

FINAL REPORT

DAW00078

Continuing the Crop Updates Partnership

PROJECT DETAILS

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Summary

Agribusiness and Grower Crop Updates were developed by the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia (DAFWA) to deliver the latest cropping systems and grain production research and development (R&D) results to the West Australian (WA) grains industry.

Prior to the instigation of Agribusiness and Grower Crop Updates, there was a fragmented approach to R&D exchange in WA. This resulted in delays in integration of new R&D and duplication or conflicting information. The presentation of the annual Agribusiness Crop Updates has facilitated the maturing of the service sector in WA agriculture.

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Conclusions

During the three years of this project, the WA Agribusiness Crop Updates grew in popularity but grower attendance at the regional Grower Crop Updates fell. This was in line with overall trends in participation of growers in field days and other extension activities throughout broadacre agriculture.

Results of the evaluations held with every Updates event showed that the participants - both grower and agribusiness delegates - were provided with useful learning experiences. The more experienced agribusiness delegates, however, craved a higher level of technical information than what is currently provided. This will be one of the challenges for the management committee for the future.

Recommendations

Facilitating greater access to the details of GRDC's research programs for delegates is continuing to be a high priority. At the Agribusiness Crop Updates 2006, a GRDC booth was set up and GRDC Western Panel members and other staff were present to interact with delegates. This initiative should be expanded. The GRDC presentation should be earlier in the program, should introduce members of the Western Panel and should focus on the 'nuts and bolts' of where its investments are being made in the grains industry.

There should be more 'open' sessions, where issues are interactively discussed in greater detail. Farming systems issues need to be better covered in the program and these sessions are an ideal forum. They could be split along regional - or 'hot topic' - perspectives. Emphasis on 'take home' actions should be built into the planning and implementation of the Updates program.

A number of high profile grower events should have interstate and/or international speakers attending as drawcards. Each event should have high calibre interstate and international speakers and be heavily promoted so that the audience will travel to the event from surrounding regional centres. In this, it is expected that the regional events will be more synergistic with the main agribusiness event - with greater use of high profile speakers shared across the events. Opportunities to share speakers with GRDC Grains Research Updates in other parts of Australia should be explored. Eastern States presenters will be encouraged to present at WA Crop Updates by developing a travel package that will include airfares, accommodation and registration concessions. It is recommended that a presenter's package should offer the earlybird rates as an incentive for

participation.

The grower demographics and increased participation of women and young men should be enhanced. The increased role of grower groups in hosting Grower Crop Update events is seen as a way of achieving greater participation from a wide demographic of growers in the Update series.

The contents of the proceedings need to target grower requirements.

Selected papers from Agribusiness Crop Updates should be re-written for inclusion in the rural media and high profile publications, such as Ground Cover, Australian Grain and Australian Farm Journal.

Linkages should be further developed with the Grain Research Updates in the Southern and Northern GRDC regions to ensure quality and coordination is improved.

Outcomes

Crop Updates are a very successful partnership between DAFWA and GRDC and provide forums to meet the technical information needs of grain growers in WA.

This delivery of information to both growers and primary communicators is critical in facilitating the adoption of new technology by growers.

Economic and Environmental Outcomes

The economic and environment benefits are expected to derive from faster adoption of new technology that impacts on the productivity and sustainability of the grains sector.

Examples of areas of technical development with rapid adoption are: precision agriculture (PA), soil acidity management, cereal variety adoption, integrated weed management (IWM) and the increased adoption of field peas in the WA farming system.

Achievements/Benefits

Agribusiness Crop Updates attract about 450 delegates from agribusiness every year. Grower Crop Updates provide a forum for the extension of latest R&D directly to growers in regional areas in a coordinated manner. The Grower Crop Updates initiative has proved popular with growers in the regional areas, as they receive the latest R&D information first hand. Each year of this project, there have been 14 or 15 Grower Crop Update events conducted state-wide - attracting more than 600 growers every year.

Prior to the instigation of Agribusiness and Grower Crop Updates, there was a fragmented approach to R&D information exchange in WA. This resulted in delays in integration of new R&D and duplication or conflicting information. The presentation of the annual Agribusiness Crop Updates has facilitated the maturing of the service sector in WA agriculture. These annual events have enabled industry wide participation (including private sector consultants, agronomists, agency R&D specialists and peak grower group delegates) in information exchange with primary communicators.

Responsibility for overall coordination of the Grower Crop Update series rested with the Chair of Crop Updates - with support from the Executive Officer. This involved the coordination of dates and locations for events, state wide communication and promotion design and printing of flyers and booklet covers, evaluation sheet design, securing keynote speakers, provision of banners and promotional material and ensuring that the criteria for funding are met by local organising teams.

Convenors of the Agribusiness Crop Updates were responsible for design of the program, liaison with speakers and collation of the proceedings. Convenors represented the commodities of cereals, oilseeds, pulses, lupins and the major research areas of weeds and farming systems.

The Crop Updates Series has achieved its aims of updating the grains industry with the latest in R&D information. The three years of events have resulted in more than 400 agribusiness delegates attending each agribusiness event in each year. All Agribusiness and Grower Crop Updates during the three year period had peer-reviewed proceedings produced. The Agribusiness Crop Updates has all proceedings from every year available for download from the Crop Updates website

(www.agric.wa.gov.au/cropupdates).

2004 Events

The 2004 Agribusiness Crop Updates was held at the Sheraton Hotel in Perth on February 17 and 18. It attracted 449 agribusiness delegates on day one and 419 delegates on day two. A total of 163 papers were included in the proceedings. The Grower Crop Updates were held during the next six week period and a total of 749 growers attended over 14 locations throughout the wheatbelt.

2005 Events

The 2005 Agribusiness Crop Updates was held at the Sheraton Hotel in Perth on February 16 and 17. There were 404 agribusiness delegates who attended on day one and 391 attended on day two. A total of 178 papers were included in the proceedings. The Grower Updates were held during the next six weeks and a total of 754 growers attended the 15 locations throughout the wheatbelt.

2006 Events

The 2006 Agribusiness Crop Updates was held at the Burswood Convention Centre in Perth on February 13 and 14. There were 431 agribusiness delegates and consultants in attendance on day one and 414 attended on day two. Five sets of peer reviewed proceedings were produced for cereals, lupins and pulses, canola, weeds and farming systems - containing a total of 147 papers.

The Grower Updates were held during the next six weeks and a total of 607 growers attended 15 locations throughout the wheatbelt.

Additional activities during 2006

During the growing season in 2006, as a trial, two meetings for agribusinesses were convened under the Crop Updates banner for DAFWA's Merredin office to brief local agronomists about strategies for managing the dry seasonal conditions. In addition, the Merredin Research Station Field Day was hosted by the Crop Updates project - with 78 growers and 20 local agribusiness representatives and members of the public attending. GRDC research work was specifically highlighted and the event was opened by Neil Young, from the Western Panel of GRDC. The theme of the event was 'Get Connected' and it featured the latest in agronomic research, varietal development, disease and weed control - as well as highlighting the useful information sources now readily available to growers on the internet.

During the three years of this project, the Agribusiness Crop Updates event has grown in popularity but grower attendance at the regional events has been falling. This is in line with overall trends in participation of growers in field days and other extension activities throughout broadacre agriculture. Results of the evaluations held with every Update event showed that the participants, both growers and agribusiness delegates, were provided with useful learning experiences. The more experienced agribusiness delegates, however, crave a higher level of technical information than what is currently provided. This will be one of the challenges for the management committee for the future.