

Extension—enabling change

Extension is the process of enabling change in individuals, communities and industries. It improves practice in two significant areas: increasing the sustainability of production, and enhancing natural resource management.

Extension does this through:

- providing a bridge between science, policy and community stakeholders to facilitate changes in practice
- improving communication between industry, agency and community stakeholders
- contributing to capacity building
- facilitating solutions for protecting, maintaining and enhancing lifestyles, landscapes and livelihoods.

The Building Rural Leaders program, funded by Queensland's DPI&F, is an extension program for individuals seeking skills to advance themselves, their business, industry or community. Almost two-thirds of the participants are from primary production, and the others are from a broad range of backgrounds in rural communities. The BRL Foundation program consists of six workshop modules which are presented over a nine-month period. Action learning sets provide social support and a springboard for action. As a result of the program, more than sixty per cent of participants have significantly increased their involvement within their rural industries, many at a strategic leadership level. Overall, the Building Rural Leaders program has been remarkably successful in generating positive outcomes for rural Queensland.

Extension is a significant activity across Australia in both the public and private sectors, and involves thousands of extension practitioners who work with landholders and community members. Commonwealth and state governments are significant players—publicly funded extension aims to improve the sustainability of production and contributes to natural resource management (NRM). Industry programs, regional NRM bodies and private practitioners are increasingly playing a role in working with individual producers and natural resource managers.

How extension improves practice

The benefits of extension include:

- increased profitability and competitiveness
- improvements in community capacity building
- new ways of interacting to assist landowners and others adapt to change
- more efficient use of resources
- better coordination between, and support for, a range of policy instruments and tools.

While extension models were based traditionally on the technical transfer of expert knowledge, they now support the co-creation of knowledge and aim to empower stakeholders.



BeefCheque® is an extension approach in Victoria which aims to achieve profitable beef production. It is a collaborative venture between DPI Victoria, FarmBi\$ and Rural Industries Skills Training. The project focuses on grazing management skills so producers can make increased profits. The underlying philosophy is a combination of action and experiential learning—‘involve me and I will understand’. The project values the knowledge and experience of participants as part of the learning process. Post BeefCheque, 98 per cent of participants feel able to implement change in their farming enterprise. A qualitative analysis showed the most consistent and significant ‘on farm’ changes included establishing new pastures, implementing rotational grazing, measuring pasture availability and doing feed budgets.

Links with other policy instruments and practice change tools

Extension is one of a number of policy instruments and practice change tools.

In addition to policy instruments such as regulation and self-regulation, market-based mechanisms and subsidies, education and training, extension is a vital tool in achieving government outcomes.

Taken together, these instruments and tools can be developed and implemented to influence and accelerate change to achieve increases in productivity, sustainability and resource efficiency. They are most powerful when used in combination, and selecting the appropriate mix will depend on what a project or program is trying to achieve.

Extension projects should not be considered in isolation from other interventions occurring in a community, industry or sector. This is because extension adds value by being able to integrate, facilitate and support other policy instruments and practice change tools.

Working with extension providers

The State Extension Leaders Network (SELN) is a gathering of government extension leaders and influencers from each state and territory of Australia. SELN strives to provide leadership and strategic direction in the development of state and national extension service delivery. SELN works with rural and regional stakeholders across Australia to:

- increase awareness and understanding of the role of extension in achieving outcomes
- provide leadership for national and state extension strategies
- demonstrate the impact and value of extension in achieving government outcomes
- inform and influence government, industry and community stakeholders
- work collaboratively and share knowledge—develop joint projects, facilitate cooperation and exchanges, advance professional development in extension.

For more information contact SELN by visiting www.seln.org.au

November 2006



Disclaimer: This document represents the views of the members of the State Extension Leaders Network and does not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of state and territory governments or their departments or agencies. Endorsement of this document by them is recognition of extension as presented in this document in broad principle, and does not necessarily represent departmental policy or practice.