

FINAL REPORT

MIG00013

Grower Group Alliance

PROJECT DETAILS

PROJECT CODE:	MIG00013
PROJECT TITLE:	GROWER GROUP ALLIANCE
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Summary

The Grower Group Alliance (GGA) was formed in 2002 by five grower groups with an overall objective to communicate and collaborate. Phase 4 (from 2011 to 2013) of the GGA project provided one network servicing all 42 Western Australian (WA) grower groups, with an estimated membership of 2500 growers. In the past 10 years, the GGA has worked with grower groups to actively form partnerships with other grower groups, researchers and private industry. Phase 4 introduced a more hands-on approach, with better communication of GGA opportunities.

This project was an extension from Phase 4 to maintain the capacity of the GGA as it transitioned to a new model funded by the Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA).

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Conclusions

This short extension project was aimed at transitioning the GGA to a new funding model. The GGA has successfully transitioned over to a DAFWA-supported project and its administration/office is now hosted by the Grains Industry Association of Western Australia (GIWA). During this transition period, the GGA was able to maintain its functions in delivering support to grower groups in project collaboration and operational support and continue to be the linkage between groups, industry and researchers - as well as develop a new project for supporting the network into the future.

Overall, the investment by GRDC in the GGA project has led to a more effective WA agricultural sector through increasing communication efficiencies and enabling grower groups to become more professional and build capacity.

Recommendations

1. GRDC to continue to support grower groups as regional extension service providers:

Grower Group Alliance (GGA) Phase 1-4 has invested heavily in up-skilling and increasing the capacity and networks of grower groups as effective on-ground research, development and extension (RD&E) providers. Grower groups have proven that they are the most efficient and effective vehicle for delivering agricultural extension outcomes (and to a varying extent, R&D outcomes) resulting in fast distribution of information and adoption of new technologies among members.

It is vital that GRDC continues to support the grower group model of extension among its research projects.

2. Investment in the Regional Cropping Solutions Network (RCSN) has further highlighted the importance of grower groups: GRDC investment in RCSNs has highlighted the strength of the grower group structure and its ability to adapt and respond to seasonal as well as strategic RD&E issues. This is evidenced by the high number of RCSN projects that are being delivered by grower groups.

This project recommends that RCSNs continue to work closely with the full network of grower groups to deliver GRDC initiatives and address seasonal and strategic RD&E issues.

3. Support for continuation of GGA:

There is widespread support from stakeholders and industry for the GGA and its services, evidenced by an internal and external review undertaken by GGA in 2012. As a result of this, GGA submitted a full application to GRDC in November 2012 for continuation of the GGA for an additional three year period. After long negotiations, this application was not successful. However, interim funding for this project was granted until April 2014. GGA has since transitioned across to a project supported by DAFWA from April 2014.

It is the recommendation of this project that the GRDC continues to support GGA project activities as part of this new alignment with DAFWA.

Outcomes

Economic

Grower groups have a key focus of undertaking activity that positively impacts on their members' (growers) profitability and productivity. The outcomes of GGA are centred on increasing the capacity and sustainability of grower groups so that they can provide greater value to their grower members.

Environmental

Many grower groups developed from a natural resource management (NRM) base (historically through Land Conservation District Committees set up in the 1990s). This environmental background has been a real strength of grower groups, as they are able to integrate NRM principles and best practice into their core business of delivering production and profitability outcomes.

The GGA increased its level of activity in this area in Phase 4 by assisting in developing initiatives and relationships between grower groups and the peak NRM organisations and providing input to several NRM steering committees. The extension period of this project continued with this.

Social

GGA outcomes have resulted in both direct and indirect social benefits:

- Directly- The premise of the GGA was to develop an alliance, delivering the greatest value possible to grower groups by developing a network. This network, at the end of this project, comprises 42 grower groups and hundreds of research and industry contacts from across the Australian agricultural industry.

As well as delivering on the outcomes of information sharing and increasing efficiencies in information dissemination, the GGA has provided a vehicle through which many thousands of connections have been made with and between grower groups, researchers, government and agribusiness.

In addition, the GGA has provided important support for grower group staff and committees. The nature of grower groups - as small not-for-profit organisations - means that staff and committee members often do not have support structures in place. GGA has provided a key support for these men and women, many of whom are working on their own.

- Indirectly- It is widely recognised that grower groups play an important role in the social fabric of their farming communities. During times of stress and extreme conditions (such as drought, fire or frost), grower groups often become a central point for support and are often relied on to coordinate activities to assist in relieving or providing support to those in distress. By strengthening the capacity of grower groups through the GGA project, grower groups are able to provide greater value to their communities.

Achievements/Benefits

Achievements of the Phase 4 extension phase of the GGA project include:

- New GGA Tool kit (Volume 3) distributed to grower groups in WA and nationally. This was also delivered to almost 450 industry representatives via the online GGA Newswire publication.
- Events Handbook reprinted and available to groups and stakeholders.
- Policies and Procedures Handbook distributed to groups.
- On-farm trials resource guide available online.
- Four regional meetings were delivered in Ravensthorpe, Dongara, Katanning and Merredin, in conjunction with grant application writing workshops. There were 25 groups that attended the four meetings. The Grant Application Writing Tips and Tricks publication was distributed to groups.
- Supported six grower group representatives to attend an Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) not-for-profit governance course.
- GGA supported the North Stirlings Pallinup Natural Resources Group, Agricultural Wheatbelt Women East (AWWE), Merredin and Districts Farm Improvement Group (MADFIG) and Esperance Regional Forum to develop strategic plans.
- GGA supported grower group members and staff to attend Perth Agribusiness Crop Updates.
- GGA supported South Australian (SA) grower and Nuffield scholar, Robin Schaefer, to attend Southern DIRT, South East Premium Wheat Growers Association (SEPWA) and Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network (RAIN) regional Crop Updates events.

This project continued to expand a network that allows the exchange of knowledge, ideas and research results between

grower groups, industry partners and the wider research community.

There was enhanced participation of grower groups in collaborative projects developed between grower groups, research providers and industry.

Grower groups became more efficient and effective as a group.