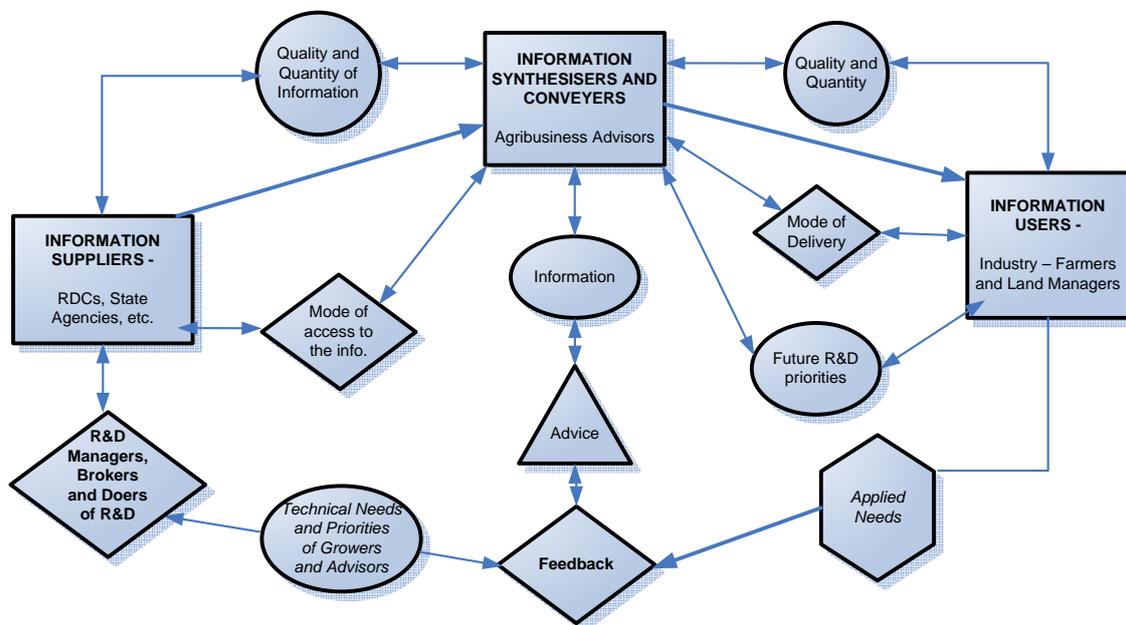
The concept of a Management System was proposed to jointly meet the needs of RD&E providers and agribusiness in terms of: agribusiness information needs; agribusiness information access and delivery; feedback processes; and RD&E priority setting. Work began on the conceptual model in late 2005.

It was proposed that the outputs and learnings from the project would be made available formally and informally as part of a managed system to guide R&D provider and agribusiness interactions. The formal ways were proposed to be two low-key forums, a bi-monthly electronic newsletter and discussion forum. At an industry level it was anticipated that the involvement of RDCs and other R&D organisations would make it easier for the project findings to be disseminated through those organisations. The planned informal processes were that industry groups involved in the project would be encouraged to distribute project information through their networks, agribusiness would be encouraged to access the learnings, and other interested parties would be invited to participate in these processes.

However, as a result of data gathered in the earlier phases of this project, the proposed Management System concept was superseded. This is discussed later in the report. In summary, greater understanding of the interaction between RD&E providers, RDCs, agribusiness and growers that emerged during the study demonstrated that the key issue for all sectors was some form of knowledge/information dissemination/delivery process that was simple and equitable.

Figure 2, the Agribusiness Knowledge Loop, was developed during this project, and illustrates how such knowledge interactions might operate – factoring in how Information Suppliers (RDCs and RD&E providers), Information Synthesisers (agribusiness advisers) and Information Users or End Users (growers) might best interact.

Figure 2. Agribusiness Knowledge Loop



The case studies

The three proposed case studies outlined above were:

1. The dairy industry of Victoria – where the Dairy Australia ‘Taking Stock’ Program, which focuses on milk production and business management, uses milk processor advisory staff as deliverers of key information. The Taking Stock Program was seen as having Australia wide importance. A connection with this proposed project was seen as a way of facilitating stronger connections by Taking Stock workers with advisers and the broader capacity building agenda of rural industry.
2. Connecting the grain industry more strongly with agribusiness – the developing focus of the GRDC on a stronger connection with agribusiness had emerged from recent grower surveys and industry strategic thinking within GRDC. It was proposed that this CVCB project would have synergy with GRDC initiatives, which at that time were proposed but unplanned.
3. Landmark and salinity – the large agribusiness company, Landmark, a subsidiary of AWB Ltd, was planning to take a national coordinating role in collaborating with key R&D stakeholders. In southern Queensland it proposed to address salinity issues on-ground in key sites. Its work was in collaboration with the Murray-Darling Basin Committee, the Condamine Alliance, the Salinity CRC and the National Centre for Engineering in Agriculture – which is a joint venture of the Queensland Dept of Primary Industries and Fisheries and the University of Southern Queensland – and with private consultant agronomists. It proposed to commence a series of trials, involving these stakeholders, in determining and implementing farmer based salinity management strategies.

Establishing the three case studies

The purpose of these case studies was to:

- investigate the interrelationships between the stakeholders within each case study
- gain insights and learnings on these interrelationships
- trial feedback and other mechanisms to increase contact, understanding of issues (relevant to the project objectives), information delivery and access processes and feedback mechanisms – within the bounds of the individual case studies
- facilitate case study-to-case study data collection and interaction – and networking
- contribute to the development of the proposed Management System.

The three case studies were relevant to the proposed project because they:

- demonstrated ‘across industry’ and ‘across Australia’ relevance
- presented a diversity of priority issues from production, to business, to sustainability issues – and variations in between
- were varied RD&E providers and agribusiness organisation parties
- showed willingness to be involved in this project and share experiences – with potential networking and other benefits.

The consensus from the case studies’ personnel during the early project stage was that the project and its potential facilitating role could inform all of them. They could see it would provide them with knowledge about capacity building and extension strategies that could be applied to their own projects, whilst informing the wider industry and bring further perspectives to them.

2. Project Outputs

2.1 Data Gathering

Creating the baseline data

The first stage of collating baseline data was to seek out the key organisations that are undertaking RD&E and establish their current and proposed connection with agribusiness.

Contact was made with nine of the 14 RDCs and three of the 20 relevant CRCs – who were known to be most interested in and affected by the possible strengthening of their engagement with agribusiness. The results of these interviews are summarised in Appendix 5. Data obtained in July 2007 and contained in Appendix 4 provides insights into the changes made on strategic engagement with agribusiness by some of the R&D providers during the course of the project.

Key findings

At project commencement only two of the R&D providers – the Salinity CRC and Dairy Australia – had relatively formal strategic links with agribusiness. This suggests a lack of general engagement between RDCs and agribusiness.

At project conclusion three of the R&D providers had developed or were close to developing strategic links with agribusiness, while another three had moved towards such links.

The changed level of ‘desire for association’ is regarded as a positive step in development of strengthened RDC-agribusiness relationships.

The relatively low level of ‘operational association’ demonstrates that the level of perceived difficulty of RDCs in undertaking RDC-agribusiness relationships remains high.

Further baseline data was obtained by surveys of growers and advisers which are described below.

The three case studies

All three case studies became operational early in 2006. However a series of specific issues affected and altered their contribution to the project. These issues were:

- The dairy industry of Victoria and the Dairy Australia ‘Taking Stock’ Program – this case study was affected by the worsening drought in Australia. As a result it was deemed unsuitable to involve that program in this project. During liaison with Dairy Australia (DA) personnel it emerged that the notion of an Information Repository to deliver information to agribusiness had already been canvassed for the industry as a very high priority. The project leader met with the dairy industry consultant who had worked on the repository and sought his input to the relevance of such a system and how best to structure it. This repository proved to be the key area of interest for DA, apart from continued involvement in the CVCB. The DA participation in this case study was abandoned post November 2006 due to their overwhelming focus on drought issues.
- Connecting the grains industry more strongly with agribusiness – the developing focus of the GRDC on a stronger connection with agribusiness had emerged from recent grower surveys and industry strategic thinking within GRDC. The GRDC commissioned a specific project to develop ‘A GRDC-Agribusiness Engagement Strategy’ which the project leader managed for GRDC. The project has continued through a second implementation phase during 2007/8. This implementation process is set to continue as part of the ‘normal’ GRDC portfolio of engagement strategies. Both the GRDC and CVCB projects have proven to be complementary initiatives with initial CVCB project work informing the grains work (and also work for LWA, MLA and Future Farm Industries CRC).
- Landmark and salinity – the collaborative work being driven by Landmark was adversely affected by two events. The first was the worsening drought in southern Queensland which resulted in neither

growers nor their advisers being interested in ‘non-core business’ such as this project. The second was that the Salinity Project Officer, who was primary project contact, was made redundant by Landmark in November 2006. These events effectively caused the conclusion of this case study.

As these issues resulted in this project largely ‘falling off their radar’ in terms of the dairy industry and Landmark and salinity case studies, it was determined that a series of alternative face-to-face ‘direct contact or field visiting’ processes, including agribusiness and their clients, would be used to gather the baseline data expected to be gained from the case studies. The survey process used is discussed below.

Key finding

The case study process became problematic and more intensive grower and adviser surveys were substituted to secure the data and insights needed to inform the proposed Management System.

Surveys

Interviews were carried out in the three case study areas and related sites – Bendigo (Victoria), Wagga Wagga and Junee (southern NSW), Toowoomba and Brisbane (Queensland) – and subsequently in Western Australia. The views of growers and of agribusiness advisers were sought, so their issues and perceptions could be recorded. A comprehensive summary of the findings of surveys conducted with growers and agribusiness throughout the project are in Appendix 5. The highlights are described below.

Face-to-face interviews with growers were used to seek their input to the role of agribusiness. This included seeking their opinions on the links with R&D providers and the niche they saw for their advisers as information conduits to them. The majority of the growers operated in the grain or mixed farming sectors that predominate in the survey areas of southern Western Australia, Victoria, southern NSW and the Darling Downs (Queensland) – which were roughly aligned with the case study areas (please note that there was no engagement with the horticultural, dairy (due to the drought issues discussed above) and sugar industries in this project and a low connection with cotton).

The direct views of consultant agribusiness personnel on best connections with R&D providers, how to develop and manage those connections, who their grower clients were and the extent/type of R&D information they sought and how they expected it to be delivered to them, were obtained.

2.2 Data Outputs

Progressive data collection informed the direction of the project over time, particularly leading to a pivotal November 2006 CVCB meeting, which affected the direction of the project. The data is contained in Appendix 8. The following sections discuss outcomes from the growers surveys.

2.2.1 Outcomes from Grower Surveys

Grower surveys

Grower surveys were carried out with 25 farmers in varied locations around Australia. These sites included east of Perth in Western Australia; around Bendigo in Victoria; Wagga Wagga in southern NSW; and on the Darling Downs in Queensland. The survey questioned growers about their information needs and preferred methods of access to information; and about the role of their adviser or information provider to supply that information.

It is noteworthy that advisers referred all grower respondents to the project leader and this represents an element of sample bias. However the qualitative nature of this survey means that this is of minimal concern.

Results of these surveys were collated and are reported in Appendix 5. Each of the survey questions and aggregated responses are discussed below.

Q. What information is required by growers?

The issue(s)/topic(s) that are considered particularly relevant to growers in making **current decisions** relate to (in order of relevance):

1. Products, Marketing and Customers – 20 mentions
2. Business management – 19 mentions
3. Production – 17 mentions
4. Technology – 17 mentions
5. NRM – 16 mentions.

Comments suggest that growers consider issues/topics that relate to better marketing of their product, securing future opportunities, new approaches to business and production issues the most relevant. Specific comments are summarised through these summary concepts:

- better marketing is part of getting better prices after production
- better use of futures in marketing
- key to production is soil treatments
- with current dry weather – must concentrate on production & NRM
- business management is always important, but keeping soils healthy is most important
- all decisions are about securing future opportunities
- usually agronomic issues are most pressing – I want a totally a different approach to the business, so am leasing/taking on mixed farming and more business-like approaches.

The issue(s)/topic(s) that are particularly relevant to the proposed **future decisions** of growers relate to (in the order of relevance):

1. Marketing – 20 mentions
2. Business Management – 18 mentions
3. Production – 17 mentions
4. Technology – 16 mentions
5. NRM – 13 mentions.

Indicative comments from growers about specific issues/topics were:

- grain varieties and livestock breeds; cropping; soils and harvesting techniques are key issues
- once drought finishes I will focus on expansion and focus on business management
- technology will be important in future
- technology is part of the solution to future challenges
- marketing is almost as important as production
- my adviser works out my strategy, my business management and my future plans – we meet two times a year and talk on phone – will do it more like this in the future.

Q. How do growers want their information supplied?

With regard to the level of information growers said they require for decision-making – they prefer concise information at the level of a simple paragraph or one page overview rather than a complete research paper. They prefer to access information on a variety of topics in accurate snapshots from which they can obtain more detail if required.

The overwhelming consensus is that growers require their adviser to have an in-depth level of knowledge on a range of subjects. However a number of growers also require the short summary, so they have a basic level of information: *“I want all my advisers to be spot on with decisions for me to assist my critical thinking; I delegate this role to my adviser to get back to me within 3 days.”*

Q. Who do growers rely on for advice or information in decision making?

The majority of growers chose the Agronomist first, Accountant /financial adviser a close second, Reseller and marketer coming in at a medium level, and their IT specialist at a low level. Other groups, including the Farm Manager, Government, Wholesaler, Marketing Group, QA and Catchment Management groups were not ranked as people who growers rely on for information.

It was suggested that advisers should possess practical experience with rural life and pass on other growers’ experiences – acting as a conduit. A number of the growers commented that this process would stay the same in the future.

The grower respondents reported that the type of adviser they will use in the future will be firstly the Business Advisor, followed by Marketer or Marketing Group and Agronomist.

Q. What information/R&D outcomes are sought?

Growers indicated that they valued R&D results as it gives them a greater understanding of technical issues. They want simple, down-to-earth results of R&D and feel that present information delivery is difficult for the average person to understand. One grower commented that he wanted the information to be located at a central point and another said it needed to be targeted.

With regard to the GRDC, several growers stated that *“GRDC has excellent people with rural skills”*, and *“are a good source of information”*. One grower stated that *“not a lot of GRDC R&D is relevant in the Northern Region”*. A number of growers said they were interested to know more about MLA, AWI and RIRDC.

Indicative comments from growers on how agribusiness/consultants should supply information or research work are:

- “good targeted information/advice direct to me
- want good growers involved in (R&D) decision making (so it is done our way)
- agribusiness is the best conduit from RDCs and other growers to me, I expect much more from advisers/paid consultants than research because of the money I have to pay
- agribusiness have best ability to talk to growers because they know what I need on the ground, I want agribusiness to have increased connections with RDCs to ensure I have the best advice”.

Q. The role of the adviser conveying information to growers

Other responses stress the important role of the adviser:

- “My adviser supplies strategic business advice on fee for service (\$3,500-10,000/year and hourly rate) about the farm, management, financials of today with respect to long-term strategy as they have to synthesise things for me
- I don’t want to deal with researchers or RDCs – I want my adviser to understand all the detail and tell me in practical terms
- Information overload is a key issue – that’s why advisers have to synthesise it for me

- Agribusiness companies are good – just have to be sure I am getting the right product not the most profitable one (for them)”.

Q. Information delivery to growers

It appears from the grower surveys that information is highly valued. One respondent stated that the “*key thing is to make the information available*”. Growers identified a number of different methods by which they prefer to receive their information: field days, fact sheets, brochures, industry/rural magazines, CDs/DVDs, email, and phone advice.

The growers also indicated that they would like the information to be presented in the following way:

- “Keep it simple...in information overload
- a snapshot but the detail where necessary
- conclusions that can be actively grasped
- short, sharp messages”.

The personal, 1:1 or face-to-face approach was highly valued by nearly almost all respondents. One grower commented that he “*preferred face-to-face based on the adviser knowing how we like to do things*”. One person felt that “*an information repository is very important for my advisers to get me all the information I need*”. Trials are valued but it this is mainly at a local level where advisers can do local interpretation.

On-farm advice was by far the preferred way to receive information from an adviser. In fact it was suggested that the adviser’s role is to go to the workshops and then synthesise the information.

Q. The growers views on the adviser as the ‘Honest Broker’

The adviser is seen as a key provider of information on a business and even at a personal level – “*Our advisers assist our personal decision making*”. One grower stated that the “*personal adviser-farmer relationship is the key – I would follow my adviser wherever he went.*”

Responses suggested that there is a level of mistrust with regard to the motivations of RDCs/some advisers – “*I want RDCs to be an honest broker for growers – don’t want vested interests being an influence – information has to be properly researched – always make up my own mind*”. A number of growers stated that the various RDCs/R&D providers are ‘chasing funds’. In addition it appears that the role of government staff has become invalid to the concept that – “*government staff are rarely seen and largely irrelevant*”.

A number of grower comments related to the importance of R&D information being credible:

- “credibility of information is important
- take care with validity of R&D”.

Other relevant comments were: “*need closer relationship – over last 4 years a much wider gap between grower and researcher/RDC*”.

Outcomes from this survey suggest that growers see their adviser as a key person who is the specialist or expert and who is a direct source of information or has access directly to that information. A significant number of growers indicated that there was so much information available to them, that they were in ‘information overload’. They want their adviser to make sense of the information and provide them with what they require: “*there is just so much information out there – that is why I pay my adviser to make sense of it*”.

It appears that a key role of the adviser is not only to be a **conduit** for information from all sources, but to be a **skilled synthesiser** of information – to possess a **vast array of relevant and current information** with a corresponding **depth of knowledge** but also be able to provide a **snapshot view on request**. Accordingly the role of the adviser as a key information source and decision making influencer is apparent.

Key findings from grower survey

The following encapsulate the key issues to emerge from the grower surveys:

- growers see marketing and business management as key issues requiring specialist information, followed by production and technology
- NRM information is seen to be lowest priority
- growers are 'time poor'
- information overload is (and is perceived to be) a significant problem
- need for targeted grower focussed information is increasing as change is rapid
- preferred method of information delivery is 1:1 on farm; E-mail, phone and personal contact is valued; trials and workshops are helpful if locally focussed
- preferred if information is available in short, sharp, concise summaries but detail to be accessible if needed
- information should be targeted and relevant to the growers – they are happy to pay a fee for an adviser to interpret information and pass it on
- as far as information providers go – the adviser – agribusiness/marketer or financial, is deemed as very necessary (cost of doing business) to facilitate personal and business decision making
- the adviser's role appears to be that of a synthesiser of information – able to provide answers and latest information while also being capable of providing a high level of detail
- there is some mistrust of RDCs and researchers as distributors of R&D – they may have pecuniary interest and may not have the growers interests at heart
- the adviser (particularly the private consultant with no products to sell) is seen as an 'honest broker' who is the desirable conduit for information from the RDCs
- most preferred that the agribusiness sector act as the direct conduit of information from R&D providers to them on a supplier-client basis
- they generally preferred 'snapshots' of information to be provided directly to them rather than detailed research reports or statements (noting that the detail and snapshots are often both sought).

Key findings

Growers saw the work of R&D providers as being relevant to them – though there was criticism of MLA, AWI and LWA as being distant and disconnected from them. This contrasted with their view of GRDC which was generally positive and RIRDC which was valued.

2.2.2 Outcomes from Agribusiness Surveys

Agribusiness adviser surveys

Adviser surveys were carried out at Perth in Western Australia; around Bendigo in Victoria; Wagga Wagga in southern NSW; and on the Darling Downs in Queensland. They were all in mixed farming areas.

Results of these surveys were collated and these can be found in Appendix 5. The survey questioned advisers about their links with grower clients, information needs and preferred methods to access that information; and about the role of information providers to supply that information.

Out of the 59 adviser participants, 32 described themselves as Agronomists, 12 as Business Advisers, 7 as Specialists, and 8 as Other.

The diverse range and aspects of their work was described as:

- physical and financial farm business management consulting

- whole farm planning and management, with overall knowledge base
- field consulting for agronomy management and advice, production advice on cropping and grazing
- business management advice
- HR and graduate traineeships
- R&D
- broadacre specialist
- transferring technical info to customers – on farm, group facilitation
- paddock recording with software
- expert witness
- adult education
- information technology, ranges from sales to consultant
- interesting comment was that ... *the cocky sees me as sales but I see me as consultant*
- commercial sales and marketing
- helping growers/growers maximise returns
- fee for service also with sales role
- soil amendments and recommendations agronomy and farm business management
- management adviser /project manager; farm management advice
- technology transfer specialist, and info sharing
- conduit for extension internally and externally to industry and growers
- take the company's strategies and directions and develop training and publications to outline business objectives
- R&D and pesticides e.g. new formulations, products, new ideas etc.
- provision and extension of technical and product information from R&D trials
- manage, mentor, train agronomists and direct/manage company research programs.

These adviser roles ranges from salespersons, to trainers, to consultant to specialist, to mentor, to technical support – and these can all be rolled into one role at times.

Client profile

Stone (2005) reported growers/agribusiness clients as falling into three categories. During this study, the consensus from agribusiness is that farmers can be defined into four categories:

- 'A' class clients/farmers – who are the top farmers in their discipline and are true farm business operators and innovators
- 'B' class clients/farmers – who are actively moving towards the 'A' class and are followers
- 'C' class clients/farmers – whose operations are largely static in terms of innovation and development and are regarded as traditionalists
- 'D' class clients/farmers – who are expected to exit the industry.

'A' and 'B' are increasingly time poor and income focussed. They operate in accordance with the Agribusiness Advisory Hub outlined by Stone (2005).

Of the clients surveyed in this project, the majority of clients were A class (34%) and B (33%) clients with the remaining 33% of clients at C and D – where A class clients are the most profitable businesses and C and D class clients defined as those “*I would prefer not to work with*”.

The overwhelming response to the question of how the clientele may change in the future was that there would be more A and B clients and the C and D type would diminish – in fact, they may disappear. The reasoning was that less successful farms would be bought out. There would be a gradual shift to more efficient businesses resulting in fewer growers – so A and B type businesses would be more extensive and important to the wider industry. Some felt that there would be more ‘super farms’. As a result it was expected that there would be greater need for information and for servicing of information needs. The following comments were made by advisers in relation to the new emerging A and B type business:

- “They will be more critical with their business decisions
- More demanding of advisers and need more 1:1 time
- Have a greater need for instant info when agronomist present with client
- Have greater influence with consultants and will require more liaison”.

Relevant topics and issues

According to agribusiness respondents the issue(s)/topic(s) that are particularly relevant to current agribusiness clients relate to:

- Production – 39 mentions
- Technology – 32 mentions
- Marketing – 25 mentions
- Business Management – 25 mentions
- NRM – 9 mentions.

Responses suggest that a diverse range of information is currently sought from the advisers

- information about products and their use
- innovation and technology to maintain enterprise viability and minimise cost
- latest technology advances and production R&D issues
- competition and climatic conditions
- marketing products like grain futures and grain supplements
- business management and investment off-farm
- production advice
- daily management advice – labour management, capital/resource allocation and risk management
- irrigation and whole farm management strategies
- social issues – succession planning
- training and courses for structured learning
- what works – the rate to use and \$ return
- whole farm systems approach rather than one off solutions.

The advisers felt that Technology would be forefront in future, with Production following as the significant topics particularly relevant to their future clients. Responses indicated that Business Management and Marketing would be of medium interest, with NRM issues the lowest priority.

Specifically, they felt the following topics will be of interest to their future clients:

- gross profit vs. sustainability
- GM technology, GPS/GIS, budgeting
- increasing production with \$ return and use of technologies to do it
- buying the farm next door and coping with labour/time pressures
- new problem weeds/diseases
- herbicide resistance.

Advisers reported that the fundamental requirements for information on the part of the growers would be:

- “To be in business in 20 years
- More efficient methods of production and new ideas to improve profitability and sustainability
- Increasing productivity with existing info and streamlining processes and operations
- Increasing production with \$ return and use of technologies to do it
- Return on investments – ‘what’s in it for me’ is becoming a higher requirement”.

Emerging issues

Some interesting observations and predictions were made by the advisers with regard to their future operating environment. Many advisers saw the emerging issues related to climate change and environmental issues and could be summarised as:

- “To be in business in 20 years
- Sustainable business and increased efficiency
- Water issues – availability and efficiency of use
- Soil biology in the broadest context
- New weed species invasions in different areas
- Resistance to chemicals”.

A number of respondents commented on the need for change through adoption of new technologies and methodologies. In fact, one adviser stated “*we have reached the pinnacle on production issues – now technology and business analysis needed*”. Other comments relating to this were:

- “Educating growers on new or evolving enterprise changes
- Business management and marketing are the two areas they can improve in the most quickly
- They (the growers) like technology and hate NRM issues being imposed
- Climate prediction with ‘blue sky research’
- Minor pasture crops on the increase but little knowledge of what can be used on them
- Controlled traffic farming in mixed systems with livestock and crops
- Profitability and diversification
- OH&S and investment”.

Advisers indicated that growers will be focussed on working smarter not harder as indicated by the following comments:

- “Focus on... looking at better returns for products i.e. hedging; adoption of new ideas
- Likely to be more focus (on) developing specific growth and marketing strategies”.

They also suggested that advisers may need to become more accountable to growers:

- “Growers may want to look at ways to measure the agronomist performance and maintain services by monitoring long-term performance
- Growers will be surviving in an increasingly competitive world
- There will be more interest in efficiencies and sustainability including duty-of-care issues”.

Information requirements of agribusiness advisers

The level of information that advisers said they seek for their own purposes were predominantly simple 2 to 4 paragraph overviews. Conversely, there was interest also in the more detailed research paper or report.

In terms of doing their work now and in the future, advisers indicated:

- they need electronic access when out of the office
- they need to know what information is available
- there is a lot of pressure to remain up to date within time constraints
- it would be great to have a list of topics being researched at present and a web link to more information if needed on that work
- they want easily accessible information for all advisers and some personal involvement in R&D work
- good to have a centralised system where consistent data can be accessed easily from all sources
- they want access to quality independent info
- need access to all types as most advice now is whole farm production based
- need data to move top producers to very top and this includes blue sky research.

Many advisers suggested that they are time restricted and that information would be best if it was:

- concise but can get more information if required
- highly available
- relevant
- easy to reference
- in a useable format – software based with easy access
- current on a national and local level
- accurate
- *“A range of sources are needed even where there is overlap – my job is to distil the relevant bits for clients”.*

Perceived limitations in information delivery

- “Access to research projects and results are a limitation
- Information is not readily accessible
- Information needs to be commercially relevant
- Need to stop loss of local R&D staff as info goes with them
- There is a huge amount of information that the industry is unaware of and it is poorly databased
- Must first assess experience and knowledge of researcher then assess value of research”.

Suggestions for improved information delivery

- “Want to interpret it myself with no middle man
- E-mail updates – concise information on which we can make further enquiries
- Information that is delivered not in isolation but collectively
- A lot of the researchers are not good presenters so I can see a benefit in parties delivering the info for them
- With today’s technology the information is generally out there – our success as advisers is judged on being able to access it easily from all sources.”

Knowledge sources

In terms of using knowledge sources, especially RDCs and other growers, advisers indicated they used many organisations including GRDC, MLA, AWI, LWA and others.

While GRDC was generally well thought of, advisers were somewhat more critical of MLA, AWI and LWA – see Appendix 8.

In terms of knowledge sources and professional development, some comments were:

- “GRDC updates are very good for the information and contacts with others in the industry
- It needs to be continuous with a review in place
- Maintain an extensive network of contacts throughout the industry in production, finance and marketing arenas
- Very important to get more Professional Development
- Limited access to DPI NSW whereas CSIRO contact is good
- GRDC is best and other RDCs trying to catch up
- Never underestimate growers as a source of knowledge
- Knowledge needs to be freely accessible in multitude of formats, designs and ways”.

Outcomes indicate a general dissatisfaction with regard to the government agencies and staff as knowledge sources:

- “Ag department used to be a good source but not so great now
- Inability of some in R&D to get back to you – these are dead wood in gov’t that have no respect for growers;
- Government very good for NRM but no other use”.

Advisers expressed these preferred ways to access information for their own business in the following order:

1. Workshops and seminars
2. Factsheets
3. The Internet and e-mail
4. Specialist visits to me and study trips
5. Conferences
6. Brochures
7. Phone.

Other ways are – personal contact and connections, which was rated highly; feedback through grower groups; networking; local meetings; concise written reports; newspapers; field days and face-to-face.

Accessing information in the future

Many respondents suggested that the Internet and e-mail would be vital due to the advisers being 'time poor'. These were also felt to provide fast, economical access to the most relevant and current information.

Increased face-to-face interaction is suggested – networks, smaller groups for better interaction and industry based workshops.

The existing channels, the GRDC Adviser Updates for example, appear to be valued. One adviser commented that "... *a similar thing is needed by MLA*".

It is of note to the outcomes of this project that a significant proportion of general comments by the agribusiness advisers related to the level of knowledge required by them and the growers, the availability of information and the methods for accessing it. For example:

- "GRDC Updates are good but now way too big
- Growers knowledge is very high – and there is a much higher standard of retail advice
- Information is produced but not extended – research objectives should be to have results and strategies adopted not just be researched
- Lots of research is funded but we do not always know what it is or how to get hold of the results
- Information needs to be concise and relevant but need to access whole research papers
- Systems of info repository has to be seen to be unbiased so can't be linked to resellers
- We are seeking commercially relevant information – not theoretical information
- Researchers need to know what drives profit in a farming operation
- We need open access to information from all RDCs/universities/government departments/private industry; to only focus on one group weakens the information pool generated
- Information on research funded
- Input into research priorities to ensure relevance
- Currently I perceive that there is a lot of data that exists that has not been adequately/effectively extended to agribusiness and growers".

What about the future for agribusiness and the RDCs?

- "Myself and clients would like things to be simpler e.g. Focus on priorities, more information can be a 'headache'; need to be able to demonstrate what our clients need
- Improve extension activities, greater/improved feedback mechanism
- Try and get some linkages between RDCs – any linkages that may exist are poorly extended and not obvious to growers/advisers".

Key messages from the agribusiness adviser surveys

- Advisers foresee a more specialised role in the future as information conduits to the end user
- Growers are requiring a greater level of information due to rapid changes in technology and with the move to 'superfarms' these growers will be more demanding of their adviser
- With the conversion to larger businesses – there may be a move to higher accountability and more performance based measures/pressure on the adviser
- There is a vast array of information available from RDCs but the difficulty is to make sure it is valid and accurate.
- Accessing data is difficult and locating relevant information is a limitation

- The expectation by the grower is that the adviser will possess an in-depth knowledge of relevant information and be able to present it in short, sharp messages in language that the grower understands
- Many advisers suggest that a centralised repository would be a practical place to access R&D
- Advisers are ‘time constrained’ and would prefer their information in summary form – 2 to 4 paragraphs – but would like access to more detail in full research reports if necessary
- Access to information is crucial
- There would be benefits in fostering better linkages between advisers and RDCs
- In summary, the knowledge priorities of growers and advisers are at variance to each other in general as revealed by their responses to the priorities of the five key areas of the farm business. However the level of trust and involvement of advisers with farmers suggests this is not a significant issue.

2.2.3 Grower segmentation findings

This project has revealed further grower/client/levy payer segmentation (see Appendices 3 and 8), which can be summarised as:

- A clients – business operators
- B clients – business-like operators
- C clients – traditional operators
- D clients – marginal operators and could exit the industry
- Peri-urban/lifestyle – mostly professionals and city dwellers with weekend farms
- Corporate farms – aggregated family farms and corporate entities like super funds
- Next generation farmer young professionals returning home.

Advisers reported that:

- they preferred A and B clients to C and D clients – and would actively pursue that mix for profitability and ‘job satisfaction’ (clients who implement their advice/recommendations) reasons
- similarly, they also preferred clients from the corporate and professional categories.

Key findings

It can be expected that existing drivers will focus agribusiness advice on the more profitable and motivated clients – segments of A and B and professionals, corporate and peri-urban growers. The C and D clients are expected to be serviced by advisers at a low level.

2.3 A Management System or Not?

A key issue emerging from the surveys was that growers and advisers were “*seeking streamlined access to information*”.

By the time of the first project report in November 2005, a conceptual model for ensuring feedback to RDCs via the proposed Management System – the focus of this project – had been developed. This focussed strongly on information delivery. As indicated earlier, it was about this time that the case study process became problematic and a more comprehensive survey process was substituted. The survey process commenced early in 2006.

The project leader reported to the CVCB in November 2006 and sought input from members on the future direction of the project – due to the problematic issues that had emerged and the findings of the grower and adviser survey work. Interest of the CVCB centred on the proposed agribusiness segmentation, categories of agribusiness clients, motivation of agribusiness and their clients, the value in a ‘whole of RDC approach to

agribusiness interaction’ and the idea of the Information Repository. It was agreed that the emphasis of the project ought to shift to ... *engaging direct with agribusiness*.

Key findings

The project focus moved towards a strong focus on engaging direct with agribusiness in November 2006.

The CVCB Agribusiness Working Group

At the CVCB meeting in April 2007 key issues to emerge focussed on – structural issues on both sides that impede links between RDCs and agribusiness, cultural differences that influence the interaction, transaction costs and the need for common communication between RDCs who interact with agribusiness. It was agreed that a CVCB Agribusiness Working Group was formed to discuss the key issues and refine and direct the remaining project milestones.

The CVCB Agribusiness Working Group was given the role of progressing those issues on an ad hoc basis during the remainder of this project. The members represented GRDC, LWA, CRDC, RIRDC, HAL, MLA, DA and SRDC, with general interest from AWI. Varied levels of involvement of each of the RDCs characterised the Working Group, though a number were consistent members making strong regular contributions. Table 1 shows members of the CVCB Agribusiness Working Group that attended at varied stages of the project.

Table 1. Members of CVCB Agribusiness Working Group

| <i>Initial members</i> | <i>RDC</i> |
|------------------------|---|
| John McKenzie | Executive Officer, Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building |
| Tom McCue | Grains Research and Development Corporation |
| Stuart Pearson | Land & Water Australia |
| Tony Clancy | Land & Water Australia |
| Kate Andrews | Land & Water Australia |
| Ian Bamford | Meat & Livestock Australia |
| Jane Weatherley | Meat & Livestock Australia |
| Ruth Nettle | Dairy Australia |
| Cathy Phelps | Dairy Australia |
| Diana Maldonado | Sugar Research and Development Corporation |
| Rohan Boehm | Cotton Research and Development Corporation |
| Richard Stephens | Horticulture Australia Limited |
| Jane Fisher | Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation |
| Lu Hogan | Australian Wool Innovation |
| Claudia Wythes | Australian Wool Innovation |
| Nerida Hart | AANRO |
| Anne Currey | Naturally Resourceful – Communications consultant to the CVCB |
| Gordon Stone | Project Leader, Corporate Development Institute |

The first meeting of the CVCB Agribusiness Working Group was held in May 2007. A five step process for the remainder of the project was identified – see Appendix 6 for detail. In summary, the steps of the project process were:

1. Review the interaction of member RDCs with agribusiness
2. Consider how to value add to these relationships through joint RDC projects – to create a win for RDCs, growers and agribusiness
3. Formally engage with relevant RDCs in a roundtable forum – to discuss how to establish relationships and what to bring to the table
4. Convene an agribusiness and RDC Forum to formally consider how to achieve the outcomes
5. Enter a partnership phase with agribusiness and RDCs.

Stakeholders and their drivers (Table 2) were defined as follows at that meeting:

Table 2. Stakeholders and their Drivers

| Stakeholder | Definitions/segments | Drivers/needs |
|--------------|---|--|
| Growers | Growers – broadacre in grains, meat & livestock, sheep & wool, cotton & dairy Growers in more intensive industries – horticulture, sugar and wine/grapes Growers in highly intensive industries of pigs, eggs, etc. | Raw information and synthesised information Practical and economic take home messages for decision-making A fit with their goals and key drivers – business, ROI, personal, family and lifestyle Advice – mostly from agribusiness leading to adoption and change |
| Agribusiness | Suppliers of product Resellers Private consultants – agronomists, marketers Specialist management consultants Dealers Technical associations Professionals – Bankers/accountants | Long-term client relationships Meeting client goals and drivers Access to information Delivery in terms they relate to – relevant to their clients too Ability to synthesise information into advice and products Relationships = profits = \$ change hands |
| RDC | Sector specific Operates mostly in silos Collaborate on key industry projects | R&D strategic planning Manage R&D Show benefits and ROI to stakeholders Extension, Adoption and Practice Change as an emerging issue Increase \$ returns to growers Triple bottom line |

Source: CVCB briefing notes from meeting 3 May 2007

It was agreed that it was necessary to understand the ‘various market segments’ in order to engage with agribusiness and their grower clients/RDC levy payers.

Key findings

Targeted engagement with specific market segments of the grower and agribusiness target audiences must be a feature of future RDC-agribusiness engagement.

The new project focus

From these outcomes it was agreed by the CVCB Agribusiness Working Group that the focus of the Management System should become ... *the delivery of information to agribusiness based on their defined needs.* It was suggested that the input of the CVCB Agribusiness Working Group as outlined above could support consideration of how best to deliver R&D outcomes in a way that agribusiness can receive the defined R&D outputs that meet their client needs.

It was further proposed agribusiness could be invited to provide feedback on how well those outputs meet their needs and then ‘have their say’ on how they see the emerging priorities for information and R&D in the region that they/their personnel service.

Key findings

Information delivery to grower end users is a key area of common ground between R&D providers and agribusiness.

Further collaboration on providing feedback on R&D priorities for RDCs and R&D providers from growers via agribusiness is another area of common ground and common benefit.

The next consideration was ‘what would motivate meaningful RDC-agribusiness engagement?’ The reason for a meaningful engagement process was regarded as being ... a joint high priority issue shared by both the RDCs and agribusiness. That shared reason was identified as being ... information delivery through some form of one-stop shop Information Repository.

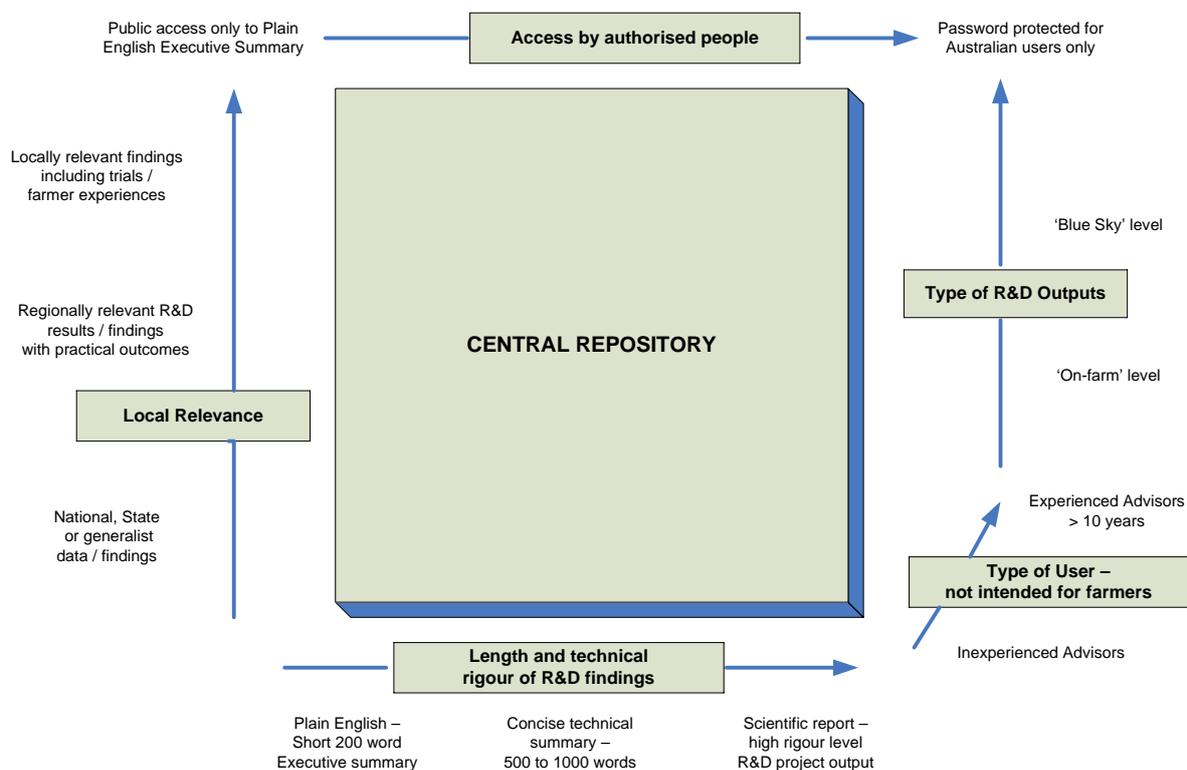
The development of the hypothesis about the operation of the Management System and the emergence of the need for the Information Repository took considerable time and the finalisation of this issue in July 2007 was a key step to moving forward to the new and final project phase. However the approval of this new direction meant that the Management System in its original form was not to be actioned further during the project. The Information Repository substituted for the Management System as the major focus of the project.

Key findings

The motivation for meaningful engagement between RDCs and agribusiness was identified as being information delivery through some form of one-stop shop Information Repository.

Figure 3 below shows a representation by the project leader of the ideal Information Repository – fostering information transfer from RDCs through the Next Users (agribusiness in all its forms) out to the End Users (growers).

Figure 3. The Structure of the Ideal Information Repository – Supporting 2-way Information Flow from R&D Suppliers to Next Users to End Users



The Information Repository

It was noted above that Dairy Australia had undertaken work on an Information Repository. Other RDCs including LWA and GRDC, plus the Cotton CRC, had canvassed Information Repository models including their own websites. The development of such an Information Repository was identified to be a major value-adding proposition that could benefit rural industry overall, as well as individual RDCs and agribusiness. One particular benefit was regarded as facilitating access to cross-RDC information relevant to all sectors, for example soil management, climate variability, pasture species, and soil fertility. Another benefit was the storage, classification and accessibility of common cross-sector information.

It was noted that one of the key issues for agribusiness was the ... 'perception of difficulty in accessing knowledge stored in researchers' heads or their filing cabinets'.

It was also recognised that the RDCs had been collaborating on an e-library concept known as Australian Agriculture and Natural Resources Online (AANRO). The progress of the AANRO project was unknown in mid 2007, and it was suggested that AANRO could be such a repository, or an element of such a repository, focussed on facilitating access by agribusiness advisers.

During the May 2007 meeting it was considered that some form of commercial Information Repository might already exist. It was proposed that the project leader investigate such options and report back to the Agribusiness Working Group. It was agreed that the status of AANRO and its links to an Information Repository was to be investigated and reported on. A commercial entity known as FarmPlus was to be investigated.

Key finding

The Information Repository became the major project focus in May 2007 and became regarded as the key to facilitate RDC-agribusiness interaction.

Some form of relationship between the e-library concept of AANRO and the Information Repository was thought to be a mutually beneficial arrangement.

2.4 Fostering RDC to Agribusiness Engagement

The roundtable forum

The key issues to emerge from the June 2007 CVCB meeting concerned the agribusiness roundtable and establishment of the Information Repository (see above).

Further, the project leader reported project findings that could be summarised as:

- agribusiness is a key information delivery, advisory and practice change agent
- agribusiness seeks to engage with RDCs
- strategic and structural issues with agribusiness influence their ability to be an information conduit to growers (i.e. sufficient numbers of skilled advisers; the aging adviser population; the move to full fee-for-service) and understanding of the impact of those issues are the key factors to be considered
- Agribusiness is evolving in its information delivery and knowledge management and this provides an opportunity for RDCs to engage with and support that process – which in turn addresses their key performance indicators (KPIs).

It was established that the purpose of liaison between RDCs and agribusiness is to:

- build relationships
- open lines of communication
- determine key significant issues of interest that have cross-RDC relevance and relevance to agribusiness
- establish overall consistency in approach

- consider collaboration on the basis of identifying key cross-RDC projects
- consider undertaking direct liaison on more specific issues on a RDC/sector direct to agribusiness basis
- transfer value from RDCs to agribusiness and onto growers
- foster longer-term direct RDC-agribusiness relationships.

It was proposed that a roundtable forum be planned as the way of addressing these purposes.

Key findings

An RDC-agribusiness Roundtable forum could be activated once the Information Repository and suitable collaborative cross-RDC projects are identified.

Fostering cooperation

During the meeting in July 2007 there was discussion about what each RDC is doing or planning in order to connect with agribusiness. From this it was further proposed that some form of cooperation in liaising with agribusiness might emerge from some of the cross-RDC projects (see Table 3).

Table 3. Across-RDC projects and links – July 2007

| <i>Across-RDC project</i> | <i>Current link to agribusiness</i> | <i>Future potential/ relevance test</i> | <i>Priority for attention</i> |
|---|---|--|--|
| CVCB | Take lead on across-RDC collaboration | Creates unified approach | 1 – already taking role |
| Grain & Graze | Delivery of messages via range of agribusiness | Phase 2 being developed | 1 – already a focus on agribusiness, covers range of sectors |
| AANRO | Many R&D outputs filed there – being revised | Critical mass outputs reside there – how to ensure delivery? | 1 – has opportunity to purpose build agribusiness delivery on key issues |
| Pastures Australia | Nil because R&D phase heading toward delivery | Could pilot cohesive approach of delivery across agribusiness | 1 – has opportunity to purpose build agribusiness delivery on key issues |
| Climate Variability | Nil | Very topical issue – base decision support information could be made available | 2 – topical issue that would get everyone’s engagement; outputs to be synthesised into easy ‘take homes’ |
| Sustainable Grazing on Saline Lands/Evergraze | Through CRC Salinity, Landmark has role – links production and NRM | Has strong delivery component – could it be made stronger with more agribusiness?? | 2 – delivery element there, products there; is a wider strategy needed? |
| CRC Salinity Communication Strategy | Delivery of outputs of R&D via training in general and Landmark in particular | Landmark seen to ‘own it’ – though all products are freely available to all | 2 – current process in place |
| Farming Systems | Wider issue | Strong area for collaboration | 2 – key issue for collaboration; is there a structure? |
| Land, Water & Wool | NRM and wool production – consultants involved in trialling delivery? | Potential for delivery by agribusiness – integrated with other issues | 3 – restricted activities in the project and focussed on wool and NRM |
| Landcare | Elders have taken sponsor and support of delivery role. Links with Landcare | Holistic issue Elders has taken the ‘perception lead’ | 3 – Elders has staked a claim and are expected to pursue vigorously |
| Joint Venture Agro-forestry | Largely R&D | Potential to add module to adviser software packages | 3 – restricted activity, limited advisory outputs |

These projects and their relative priorities were targeted for discussion at future meetings. It was suggested that the agribusiness delivery mechanisms and terms of trade, etc. could be investigated using two of the

above projects as case studies when the RDCs and agribusiness meet in a roundtable discussion/engagement/communication forum.

Key findings

Cross-RDC projects identified in Table 3 form a sound basis for investigating RDC-agribusiness engagement, including access to an Information Repository.

The experimental Information Repository

It was further agreed that some form of cross-RDC Information Repository is a key element in the relationship between RDCs and agribusiness. Some of the specific issues to be considered with regard to the application of a suitable Information Repository include:

- it must link to a value proposition for all stakeholders
- it must consider issues of knowledge exclusivity
- it must consider commercial-in-confidence issues
- agribusiness has to be considered a client of the Information Repository
- the Information Repository could be billed as a place where ... 'agribusiness can get access to unprocessed knowledge and summarised information that directly meets your needs'.

Two potential options for the Information Repository were discussed: Australian Agriculture and Natural Resources Online (AANRO) and the commercial model called FarmPlus (noted above). They were described as being:

- AANRO – the process of storing R&D outputs in an e-library has been regarded on the one hand as being a central information repository and on the other hand as being less than user-friendly by agribusiness. It was understood to be in a re-development phase during 2007.
- FarmPlus – this commercial information repository model was developed by Sydney based consultants and is expected to be used by one/some national agribusiness organisations late in 2007/8. The FarmPlus package is able to aggregate information in such a way that there can be easy searching for specific issues like 'weeds at Dubbo'. It is being developed to operate on slower line speeds used by many agribusinesses and created for specific use by agribusiness.

A central proposal from this meeting was that the AANRO and FarmPlus programs were both to be investigated regarding suitability of purpose to facilitate easy access by agribusiness to RDC R&D outputs (as well as those of CRCs and state departments).

These were discussed in detail at the September 2007 CVCB Agribusiness Working Group meeting. Representatives of CRT/Ruralco (a large agribusiness supplier with approximately 400 national outlets who was negotiating access to FarmPlus), FarmPlus (developer of the Information Delivery System being created for CRT/Ruralco) and AANRO (the across-RDC information 'library') attended to discuss the concept of an Information Repository. AANRO was interested because of opportunities for added value and collaboration.

The outcome of that meeting was an invitation for FarmPlus to liaise with AANRO about potential collaboration, and then provide a business plan outlining how the Information Delivery System might work to allow RDCs to deliver R&D outputs to agribusiness. This information was to be reviewed at another CVCB Agribusiness Working Group meeting in early 2008, and ideally working models of these systems were to be shown.

The business plan for FarmPlus (see Appendix 7) was reviewed then referred to the Working Group in March 2008. It was proposed to be further reviewed at the next RDC Executive Directors Forum so they could sign off on the strategy for the Information Repository. The purpose of doing so was so that FarmPlus could be trialled at the proposed agribusiness roundtable meeting, which was deferred from 2007 with the intention of being conducted by mid-2008.

The focus of the remainder of the project altered to investigating the efficacy of the FarmPlus product.

Key finding

The focus of the project altered so that initial RDC-agribusiness engagement revolved around development and implementation of the FarmPlus model.

3. Outcomes and Conclusions

3.1 Discussion

The issue of engagement

As a result of the survey process outlined above and the discussions amongst the CVCB Agribusiness Working Group, a key issue emerged which impacted on this project – *how to engage the culture of the RDCs with the culture of agribusiness*. It was considered essential to understand these cultural differences in order to fully engage interested RDCs in a strategic future approach to agribusiness relationship development.

The project leader defines ‘culture’ in the following way:

“RDCs and most R&D providers are government managed or government funded. Government has a strong and focussed priority on accountability, transparency, systems, annual budget cycles, strategic plans, action plans, management systems, defined delivery paths, consensus and political awareness. The R&D provider culture can be described as being accountability and process focussed.

Agribusiness as the name suggests is focussed on doing private business and creating a private return on investment for shareholders from private and public resources. In order to achieve those returns, agribusiness is very focussed on generating an income. While all the characteristics of government operate in business too, they are less of a priority than getting the job done, meeting clients needs, creating profitable products and services. This includes rapid delivery of products and services to clients who are profitable and this will in turn contribute to the agribusiness bottom line. It is notable that community good and altruistic motives are included in the decisions of agribusiness although with a different emphasis to the RDCs. The agribusiness culture can therefore be described as one of client based action focussing on income and profits for the immediate, short and longer term.”

The project leader noted a disconnect between these two cultures, which was acknowledged by members of the CVCB Agribusiness Working Group.

This is particularly evident in the notion of agribusiness .. ‘*making money out of information delivery, creating money making products and use of industry-funded IP*’. The notion that agribusiness’ primary role is to facilitate levy payers maximising their income through the use of industry funds (and tax payer funds) – so as to lift the profitability of that business, the regional communities and the overall industry – proved a difficult concept for many RDC personnel to grasp. Equally agribusiness has difficulty grasping the extent and complexity of the accountability process of publicly focussed organisations.

The project leader is aware that this is a similarly difficult concept for other R&D provider personnel to grasp also. This caused some discussion in the project meetings of the concept of ‘terms of trade’, to ensure that R&D providers have some understanding of these concepts when RDCs collaborate with agribusiness.

Key findings

There is a disconnect between the R&D provider culture and the agribusiness culture, which influences how their interaction is best managed.

The focus of this disconnect is principally the RDC perspective regarding the use of R&D outputs for ‘agribusiness to make money’ – which appears at variance to the notion that growers (their levy payers) are encouraged to make money from implementing R&D outputs on farm and for industry good.

This issue is aligned with determining and agreeing the transaction terms of trade when RDCs and agribusiness collaborate or ‘do business’.

Issues of ‘terms of trade’

There was significant discussion by the CVCB working group about ‘terms of trade’ between agribusiness and RDCs. The question of relationships and collaboration between agribusiness and the RDCs is one of diverging cultures (see Table 4).

Table 4. Agribusiness Drivers/Needs vs. RDC Drivers/Needs

| <i>Agribusiness Stakeholders Drivers/Needs</i> | <i>RDC Stakeholders Drivers/Needs</i> |
|---|--|
| Long-term, high profit client relationships Meeting client goals and drivers Access to information Delivery in terms growers relate to, in language relevant to them – detailed/simple/practical Ability to synthesise into advice/products Relationships = profits = \$ change hands. | Industry survival R&D strategic planning & management of aggregated investments of public monies Manage R&D delivery Show benefits and ROI to stakeholders – especially levy payers Extension, Adoption and Practice Change Increase \$ returns to growers Triple Bottom Line. |

The factors that influence the relationship from the point of view of agribusiness were determined by the project leader to be:

- agribusiness is time poor
- agribusiness is client focussed – because pay off is fast and failure is quick
- agribusiness is closely aligned with client wants and needs – based on relationships and it is unlikely to step beyond boundaries
- agribusiness has specific needs to meet client needs – focussed on regions, sectors, levels of its expertise, types of information delivery
- agribusiness focuses on client change: to meet client goals; to increase their profitability
- to focus on client change, information must be converted to advice that is practical and relevant and is \$ focussed to facilitate practice change
- there is limited time for liaison with RDCs so every interaction has to be a win:win.

With regard to agribusiness segments and terms of trade the following issues were identified:

- building relationships is crucial
- open lines of communications are crucial
- partnerships can elicit real \$/in-kind support from agribusiness to match real \$ from RDCs
- understanding each other’s culture and drivers, and those of the growers, is crucial to support strong relationships.

The crucial action to diminish the effects of these cultural differences and foster collaboration is to determine the ‘terms of trade’ for the relationship. Establishing ‘common ground’ is a key issue and is helpful for the interaction.

Key findings

Understanding and acknowledging the ‘terms of trade’ and ‘common ground’ between agribusiness and R&D providers are key factors in building the relationship.

It was agreed that ‘common ground’ does exist between agribusiness stakeholders and RDCs with regard to their joint requirements. These findings about ‘common ground’ informed the remainder of the project:

- need for information – to ensure access to, and delivery to, growers of relevant information
- practical and relevant R&D outputs to be made available to growers via agribusiness
- meeting varied grower’s needs (in terms of that target audience segmentation according to their industry sector/geographic location) is crucial
- ultimate aim is to lead to practice change (where relevant/required/sought by growers) creating \$ benefits for individual enterprise and the wider industry/community

- valuable to seek input from agribusiness into setting future priorities for R&D
- valuable for agribusiness and growers to be assisting in trials/R&D.

It was established that the purpose of any liaison between RDCs and agribusiness is to:

- build relationships and open lines of communication
- determine key significant issues of interest that have cross-RDC relevance and relevance to agribusiness and to growers/levy payers/clients
- establish overall consistency in approach
- consider collaboration on the basis of identifying key cross-RDC projects
- consider undertaking direct liaison on more specific issues on a RDC/sector direct to agribusiness basis
- foster longer-term direct RDC-agribusiness relationships.

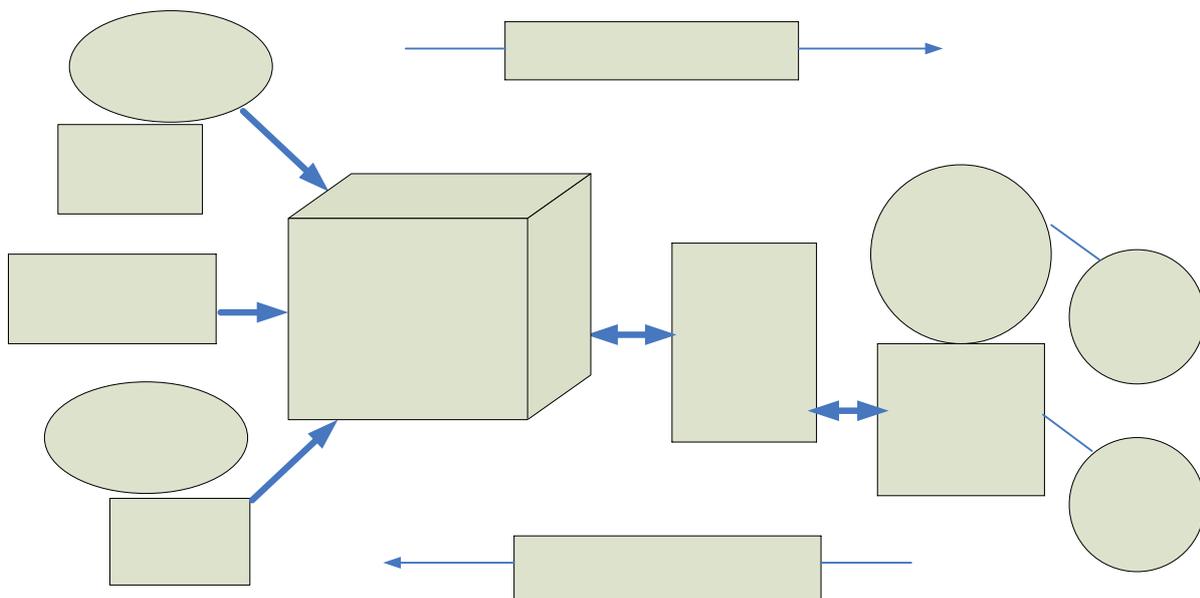
Outcomes from the CVCB working group meetings indicated that meaningful RDC-agribusiness engagement was a joint priority and that reciprocal benefits could result from collaboration on a relevant key project or activity. Current and future projects were canvassed and targeted for further investigation as a means to foster engagement between RDCs and agribusiness. The issue that was identified as being critical for meaningful engagement was ... *the implementation of the industry Information Repository.*

3.2 The Appropriate Information Repository

A consistent high priority issue to emerge from the agribusiness sector throughout this project was how they can best access R&D outputs funded by R&D providers (RDCs, CRCs and state departments) on behalf of grower clients. The outputs fall into two categories – sector specific (e.g. grain, horticulture) and general to the farm enterprise (e.g. soils, climate).

Figure 4 illustrates how an appropriate Information Repository benefits and has large scale influences for all stakeholders.

Figure 4. *An Information Repository – Private and Public Good Results in Public and Private Benefits*



With regard to an appropriate Information Repository it was agreed at the September 2007 CVCB Working Group meeting, where the rationale behind the commercial FarmPlus model was presented, that:

- FarmPlus and AANRO have strong synergies
- FarmPlus and AANRO should commence discussions about how best to collaborate based on a wholesaler (AANRO) and retailer (FarmPlus) model
- the ultimate position ought to be an agribusiness friendly tool i.e. FarmPlus, with access to the R&D data in raw form (AANRO)
- each organisation should be independent and yet collaborative in these discussions
- an evaluative mechanism needs to be built in throughout the process to look at data use and get some insights into adoption issues
- the next major outcome (after the agreed AANRO and FarmPlus liaison) is to see a FarmPlus business plan/marketing plan with links back to AANRO
- the next step after that is to run a pilot.

Some of the key issues with FarmPlus that were raised by the CVCB Working Group were:

- agronomic advice requires access to appropriate information
- there is a need for strong marketing and capacity building to use these information products; hence the value of FarmPlus
- future enterprise planning also fits into this product in future
- it is important for advisers to guide clients' thinking and actions with detailed factual R&D information
- it is important to build in a robust feedback mechanism (both on the system and on R&D priorities) to allow RDCs to apply this information to their planning and their accountability.
- need to determine on a continuing basis, what are the most current R&D findings/information for use by advisers
- single point of contact for advisers is crucial – with a help desk function for sorting/classifying in a product like FarmPlus
- any chosen system must have the triple outcomes of providing value for RDCs, agribusiness and growers
- industry cannot afford any duplication and requires strong collaboration
- information Repository must be accessible in 'adviser speak' to assist the information synthesising
- it must operate in 'real time' and have commercial reality built in to facilitate sound decisions.

The FarmPlus product

The FarmPlus business plan which was presented in February 2008 describes the product as 'Creating a One-Stop Shop where Growers and Agribusiness Advisers (and Researchers) can search for information 'Quick Bites' or detailed RD&E outputs'.

Specific features and benefits of the FarmPlus product are as follows:

- ability to be an 'in-store information shop' that agronomists and others can use when clients come into the premises
- ability to be used 'on-the-road' by agronomists/advisers
- capacity to be used 'at the farm table' during advisory sessions between advisers and farmers
- search capability which allows it to separate and sort information specific to Australia and specific regions/issues/sources of information
- classification capability which allows sorting by people who are time poor and want to decide whether to 'dig deeper' into final R&D reports

- both a detailed information access point and ‘overview/summary information’ capability
- the ‘purchase of the FarmPlus product’ by both CRT/Ruralco and the IHD group was expected to provide potentially 2/3 coverage of Australian growers who use advisers.

Figure 5 below illustrates how the FarmPlus model ‘fits’ into the information delivery and practice change continuum.

Figure 5. A Supply Chain Based Route-to-Market for R&D Outputs
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Facts about AANRO

It is noted above that AANRO was thought to act as a central point for deposits of government funded R&D and its future in mid-2007 was unknown. Further detail was sought on its expected capability:

- AANRO is a bibliographic reference source that has research in progress statements and final reports of R&D, and is based on providing information from R&D organisations to the public
- it recognises the RDC need to provide R&D outputs into the public domain
- around \$12.5 million had gone into it by September 2007
- another three years of funding is assured to continue operations/progress.

3.3 Key Issues

In summary, this report outlines a series of research findings that discuss/confirm the following key issues:

- The delivery of information (including R&D findings), synthesised into take home messages and decision support to facilitate grower change practice, is a key need for RDCs, for agribusiness, and for the ultimate client of both ... growers
- The information required is both generalist and sector/region specific
- The agribusiness and grower market place is highly segmented – the RDCs are equally segmented and they operate largely in sector-based silos
- There is a cultural barrier between how agribusiness (and grower clients) do their business (highly responsive, leading to rapid action) compared to how RDCs do their business (strong focus on process and accountability through annual work cycles)
- Comments from the agribusiness sector suggest the desire/willingness to move through these cultural barriers to access information in order to best service their grower clients – and an expectation from growers that this has already taken place (or was never an issue)
- This cultural barrier has proven problematic in the current CVCB Agribusiness Project as RDCs in particular come to grips with the different culture operating in business
- Both agribusiness and RDCs seek strategic engagement with each other – there simply needs to be a reason for the engagement. Growers expect such engagement to be in place and functioning.
- A focus on information delivery, adoption of relevant technologies and practice change thus provides the ‘common ground’ for strategic engagement
- Support and use of the FarmPlus model of an interactive Information Repository, providing a one-stop shop for information access and feedback from information users, primarily focussed on agribusiness, is an immediate reason to engage
- The implementation of the FarmPlus model was insufficiently advanced by the project completion date for the proposed RDC and agribusiness interaction to commence.

The final meeting of the CVCB Agribusiness Working Group occurred late April 2008. The prototype FarmPlus model was presented and its attributes outlined:

- The model is searching 300-400 Australian research and agribusiness web sites for the latest relevant information
- This is more targeted than a Google search for example, which is a ‘grab bag of anything remotely relevant’
- This could be regarded simplistically as a ‘new publication’ – it was noted that ... *today’s market is about re-packaging to meet specific market needs*
- Recognition about not being seen to charge growers direct for the information that has come from RDC and state departments of agriculture and related sites – and an appreciation that this will/can be addressed
- It can be regarded as a data gatherer for RDCs and ‘partners/funders’ and can be used to supply statistics on who accesses what, from where and also user views on a range of issues
- A group of rural journalists could synthesise the information and seek out region specific needs – though there was some discussion about this being better done by RDCs.

During that meeting it was reported that the FarmPlus system will form the basis of the conference information point for delegates to the 2008 Cotton Conference. Delegates will log on to complete their conference management details, then retain the logon details for future, long-term access to the system. CRDC have committed to FarmPlus as a long-term electronic information delivery system from the cotton industry to advisers and other users. CRDC is also providing ‘information synthesisers’ to gather and make sense of information before it goes onto FarmPlus.

The following specific actions and activities were reported as being undertaken:

- CRT/Ruralco has expressed particular interest in taking on the FarmPlus model and are examining this in-depth
- HAL has a current proposal from FarmPlus which is currently progressing through the HAL system and is gaining positive support (support approved in May 2008).

Some stakeholders (meeting attendees and other R&D agencies) sought further information on a range of relevant issues to be investigated with regard to the implementation of the FarmPlus model:

- Who makes money out of the product, ownership/use of the IP?
- How to maximise value adding through the whole R&D/extension/adoption/practice change chain?
- Government may well be interested in a market based instrument to specialise in delivery to a key target audience.
- Turning the model into reality; how to ensure public/industry funded R&D outcomes become a reality and how validity and ‘public record’ can be retained?
- Consider relevant models regarding whether the RDCs are commercial partners in the model, or they put in seed funding for (say) three years to create delivery of their outputs so success can be tracked and used in future based on guaranteed track-able outputs and results.

Questions to be answered

The following discussion points were canvassed during the final April CVCB Agribusiness Working Group meeting where the FarmPlus product was demonstrated:

- FarmPlus can be considered the final step in the information wholesaling chain before direct access by the adviser and/or grower. It was noted that, in marketing terms, real interest occurs in a consumer after users have at least three exposures to the same information from three different sources to give it ‘credibility’.
- What is the case with liability – when data is ‘harvested’, when the data is synthesised, at the actual final report stage (which is in the jurisdiction of the RDC) and when one grower passes the information on to another grower who uses it?
- Liability issues can develop relevant to information quality, duplication, accessibility and re-synthesis.

- Duplication – FarmPlus is not duplicating current initiatives. The distinction is that it is a distribution and harvesting system, and acts as the ‘one point of contact’ to allow for any authorised person to access, obtain data, package it themselves and deliver to growers and other industry users.
- Monitoring and evaluation issues include ROI, practice change, adoption, baseline position, benchmarking and how to assess change, impact and effectiveness of the system.
- Are all users to be subscribers? It was agreed that only minimal information in FarmPlus ought to be accessible without the subscriber log-in. It was felt that even serious information seeking producers would be happy to subscribe. This could be handled by advisers being able to authorise their clients to receive a log-in. This could also form part of understanding information access and adoption.
- FarmPlus could support capacity building, ultimately leading to practice change – noting that today advisers play a key role between information access and information use/application/adoption/practice change.
- In terms of funding, it was reported that the funds sought to make FarmPlus fully operational are one-third product suppliers, one-third distributors and one-third knowledge suppliers (RDCs, etc.).
- There are a range of commercial-in-confidence issues associated with FarmPlus.
- It was noted that this is about delivery to people in regions who have region specific issues and needs. For regional growers, advisers are their local conduits so tailor-making the information and balancing the needs of various organisations creates some logistical issues.
- There are contribution vs. costs issues to the development of FarmPlus. Real on-going costs, start up costs, flat fee for RDCs vs. diminishing fees, RDCs understanding the funding model in detail, and quality control methods need to be planned as well as possible, to seek out synergies that exist.
- The working model is to get people’s input to finalise what is specifically needed.
- RDCs need to be clear on what they want and what is needed for them to connect effectively with their target audiences. The evaluation element of FarmPlus is easily achieved; the question for the RDCs is ... ‘what processes suit your needs and what questions do you want answered?’
- In terms of RDCs meeting their governance requirements and the terms of the PIRD Program/Act, what support can FarmPlus provide through these processes?
- It was proposed that agribusiness advisers are a key medium for RDCs to achieve adoption and practice change objectives; another question for RDCs is how effectively are advisers being used and is FarmPlus a key part of that strategy?
- The meeting agreed that there was interest in FarmPlus taking a role as a one-stop shop to act as an initial point of contact for R&D findings/outcomes.

Issues for FarmPlus to consider

- It is important to state clearly how FarmPlus fits/differentiates these key roles – the synthesis of the information into specific format(s) for use in FarmPlus, the delivery process to growers/advisers, the repository role, interaction with current wholesalers of information, etc.
- What are the implications to FarmPlus if RDCs do/do not sign up?
- How will the evaluation process operate? Define what information could be gathered, how, from the RDCs. Are there privacy issues of accessing data from advisers about their grower clients? How would the information be gathered? How regularly? How would it be reported? Could this CVCB project be considered a baseline and if so how?
- What performance targets are there? For whom? How will they be measured? What flexibility would there be in gathering/measuring?
- Provide the counterfactual case. What would happen if RDCs did nothing or just used what we have now? If FarmPlus didn’t become reality? If some/all RDCs did not sign up? What if only AANRO existed, or AANRO and FarmPlus operating together?

- How could ROI be determined/measured?
- Is it relevant to map the expectations of the potential partners in the project?
- A perspective on liability is needed.
- How might the federal government feel about links through FarmPlus with commercial organisations like chemical companies?
- Define the varied target audiences. Will there be a need to train people in the use of FarmPlus; if so, whom and how?
- In terms of risk management, need to state the assumption on which risk and management is/are based, no. of growers, no. of advisers, rate of use, how it can solve their problems, etc.
- A range of other issues were identified. Determine how 'branding of information origin' could be added, what about being able to select specific sites, timing/timeliness of sending out news updates on release of R&D results, what level of commercial selling on the site, importance of log-in process, risk management issues, what about the marketing/promotion program, QA, security, confidentiality agreements, how to go across commodities/farming systems, value proposition of shop fronts, mobile office use, etc.

Next steps

A series of next steps to continue interaction towards sign-off of the RDC-FarmPlus relationship were agreed. A key project outcome, which influences this thinking, is that the Number 1 priority of growers is to gain access to information in a readily understood form and increasingly this is via agribusiness advisers.

The CVCB Agribusiness Project concluded that the use of the FarmPlus model is a way to commence RDC and agribusiness engagement using a tangible product, especially when associated with AANRO, that is demonstrably of value to agribusiness advisers and is tailored to their needs.

Conclusion 1

The FarmPlus model is a key platform for information delivery of R&D outputs to growers via agribusiness.

Conclusion 2

The FarmPlus model and AANRO have greater mutual value to agribusiness and to RDCs when aligned and linked.

A one-year long Implementation Phase is proposed in order to commence strategic engagement between key R&D senior managers and their counterparts in key agribusiness sectors. The purpose of this Implementation Phase is to commence communication, evaluate the FarmPlus model and determine other communication methods to secure longer-term engagement.

Conclusion 3

An Implementation Phase is needed to actually engage RDCs formally with agribusiness.

This project can be considered to have successfully undertaken several of its key research and development aims of:

- creating a baseline understanding of the current status of RDC and agribusiness interactions
- recommending a direction of how to maximise the interaction between RDCs and agribusiness
- establishing a Management System (FarmPlus), that will facilitate agribusiness and RDC engagement.

However it was unable to fulfil the project aims of:

- trialling the Management System (FarmPlus)

- commencing RDC and agribusiness engagement through undertaking key forums/roundtable meetings and creating newsletters and interaction processes.

The reasons it was unable to fulfil those project aims were:

- the relationship between FarmPlus and the RDCs was insufficiently advanced to justify formal interaction between agribusiness and RDCs on that issue
- a trial of FarmPlus as a Management System was unable to be completed because the arrangements were at a formative stage at project conclusion.

With regard to the roundtable process it was ultimately decided that a roundtable was not yet appropriate. It was concluded that the FarmPlus strategy must be implemented before such a roundtable takes place.

Conclusion 4

An RDC-agribusiness roundtable forum is the next step in RDC-agribusiness engagement, which would focus on best uses of FarmPlus and how to deliver outcomes of cross-RDC projects.

It is noteworthy that both CRDC and HAL have committed funds to secure the use of FarmPlus for their industries for specific industry/corporation purposes. However it was noted that there is merit in ‘pooling of funds’ for stronger outcomes across RDC benefits.

Conclusion 5

Pooling of funds to go into FarmPlus is a key element of the next phase of engaging with FarmPlus, as long as those funds are appropriately managed on behalf of the participating RDCs and FarmPlus delivers specified outcomes.

3.4 The Implementation Phase

The final meeting of the CVCB Agribusiness Working Group canvassed a series of issues that could impact on the next stages of implementing FarmPlus as an information delivery tool. In terms of this implementation phase a series of key issues needed to be considered – financials, management, outcomes and process.

Financials

CRDC and HAL have individually committed to financially support FarmPlus for cotton and horticultural industry purposes. It is understood others of the RDCs are actively considering positions of support.

However an option to pool all funds in a central account was canvassed, so that a consistent across-RDC approach to fund FarmPlus could be managed on behalf of all participating RDCs. This could be managed by one agency such as RIRDC.

FarmPlus is seeking collective funding to support the engagement of the RDCs with FarmPlus at \$30-60,000/RDC/year dependant on the extent of the task for each RDC sector. It is expected that current CRDC and HAL funds allocation in 2007/8 would need to be quarantined for their specified purposes, although future funds for 2008/9 could potentially be included in a ‘pool’. The funds directed to FarmPlus would be used to:

- classify research reports/outputs for easy access/understanding (plain English format) by agribusiness advisers and therefore growers
- post these summaries on FarmPlus, so they are linked back to point of origin detailed research reports/outputs so users can access original (branded) data
- promote the role and function of RDCs (R&D providers), their events and contacts for ease of access by agribusiness advisers (and growers)

- supply feedback data to RDCs (R&D providers) on usage/issues/innovations/statistics to allow for continuous improvement of service offerings/future R&D priorities
- ensure industry/sector specific RDC needs are met
- ensure robust links to existing RDCs (R&D providers) e-libraries and websites, including AANRO, the Livestock Library, etc. and ideally direct to researchers
- ensure open lines of communication to ensure the best outcomes for all parties.

If it is assumed that a management role would need to encompass the activities listed above, then a management cost of approximately \$49-56,000 ought to be expected for the year. While the 2007/8 financial year is concluding, some initial base funds may be allocated this financial year to this process and other funds to the project in 2008/9 – on the basis of a group of R&D providers ‘chipping in’ to the one pool.

Conclusion 6

An appropriate management function, such as the continuation of the current project, is an appropriate manner of ensuring the RDC and FarmPlus relationship develops in a structured and accountable way.

Management

It is recommended that the management of this Implementation Phase is an extension of the current CVCB agribusiness project contract, thus creating a logical conclusion for that project. One further year ought to be sufficient time to commence the first phase of a successful implementation of the agribusiness-RDC communication strategy. The focus on the implementation of the FarmPlus system as the information delivery system for agribusiness is a key reason for communication.

The management role must include an evaluation of success in meeting objectives and reporting on those outcomes. The concept of this project encompasses creating the one forum where RDCs can collaborate with agribusiness on across-sector strategic issues.

Conclusion 7

A robust accountability and evaluation function ought to be built into future management of the RDC and FarmPlus relationship.

Outcomes and Process

The proposed outcomes for this implementation phase are:

- facilitate up to four meetings at the CVCB Agribusiness Working Group, RDC Program Manager and RDC Executive Director/Chair level to sign-off arrangements for the engagement of the RDCs with FarmPlus (management role – facilitate, acting as the one conduit to keep the process on track; task to be complete by December 2008 so FarmPlus becomes operational for this purpose early in 2009)
- facilitate 1-2 roundtable meetings with senior agribusiness personnel representing the reseller companies and private consultants, senior R&D managers of the crop protection and animal health product supplier companies, peak bodies such as CropLife, and either Executive Directors or senior Program Managers of the RDCs and FFI CRC, with DAFF and the FarmPlus directors included (management role – organise and facilitate meeting(s) and determine next steps by end of first quarter 2009; meeting(s) purpose to focus on how best to communicate R&D outputs to agribusiness, via implementation of FarmPlus communication case study)
- gather data and report on the successes of FarmPlus in the delivery of outcomes (data to be gathered from FarmPlus usage and interpreted by a third party; completion by end of second quarter 2009).

Conclusion 8

The management function would need very clear agreed terms of reference to guide it.

The issues that an Implementation Phase could usefully cover are:

- drive the engagement of FarmPlus and RDCs and manage the process of engagement – particularly engaging RDC Program Managers and Executive Directors – and RDC Chairs and senior DAFF personnel
- ensure final agreement between a group of the RDCs (CRDC, HAL, LWA, RIRDC and GRDC) who have expressed an interest in FarmPlus – and FarmPlus itself – regarding how the system operates and assess its success against KPIs
- articulate how best to maximise the benefits of this one-stop information shop; this recognises the focus on delivering R&D outcomes direct to the agribusiness sector, with potential for the system to be accessed by researchers and growers, too, while providing response data back to RDCs on use of R&D outcomes by users
- manage the actual delivery of FarmPlus as a product across that group of RDCs and possibly the Future Farm Industries CRC who has expressed initial interest
- monitor success of the outcomes against agreed objectives – say for 12 months
- use FarmPlus as the vehicle for RDCs (R&D providers) to engage with agribusiness to ensure it meets their needs and obtain feedback on progress (noting that CRT/Ruralco and Landmark are presently [late May 2008] negotiating adoption of the FarmPlus model for their businesses) focussing on ‘industry good’ outcomes
- ensure proposed roundtable commences RDC-agribusiness communication.

Conclusion 9

The RDC and FarmPlus relationship is dependent on engaging RDC Executive Directors, Chairs and DAFF.

It was agreed that DAFF had a role in the way forward. The project leader briefed an Executive Manager, DAFF, on a range of relevant issues regarding the implementation of the FarmPlus model. This perspective from DAFF emerged:

- issues of who makes money out of the product, payments by RDC/government/growers, the ownership/ use of the IP and liability would need to be worked out but they should not be ‘blockers’
- a key issue for government is how to maximise value adding through the whole R&D/extension/ adoption/practice change chain
- this new (federal) government may be interested in piloting a market-based instrument like FarmPlus to specialise in targeted delivery of R&D outputs to growers
- a key strategic issue for all stakeholders is how to be sure this model can be turned into reality; the Bureau of Meteorology and distribution of climate and weather information may be a useful case study
- tied to this is how to ensure public/industry funded R&D outcomes are applied by growers on-ground and how validity and ‘public record’ can be retained
- there is a need to consider relevant models regarding whether the RDCs are commercial partners in the model, or they put in seed funding in some form for (say) three years to facilitate delivery of their outputs. A further element is to track successes to inform future decision making, based on guaranteed track-able outputs/results.

It is important to deal with these issues at the level of the RDC Program Manager Group and then the RDC Executive Directors forum.

A series of steps are needed to implement FarmPlus as it is about to move into an Implementation Phase, and ought to cover:

- finalising arrangements between a group of the RDCs (CRDC, HAL, LWA, RIRDC and GRDC) that have expressed an interest in FarmPlus – and FarmPlus itself
- delivering FarmPlus as a product across that group of RDCs
- monitoring success of the outcomes against agreed objectives – say for 12 months
- using FarmPlus as a reason to engage with agribusiness to ensure it meets their needs
- undertaking the proposed roundtable to commence communication.

Key findings

A series of immediate steps to finalise key issues regarding the suitability of operations of FarmPlus to meet RDC accountability and management parameters are proposed to be finalised by 30 June 2008.

A further one-year Implementation Phase in 2008/9 would be valuable to secure the engagement of agribusiness with RDCs using the FarmPlus model.

3.5 Conclusions

“A smart society is not just one that has excellent science. It is one that can best distribute and adopt excellent science. Unfortunately, for several decades Australia has fallen into the trap of assuming research quality alone is sufficient. Dissemination of scientific findings is one of the lowest priorities on the agenda, as is perfectly evident in the budgets of the commonwealth or practically any of its agencies and universities. As the Government inquires into the universities, the co-operative research centres and eventually all the other arms of the knowledge machine in its quest to make them better, the adequacy of their knowledge transmission systems needs to come under glaring scrutiny. Skills are low, resources pathetic and barriers to knowledge transfer high.” (Cribb, April 2008)

This project concluded end of May 2008. Its objective was to create a management system to facilitate general RDC interaction with a cross-section of agribusiness in order to facilitate the transfer of RD&E through agribusiness to growers. This was replaced with the concept of establishing a single agribusiness access point to R&D outputs via the interactive FarmPlus Information Repository.

The Number 1 priority of growers and agribusiness is to gain access to information in a readily understood form. Many growers across all rural sectors use agribusiness advisers as a key information source. This priority of information access/delivery is shared by RDCs and R&D providers.

This study has demonstrated that agribusiness advisers make up a significant information conduit to growers – and yet that conduit has not yet been used strategically by the R&D community. The CVCB Agribusiness Project, subject of this report, concluded that the use of the FarmPlus model of an interactive Information Repository is a way to commence RDC and agribusiness engagement using a tangible product.

A series of roundtable forums is the next step of building engagement. However the project, due to a number of constraints related to the need to establish cultural issues and terms of trade and some form of Information Repository did not enter an engagement phase – at the request of the CVCB Agribusiness Working Group.

A one-year long Implementation Phase is now proposed in order to commence strategic engagement between key R&D senior managers and their counterparts in key agribusiness sectors. The purpose of this Implementation Phase is to commence communication, measure success of the FarmPlus model and determine other communication methods to secure longer-term engagement.

The series of specific project key findings were reported:

- At project commencement only two of the R&D providers – the Salinity CRC (Cooperative Research Centre for Plant Based Management of Dryland Salinity now the FFICRC) and Dairy Australia – had relatively formal strategic links with agribusiness. This suggests that engagement of RDC and

agribusiness is limited. At project conclusion three of the R&D providers had developed or were close to developing strategic links with agribusiness, while another three had moved towards such links.

- The relatively low level of ‘operational association’ demonstrates a level of perceived difficulty of RDCs in undertaking RDC-agribusiness relationships. The changed level of ‘desire for association’ must be regarded as a positive step in development of strengthened RDC-agribusiness relationships – and can be attributed significantly to this study and the increased understanding/benefits of R&D provider and agribusiness engagement.
- Both agribusiness and RDCs seek strategic engagement with each other – there simply needs to be a purpose for that engagement. Support and use of the experimental FarmPlus model as an interactive Information Repository – which could provide a central point for information access and feedback from information users, primarily focussed on agribusiness – proved to be a reason to engage.
- The agribusiness and grower market place is highly segmented. The RDCs are equally segmented and they generally operate in sector-based silos. Identification of the diverse segments and groups is necessary to achieve effective delivery of RD&E. It may be expected that market forces will dictate that agribusiness advisers will focus their attention on the more innovative, profitable and motivated clients. These grower groups, the most successful, the professionals, corporate and peri-urban growers are highly responsive and profitability focussed and expect – and are prepared to pay for – cutting-edge, relevant R&D information in a refined form – although transaction costs are critical.
- Growers saw the work of R&D providers as being relevant to them – though there was some criticism of MLA, AWI and LWA as being distant and disconnected from them. This contrasted with their view of GRDC, which was generally positive and also RIRDC, which was valued.
- There is a disparity between the R&D provider culture and the agribusiness culture and this influences how their interaction is best managed. General RDC perceptions are that R&D outputs (accessed by agribusiness) are used primarily for ‘agribusiness to make money’ – which is at odds with perceptions that growers (their levy payers) are ‘encouraged to make money’ from implementing R&D outputs on farm and for industry good. This cultural issue reinforces the importance of determining and agreeing to the transaction terms of trade when RDCs and agribusiness collaborate or ‘do business’. Understanding and acknowledging the terms of trade and common ground between agribusiness and R&D providers are key factors in building the relationship.
- There is also a cultural barrier between how agribusiness and grower clients do their business – related to differing focus on profitability vs. accountability. These barriers need to be further understood in order to foster improved engagement.
- The delivery of information (including R&D findings) and its synthesis into ‘take home’ messages and decision support advice to facilitate grower practice change is a key need for RDCs, for agribusiness, and for the ultimate client of both ... the growers. This provides a ‘common ground’ and an impetus for change.
- The focus of the project altered so that initial RDC-agribusiness engagement revolved around development and implementation of the information repository model. The Information Repository became the major project focus in May 2007 and the FarmPlus commercial model emerged as the key concept to facilitate RDC-agribusiness interaction and a motivation for meaningful engagement between RDCs and agribusiness.
- Some form of relationship between the e-library concept of AANRO and the FarmPlus Information Repository was thought to be a mutually beneficial arrangement.
- Cross-RDC projects identified in Table 3 form a sound basis for investigating RDC-agribusiness engagement, including access to an Information Repository. An RDC-agribusiness roundtable forum could be activated once the Information Repository and suitable collaborative cross-RDC projects are identified. These both form valid reasons to commence a formal RDC-agribusiness engagement process.
- A series of immediate steps to finalise key issues regarding the suitability of operations of FarmPlus to meet RDC accountability and management parameters are proposed to be finalised by 30 June 2008.

- An Executive Manager, DAFF sees the RDC-FarmPlus collaboration as being a useful and timely way of facilitating information delivery to growers via agribusiness and sees it meeting current federal government policy perspectives.
- A further one-year Implementation Phase in 2008/9 would be valuable to secure the engagement of agribusiness with RDCs using the FarmPlus model.

A series of Conclusions that support the key findings are also reported:

Conclusion 1

The FarmPlus model is a key platform for information delivery of R&D outputs to growers via agribusiness.

Conclusion 2

The FarmPlus model and AANRO have greater mutual value to agribusiness and to RDCs when aligned and linked.

Conclusion 3

An Implementation Phase is needed to actually engage RDCs formally with agribusiness.

Conclusion 4

An RDC-agribusiness roundtable forum is the next step in RDC-agribusiness engagement, which would focus on best uses of FarmPlus and how to deliver outcomes of cross-RDC projects.

Conclusion 5

Pooling of funds to go into FarmPlus is a key element of the next phase of engaging with FarmPlus, as long as those funds are appropriately managed on behalf of the participating RDCs and FarmPlus delivers specified outcomes.

Conclusion 6

An appropriate management function, such as the continuation of the current project, is an appropriate manner of ensuring the RDC and FarmPlus relationship develops in a structured and accountable way.

Conclusion 7

A robust accountability and evaluation function ought to be built into future management of the RDC and FarmPlus relationship.

Conclusion 8

The management function would need very clear agreed terms of reference to guide it.

Conclusion 9

The RDC and FarmPlus relationship is dependent on engaging RDC Executive Directors, Chairs and DAFF.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Project Milestones and Performance Indicators

| Task | Milestone | Reporting Date | Performance Indicator |
|--|---|------------------|--|
| Establish initial project settings – case studies, Change Assessment System, newsletter and TORS and protocols for Management System | Establishment of three case studies | 30 November 2005 | Set out and sign off on Interaction Protocol and Time Lines with case study key personnel |
| Seek out baseline data on RD&E providers and agribusiness interaction | Report on baseline understanding of how key RD&E providers interact with agribusiness | 31 December 2005 | Draft report of baseline data on key RD&E providers and how they connect with agribusiness now and propose to do in future |
| Work on developing practical protocols to inform the Management System | Finalise terms of reference for the Management System | 31 March 2006 | A statement of the protocols needed to allow development of the draft Management System |
| Develop draft Management System | Draft Management System available for first Open Forum | 27 February 2007 | Draft Management System report |
| Arrange first Agribusiness Capacity Building Open Forum | First Agribusiness Capacity Building Open Forum | 31 August 2007 | Report on findings of first Agribusiness Capacity Building Open Forum and implications for Draft Management System |
| Develop proposed Management System | Proposed Management System available for second Open Forum | 31 December 2007 | Proposed Management System report |
| Arrange second Agribusiness Capacity Building Open Forum | Second Agribusiness Capacity Building Open Forum | 27 February 2008 | Report on findings of second Agribusiness Capacity Building Open Forum and implications for Proposed Management System |
| Prepare final project report | Final report to CVCB | 30 April 2008 | Final report delivered to CVCB |

Appendix 2: Project GANTT Chart

APR denotes Annual Progress Report in November each year; M denotes Milestone

| Task | Year 1* | | | | Year 2 | | | | Year 3 | | | | Constraints / Comments | |
|---|-----------|-----|---|---|-----------|-----|---|---|-----------|-----|---|---|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | 2005/2006 | | | | 2006/2007 | | | | 2007/2008 | | | | | |
| Project commences – August 2005 | x | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Create baseline data on RD&E providers/agribusiness interaction | x | | | | | | | | | | | | | Self contained activity |
| Establish three case studies | x | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Establish Change Assessment System | x | | | | | | | | | | | | | Links to Needs Analysis/State't |
| Establish bimonthly electronic newsletter and discussion group | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | Occurs all through project |
| Finalise terms of reference for Management System | | x | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Use case studies to develop protocols for Management System | x | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Report on key issues – in Annual Progress Report | | apr | | | | apr | | | | apr | | | | |
| Work on practical protocols – and compare across case studies | | | x | x | x | | | | | | | | | Initial protocols in place |
| Prepare draft Management System for review at first Agribusiness Capacity Building Open Forum | | | | x | x | | | | | | | | | |
| Conduct first Agribusiness Capacity Building Open Forum | | | | | | x | | | | | | | | |
| Continue work on protocols - compare across case studies | | | | | | x | x | x | x | x | x | | | |
| Regular field testing of protocols, input and feedback to case study personnel | | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | | | |
| Prepare Management System for review at second Open Forum | | | | | | | | | | x | x | | | |
| Finalise all protocols – via final field checking | | | | | | | | | | | x | x | | |
| Conduct second Agribusiness Capacity Building Open Forum | | | | | | | | | | | | | x | |
| Revise Management System – review and preparation final report | | | | | | | | | | | | | x | |
| Final report – April 2008 | | | | | | | | | | | | | x | |

Appendix 3: Survey pro-formas seeking data from agribusiness / growers

Pro-forma #1 – Grower feedback sheet

Name: -----

Address: -----

Phone: ----- E-mail: -----

Yes, I am prepared to give feedback in future to assist with this project.

No, I am unable to assist.

The **issue(s) / topic(s)** that are particularly relevant to my *current decisions* relate to:

Production Marketing NRM Technology Business management

Some specific issues / topics are: _____

The **issue(s) / topic(s)** that are particularly relevant to my *future decisions* relate to:

Production Marketing NRM Technology Business management

Some specific issues / topics are: _____

The level of information *that I seek* for my own decision making is (please tick):

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Where 1 is a simple 2-4 paragraph overview – and 5 is a complete research paper | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The level of information I need | | | | | |

The level of information *that I would like my advisers to have* to assist my decision making is (please tick):

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Where 1 is a simple 2-4 paragraph overview – and 5 is a complete research paper | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The level of information I think my adviser needs | | | | | |

When I think of *those I rely on* for advice or information in my decision making (please tick):

| | | | | | |
|------------|----------|----------------------|-----------|-------|-------------|
| Agronomist | Farm mgr | Acc'ant / Fin adv'er | Marketer | Gov't | Reseller |
| Wh'saler | IT | Business devel cons | Mkt'g grp | QA | Catch't Mgt |
| | | | | | |

As I think back to the Farmer-Advisory Hub diagram, the **advisers or providers I use – or may need to use in the future** – are (please briefly list the type of adviser, e.g. accountant, marketer, QA, marketing group, business adviser, supermarket, etc.): _____

My thoughts on the work of Research and Development Corporations – and other agencies that could **supply information or research work** – are: _____

The ways I like to **receive information from my advisers** are: _____

Other thoughts on this issue are: _____

Many thanks for your input.

The information in this feedback sheet will only be used to inform RDCs and the Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building about agribusiness extension, education and training roles. No names will be used when reporting the data. By ticking the Yes box you may be added to a data base to receive a periodical newsletter outlining information concerning the continuing evolution of the role of agribusiness in extension, education and training.

Pro-forma #2 – Agribusiness adviser feedback sheet

Name: _____

Company: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Yes, I am prepared to give feedback in future to assist with this project.

No, I am unable to assist.

| | | | | |
|--|----------------|---------------------|------------|-------|
| Business options for agribusiness | Agronom ist | Business adviser | Specialist | Other |
| I would describe myself in business as (tick) | | | | |

In my business the sort of work I do is: _____

As I think about the proportion of **my clients** (please tick):

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| Where “A” class client are the most profitable businesses – and ones I would prefer to work with – and “C” class clients are those I would prefer not to | A | B | C | D |
| The % of my clients that fit each are – | | | | |

I see my clientele changing in future like this: _____

The **issue(s) / topic(s)** that are particularly relevant to my **current clients** relate to:

Production Marketing NRM Technology Business management

Some specific issues / topics that they seek information / advice about are: _____

The **issue(s) / topic(s)** that are particularly relevant to my **future clients** relate to:

Production Marketing NRM Technology Business management

Some specific issues / topics that are emerging are: _____

The level of information **that I seek** for my own purposes to do my work is:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Where 1 is a simple 2-4 paragraph overview – and 5 is a complete research paper | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The level of information I need (please tick) – and / or the % at each level of the info sought | | | | | |

In terms of doing my work now and in the future – some comments on accessing information myself – are: _____

In terms of using **knowledge sources**, especially Research and Development Corporations – and others:

| | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|-----------|
| The RDCs I have used or want to use | GRDC (grains) | MLA (meat) | AWI (sheep) | LWA (NRM) | Other |
| The RDCs I have used in the past (tick) | | | | | |
| The RDCs I would like to use in future | | | | | |
| The RDCs I would like to give feedback to – in terms of RD&E priorities – and delivery of info to me | | | | | |
| Other knowledge sources I use | Supplier staff | CRCs | CMA – landcare | Gov't | Inter-net |
| My priorities to access – H=High, M=Medium and L=Low | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

In terms of knowledge sources and professional development, some comments are: _____

My preferred ways of **accessing information** for my business use are (please tick):

| | | | | |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------------------|
| Brochures | Seminars | Fact sheets | Workshops | Internet |
| E-mail | Phone / SMS | Conferences | Study trip | Specialist visits to me |
| | | | | |

Other ways are: _____

My thoughts on accessing info in future are: _____

Other general thoughts on these issues are: _____

Many thanks for your input.

The information in this feedback sheet will only be used to inform RDCs and the Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building about agribusiness extension, education and training roles. No names will be used when reporting the data. By ticking the Yes box you may be added to a data base to receive a periodical newsletter outlining information concerning the continuing evolution of the role of agribusiness in extension, education and training.

Appendix 4: Baseline understanding of RDC engagement with agribusiness

At the commencement of the project – second half of 2005 – a short phone survey was undertaken of the RDCs to determine current and proposed level of engagement with agribusiness.

Work during the CVCB Agribusiness Working Group, July 2007, revealed changed status of some RDCs in terms of their strategic engagement and future plans.

| <i>RDC / CRC</i> | <i>Notes on engagement – project commencement</i> | <i>Notes on engagement – July 2007</i> |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Australian Pork Ltd | More specialist private consultants than departmental extension staff Top 6-8 nutrition consultants service 75% of industry + similar environmental, piggery management and vets Small industry means can easily contact growers with new technologies Too much info around – Pork CRC to make sense of it for industry – help with private sector career paths because such small industry | Not part of CVCB Agribusiness Working Group |
| AWI | Occasional interaction Nil response to initial input for project | Occasional interaction – have discussed strategic interaction process – no action to date Not part of CVCB Agribusiness Working Group at that time (subsequent increased interest in information repository) |
| CRDC | A series of key organisations, RDC, CRC, Cotton Australia, Consultants association, etc. so a cohesive industry A good cohesive agribusiness industry too – all involved in R&D in some way Key issue is accessing people for the varied industry roles to help it grow – hampered by drought | On-farm advisers now seen to be most effective way to get R&D outputs to growers + feedback to CRDC and CCRC Major concerns about structural issues regarding advisory sector that the industry seeks to address in new strategic plan Paying advisers to be conduits to growers remains an option Agribusiness a key conduit for cotton – they engaged with FarmPlus in 2008 |
| DA | Strong engagement with milk processors and their extension staff Group of private specialist consultants / national suppliers on genetics and breeding, animal nutrition, milk quality etc. Little engagement with national reseller companies Project by project basis Regard DA as having strong agribusiness links Noted the need to change culture of adviser sector of dairy industry – and culture of growers to seek out specialist advice | Strong engagement with milk processors and their extension staff Group of private specialist consultants on genetics and breeding, animal nutrition, milk quality etc. Little engagement with national reseller companies Project by project is basis for interaction – though this is strengthening DA as has strong agribusiness links – see body of report |
| GRDC | Ad-hoc interaction on a project by project basis – internal research shows increased growers use of agribusiness Involvement in GRDC Panels / Regional Advisory Committees on application Currently seeking strategic interaction strategy – about to fund work | Project undertaken to determine how best to engage with agribusiness strategically A defined interaction strategy to be implemented – national and regional level Reference Groups – commencing July 2007 Agribusiness a key opportunity for GRDC implementation of RD&E outputs to growers |
| HAL | Adhoc engagement | Agreement in HAL that closer collaboration with agribusiness is needed Proposed to develop a strategic agribusiness engagement process – not supported by cross-industry committee of HAL Now back to starting point again although they engaged with FarmPlus in 2008 |

| | | |
|------------------------|--|--|
| LWA | No formal engagement Would like to trial some form of engagement with those who provide knowledge to agribusiness Internal research shows need is there Adhoc use of agribusiness in projects | Established a 'Hilton Group' as a sounding board Project undertaken – Insights into an NRM agribusiness strategy – June 2006 Proposed to commence adding NRM layer to adviser decision supports – no action taken |
| MLA | Uses NLIS as point of contact + connect with stock agents when running seminars Need greater skills in those agents Hard to determine how to deal with multiple parts of skills, engagement, etc. Our process is increased grower awareness at this stage – moving to 'adoption' then engage agribusiness Issues about who will make money out of knowledge 'sales' Growing need for specialist consultants – but who pays? | Conducted a pilot 'insights forum' in mid-2006 for advisers which achieved a mixed reaction At policy level determined need for stronger interaction Planned more cohesive engagement strategy for 2007 – still to be considered |
| RIRDC | An area of interest – by a diverse portfolio of varied products | Retains interest Sees value in Information Repository – and possible specific industry case study uses |
| SRDC | Primary engagement with Mills, structured engagements with BSES, Productivity Boards, etc. to become more user driven Changes taking place thru grower group innovation projects Still very varied in the industry – no connection with resellers / suppliers Opportunities are there | At policy level some interest in links with agribusiness Proposed project work not supported Reduced involvement in CVCB Agribusiness Working Group |
| Salinity CRC | National agribusiness company Landmark the CRC extension partner Adhoc involvement of agribusiness in projects | Metamorphosis into new Future Farm Industries CRC – July 2007 Continued stronger Landmark engagement with structured plans for agribusiness engagement as core business |
| Irrigation Futures CRC | Have a partnering program with some agribusiness type organisations Trialling new extension models Agribusiness connections on the horizon – not yet really thought through – and no real practical connections with them | Not part of CVCB Agribusiness Working Group |
| Cotton Catchment s CRC | Role is to create adoption mechanism Agribusiness linked into all levels of cotton industry – varied links though Focussing on structuring agribusiness as key delivery process – a range of issues such as staff no's, skills, etc. | Part of larger integrated process with CRDC as prime information deliverers / facilitators Capacity building strategy being developed as part of industry wide process |

Appendix 5: Summary of surveys conducted with growers and agribusiness advisers

Grower feedback sheet – these notes summarise findings in the data and the ratings are based on no of mentions

The issue(s)/topic(s) that are particularly relevant to my current decisions relate to:

| Production | Marketing | NRM | Technology | Bus. Mgmt |
|------------|-----------|-----|------------|-----------|
| 17 | 20 | 16 | 17 | 19 |

Some specific issues/topics are:

- Grain, sheep and cattle; better grain marketing to get better price after harvest; relating business decisions to account for no use of Dept of Ag because they are concerned about legalities of giving advice; better use of futures in marketing
- Key to production is soil treatments; current dry weather means I concentrate on production & NRM; business management is always important, keeping soils healthy is most important; all decisions are about securing future opportunities
- I get consultants to advise on business management / production while I do marketing, I like my adviser to know the detail; usually use agronomist and advisers as I want totally a different approach to the business, now using different practices like leasing the cropping land and concentrating on the sheep

The issue(s)/topic(s) that are particularly relevant to my future decisions relate to:

| Production | Marketing | NRM | Technology | Bus. Mgmt |
|------------|-----------|-----|------------|-----------|
| 17 | 20 | 13 | 16 | 18 |

Some specific issues / topics are:

- Cropping; soils and harvesting techniques;
- Need to stabilise NRM; once drought finishes focus on expansion and focus on business management; technology will be important in future; marketing almost as important as production; technology is part of solution to future challenges;
- Consultants / adviser help me work out my strategy, my business management and my future plans – we meet 2 x /year and talk on phone – they will do more in the future; important to grain variety selection and sheep breeds

The level of information that I seek for my own decision making is (please tick):

| 1 is a simple paragraph overview – and 5 is a complete research paper | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The level of information I think I need | 6 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 1 |

Some specific issues/topics are:

- Level 1 needs to be correct; I want to understand the detail myself; I want a snapshot then I go to 3 or 5; I want lots of information on a variety of things.

The level of information that I would like my advisers to have to assist my decision making is (please tick):

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| <i>I is a simple 2-4 paragraph overview – and 5 is a complete research paper</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | |
| <i>The level of information I think my adviser needs</i> | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 9 |

Some specific issues/topics are:

- I want all my advisors to be spot on with decisions for me to assist my critical thinking; I delegate this role to my advisor to get back to me within 3 days.

When I think of those I rely on for advice or information in my decision making:

| | | | | | |
|------------|----------|---------------------------|-----------|-------|-------------|
| Agronomist | Farm Mgr | Accountant Fin advisor | Marketer | Gov't | Reseller |
| 15 | 1 | 14 | 8 | 3 | 10 |
| Wh'saler | IT | Bus. Devel Cons | Mkt'g grp | QA | Catch't Mgt |
| 1 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 1 | |

Some specific issues/topics are:

- I want my advisors to have practical experience with rural life and pass on other grower experiences to me; business advisor may be needed in the future

- All consultants used on an hourly rate/retainer; want it to stay the same in future; my current group is all I need for the future

As I think back to the Farmer-Advisory Hub diagram, the advisors or providers that I use – or may need in the future are:

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Accountant/ Bus.Advisor | Marketer/ Marketing Grp | Agronomist | Wholesaler | Stock Agent |
| 7 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 2 |

My thoughts on the work of Research and Development Corporations – and other agencies that could supply information or research work – are:

- Farm business adviser; simple down to earth results of R&D; the researchers are chasing the funds not addressing the problems; various good publications with research articles; they are better at research than I am; very helpful and want info at a central point; present information for the average person to understand;

- Not a lot of GRDC R & D is relevant in the Northern Region; excellent people working for GRDC with rural skills; need personal interaction between grower and specialist staff; I have livestock but hear very little / never hear from MLA / AWI / LWA; interested in RIRDC

- Need closer relationship – over last 4 years a much wider gap between grower and researcher/RDC, has to be very targeted information – not a lot of generalist information needed; see real value in results of R & D work, it gives greater understanding, need good applied outcomes and results; GRDC is a good source of information on agronomic issues and drought, yield and problem issues still have to be addressed, I know a little about AWI, nothing at all about MLA / LWA

My specific thoughts on what I need from R&D providers – and how agribusiness / consultants could supply information or research work – are:

- Good targeted information/advice direct to me and require agribusiness to have more detail; want good growers involved in decision making (so researchers see it our way); agribusiness is the best conduit from RDCs and other growers to me, I expect much more from company advisers / paid consultants than just the research information because of the money I have to pay them; agribusiness have best opportunity to talk to growers because they know what I need on the ground, I want agribusiness to have increased connection with RDCs to ensure I have the best advice

The ways I like to receive information from my advisers are:

- Field days, 1:1 contacts / 1:1 face to face; fact sheets, CDs/DVDs, brochures to support the 1:1 – I want the detail and the snapshot; fact sheets with conclusions that I can actively grasp, email, short, sharp messages, 1:1 in paddock, phone advice

Other thoughts on this issue are:

- Know that marketers supplies strategic business advice on fee for service (\$3500-10,000/year and hourly rate) about marketing the products from the farm, production management advice is important, financials of today need to be linked with long term business strategy, company advisers less involved in agronomy because paid through product sales, I don't want to deal with researchers on RDCs – I want my adviser to understand all the detail and tell me in practical terms; we are prepared to be flexible as long as we get the information; they have to synthesise things for me, I like the independents even though he does do work for the big companies occasionally, information overload is a key issue – that's why advisers have to synthesise it for me, Landmark and Elders both good – just have to be sure I am getting the right product not the most profitable one.

The ways I like to receive information from my advisers are:

| GRDC Updates | On-Farm | Web | Email | Face To Face | Phone | Radio |
|--------------|---------|--------|-----------|--------------|------------|-------|
| 2 | 10 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Newspaper | Groups | Trials | Magazines | Local BBQ | Government | |
| 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | |

Some specific issues/topics are:

- Face to face based on knowing how we like to do things; breakfast BBQ with specialists; PDA and booklets good in future; information repository is very important for my advisors and me to get all information; phone calls; email

- Face to face brochures and magazines with detail and web are 1st priority; second priority is GRDC updates then radio; I am most likely to believe the results of a farmer trial at a local level and can relate to; Ground Cover is good to give me information to check with my advisor; I want my advisor to go to workshops; Australian Growers is good; GRDC updates are good

Other thoughts on this issue are:

- I like my Landmark agronomist sales and advice; some research papers are based on incorrect info and so the conclusions are false but then they are used to validate future research too; keep messages simple as we are in information overload;

- I get advice from specialists because I run trials on my farm; I do value passionate young advisors to make me think differently; our advisors assist our personal decision making; there is just so much information out there – that is why I pay my advisor to make sense of it; government staff are rarely seen and largely irrelevant; credibility of information is important; want RDCs to be an honest broker for growers – don't want vested interests being an influence – information has to be properly researched – always make up my own mind; rate of change is so fast; I use advisors as second opinion; personal advisor-farmer relationship is the key – I would follow my advisor wherever he went; I have 2/3 production advisors and 3 financial/accountant advisors and 2/3 marketing advisors; do not find catchment or landcare groups useful because of how they do things and high level of administration – prefer farmer groups that farmer needs are number 1 priority; I am also very time poor - when I have to do things that is my number 1 priority not when someone else thinks I should do them; key thing is to make information available; important that public sector is different from private sector = different perspectives which is good

keep message simple re overload, take care with validity of R&D; researchers chasing funds; central info point needed

Summary of surveys conducted with agribusiness

Agribusiness Advisor Feedback Sheet – these notes summarise findings in the data and the ratings are based on no of mentions

The sort of work I do is:

| Business options for agribusiness | Agronomist | Bus. Adviser | Specialist | Other |
|---|------------|--------------|------------|-------|
| I would describe myself in business as (tick) | 32 | 12 | 7 | 8 |

- Farm plans, agronomist management, HR and graduate traineeships; R&D broad acre cropping; about 50 clients supplying agronomic services including weeds mgt and checking and farm plans with overall knowledge base for growers; commercial agronomist

- Broadacre product specialist and transfer technical info to customers; provide whole farm planning and agronomic advice + shareholder in CRT outlet; research and development; market development; agronomy consulting and advising business management; field agronomy and business advice

- Production advice on cropping and grazing, agronomic consulting – pastures and crops and group facilitation and paddock recording with software; physical and financial farm business management consulting; farm financial work and expert witness and agronomy; whole farm mgmt and farm consultant; whole farm agronomist; business and agronomic advice to growers in Sth NSW and nth Vic; 60% agronomy and 30% business with 10% environmental; agronomic and technical and financial mgmt; whole farm mgmt for growers and corporate work and adult education.

- Information technology, ranges from sales to consultant – the coy sees me as sales and I see me as consultant; sales and info sharing, agronomic advise to growers including selling seed and crop chemicals and services, provide agronomic info to grain growers in order to maximise their returns – small amount on pastures and grazing, cotton consultancy – fee for service also with sales role, increase farm production through product advice, soil amendments and recommendations and spraying advice and pasture advice on consultancy basis – varies from company and personal view as a salesman to a technical consultant to improve production

- Agronomy and farm business management; management advisor /project manager; farm management advice

- Technology transfer specialist, conduit for extension internally to Bayer and externally to industry and growers; commercial sales and marketing role, take the companies strategies and directions and develop training and publication to outline business objectives; manage a team of agronomists especially training and development; R & D and pesticides e.g. new formulations, products, new ideas etc.; technical support – provision and extension of technical and product information from R & D trials; manage, mentor, train agronomists and direct/manage company research programs

1. My client profile

As I think about the proportion of my clients (please tick):

| | | | | |
|--|----|----|----|----|
| Where “A” class client are the most profitable businesses – and ones I would prefer to work with – and “C” class clients are those I would prefer not to | A | B | C | D |
| The % of my clients that fit each are – | 36 | 35 | 22 | 11 |

I see my clientele changing in future like this:

- Greater need for instant info when agronomist present with client; more A and less B and no C is the ideal – also we have competition from blockies in this area;

- Big changes as more generics (products) sold, less ‘C’ clients and more FFS for ‘A’ clients; greater influence of consultants will require more liaison with them; A+B growing and C reducing; 60:40:0%

- Increase in A & B with C dropping off, no real change, bigger clients getting bigger and smaller clients exiting industry; move from C>B and B>A; expanding in size; retiring clients and becoming more conservative; change to 75:20:5; more “D” clients seeking data; needing to be more critical with business decisions; stay at 70:30 for A:B clients

- 80, 10 & 10, increase no of “A” with “C” disappearing and being bought out, more aware of environmental issues and nutrient enrichment, more larger clients as farms get sold + number of farmers decreasing making A+B clients more important, I would like to see a shift from A to B – I believe most but not all growers are improving year to year, no stays the same – gradual shift to larger A+B clients who improve their business

- Super farms

- No Change

- In the market area I work with we tend to deal more with the B, C & D with increasing concentration of B/C, A tend to use professional consultants, we access A through them; more in A and B, C will drop off the radar or be serviced by group activities only; 40, 40, 20; smaller growers will be lost and more larger, more demanding growers

The issue(s) / topic(s) that are particularly relevant to my current clients relate to:

| Production | Marketing | NRM | Technology | Bus. Mgmt |
|------------|-----------|-----|------------|-----------|
| 39 | 25 | 9 | 32 | 25 |

Some specific issues / topics that they seek information / advice about are:

- Product use & weed spectrum & crop safety, latest technology advances and production R&D issues; disease control and herbicide resistance and spray application particularly nozzle selection; competition and climatic conditions spray applications; advanced technology in crop production to minimise costs + no till + disease mgt + marketing products like grain futures and grain supplements; maintaining enterprise viability

- Business management; get production advice from me with my input on other areas often using other specialists;

- Daily management advice in variable climates with impact on business performance; production – rotations and all inputs and technology – precision ag; productivity gains and labour management and capital / resource allocation and risk management; irrigation and whole farm mgmt strategies and nitrogen mgmt; cover most topics at some stage of farm planning – from livestock to pastures, to financial to social issues; production based and innovative systems to get low risk stable and productive systems in place; profitability and risk and investment; courses on production and structured learning and seeking specific data for their own setting; all and everything – the focus is to be in business in 20 years

- Increasing productivity with existing info and streamlining processes and operations, production gross profit vs. sustainability; more efficient methods of production and new ideas to improve profitability and sustainability, what crops to grow given current climate conditions and soil moisture issues re “Should I plant?”, GM technology GPS/GIS budgeting fertiliser use water budgeting, what works – the rate to use and \$ return, unfortunately NRM is the last thing thought about – increasing production with \$ return and use of technologies to do it

- Buying the farm next door and coping with labour/time pressures; whole system, succession, technical issues; profitability, farm expansion, succession, grain marketing, off-farm investment, fertiliser, technology adoption.

- Resistance – whole farm systems approach rather than one off solutions, return on investments – what’s in it for me is becoming a higher requirement; interpreting PA information in the paddock pasture management; new problem weeds/diseases; updates on new registrations and new patterns; herbicide resistance, managing climate change, root disease management, foliar disease management, frost; Elders agronomists provide full coverage of production issues including herbicides, fungicides, varieties advice

| Production | Marketing | NRM | Technology | Bus. Mgmt |
|------------|-----------|-----|------------|-----------|
| 32 | 23 | 11 | 34 | 23 |

The issue(s) / topic(s) that are particularly relevant to my future clients relate to:

Some specific issues / topics that are emerging are:

- Marketing and ability to measure agronomist performance and maintain services by monitoring long term performance; production less so in future because moving towards high end of country potential – business mgt and marketing are the two areas they can improve in the most quickly – they like technology and hate NRM issues being imposed;

- Minor pasture crops on the increase but little knowledge of what can be used on them – new weed species invasions in different areas; we have reached pinnacle on production issues – now technology and business analysis needed; resistance and profitability and resources; resistance to chemicals accessing new technologies and marketing options and investing in new equip (technology – defined here to be “gear” rather than knowledge); educating farmers on new or evolving enterprise changes

- Controlled traffic farming in mixed systems with livestock and crops; profitability of straight cropping vs. that with sheep %; environmental issues – does the long dry point to climate change?; productivity gains and labour management and capital / resource allocation and risk management; climate change and new products; cover most topics at some stage of farm planning – from livestock to pastures, to financial to social issues; climate prediction with blue sky research; profitability and diversification and OH&S and investment; reducing costs and increasing production over the whole farm; surviving in an increasingly competitive world; soil biology in the broadest context and water use efficiency

- Keeping high efficiency and maintaining controlled business growth (client and own business), sustainable business and increased efficiency; water issues – availability and efficiency of use + WUE of crops and soil health and its management, fertility run down and nutrient stratification, we will gain future clients from other consultants as we prove that we can provide a better service that our competitors bottom lines and improve profits and yields, duty of care in the management of these products and this includes the (crop) rotations, unfortunately NRM is the last thing thought about – more interest in efficiencies and sustainability of the business including duty of care issues

- Drought recovery, grain marketing, labour risk management; whole system, succession, technical issues
see previous; better returns for products i.e. hedging; adoption of new ideas; as above; as above; likely to be more focus on grower developing specific growth and marketing strategies for their crop

2. The information that would assist me do my work

The level of information that I seek for my own purposes to do my work is:

| Where 1 is a simple 2-4 paragraph overview – and 5 is a complete research paper | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| The level of information I need (please tick) – and / or the % at each level of the info sought | 50 | 24 | 31 | 35 | 33 |

In terms of doing my work now and in the future – some comments on accessing information myself – are:

- Electronic access away from office; mostly electronic and knowing what is available; a lot of pressure to remain up to date within time constraints – and having to cross sell;

- A list of topics being researched at present and a web link to more information if needed on that work; access to research projects and results are a limitation; must first assess experience and knowledge of researcher then assess value of research; commercial relevance of information at hand; easily accessible information for all advisers and some personal involvement in R&D work; a centralised system where CONSISTENT data can be accessed easily from all sources.

- Want access to quality independent info and get it from local farming systems group; I should use websites more and e-mail more – gradually doing so; time efficient access and ability to scan for relevant info and the best info often the things you stumble over; Internet and e-mail; has to be a website system but not like poor sites like ACAS site for NVT data; time limited easy reference and easy access – this is not how it is at present; I need to be able to evaluate effort on profit and risk; need data to move top producers to very top and this included blue sky research – varied level of detail of overview vs. details; access to different levels of research and the researcher if needed; time mgmt and sifting out the pearls from the swill

- Want highly avail info and want to interpret myself with no middle man, want info to come to me with no middle man; useable format and software program based, time – not enough to research information and the best way is to discuss with people rather than mail or e-mail – invitation to ask questions is best way, need some research papers (especially review and overview papers) to understand the issues, I like to be able to gain access to in-depth research papers on topics of specific interest and good overview on general relevant areas and would rather summarise myself and deliver to growers in this way, telephone – get access to relevant and detailed info in a form that I can synthesise myself through personal discussion

- I can always skim read; email updates, concise information on which we can make further enquiries; I do not need to access GRDC research to deal with most of the issues that I advise on each day

- Important but information that is delivered not in isolation but collectively; need access to more than trial summaries – complete reports, needs to be current on national as well as local; knowing what research is being done and access to the results; update web and new search engine; if I need information, it would need to be detailed and accurate to influence decisions and adoptions made with R & D effort; not as readily accessible as required, technical content at lower level than required; need to have abstract type material to arouse interest and awareness and fully detailed experimental outcomes to be able to dwell down on, detail varies depending on topic and timing

3. Accessing information from Research and Development Corporations

In terms of using knowledge sources, especially RDCs and others:

| The RDCs I have used or want to use | GRDC | MLA | AWI | LWA | Other |
|---|----------|----------------|-----|---------------|------------------|
| The RDCs I have used in the past (tick) | 39 | 22 | 10 | 11 | 13 |
| The RDCs I would like to use in future | 34 | 36 | 13 | 15 | 10 |
| The RDCs I would like to give feedback to – in terms of RD&E priorities – and delivery of info to me | 35 | 19 | 12 | 17 | 13 |
| | | | | | |
| Other knowledge sources I use | Supplier | CRCs | CMA | Gov't | Inter-net |
| My priorities to access – H=High, M=Medium and L=Low | | | | | |
| | high | medium to high | low | low to medium | generally medium |

In terms of knowledge sources and professional development, some comments are:

- *Inability of some in R&D to get back to you – these are dead wood in gov't that have no respect for growers; GRDC is my interest;*
- *GRDC updates are very good for the information and contacts with others in the industry; it needs to be continuous with a review in place; with today's technology the information is generally out there – our success as advisers is judged on being able to access it easily from all sources.*
- *Maintain an extensive network of contacts throughout the industry in production, finance and marketing arenas; very important to get more PD; able to access quality information in a time efficient manner; I still go to NSW DPI 1st then to the GRDC site; limited access to DPI NSW whereas CSIRO contact is good; all depends on topics (agronomy and business); GRDC is best and other RDCs trying to catch up – and gov't v. good for NRM but no other use; never underestimate farmers as a source of knowledge; a range of sources are needed even where there is overlap – my job is to distil the relevant bits for clients*
- *Knowledge needs to be freely accessible in multitude of formats, designs and ways; need to stop loss of local R&D staff as info goes with them, there are a wide range of people's ability to input knowledge and the sector specific conferences like sorghum and corn are all good, lots of good cotton work done but a lot of the researchers are not good presenters so I can see a benefit in some of parties deliver the info for them – seek freely available info in a variety of ways / forms and technical workshop type settings*
- *The old “top down” research model has now become dysfunctional; hard to access independent aerial data, Ag department used to be a good source but not so great now; we run our own PD-accessing researchers and others as needed, because we have a group of consultants we also use our own network to seek advice in specific areas.*
- *Ongoing process; you go to people or places where you know you can answer, based on network and past experience of success; there is huge amounts of information that industry is unaware of and poorly databased, we need access to all types as most advice now is whole farm production based*

My preferred ways of accessing information for my business use are (please tick):

| | | | | |
|------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| Brochures | Seminars | Fact sheets | Workshops | Internet |
| 12 | 30 | 28 | 31 | 28 |
| E-mail | Phone/SMS | Conferences | Study trip | Specialist visits to me |
| 25 | 10 | 14 | 16 | 16 |

Other ways are:

- *Personal connections with relevant researchers; trial tour and local meetings with researchers; getting feedback from farmers and grower groups asking what they want from product suppliers companies; networking with industry peers; internal agronomy and R&D meetings; following up what I recommend in the paddock;*
- *Meetings with other consultants to share ideas and info; concise written reports; personal contacts are best; professional associations and peer groups, personal networks so I can get contacts to follow up*
- *Newspaper like Qld Country Life and the pub, direct access to researchers – some of whom are hard to reach and it is hard to know who to contact at times, field days, meetings amongst consultants with researchers on specific issues, farm tours and discussions – direct access to researchers, etc.*
- *Via farming clients – they help me skim read*
- *All advisers need to have access to detailed information as well as the summary ‘take home messages’; field days or trial inspections with researcher; face to face – one on one*

My thoughts on accessing info in future are:

- *Internet based is fine as long as a reminder that something new has gone on there; e-mail and Internet vital due to time constraints and conferences too costly re time away from business; has to be relevant info as people are time poor with short attention span; workshops and hands-on seminars in smaller groups for better interaction is best for me; GRDC updates + supplier info + Internet + internal networking, how to quickly find what you are after without wading through huge amounts of electronic info; Internet and e-mail;*
- *Use existing channels eg GRDC adviser updates + networks of advisers like this one; this is a big challenge; needs to be easy to find and relevant to the local information needs; Internet and e-mail and conferences and workshops; need a cooperative venture between all RDCs and DPIs to be able to search all relevant sites to make sure it is the latest and most relevant – so the postings have to be dated; want useful and practical data from applied research; topics specific; more Internet and personal contact for harder data; harder in future to sort wheat from chaff; confusing*
- *Increase face to face with specialists + good notes with “Take homes” for me to follow-up, personal contact with specialists and info on how it relates to mgt; must fit with my tight time schedule, I still prefer hard copies but Internet is good to access info on new topics as it is immediate – increased interactive personal contact in varied forms is best, supplemented by electronic means*
- *Is GRDC going to be able to contribute anything? – other than a social function e.g. chance to talk to other farmers; specialist visits, small seminars*
- *KISS – keep is simple sweetie, ensure that input to one area e.g. websites do not drain dollars from other effective methods of information delivery e.g. text books, technical publications; would use more of their information if readily available, we are in the information delivery game; internet, one on one; the information repository sounds like something I would access; improve internet site, more frequent higher level provision of information; need to develop good easy to use database for access by all parts of industry, web based consultancy updated with good search engines*

Other general thoughts on these issues are:

- Adviser Updates from GRDC are critical and a similar thing for MLA needed; I will continue to attend GRDC updates and follow-up with relevant researchers; always define the target audience needs; greater communication and consultation across the board;
- Want to open links into research channels before projects approved or release to industry; want access to Southern Panel planning process for future project development; GRDC Updates are good but now way too big; farmers knowledge is very high – and there is a much higher standard of retail advice; research needs to be commercially relevant that will benefit the overall profitability of the farm business; longer term > 3 years projects to be funded; systems approach to research; information needs to be concise and relevant and occasional need to access whole research paper; systems of info repository has to be seen to unbiased so can't be linked to resellers; seeking commercially relevant information; > role of lobbyists confuses the issues and also Chinese walls early in project disguises their relevance or otherwise;
- Have to be able to follow-up myself later to get more relevant detail to me; while hard to do it is best to discuss things in person – and 3 or 4 monthly workshops are probably best way – good take home messages with personal contact that is relevant on the ground and fits with their program
- Researchers need to know what drives profit in a farming operation
- Needs to be easy and not too time consuming; regional meetings, global website; currently I perceive that there is a lot of data that exists that has not been adequately/effectively extended to agribusiness and growers; too much funding for non essential work going to grower groups who are duplicating, simplifying and not using the full opportunity presented by funding, if they don't have a full time, qualified professional driving the group – don't fund it

In terms of how things might change and what the future needs of me / the organisation might be in connection with RDCs:

- Myself and clients would like things to be simpler e.g. Focus on priorities, more information can be a 'headache'; need to be able to demonstrate to RDCs what our clients need
- We need open access to information from all RDCs/universities/ government departments/private industry, to only focus on one group weakens the information pool generated; information on research funded input into research priorities to ensure relevance, some funding for research work; more personal contact with researchers;; greater collaboration with agribusiness including crop protection companies and retail agronomists and consultants

My thoughts on how my organisation could assist adoption of R&D outcomes are:

- We are assuming R & D will produce some outcomes – may not be the case; as above; is the adoption rate poor now? If so it is whether an extension problem or a contact issue, I would not assume that adoption is poor because of an extension problem
- Many of the projects do not have good extension processes for having the information adapted, results often form part of commercial strategies and product placement and hence have mutual desired outcomes; having research data made available to all our team so they can pass this on to our clients, sell/ deliver information with enthusiasm; field days, trials, one to one farmer contact, testimonials; global research (international business), joint/collaborative projects of mutual benefit; potential for GRDC to have dedicated extension experts to liaise with, agribusiness so they can ID needs, find research and extend outcomes to different groups e.g. Elders, AAAC

Appendix 6: Stages and steps of the CVCB agribusiness project – 2007/8

| Key Stages of work between RDCs and Agribusiness | Outcomes sought | Factors that come into play | Timing issues | Other issues |
|--|--|--|---------------|---|
| Stages 1 & 2 operates at RDC to RDC level | | | | |
| Lessons learned in dealing with Agribusiness – Sharings through Working Group | GS to prepare Paper that reviews what each RDC is doing and planning with agribusiness | | | Public good issues |
| | | Has to secure initial buy-in from RDC senior mgmt to support greater investigation and see value of strong partnerships with agribusiness | | How to change the thinking internally within RDCs and externally with Agribusiness |
| | GS to do a Review of all the agribusiness segments and summarise their relevance to the CVCB Working Group | This review to consider how agribusiness might derive its income – and how synergistic agribusiness-RDC relationships might support this | | Payment – terms of trade – issues to be considered – main concern is double payments to consultants |
| 2. Value adding to Current Joint projects – provides an opportunity to value add with Agribusiness | GS talks to major agribusiness segment reps at a strategic level about wants and needs of RDCs | | | |
| | Working Papers to Working Group for agenda about how to engage all of agribusiness in certain key projects | Papers to include summary of most relevant joint across-RDC projects that could be of value to agribusiness segments and could be the start of a productive relationship | | GS to propose suitable projects that come from Stage 1 that could foster RDC and agribusiness co-operation on delivery to growers |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| | Next Working Group meeting – starts with Dinner the night before for informal interaction | Stop – Go point for the project to go Stage 3 | July '07 – also links to first CVCB briefing meeting for CVCB next stages with senior RDC folks | |
| | | Project could go completely different direction – based on findings in Stages 1&2. | | |
| | Stages 3, 4 & 5 – operates at RDC to Agribusiness level | | | |
| 3. Awareness raising of RDCs with their RDC / Agribusiness Partners through value adding | Entering Engagement phase between RDCs and Agribusiness | Has to secure next level buy-in from RDC senior management to support greater investigation and secure the strong partnerships with agribusiness so they start in practice | | |
| | Shared Forum – fact finding opportunity for both agribusiness and RDCs in round table environment Uses potential joint delivery of R&D outputs projects as reason to talk and get together. Can canvass individual RDC projects that are relevant as talking point – comes from Stage 2 | Considers: Needs, Drivers Profit Issues, Industry Issues of agribusiness. To develop and agree on a Value Proposition that guides future engagement between agribusiness and RDCs | September and complete by October for RDC funding cycles and CVCB next partners meeting | May consider the role of ANRO as an Information Repository – or whether some work required to increase its relevance |
| 4. Building relationships between RDCs and agribusiness through an RDC-agribusiness Forum | Forum builds personal relationships and contact for 1:1 liaison between RDCs and agribusiness for later personal contacts | Understanding of varied agribusiness and RDC business models that operate – and the needs and drivers to each | | |
| | May identify Tools / Tool Boxes or Products relevant to or | | | Products – can be jointly developed with agribusiness; maybe jointly badged or OK to |

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| | needed by agribusiness | | | contribute to increased agribusiness profit based on growers increasing profits or meeting their needs |
| | | The Management System may or may not continue to exist – it may morph into a Feedback Loop or something more relevant | Decision made in late 2007 at end of Stage 4 | |
| | | | Stop – Go point for the project to go Stage 5 | |
| 5. Engage together with each other and agribusiness on projects | Entering Partnership phase between RDCs and Agribusiness | | Project could go completely different direction – based on findings in Stages 3&4 – Management System may disappear. | |

8

Notes: Current joint projects to come out of RDC annual reports – GS to work with Alan Smart, ACIL Tasman to get the major ones and run a ‘relevance test’ over them along with a ‘can we influence their work to benefit growers through agribusiness’ test, e.g. Climate Variability, Grain and Graze, and ANRO Information Repository.

Appendix 7: FarmPlus Business Plan - 3 March 2008

(Please note that the FarmPlus Business Plan is a commercial-in-confidence document and will be supplied after review of the request).

Appendix 8: Year 1 Update and Proposed Project Direction

The November 2006 briefing to the CVCB proved a pivotal briefing occasion. Key data was contained in those notes and is reported here.

This update provides a focus for the CVCB briefing seminar on Monday 27 November 2006. It summarises the first year of the project – and considers the way forward for Years 2 and 3.

This update:

- Reviews the project aims
- Reports the findings to-date
- Outlines Key Findings and the Key Issues
- Considers the way forward
- Defines a series of needed Actions and assigns responsibilities
- Provides the basis for considered discussion by participants at the seminar to be held at RIRDC on 27 November 2006 commencing at 1pm.

1. The Project

These findings are based on work in Wagga Wagga and district NSW, Bendigo district Victoria, Toowoomba district Queensland and Perth and environs WA. The districts are mostly mixed farming, with a grains and livestock enterprise focus.

The project has used group meetings, personal interviews and questionnaires to gather data. Data gathering has been qualitative and recognises weather condition issues.

This CVCB reporting draws on additional work commissioned by LWA and GRDC. A proposed dairy industry connection will be activated later in the project.

2. Project aim

The focus of the project is:

- “Objectives/aims of the research – The project aims to foster a strong connection between agribusiness and providers of RD&E information, to benefit farmers, through the supply of timely, cutting edge R&D outcomes that will assist them in the globally competitive market.
- Outcomes of the research – The outcomes are a baseline understanding of the current and proposed agribusiness and RD&E provider interaction, a detailed assessment of three case studies in which this interaction occurs or is proposed to occur, a recommended direction to facilitate a highly effective interaction process – and a Management System which can facilitate that interaction across most industries and regions.
- Deliverables/outputs of the research – The outputs will be a report of the current and future interaction of agribusiness and RD&E providers (baseline understanding), documentation and use of the case studies as practical and test examples of how this interaction could and will work, documentation of the change process for the stakeholders involved, the engagement of the key stakeholders through a newsletter that outlines the innovations, two Agribusiness Capacity Building Open Forums and a Management System that is of practical value to users.”

3. Findings to-date

3.1 *The contemporary farm business*

In terms of the issues that farmers have to face in their business – and where agribusiness could have a niche – there are **five elements of the farm business** which are ranked in order of importance to farmers:

- Production – produce the product
- Products, markets and customers – supplying the most profitable product from the production system to the highest paying customer consistently
- Use of technology – from RD&E outputs and at a level for overall innovation in production and business
- Business management – in terms of managing all the aspects of the business
- Natural resource management – manage the resources for today and the future (NRM).

These priorities are expected to be retained into the future. NRM is expected to have a slight upward trend while Business Management and Technology are expected to move upwards more rapidly.

3.2 *Farmers of today and the future*

In terms of **groupings of farmers** the consensus from the interaction with farmers and agribusiness, is that farmers are best thought of in four categories:

- ‘A’ class clients / farmers – who are the top farmers in their discipline and are true farm business operators and innovators
- ‘B’ class clients / farmers – who are actively moving towards the ‘A’ class and are followers
- ‘C’ class clients / farmers – whose operations are largely static in terms of innovation and development – and are regarded as traditionalists
- ‘D’ class clients / farmers – who are expected to rapidly exit the industry.

A further emerging group is the lifestyle farmers.

A further group is the next generation young professionals returning home to the farm business with external specialist training and experience – which may well be non-rural.

‘A’ and ‘B’ are increasingly time poor and income focussed. They operate in accordance with the Agribusiness Advisory Hub outlined by Stone 2005.

3.3 *Farmer’s view of agribusiness*

Due to the business and income focussed and time poor nature of farmers, the ‘A’ and ‘B’ farmers regard agribusiness variously as ... essential advisers ... informants ... those they delegate tasks to ... crucial elements of the business ... conduits for information and advice ... synthesisers ... experts ... indispensable ... locally knowledgeable ... part of wider networks ... part of the farm business decision making team ... having the best interests of the farmer at heart.

They see them also being ... income driven – for themselves and for the farmer client ... commercially focussed ... timely ... responsive ... well informed ... able to / required to readily access information ... time poor ... conduit to other farmers ... immediately available ... value for money ... aging ... contemporary ... young and enthusiastic but inexperienced ... here to stay ... part of an evolving model of information and advice ... a second opinion ... a primary opinion ... verifier of farmer thoughts ... sounding board ... practical ... specialist rather than generalist.

Generally 'C' and 'D' farmers see agribusiness as being ... expensive ... only used if free and as part of the sale of products ... practical ... a sales person ... primary source of information and advice ... a necessary evil ... only to be used when absolutely necessary ... not considered value for money.

Key findings

Agribusiness is regarded by the innovative and profitable farm business operators as the key conduit to them and the most relevant and credible information / advice source.

Many traditional farmers use agribusiness at a low level.

3.4 The identity of agribusiness

While Stone 2005 had a wider definition, the following groupings of agribusiness are most relevant to this project:

- Resellers – such as the larger national companies Landmark, Elders and CRT plus smaller state and regional aggregations such as AgNVet based in NSW and other operators such as CSBP in WA, that market products and generates income largely from product sales and some fee for service. They provide both information and advice
- Independent Consultants – who are principally agronomists or farm financial consultants. They generate income largely through fee for service in exchange for information or advice or planning / review activities. There is some evidence of commissions being generated from product sales
- Suppliers to resellers – such as Nufarm, Bayer Crop Science, Syngenta, CSBP and Dow AgroSciences who are also suppliers of products and associated technical information to advisers (resellers and independents) and sometimes farmers. They market their products through resellers and may conduct R&D activities and some information delivery activities. Most are under financial pressure due to imports of cheap generic products.
- Accountants, financial and specialists – that are largely fee for service based.

In terms of agribusiness personnel there are clear distinctions between junior personnel and more senior experienced personnel. Farmer clients as well as agribusiness make these distinctions.

Key findings

There is a range of agribusiness personnel who service a range of farmers. Within the agribusiness and farmer groupings there is considerable variation in terms of needs, expertise and interest.

Such groupings – or target audiences – have to be considered separately in terms of determining how best to interact with them and meet their specific needs.

3.5 Agribusiness roles

The **varied roles of agribusiness** are regarded as being some or all of:

- Provide advice on issues that are crucial to farm operations
- Provide relevant information to aid farmer decision making that is generally synthesised to meet local / farmer needs
- Provide suitable products
- Provide a reference point or sounding board.

When undertaking these roles agribusiness are mindful of – the clients financial position, their immediate short term needs, their interest in longer term issues, their ability to address longer term

issues and the balance between commercial personal gain and financial viability and public good issues.

The key factor is to ensure the financial viability of the client and of the agribusiness.

Generally interest in public good issues is weighed up based on an assessment of the clients needs and relates strongly to the advisers interest in / knowledge of public good issues.

Key finding

Agribusiness balances providing information and advice about short and long term and private good and public good issues based on a range of financial, time, personal interest and knowledge factors.

3.6 Characteristics and focus of agribusiness

Most of the **focus of agribusiness** is on production. Some is focussed on new technology. A little is focussed on business management and markets, products and customers. Generally very little is focussed on NRM.

All of agribusiness is **time poor** and very **dollar focussed**. Most have very defined financial outcomes. Thus few can focus on community good or philanthropic issues that don't produce income in the short term.

All are very **client focussed** – on the basis that if they don't service their clients' needs then they will lose that client. Some clients have very short-term needs whilst others have longer-term needs. These are very individual circumstances on an adviser-client basis. Some agribusiness are reluctant to recommend non-core strategies to clients whilst others are. Junior and senior agribusiness personnel often have different levels of interaction with clients.

It appears that the Independent Consultants and their clients – mostly 'A' clients – have a greater long term focus and are thought to be mostly in the top 10% of growers.

Key finding

The client focussed, time poor and dollar focussed nature of agribusiness is its strength in client terms and must be recognised in its role as a conduit to farmers.

3.7 How agribusiness generates income

In terms of **generating an income** agribusiness makes its money from fee for service and product sales and sometimes commissions. National supplier organisations largely make their money from product sales. The larger companies are governed by returns to shareholders. Thus the income generated in terms of providing information and advice to clients who are prepared to pay for it are key drivers. Some clients are very strongly aligned to their agribusiness personnel – the 'A' and 'B' clients only – and regard them as highly credible and make few decisions without consulting these advisers.

Such 'A' and 'B' clients and their advisers are open to **new income producing ideas** relevant to the client's business – generally as long as it is focussed on generating further income for the client and for the agribusiness. Thus income producing ideas and their practical application are the key drivers of the agribusiness world.

Key findings

The production of income and company / business profits are the key overriding drivers of the role of agribusiness when servicing client needs.

Those who fail to do so rarely remain in business.

Income production and profits must therefore be the key drivers for RD&E programs so these outputs can be passed on.

How best to address community good and public good issues must be considered within this framework.

3.8 Agribusiness perceptions of RDCs

In terms of **agribusiness identifying with RDCs**, agribusiness in the study areas / sectors identified with key RDCs in this way:

- GRDC strongly at a high level – with GRDC being generally well regarded due to strong perceived alignment to meeting grower needs (as opposed to some years ago) which provides agribusiness with the opportunity to do so as well
- RIRDC at a low level – with RIRDC being positively regarded due to their connection with new and innovative industries
- MLA and AWI at a low level – with both MLA and AWI generally regarded as being aloof from agribusiness due to providing little of value to agribusiness for their engagement with their clients on meat and livestock and wool issues
- Little connection with LWA – due to a low market presence and perceived low relevance due to their focus on NRM issues.

In terms of the agribusiness identification with RDCs, agribusiness in this study so far have valued this project as a means of understanding the role of RDCs and the closer connection that could be created. They value the potential to act as a conduit from RDCs to clients and back to RDCs and to influence RD&E priorities. They see value in open lines of communication.

Key findings

While work is required to strengthen the connection between GRDC and agribusiness and thus grower clients /levy payers, there is strong perceived potential and will to do so.

Where RIRDC is known it is regarded as being a relevant source of information by agribusiness. The ability for agribusiness to access resources on behalf of clients suggests that they feel confident in seeking out RIRDC resources as and when required.

Agribusiness generally perceives that both MLA and AWI are disinterested in linking to levy payers through agribusiness as a conduit. Those who have attended MLA activities seeking out information for clients regard this as ineffective use of time. This particularly contrasts in their minds with their ability to access GRDC R&D outputs.

In the case of both MLA and AWI agribusiness does not perceive that there is value in providing feedback to those RDCs as their opinions are unlikely to be considered in decision making.

LWA is largely unknown to agribusiness.

The relationships with other RDCs has not been considered to date in this project due to the nature of the industries occurring at the study sites.

3.9 Agribusiness as a conduit

Farmers see agribusiness as **their primary information source**, the **synthesiser** of information to ensure it is relevant to that farm business and **primary adviser**. These roles complement the farmers' own information accessing or passive information receipt processes. However due to farmers time scarcity, many leave the information accessing process primarily to their advisers.

The consensus appears to be that most 'A' and 'B' farmers have the following advisers:

- Production – at least a reseller agronomist or adviser from whom they purchase products. Many elevate this person to be their primary adviser whereas others have an independent agronomist fee for service consultant and the reseller acts as a second opinion
- Marketing – most have a person who acts as sounding board for marketing decisions. Some have dedicated marketing or QA fee for service consultants or commission based sales consultants who assist in making decisions about which crop to grow or livestock to sell and these decisions are made early in the production cycle
- Business – all to-date have an accountant. Many have financial advisers. Some have fee for service farm business consultants who develop farm business and cash flow plans sometimes in association with benchmarking programs.

The levels of direct fees paid can range from \$10,000 / per annum to much higher levels. The additional indirect costs, commissions and margins are unknown but could be assumed to be similar amounts.

'C' and 'D' clients are thought to be much more passive information accessors largely via resellers.

Key findings

Agribusiness is the main detailed information source and adviser for farmers in the broadacre industries.

Other information sources supply additional information or prime the farmer to ask questions of their adviser. Some farmers spend considerable time seeking out detailed information, the majority though seek 'snapshots' of information on which to base considered and detailed questions to their advisers.

Such advisers are expected to be able to access complete answers to those questions –including highly technical data, actions to take on the ground, implications and other farmer experiences to support the practical 'take home messages'.

3.10 Agribusiness professional development processes

Due to their tight time commitments, agribusiness **critically assesses time and money spent** on education and training, capacity building, professional development and information delivery activities and processes. They generally allocate up to 10 working days per year for all these activities.

The exception is where they perceive it to provide client benefits and forge closer client and agribusiness relationships.

They chose such activities with discernment in order to ensure that their time is well spent finding information that will assist their clients. They seek very targeted and relevant activities where they can be assured that they will get value for money and relevant information.

They seek **professional development activities** that they prefer with the following characteristics that focus on **close personal interaction**:

- The GRDC Adviser Update model is highly valued – ideally facilitating agribusiness and scientist interaction in a setting where both production issues and NRM issues are delivered by a range of providers
- seminars, workshops and interactive processes – that operate at a personal level and encourage discussion
- Internet and e-mail – where information delivered ranges from snapshots with clear “take home messages”, through relatively detailed technical information, to the finer details of R&D work which can then be interpreted by agribusiness to meet its own needs
- 3rd party organisations like specific training organisations – where existing training processes are used to provide technical updating of production information.

Key finding

Personal methods of information delivery in an interactive setting with technical specialists are the primary delivery methods sought by agribusiness.

Concerning **non-personal methods**, several key issues emerged:

- delivery with short sharp take home messages to deliver key findings of R&D is needed – as is detailed information
- the use of the Internet and e-mail are well used methods of accessing information. A number of comments were made about the use of websites – agribusiness has definite likes and dislikes regarding the layout and operations of websites. This partly relates to the emerging relevance of the ‘mobile agribusiness office’.
- e-mail updates fall into the categories of highly useful and spam. A discerning approach to the use of e-mail will be required
- use of fact sheets – again with short sharp messages and contacts to researchers and with a strong relevance factor.

Key finding

Of the non-personal methods Internet and e-mail delivery are the next most sought after methods – and could be considered slightly ahead of fact sheets.

3.11 Agribusiness views on constraints in the RD&E process

Agribusiness is aware of a number of **constraints to seeking out information** that is the result of industry and government funded R&D:

- duplication of R&D endeavours on particular issues – through multiple providers, on the same or similar topics with a slightly different focus – and often with conflicting findings
- difficulty in accessing the results – because ... ‘agribusiness might make money out of it’, due to government imposed restrictions on disseminating information ... ‘that might have political ramifications or be politically unfavourable’, specialist research staff have been re-deployed / retired early / have no FTE time allocated to dissemination of previous project work as ... ‘there is no longer money allocated to me to put time into this project’, etc.
- poor delivery and extension of findings – while the R&D process occurs there remain constraints to accessing the findings which are widely distributed, often unavailable and in terminology / form that is unsuitable for ready uptake by agribusiness and growers
- farmers and agribusiness are generally the missing link – in assessing the relevancy of the outputs of R&D. Given that they are the closest to the use of the outputs this is of some considerable concern.
- Pecuniary interest in the interpretation of R&D outputs remains an issue – and agribusiness and farmers are calling on the RDCs to be the ‘honest broker’ in the process of establishing relevancy to users and joint levy payers – farmers – so that R&D outputs can be clearly articulated in terms that are immediately relevant to farmers and agribusiness. While agribusiness recognises that pecuniary interest issues are impossible to remove, the delivery of R&D outputs to agribusiness must be seen to be as free of pecuniary interest as possible.

Key finding

The role of RDCs as an honest broker is sought to avoid pecuniary interest and government political interference. These must be seen to be avoided at the time of delivery to agribusiness for reasons of transparency / accountability / relevance in their dealings with farmer clients within the free market forces framework.

3.12 Making the RD&E process more effective

For the reasons outlined in 3.11 a **revised process of delivery of R&D outputs** is proposed for all agencies to ensure:

- Ready access by agribusiness and farmers
- Suitable commercially relevant and technical terminology is used
- The outputs are dollar focussed for use by farmers and agribusiness and delivered in a relevant and timely manner using varied relevant delivery methods
- There is cooperation and coordination amongst the various agencies to ensure a seamless, consistent and complementary delivery process.

The elements of the process are:

- Take a Systems Approach to RD&E
- Create a central Information Repository – as a central storage point from which all rural production information can be readily retrieved (a process for the Information Repository is being developed)
- Involve agribusiness in RDC priority setting – through a series of collaborative processes where R&D outputs are delivered to agribusiness and in return the RDCs obtain feedback on key priorities
- The focus of each R&D project design and project output – is proposed to be on the delivery of “3x take home messages” and “4x ways to apply the findings on the ground” and “3x solutions relevant to this district” (called the R&D Delivery Focus model) throughout the R&D process and at project conclusion
- A revised project funding model is proposed – to separate the role of undertaking R&D from the information synthesis function and the R&D Delivery Focus model – in order to focus the outcomes of R&D on practical value based findings which actually reach users in a timely manner
- A model of involving agribusiness and growers in managing the R&D Delivery Focus model is proposed – to maximise the potential for adoption by involving those who are at coalface – and is called the Communications Plan and Delivery Program.

It is proposed that greater coordination of delivery of R&D outputs occurs amongst RDCs. The CVCB has a capacity building brief amongst the RDCs and for that reason a coordinating role by the CVCB is proposed.

Key findings

A revised RD&E funding and project operation process is proposed. This has the purpose of altering the primary project focus from the R&D activity to the progressive delivery R&D outputs to levy payers. A process is proposed that facilitates delivery to levy payers by their primary conduit, which is agribusiness.

Complementary direct to farmer delivery methods are proposed through a proposed R&D Delivery Focus Model and its associated Communications Plan and Delivery Program.

The CVCB is proposed as a major inter-agency coordinating entity to ensure a systems and topic / issues based and complementary R&D project output delivery and agribusiness engagement process occurs – that engages across all RDCs and takes a systems approach.

The inter-agency coordinated delivery process relies upon development of a central Information Repository and a regional multi-stakeholder and systems based Communications Plan and Delivery Program. For example, soils R&D is undertaken amongst multiple agencies. The Repository would ensure that common information on the topics is stored for all to see – and stored using rigorous standards with ready access at varied levels of complexity. ‘R&D in progress’ outputs would likewise be stored and be made widely available.

Furthermore a revised R&D process is proposed. In this process government agencies would undertake pure science R&D, while organisations with a closer connect to levy payer R&D outputs users would undertake applied R&D. Farmer and agribusiness trials would be linked to this process and given a level of credence – based on the levels of rigour assigned during the design of the Information Repository.

Structural issues associated with short-term R&D contracts and reported politicisation of the outputs of R&D, while difficult to address, ought to be considered as key issues of concern.

Key findings

The central Information Repository is proposed as a significant multi-agency and topic based initiative that would make R&D outputs readily accessible to all.

A significant revision of the current accepted modus operandi of undertaking rural R&D is proposed. This involves the skills based identification and selection of service providers to undertake varied levels of R&D, separating the extension function from the R&D function and establishing funding milestones for R&D based on practical progress based outputs of findings. It also involves addressing the structural issues of the removal of key technical skills from ‘the system’ thus denying agribusiness and levy payers access to the knowledge bank they have helped to fund and create.

Greater engagement of agribusiness in input to R&D priorities is proposed to ensure the commercial relevance of the findings to levy payers and to focus on a ‘free of pecuniary interest’ strategy to facilitate the operation of free market forces in the information delivery and synthesis process.

4. Way forward

In terms of the proposed project process and the Key Findings above, a way forward for this project is recommended.

The Key Issues that appear to be crucial in terms of **creating a greater RDC-agribusiness connection** are:

- Developing agribusiness and RDC networks

- Closer engagement with agribusiness in the R&D priority setting process
- A wider selection of R&D providers to ensure pure, applied and practical R&D is undertaken
- Greater involvement of agribusiness in identifying the best delivery methods to growers and agribusiness in a regional setting
- Ready access to information of varied levels of complexity
- Dedication of resources to information delivery rather than simply to R&D – and ensuring the delivery of findings occurs on a ‘research in progress’ basis, as well as on a ‘research is complete’ basis
- A strategic approach to information delivery using a range of processes to access a range of target audiences – agribusiness and growers /levy payers
- Using proven delivery models such as the GRDC Adviser Updates, workshops, and seminars on a coordinated and topics based approach
- Taking a topic / issues based approach to extension rather than an industry approach, e.g. delivery of a coordinated soils information delivery strategy through an integrating organisation like the CVCB.

The Key Issues that influence the feedback process to RDCs – and the creation of a Management System to guide that process – are:

- Regional RDC and agribusiness engagement
- A seamless topics based systems approach to R&D priority setting and delivery
- Agribusiness role in R&D priority setting with growers and R&D providers as well as considering best delivery methods
- Ready access by agribusiness and growers to an Information Repository where all information is stored
- RDCs to listen to and act on advice from agribusiness as well as their other sources.

The **original project process** for Years 2 and 3, contained these key elements:

- The above findings to be developed into a draft feedback process to R&D priority setting that would form the basis of a Management System
- This Management System to be reviewed at an Open Forum in early 2007 then refined and presented at a subsequent Forum
- Field test a series of protocols to guide this process
- Conduct a regular update newsletter.

Thus the way forward for this CVCB project is proposed as:

- Seek input to these Key Issues and Key Findings from RDCs at a roundtable discussion – 27 November 2006
- Consider how to address the Key Findings and Key Issues outlined above – and create a series of steps to address those Key Issues and Key Findings
- Prepare draft protocols for a Management System that are based on addressing the Key Findings
- Report on the Management Systems, proposed RDC-agribusiness interaction processes and other key issues to the agribusiness working groups convened to date in Wagga Wagga, Bendigo and Toowoomba regions

- Interact with RDCs and specific agribusiness projects that they commission so that all projects leverage off each other and contribute to learnings.

5. Proposed Actions

Current work on elements of these issues are underway through the CVCB, GRDC and LWA. A number of issues remain unaddressed. A series of actions are proposed:

| Key Issue related to Key Findings | Action required | Who |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| Establish RDC – agribusiness contact process | Work in Progress (WIP) | CVCB |
| Define key drivers of the range of agribusiness audiences and levy payer audiences(Key Findings 3.4) | WIP | CVCB |
| Establish strategic communications process with agribusiness (3.5/ 36) | WIP | CVCB |
| Strategic approach to addressing public good issues is needed (3.7) | Define a suitable process | CVCB and LWA |
| Poor perception of MLA, AWI and LWA (3.8) | Better understand the issues – take remedial action | MLA, AWI and LWA – in assoc with CVCB |
| Across-RDC integrated information delivery on specific topics (e.g. soils) (3.10) | Develop a strategic approach managed by central integrating entity | CVCB |
| Address ‘honest broker’ role for RDCs (3.11) | Determine how to do so | CVCB |
| Central Information Repository methodology (3.12) | Create TORs – WIP | CVCB, GRDC and DA |
| Central Information Repository operationalisation (3.12) | Make it a reality | CVCB |
| Management system to involve agribusiness in RDC priority setting (3.12) | WIP | CVCB |
| Revised RDC R&D funding and project operation model to focus on delivery of R&D outputs rather than R&D process (3.12) | Policy initiative required | CVCB |
| R&D Delivery Focus Model and Communications Plan and Delivery Program (3.12) | Develop and trial process | GRDC |
| CVCB as interagency coordinating entity to facilitate communication with agribusiness (3.12) | Policy initiative required | CVCB |
| Greater RDC / agribusiness engagement in output delivery (3.12) | Policy initiative required | GRDC and CVCB |