GROWER GROUPS

EMERGENCE ROLE IN FARMER LEARNING

AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

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   DAFWA  NACC

Grower Group Alliance (Ms Susan Hall and Ms Megan Meates)
GROWER GROUPS

Group of farmers and experts

Activities Conducting research projects trials and demonstrations, communicating the results

Focus Collective participatory learning and action
BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Until recently Australian agricultural extension

State department of agriculture (Applied Research)

One-on-one information model

Support from CSIRO and agricultural faculties of Universities (Basic Research)

Active but limited involvement of Private sector
CURRENT EXTENSION SCENARIO IN AUSTRALIA

Cooperative Research Centers

Universities

Rural Research & Development Cooperations e.g. GRDC

State Departments of Agriculture

Farmer Groups

Group Extension

Private Consultants

Research organisations e.g. CSIRO

Agribusiness
THE CASE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

From the 1990’s a rapid rise in grower group numbers

Focus on production and environmental issues

Key topic addressed R&D NRM grain quality perennial pasture skill development among members and community issues

Over 2500 farmer members involved
Formation of Grower Group Alliance

In 2002:

Locally focussed grower groups

Along with 6 research org.

The University Of Western Australia
Centre For Legumes in Mediterranean Agriculture
Western Australian Herbicide Initiative
CRC For Plant Based Management For Dryland Salinity
Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia
CSIRO
Growers Group Alliance (GGA)

GGA
Coordinating Organisation

Grower groups in Western Australia (41)

Research Organisations

Agribusiness

Managed by
Strategic Advisory Group and Staff
WHY STUDY GROWER GROUPS

Limited public sector involvement in extension

Increasing use of grower groups

Efficient and sustainable groups

Connect farmers and wider agricultural industry

Applied research and extension
RESEARCH AIMS

How farmer learning occurs within grower groups

Factors influencing effective group functioning and subsistence
METHODOLOGY

Case study  5 grower groups

Selection of groups was based on their geographical area

Criterion for selection

Groups should be members of GGA
GROUP CLASSIFICATION BASED ON GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE (2010)

- Grower Group Alliance 41
  - 5 Statewide groups
  - 5 Regional Groups
  - 14 Sub regional groups
  - 17 Local groups
CASE STUDY GROUPS SELECTED (2010)

Statewide groups

- WANTFA
  - 620 farmer members

Regional groups

- SEPWA
  - 260 farmer members

- MIG
  - 197 farmer members

- Liebe
  - 120 farmer members

Local groups

- SCFG
  - 40 farmer members
A COMBINATION OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE METHOD FOR DATA COLLECTION

Analysis of secondary data

Participant observation  grower group events

Questionnaire survey among farmer members (n=232)

Interviews

  Farmer members
  Executive Officers
  Members from industry partners
  Founding members
**Farmer Interviews** (Farmer learning within groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hands on experience</th>
<th>skill development</th>
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<tr>
<td>Group events and publication</td>
<td>exposure to information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interacting with fellow farmers and experts</td>
<td>ideas and experience, informal bond, mutual respect and trust</td>
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Interaction an equally essential aspect in farmer learning

Extent of involvement comparatively less in Statewide groups

Average level of involvement highest in local groups
**Member perception about group involvement**

<table>
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<th>Statewide group</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sometimes information not relevant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficult to attend</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Except for few committee members, most others satisfied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction (committee members) over the enormous time and effort required</td>
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CHALLENGES

- Steady increase in the groups: future funding an issue, increasing time constraint for the farmers
- Difficult to measure the effectiveness of the group activities
- Issues related to representativeness of groups
- Concerns regarding the reliability of group research
- Burn out of group leaders
CONCLUSIONS

Just as group events and publications, member interaction forms an essential aspect of farmer learning.

A close knit group structure, preferably regional groups support long-term group sustainability.

A coordinating agency like the GGA is essential for improving the effectiveness of the groups.