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## Farmer Crop Update Series - Western Region' Project Number DAW630

Nicole Kerr

*Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia*

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**A Final Report prepared for the Grains  
Research and Development Corporation**

**'Farmer Crop Update Series –  
Western Region'**

**GRDC Project Number: DAW630**

**Project Supervisor:  
Ms Nicole Kerr  
PO Box 110  
Geraldton WA 6531**

**Commencement Date: August 1999  
Completion Date: August 2001**

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**Grains Research &  
Development Corporation**

## Final Report

Project number (as allocated by the GRDC)	<b>DAW630</b>
GRDC Subprogram Number	<b>4.1.1</b>

### Contact Details

**Project Title:** Farmer Crop Update Series – Western Region

**Organisation:** Department of Agriculture  
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**Commencement date:** August 1999  
**Completion date:** August 2001

**No. of Years:** 2

### 1. Budget Summary

Financial year (insert relevant years)	1999-00	2000-01				Total \$ GRDC
Total GRDC \$ agreed ( <i>excluding GST</i> )	30 000	30 000				60 000
Summarise the equity calculations for the share of total project intellectual property (IP), licensing and / or royalty income. This should be consistent with the Full Proposal.						GRDC's share = 50%

## 2. Summary of Project Achievements

### **Project Title**

Farmer Crop Update Series – Western Region

### **Project Aims**

The aims of this project are to:

- Provide regional forums for updating growers with the latest R&D in cropping systems and grain production.
- To foster participative R&D through effective interchange between agency based R&D groups, agribusiness R&D groups and grower based groups with potential to participate in R&D at a range of levels (from merely providing feedback to linking broadscale on-farm tests with the research).
- To reduce research segmentation by fostering a climate of mutual benefit in R&D exchange. There is already emergence of research segmentation from proprietary research. However, apart from an initial proprietary advantage (within a single season) the mutual benefits from R&D exchange far outweigh these initial gains.

### **Background**

One of the largest challenges for any research and development organisation is the communication and subsequent adoption of R&D results by growers. The delivery of information to growers has in the past been fragmented with some growers not getting access to all of the R&D results and recommendations until after the autumn period. The Agribusiness Crop Updates has been very successful in transferring the latest R&D results to agribusiness and a limited number of growers in a very timely manner. However, this information has not reached all grain producers in a timely fashion and there are opportunities to improve the delivery of new information directly to growers.

The delivery of the latest R&D results to growers via Grower Crop Update events, and the associated publicity (including newspaper and radio articles), will encourage the adoption of the latest research and development results and recommendations by growers. This in turn will lead to an increase in the profitability and sustainability of the grains industry.

### **Project achievements**

This project has successfully addressed all of the stated aims, primarily through the regional delivery of Grower Crop Update events in 2000 and 2001.

A needs analysis was conducted in 1999 to ensure that the project was designed in the most appropriate manner. The main findings of the report were: there were opportunities for Updates in each region (north, central and south), although the structure and delivery mechanisms may differ between regions, and that a focus on building capacity of growers should be encouraged (See Appendix 1).

During the autumn update period in 2000, the provision of a series of grower updates was trialled for the first time. Two types of events were used. Regional Launches of the Crop Update Series were conducted in the three regions – northern, central and southern. Two or three grower delegates from grower groups active in the region were invited to attend the Regional Launches. The Regional Launches showcased to the grower delegates the type of information and presenters they could access through Crop Updates. Grower delegates were expected to report back to their groups the benefits of this information and organise a Crop Update event for their group.

The other type of event conducted in autumn 2000 was the traditional type of update meeting i.e. seminars delivering technical information that are open to anyone wishing to attend.

The grower update meetings that were held in autumn 2000 were very successful with all events well attended. More than 1000 growers attended these events, with a large majority of growers saying they would attend similar events next year. The initiative was also successful in supporting some grower groups who had not previously been involved in autumn updates to host or co-host their own updates.



The approach of empowering grower groups to organise and run their own update days was encouraged in 2000. This however relies on the assumption that growers are ready and willing to take on this role. The response from the Crop Update Series events held in 2000 did not generally reflect this, although there was a small number of very successful grower run and organised events. In response to evaluations and feedback received from growers, the methodology was changed in 2001. In autumn 2001, the Department of Agriculture undertook to deliver Crop Updates throughout regional areas in partnership with growers and agribusiness. In locations where active grower groups wanted to organise their own Crop Update events, they were supported as much as possible.

Reference groups containing a mix of growers, agribusiness and Department of Agriculture staff were established. The Reference groups were responsible for setting the structure and content for the local Grower Crop Updates. The Reference group was also responsible for encouraging grower groups to present key findings from research that they had conducted during the year. This approach encouraged community ownership of the Grower Crop Updates, but did not burden grower groups with operational issues such as booking venues, organising catering, promotion, handling attendee registrations etc.

A review of the different methodologies used in 2000 and 2001 has been undertaken (Appendix 2). The major finding of this review was that in practice the co-host relationship encouraged in 2000 did not vary significantly to the role of a reference group in 2001. The report goes on to state that 'given the involvement of Department of Agriculture staff, it is likely that the grower group will default to a reference group, which is probably more suitable for both parties given restrictions placed on growers time'. This review is supportive of the change in methodology implemented in 2001 and the reference group approach will be used in the subsequent Grower Crop Update project (DAW720).

In 2001, eleven regional Grower Crop Updates were held in March. The Department of Agriculture organised nine of these with help from local reference groups. The Grower Crop Updates started in northern areas and moved south delivering to 1100 people. Each event was evaluated using evaluation sheets. A combined analysis shows that the value of the events was found to be excellent or good value by participants. This information supports the decision to continue with Grower Crop Updates. Most growers attended a Grower Crop Update to gather information, knowledge and ideas (Appendix 3).

In addition to the regional Grower Crop Updates, a new event called the State Grower Crop Update was trialled in 2001. This was in response to the increase in demand from growers to attend the Agribusiness Crop Updates. The State Grower Crop Update was promoted as having a statewide perspective and as such would not compete with the regionally based Grower Crop Updates. The provision of the State Grower Crop Update was outside the scope of this project, however it complements the regional Grower Crop Update events that were delivered as part of this project. About 300 people attended the State Grower Crop Update.

The Crop Update events received widespread publicity. A series of press releases were prepared and were run by both state and local print media. Numerous radio interviews were also conducted throughout the state. A summary of the print media coverage of Crop Updates in 2001 is presented in Appendices 4 and 5.

### **Project outputs**

The major output for this project was the delivery of Grower Crop Update events in 2000 and 2001. A summary of these events is presented in Table 1.

Booklets containing articles on topics presented at the Updates were distributed to participants. A needs analysis and evaluation reports have also been completed (Appendices 1-3).

### **Industry benefits**

The ultimate benefit of this project is to accelerate the adoption of research and development results from other projects in the grains industry by growers. Prior to this project, we relied heavily on agribusiness passing the latest R&D results onto growers. The delivery of regional Crop Update events has increased the access growers have to this information with flow on effects in raising adoption rates.



**Table 1. Summary of Grower Crop Update events in 2000 and 2001.**

<b>2000</b>		<b>2001</b>	
21 February	Northern Region Launch – Three Springs	February 23	State Grower Crop Update, Perth
22 February	Southern Regional Launch - Jerramungup	March 6	Moora Crop Update
23 February	Central Region Launch - Corrigin	March 7	Mingenew-Irwin Crop Update
24 February	Narrogin Crop Update	March 8	Leibe Crop Update
28 February	WANTFA Conference (Geraldton)	March 9	Geraldton Crop Update
1 March	WANTFA Conference (Katanning)	March 13	Mukinbudin Crop Update
2 March	Leibe Group Autumn Update	March 13	Esperance Crop Update
3 March	Mingenew-Irwin Group Autumn Update	March 14	Hyden Crop Update
7 & 8 March	WANTFA Conference (Northam)	March 15	Brookton Crop Update
9 March	Wongan Hills Crop Update	March 20	Katanning Crop Update
14 March	Esperance Crop Updates	March 21	Jerramungup Crop Update
15 March	Katanning Regional Crop Updates	March 22	Ravensthorpe Crop Update
16 March	Pindar / Tardun Top Crop Updates		
20 March	East Tenterden Crop Update		
22 March	Northam Avon Districts Crop Updates		
29 March	Tenindewa Updates		
29 March	Casuarina – Top Crop Update		

### 3. Attachments

The following documents are presented as attachments:

- Appendix 1: Needs Analysis – Examining the Regional Crop Updates Program
- Appendix 2: Farmer Crop Update Series Western Region – Report on Farmer Crop Update Methodology
- Appendix 3: Farmer Crop Update Series – Evaluation Report 2001
- Appendix 4: Summary of 2001 Crop Update Promotion Activities
- Appendix 5: Press coverage for 2001 Crop Updates

### 4. Conclusions, recommendations & other R&D opportunities

This project has been extremely successful in delivering the latest grains research and development information to growers. Feedback from participants has been very positive with most participants saying that they have received excellent or very good value from attending Grower Crop Update events. Most growers attended a Grower Crop Update to gather new information, knowledge and ideas. This supports the decision to continue funding Grower Crop Updates (DAW720 commenced August 2001).

A review of two methodologies for running Grower Crop Updates support the reference group model and this approach should be used by the Grower Crop Updates for Western Australia project (DAW720).



## 5. Milestones

<i>Milestone no.</i>	<i>Description and criteria</i>	<i>Planned Achievement Date</i>
4	Evaluation of the 2001 Crop Update Series completed. Criterion: Report received.	May 2001
<p>Delivery of the 2001 Grower Crop Update events was completed by the end of March 2001. All Crop Update events were evaluated and evaluation reports were completed. In addition to reviewing each individual event held in 2001, a comparison of the two different methodologies used in 2000 and 2001 was also undertaken (Appendix 2). Listed below is a summary of the main outcomes from the evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The co-host relationship encouraged in 2000 did not vary significantly to the role of a reference group in 2001.</li> <li>• The change in methodology to the reference group approach is warranted.</li> <li>• Most participants found the Grower Crop Updates to be of excellent or good value.</li> </ul> <p>Most growers attended a Grower Crop Update to gather information, knowledge and ideas.</p>		
<i>Milestone no.</i>	<i>Description and criteria</i>	<i>Planned Achievement Date</i>
5	Final report delivered Criterion: Recommendations accepted.	July 2001
The final report for this project has been completed and submitted to the GRDC.		

## 6. Achieved outputs

### 6.1 Output 1

<i>Description</i>	<i>Delivery date</i>	<i>Output code</i>
2000 Crop Update Series implemented	April 2000	K5
<p><i>Indicate the intended users of the output</i> T1</p>		
<p><i>Indicate how the output has, and will continue to be, promoted and adopted leading to the expected outcome (benefits)</i></p> <p>In autumn 2000, a series of Grower Crop Updates were held throughout the grain belt of Western Australia. All events were well attended, with over 1000 growers attending Crop Update events. Most growers that attended these events indicated that they would attend a similar event next year. Booklets containing technical papers from the presenters were made available at the Updates.</p> <p>In addition to the seminars, research and development messages were reinforced through the use of radio interviews and newspaper articles. These activities ensured that growers who did not attend Crop Update events were also able to access technical information. A report outlining the coverage Crop Updates received by the print media is available on request.</p> <p>A Crop Updates calendar was also published in the rural press ('Countryman') during the months of January, February and March. The calendar provided details of upcoming Crop Update events.</p> <p>The delivery of these Updates, and the associated newspaper and radio articles, raised the awareness and supported the adoption of the latest research and development by growers. This will in turn lead to an increase in the profitability and sustainability of the grains industry.</p>		
<p><i>Indicate whether the output contains any third party owned technology and any implications this might have for the commercialisation of the output</i></p> <p>This output does not contain any third party owned technology.</p>		



<i>Detail the commercialisation strategy for the output during and post the project if relevant, including the involvement of all commercial parties and their inputs (financial or otherwise)</i> N/A.
<i>If the output was not achieved during the course of the project, indicate the reasons why</i> N/A.

## 6.2 Output 2

<i>Description</i> 2001 Crop Update Series implemented	<i>Delivery date</i> April 2001	<i>Output code</i> K5
<i>Indicate the intended users of the output</i> T1		
<i>Indicate how the output has, and will continue to be, promoted and adopted leading to the expected outcome (benefits)</i>  <p>During February and March 2001, eleven regional Grower Crop Updates were held throughout grain growing areas in Western Australia. The Department of Agriculture organised nine of these with help from local reference groups which contained local growers, agribusiness and Department of Agriculture staff. The Grower Crop Updates started in northern areas and moved south delivering to 1100 people. In addition to the regional Crop Updates a State Grower Crop Update was held in Perth for the first time. This event attracted approximately 300 people. Booklets containing technical papers from presenters were made available at the Updates.</p> <p>A comprehensive media campaign was undertaken to both promote the Updates and also deliver some research and development messages. This included 19 press releases, advertisements in local newspapers and the statewide rural papers and numerous radio interviews. Over sixty Crop Update articles were featured during February and March in newspapers throughout the state (Appendix 4 &amp; 5).</p> <p>A Crop Updates calendar was also published in the rural press ('Countryman') during the months of January, February and March. The calendar provided details of upcoming Crop Update events.</p> <p>The delivery of these Updates, and the associated newspaper and radio articles, raised the awareness and supported the adoption of the latest research and development by growers. This will in turn lead to an increase in the profitability and sustainability of the grains industry.</p>		
<i>Indicate whether the output contains any third party owned technology and any implications this might have for the commercialisation of the output</i> This output does not contain any third party owned technology.		
<i>Detail the commercialisation strategy for the output during and post the project if relevant, including the involvement of all commercial parties and their inputs (financial or otherwise)</i> N/A.		
<i>If the output was not achieved during the course of the project, indicate the reasons why</i> N/A		

## 6.3 Management of Intellectual Property (IP)

<i>Provide a summary of any IP strategies undertaken or planned to facilitate the protection and / or commercialisation of the project's realised outputs</i> This project did not generate any intellectual property.
<i>Provide a list of all scientific or technical papers published, and any patents filed</i> N/a



## 7. Expected Outcome (benefits)

### 7.1 Description

- a) Specify any outcome (benefits) achieved during the project  
b) Specify the expected outcome (benefits) post project

The delivery of Grower Crop Update events, and the associated publicity (including newspaper and radio articles), has and continues to encourage the adoption of the latest research and development results and recommendations by growers. This in turn is expected to increase the profitability and sustainability of the grains industry.

### 7.2 R&D Type

Estimate the R&D type expressed as a % of the total effort

Type	R&D activity (expressed as a %)	%
Pure Basic	Experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge without a specific application in view. Carried out without looking for long term economic or social benefits	
Strategic Basic	Research directed into specific broad areas in expectation of useful discoveries. Research providing the broad base knowledge necessary for the eventual solution of recognised practical problems	
Applied	Original work undertaken to acquire new knowledge with a specific application in view, to determine new methods or ways of achieving some specific and pre-determined objectives	
Experimental Development	Systematic work using existing knowledge gained from research and / or practical experience for the purpose of creating new or improved materials, products, processes or services	
Demonstration & Extension	Presenting the technology in way that allows a clear assessment of its technical and economic viability on a commercial scale. Extension is the broader communication of new knowledge or technologies	100
Commercialisation	Commercialisation can be considered to be complementary to demonstration and relates to the investment in developing a new product or technology to the point where it is ready for release to the market	
Training & Development	Relates to the development and maintenance of the human resources relevant to the GRDC's target industries	
Total		100%

### 7.3 Flow of benefits

1. Increased productivity (output per unit input).  
2. Reduction in the variability of output.

Complete 7.3.1 and 7.3.2 below to quantify the flow of benefits both to date (within project) and forecasted (post project):

#### 7.3.1 Realised flow of benefits

a) Estimate the per unit economic impact of the project to date (eg. \$/ha)	\$25 000
The development of the Grower Crop Updates has accelerated the dissemination of cropping systems information and more direct targeting of specific information needs. The increased efficiency of communication means participating growers will implement change in the following year resulting in a 5% productivity increase (value \$25 000).	
b) Estimate the scale of the system to which the impact has applied to date (eg. ha, tonnes)	600
The development of the Grower Crop Updates throughout the grain belt has exposed more growers to the latest cropping R&D. It is estimated that a further 10% of growers will access R&D directly each year through the Grower Crop Updates (approximately 6000 farming enterprises).	
c) Estimate the level of adoption to date (%)*	8%



The opportunity exists through this project for accelerated adoption of technology, resulting in greater than 8% improved adoption rate during the project. The increased participation will accelerate adoption of new technology by at least two growing seasons.

<b>Estimate the annual benefit to date (= a x b x c*)</b>	<b>\$1 200 000</b>
---	--------------------

\*remember to convert the % figure to a decimal when calculating

### 7.3.2 Forecasted flow of benefits

a. Estimate the maximum per unit economic impact of the project (eg. \$/ha)	\$25 000
Grower Crop Update events will continue to be run annually therefore the flow of benefits will continue as estimated above.	
b. Estimate the maximum scale of the system to which the impact will apply (eg. ha, tonnes)	600
See above.	
c. Estimate the maximum level of adoption (%)*	8%
See above.	
<b>Estimate the maximum expected annual benefit (= a x b x c*)</b>	<b>\$1 200 000</b>
<b>Estimate the year of initial adoption</b>	<b>2002</b>
<b>Estimate the year of maximum adoption</b>	<b>2004</b>

\*remember to convert the % figure to a decimal when calculating

## 8. Risk assessment

**Risk:** There is a risk of lower than expected benefit from this project if the information presented at Grower Crop Updates is not adopted by growers.

**Likelihood:** Unlikely.

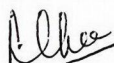
**Consequence:** The Grower Crop Updates have been very successful to date. However, there is a risk in the future that the Grower Crop Updates do not deliver the type of information that growers desire, or that the information is delivered in an unsuitable format.

**Controls:** All Grower Crop Update events are evaluated each year. This allows us to monitor the risk of not meeting the participants needs.

## 9. Certification

Project Supervisor's signature

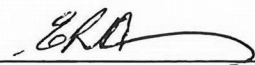
Name (in capitals)

  
for NICOLE KERR

Date 18/12/2001

Research Organisation Signature

Name and Title of authorised signatory (in capitals)

  
EMILY HARVEY  
EXTERNAL FUNDS LIAISON

Date 18/12/2001



**Project No. DAW630**  
**Title:** Farmer Crop Update Series - Western Region  
**Supervisor:** Nicole Kerr

[illegible]

■ Realised Outputs

☐ Contracted Outputs

- Achieved milestones

- Planned milestones

# Attachments

## **Appendix 1**

### **NEEDS ANALYSIS**

#### **Examining the Regional Crop Updates Program**



A project commissioned by

**The Crop Updates Working Group**

AGWEST logo placed here in printed version

**NEEDS ANALYSIS**

**Examining the Regional Crop Updates Program**

**November 1999**

Prepared by:

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## **APPENDICES:**

- APPENDIX 1 – Working Group E-mail Survey**
- APPENDIX 2 – Badgebup Participant Feedback**
- APPENDIX 3 – Liebe Participant Feedback**
- APPENDIX 4 – Esperance Participant Feedback**
- APPENDIX 5 – Listing of Grower Groups**
- APPENDIX 6 – Forum Summaries**
- APPENDIX 7 – AGWEST Customer Survey**



## Executive Summary

Crop Updates has an exciting product in the Regional Updates Series. Pilot Regional Crop Updates were successfully delivered during the autumn of 1999 and demonstrated the potential to develop the concept. Well planned and run individual events recorded favourable comments and have resulted in widespread understanding that developing and coordinating a program of Regional Crop Updates will have substantial benefits.

With serious attention and planning before the 2000 Crop Updates Perth conference, Regional Updates can emerge from their current clumsy position to become a multi-levelled program assisting the delivery of vital cropping information statewide, with the involvement of all delivery avenues.

Crop Updates information is currently being delivered to grain growers by public and private sector primary communicators but there is duplication, a lack of branding and variation in quality.

At the same time, a wide variety of grower-based groups exist throughout the state with strong structures, clear pictures of their information requirements and enthusiasm.

The term 'Regional Crop Updates' has caused considerable confusion over their intent and activity. Following the *Agknowledge* 1998 Crop Updates Evaluation, the Crop Updates Working Group agreed to utilise the Perth *Crop Updates* conference to formalise a series of event activities to continue the dissemination of research information throughout the regions. This was recommended for several reasons, not least being the need to re-establish a position of relevance for AGWEST amongst growers. The ensuing process during 1999 has been haphazard and without a managed approach to coordination within the regions.

There needs to be some clarity in describing the meaning behind 'Regional Crop Updates':

**The Event** – this describes a Regional Crop Update event which may be run in conjunction with a grower group (as in the case of the Liebe day) or in partnership with agribusiness (as with the Badgebup event) but with significant resources invested by AGWEST.

**The Delivery System** – recognises there are many individual events conducted by a host of parties including grower groups, dedicated AGWEST days, agribusiness client information days and generally any combination of these. The delivery system is active and a valuable resource to be coordinated on behalf of growers and supported with the required resources.

**The Information** – commencing with the February Crop Updates a significant amount of information is generated from R&D investment over previous years. Further information and knowledge is generated and released on an on-going basis throughout the year and the Regional Crop Updates is a perfect vehicle or medium to deliver information utilising the existing structure, either on a needs, seasonal or issues basis.

Agriculture Western Australia (AGWEST), through a well coordinated and resourced Regional Crop Updates program, can harness the momentum of existing delivery systems and provide the coordination and guidance necessary to see Crop Updates information having a greater impact for Western Australian grain growers.

The overall objectives of the Regional Crop Updates have not been defined clearly enough or been well embraced by the necessary parties. AGWEST's application to the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) for funding towards the Regional Crop Updates Series included objectives, aims and criteria for the Series. Having secured the funding, all Crop Updates partners must now address points raised in the funding application and clarify the role of the Regional Crop Updates to ensure the program's success. Regional or local objectives are likely to have been defined, however the context in which they sit in terms of the overall Crop Updates Program is less defined.

The significant component of this study involved three regional Forums, which were convened to specifically discuss activities during the year and proposals for the coming season. Although the 'mix' of grain growers, primary communicators and agency staff varied with each group and region, the contribution of information has allowed the report to remain practical and the individual reports



can be found in **Appendix 6**. *Agknowledge* has included the individual needs and concerns within the report.

One issue which needs to be constantly considered when planning and developing strategies for information dissemination is the variance in individual requirements. For instance, the knowledge and management levels of growers varies from basic to highly influential within each region, the credibility levels and balance between Agency researchers, development officers and agribusiness agronomists also varies widely and the seasonal activities requiring attention have a narrow or wide window of opportunity for presentation, depending on both the region and activity. Each of these parameters, including the growing influence of farming partners, will require specific attention when designing relevant Regional Crop Updates.

In fact, if managed correctly, the establishment of a coordinated Regional Updates Series will not only benefit grain growers but also make the primary communicators' function easier and provide them with valuable feedback.

Through Crop Updates, the agency needs to be more assertive about the steps to be taken in regard to delivery of information to grain growers. Having positioned itself as a major player in providing information to primary communicators the agency must now demonstrate to this group that they can also assist the improvement of information delivery and enhance the potential for adoption into current farming systems.

Communication and gaining the support and involvement of primary communicators and grower groups is the area of greatest need for the Regional Updates series.

As highlighted through phone interviews and Pilot Regional Crop Update participant feedback, the information delivered through the Regional Updates is less of a concern than the actual delivery mechanisms. However, an issue which stood out as a significant requirement of growers was the need to include financial, economic and marketing information and implications relevant to each topic of technical production considered. Every effort should be made to accommodate this constant request.

From a primary communicator's point of view there are concerns regarding recognition of material, value of service from the agency and maximising delivery opportunities. Meanwhile, participants consider the greatest areas for improvement relate to:

- ♦ venues
- ♦ coordination of information delivery
- ♦ quality of speakers, and
- ♦ general access to Updates.

Underpinning many of the issues identified in this Needs Analysis is the fact that many recommendations made in the 1998 Crop Updates Review have not yet been fully implemented.

Although the e-mail survey of Working Group members was only moderately supported, the results indicate a wide opinion regarding implementation of recommendations. This raises concerns including the responsibility and commitment of Working Group members, their level of understanding of Crop Updates issues and the adequacy of communication with group members.

As the initial driving force behind Regional Crop Updates, the role of the Working Group cannot be overlooked and so its role is considered in this report.

At the same time Crop Updates can take greater advantage of other 'input' sources such as the AGWEST Cereal and Pulse and Oilseed Partnership Groups and GRDC Western Advisory Panel. There is scope for the Crop Update initiative to broaden its partnership to possibly include more private industry representation, particularly as the needs of the Regional Crop Updates become meshed in the overall initiative.

In short the elements of success for Regional Crop Updates, as part of the overall Crop Updates program, are all within arms reach. What is most required is adequate allocation of dedicated resources and a coordinated structure, shared and understood by all involved.

# **Crop Updates operational structure diagram**

Included in printed version



## Recommendations

Having completed a Needs Analysis, *Agknowledge* has identified 8 principle recommendations that have the potential to impact on the success and future of the Regional Crop Updates series of events.

<b>Management</b>	<p><b>To support the agency's focus on regionalisation, the Regional Crop Updates program requires a dedicated coordinating resource to support all forms of 'regional updates' throughout the state.</b></p> <p><b>ACTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Formally identify a Crop Updates Coordinator within each of the three regions, specifying their time allocation towards Crop Updates activities according to the needs of their region.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> From the regional Coordinators, determine one person to be allocated the necessary time to also act as the central point to collect and coordinate information and materials for each region.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure all agency staff understand the links and relationships between the Regional Crop Updates Series and the overall Crop Updates Program, including the Perth-based conference. <i>They are not mutually exclusive.</i></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure alliances with GRDC Advisory Panel and AGWEST Regional Groups capture relevant input for Crop Updates management.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Determine the overall objectives or context which becomes the umbrella for decision making for both State and Regional Updates.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Adapt the Crop Updates Conference registration forms to include adequate space for participants to indicate the dates and locations of their planned customer/client information days, with this information then being included in the overall Calendar of events.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Implement a process of recording all regional updates or information days, regardless of the convenor and level of agency involvement.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify basic materials that primary communicators can use to deliver Regional Updates (overheads, note cover sheets, participant questionnaires, etc).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Prepare basic Regional Crop Updates materials (from above action) that can be managed and distributed by a coordinator – available to all primary communicators.</li> </ul>
<b>Events</b>	<p><b>Determine and support the necessary events for each region</b></p> <p><b>ACTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Test the indication from forums that each region hold 'Key Updates' following the Perth conference.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Determine the number and location of Key Regional Crop Updates within each region, according to the region's needs and resources. Recommended: Northern - one specific event (not Geraldton). Central - 2 to 3 key events. Southern - 3 to 4 key events.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Schedule these events to be held as soon as possible after the Perth conference – preferably within two weeks.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure Key Events cover broader regional issues.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Invite all parties to participate in Key Events – growers, grower group representatives, primary communicators and others.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support smaller groups and other primary communicators in their efforts to deliver more specific information at a later stage (without duplication).</li> </ul>



<b>Customers</b>	<b>A clear picture needs to be established and widely circulated to clarify the Crop Updates customer groups, from Primary Communicators at the Perth Conference to growers at Regional Updates.</b>
	<p><b>ACTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Define customer levels and where they are serviced.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Circulate picture of customer groups and ensure wide understanding within the agency and those associated with the entire Crop Updates program.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Determine areas within each region that may require particular attention in terms of information delivery.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify the full scope of information requirements within each region so that the basic through to the more advanced needs are catered for by the planning of events.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Capture and utilise grower trial results and information.</li> </ul>

<b>Partnerships</b>	<b>Primary communicators (public and private sector) need to be provided with a clear picture of how the Regional Updates Series will operate, what is in it for them and what the agency expects of them.</b>
	<p><b>ACTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Expand existing communication regarding 'information events' between all primary communicators (including grower groups) to reduce the level of duplication in events and the information delivered at them.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The Crop Updates Conference to include a brief but clear presentation that delivers a clear statement of agency expectations for information delivery (branding, acknowledgment etc).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Recognise the importance of Intellectual Property as a part of the overall Crop updates Program and specifically as part of Regional Crop Updates.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The agency to establish and clearly communicate what Crop Updates can offer primary communicators to assist in the delivery of information (such as using researchers as guest speakers).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Develop a framework in order to sustain current partnerships and invite new partners.</li> </ul>

<b>Working Group</b>	<b>Review the role of the Crop Updates Working Group in light of changes in recent years and the proposed establishment of a Regional Working Group.</b>
	<p><b>ACTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Prepare a statement of both Working Group roles and responsibilities and consider the various roles and responsibilities of the private and government representation.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Devise a structural and appointment process that ensures an ongoing renovation of the Working Group and therefore shares the burden of responsibility.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Obtain a clear commitment of responsibility from all Group members based on their understanding of the tasks they will perform as part of the Working Group or Regional Working Group.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Establish a Regional Working Group within each region to meet 1-2 times per year to test ideas and seek feedback.</li> </ul>



<b>Branding</b>	<p><b>Crop Updates materials need to be more frequently and consistently branded so that recognition is gained at all forms of Regional Updates, from the Key Regional Updates to use by grower groups and private consultants.</b></p> <p><b>ACTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Set minimum branding standards to share with all primary communicators.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Label (© copyright) every page of printed material such as conference proceedings.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Utilise the Grains Industry Calendar meeting to communicate with primary communicators.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Correct the AGWEST internet site references to Crop Updates (currently <i>Cropupdates</i>).</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<p><b>Providing a service to primary communicators by preparing appropriate materials that can be used in delivering Regional Crop Updates.</b></p> <p><b>ACTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide coordination and speaker management – enable best use of speakers and maximise grower benefit.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Prepare a printout or brochure that lists the support AGWEST can provide to primary communicators running Regional Updates – for example guest speakers, overheads, videos or participant surveys etc.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collect contact details (speakers, researchers, groups etc) as a central database that can be accessed by each region and groups within each region.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Obtain input from regional managers about what else they find suitable.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plan Regional update locations to ensure maximum accessibility for growers.</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation</b>	<p><b>AGWEST to modify the current Crop Updates monitoring and evaluation processes to include Regional Updates, capturing maximum useful information without unnecessary duplication.</b></p> <p><b>ACTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Meet with AgInsight to review monitoring and evaluation requirements for the entire Crop Updates program, prior to developing the consultancy tender.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Consider preparing a two-page survey template – one page with standard questions relevant to all growers, asked by the agency – one page blank for the primary communicator to use for their own questions if they wish.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Consider providing a service to prepare and record results – hence capturing all participant information.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure feedback is sought in all areas and does not inadvertently sway participants to focus on production issues when they may also have needs in areas such as marketing and economics.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide feedback to researchers regarding the delivery and uptake of information which in turn will assist in lifting the value of information.</li> </ul>



## **Methodology**

The pilot series of Regional Crop Updates was established without a great deal of structure and as a result elements of the proposed Needs Analysis project methodology were reassessed and modified.

At the onset of this project, *Agknowledge* outlined a process of mapping the Crop Updates current situation and detailing future needs. The Needs Analysis has examined and presented future requirements without the benefit of a complete picture of the 'current' situation.

Steps undertaken in completing the Needs Analysis included:

➤ **Discussion with the Working Group**

In both meeting and informal discussions input regarding the Regional Crop Updates series was sought from members of the Crop Updates Working Group.

➤ **Developing a statewide picture of Regional Crop Updates to date.**

*Agknowledge* communicated with Updates coordinators in each region to draw together a history of Regional Crop Updates event dates and locations as well as any documentation of participant feedback and the like. While individual efforts had been made in different regions, the information had essentially only been applied regionally and had not been drawn together for the benefit of the entire Regional Crop Updates program.

➤ **Phone and personal interviews with representatives from Crop Updates audience groups**

*Agknowledge* completed a number of interviews with growers (8), agribusiness representatives (4), Crop Updates staff (4), primary communicators (4), and R&D groups (2) to obtain a wide range of comments regarding the role and operation of Regional Crop Updates.

➤ **An e-mail survey of the Working Group resulting in six out of 18 responses**

As detailed in **Appendix 1** an e-mail survey was sent to 18 individuals associated with the Crop Updates Working Group. This aimed to establish the degree to which recommendations from the 1998 Crop Updates Review had been implemented. In addition, the survey gave respondents the opportunity to comment on each of the recommendations.

➤ **Presentation of the Structural Diagram to the Crop Updates Working Group**

*Agknowledge* prepared a diagram (**page 4**) to illustrate the structure of the Crop Updates program and the Regional Updates position within it. *Agknowledge* then met with the Working Group to present and discuss the diagram.

➤ **Extraction of relevant information from the 1999 Crop Updates Conference participant survey**

Working closely with AgInsight, *Agknowledge* has ensured this Needs Analysis has captured relevant information from the Crop Updates Conference participant survey.

➤ **AGWEST Customer Survey**

As part of the Needs Analysis, *Agknowledge* provided questions for inclusion in the 1999 AGWEST Customer Survey to test elements of Crop Updates with a statewide audience. These results were analysed and included in the Needs Analysis. **Appendix 7.**



➤ **Attendance at two Regional Crop Updates (Eradu and Badgebup)**

*Agknowledge* sent a representative to each of these Updates. Participation from a 'grower' perspective allowed information to be obtained from participants and overall assessment to be made. Written participant feedback from Liebe, Narrogin and Badgebup was provided by Coordinators. **Appendices 2-4**

➤ **Crop Updates Criteria**

In the application for GRDC funding several criteria are identified for the Regional Crop Updates Series. As part of the Needs Analysis these criteria have been examined to identify how operation of the Regional Updates can satisfy the criteria and what additional requirements may exist in order to achieve them.

➤ **Regional Forums**

In conjunction with agency staff, *Agknowledge* ran three half-day forums, one in each region. The Corrigin Forum (central region) was attended by 16 people, Katanning (southern region) 11 people and Mingenew (northern region) 14 people. The participants at each forum represented growers, agency staff and other primary communicators. The forums discussed specific regional needs, collected opinions on Crop Updates, tested the Needs Analysis recommendations and clarified the Regional Crop Updates Criteria. Information from the Forums is contained throughout the Needs Analysis report and summaries of the feedback from each venue are contained in **Appendix 6**.

An advantage presented itself during the preparation of the Needs Analysis. During this time *Agknowledge* was involved in the compilation of the Crop Updates application for the 1999 Premier's Awards. This provided an extensive examination of the positive aspects of Crop Updates in the past and allowed interpretation of this information to be included in the Needs Analysis.



## **Project Context**

Crop Updates needs to be put into perspective in terms of the overall picture of the Western Australian grains industry. The Western Australian grains industry benefits from a \$20 million investment by AGWEST and support of \$9 million from the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC). This investment is managed by the effort the two partnership groups (Cereal and Pulse/Oilseeds) and the GRDC Western Regional Panel put into understanding the needs of the grains industry.

Between them these three groups make decisions about the best ways to invest research and development funding. In respect to determining 'relevant farmer needs' for R&D investment and information, each of the groups is not universally seen as participative or interactive with growers. Further, growers are concerned that these decision making groups are over-influenced by science-driven R&D needs. Whether this perception is reality or not, the 'funders' could take action to foster an improved understanding of the role of interaction.

Another factor that must be considered by Crop Updates is the investment made by the commercial sector, including CSBP, IAMA, Elders, Wesfarmers, CRT and private consultants. The investment of these groups is driven by customer needs, profitability and the reputation of the business. This issue of grower pull, rather than science push, is central to Crop Updates and reinforces the need for collaboration between primary communicators, both public and private sector and grower groups.

Crop Updates has become a key part of the delivery mechanism for the outcomes of the industry's research and development activities.

To adequately perform its role the Crop Updates Working Group would benefit from maintaining a thorough awareness of research priorities. It would seem to currently be unduly influenced by the pressure of GRDC funding, trying to service the needs of research or science customers. Striking a more satisfactory balance is imperative to the future success of the overall Crop Updates program, including the Regional Updates.

The Crop Updates conference forms the basis of the Regional Updates series. In directing the conference the Working Group is not responding as sensitively to growers' needs input.

There is some concern that Crop Updates speakers could be selected with greater emphasis placed on the actual value of the research subject, rather than out of a sense of necessity to present in order to secure future funding. It should be remembered that the scientist or researcher behind a project need not necessarily be the one who delivers the presentation. It is possible to take the best of both worlds. The most vital research can be delivered using a suitable presenter with the original researcher fielding questions and being available to mix with participants in a more 'team' approach to achieving the highest results.

Agriculture Western Australia's role in the Regional Updates is to provide leadership and guidance but it must be remembered that this is being performed in a 'defacto' capacity as the primary communicators are largely responsible for the delivery.

For example, the IAMA Eradu Regional Update involved 200 growers, 3 AGWEST speakers, 2 chemical company representatives, 5 IAMA agronomists and 2 independent consultants. Aside from the AGWEST presenters, there were no other agency staff present. It would have been a perfect opportunity to send a small group of advisers to increase their knowledge while also representing the agency. It was interesting to note the number of growers who indicated they were aware of the lack of agency staff at such a valuable workshop.

Assuming a role of leadership in the delivery of information does not eliminate the need to maintain involvement at Regional Updates, particularly when there are additional benefits to be gained from participation. The issue then becomes one of ensuring there is adequate branding of the product back to AGWEST, other stakeholders and original sources.



## **Background**

Crop Updates began in 1996 as a three-day conference attended by a total of about 360 people. By 1999 it had developed into a two-day format attracting a total of 850 participants.

Each year the Crop Updates conference has been evaluated and modified to refine the delivery of latest research information in a readily useable format. Notably the conference is tailored to meet seasonal information requirements and market trends. The selection of speakers and topics for the conference attempts to anticipate the agronomic needs of grain growers for the coming season.

In its determination to provide quality information Crop Updates recognises that grain production requires regional application of information, rather than simply broadcasting raw research results. There is considerable research on information provision concluding that for broad research findings to have maximum impact, local interpretation is essential.

Farm businesses all differ in structure, size, paddock history, soil types, local climate, management capability and available resources. These factors and others make it more valuable for grain growers to have access to research findings and new information through a local contact who has the knowledge of research findings and the skill to apply it to the local conditions.

After the first three years of growth and customer surveying, Crop Updates identified an opportunity for the initiative to expand by running a series of Regional Crop Updates. Regional Updates would provide an opportunity for the partnership between AGWEST and other primary communicators to deliver Crop Updates information to grain growers on a regionally and seasonally relevant scale.

As an extension of the Crop Updates, Agriculture Western Australia in conjunction with GRDC facilitated a pilot series of Regional Crop Updates where a range of groups and delivery methods were trialed during 1999. Each of the regions has quite distinct characteristics and needs in terms of grower information. While the dissemination of Crop Updates in each region has reflected their individual needs, there has been little linking or coordination of activities and feedback from each region.

### Northern Region

The Northern region is perhaps the most 'mature' in terms of the integration and working partnerships between public and private sector primary communicators and the information needs of growers. Agribusiness information days are well regarded by growers and agency staff are involved with a wide range of events delivering Crop Updates information throughout the year. The area of Moora is identified as a pocket lacking information delivery networks and grower groups of the same level found elsewhere in the region.

### Central Region

The Central region has a good network of grower groups and is keen to refine the delivery of Crop Updates information. The independence of agency delivery is highly regarded and 'private days' are viewed with a degree of scepticism. Unlike the northern region there is not the same established level of working relationships between public and private sector primary communicators.

### Southern Region

The Southern Region has greater geographical challenges but there is a selection of enthusiastic grower groups keen to integrate further with Crop Updates. The 1999 information delivery events of Esperance and Badgebup were highly regarded. The diversity of information required by growers is broader than in the central and northern regions with more growers being relatively 'new' to aspects of grain production.



## **The Regional Crop Updates Program**

The Perth-based Crop Updates conference has enjoyed considerable popularity in the four years since it began. The Regional Crop Updates series can follow a similar path if it places as much emphasis on meeting customer needs as the conference has.

To date the Regional Crop Updates aims and criteria have really only been expressed in the AGWEST application for funding to GRDC. This document cites the aims of the Regional Crop Updates Series as:

1. To provide forums for updating growers with the latest research and developments in grain production.
2. To provide feedback for research and development groups through interactive forums.
3. To reduce research segmentation by fostering a climate of mutual benefit in research and development exchange and integration.

The criteria for the Series as indicated in the GRDC funding application have been tested through the Regional Crop Updates Forums conducted as part of the Needs Analysis project. As a result the criteria now state that Regional Crop Update events will be:

1. Seeking grower consultation and opportunities for co-hosted and potentially co-directed delivery as appropriate within each region (ensure accurate needs assessment and interactive formats).
2. Delivered in a partnership as appropriate (agribusiness and AGWEST).
3. Promoted as part of the Series to include 'events' of information delivery on a number of levels.
4. Use core material developed through R&D exchange, for example new R&D that has been presented at the agribusiness Crop Updates in February.
5. Receive catalytic support and funding including access to existing Crop Updates resources and \$7000 per region in direct funds to each working group. Also an additional \$9000 to support series coordination.
6. Accurate 'labelling' of R&D sources to enable effective grower and industry feedback.
7. Promotion of key stakeholders to gain return on investment.
8. Needs driven – focus on 'grower pull' rather than 'science push'.
9. Regionally focussed and presented in regional context.
10. All avenues approached for sponsorship and participation in delivery.
11. Linked to farm management analysis and current market outlooks.

The Regional Crop Updates program aims to satisfy the three aims identified for the GRDC application and the Needs Analysis has identified paths to direct the program towards its goal. The Regional Crop Updates series has been addressed on three levels which relate to customer groups:

- **Final customers** (grain growers) – Their requirements for the Regional Crop Updates' content, delivery and management to be such that it offers the best possible benefits to their businesses.
- **Delivery Partners** (primary communicators) – Arming them with the information to be delivered, promoting a standardised format or 'feel' and helping this group capture customer information.
- **Overall Crop Updates program** – Building on the success of the Crop Updates Conference, maintaining a high standard and professionalism, upholding the goal and objectives of AGWEST, completing the research loop by providing input to R&D, and accountability to AGWEST and GRDC.



## **Final Customers**

Farmer or grower needs have been assessed from a variety of angles in the past. Crop Updates Conference surveys have generated information relating to growers' requirements. For example growers' need for seasonally relevant information played a role in the introduction of the Regional Updates Series initially.

Growers can provide information on the current needs within their business but also future requirements which can help direct research investments.

Agriculture Western Australia has a vested interest in fostering and facilitating continuing self-reliance of grower-based groups. In the past primary communicator or 'reseller' groups have tended to take control of determining what information growers can access. Through Regional Crop Updates the agency can assist grower groups to regain a greater 'hosting' role in crop information events and more importantly play a key role in setting the agenda of such events.

Surveys like those completed at the Liebe, Badgebup, Narrogin and Esperance Regional Updates this year are perhaps the most valuable tool in collecting information regarding Regional Update Participants' requirements.

Clearly participants at these Crop Updates events rated them as being highly successful. As earlier identified, the information being delivered is meeting expectations and is being praised by participants. Survey comments like; "wide variety of information", "lots of information in one place on one day" and "expert information" all reflect the satisfaction of growers with the information being delivered.

Other areas praised by grower participants in Regional Updates were:

- ✓ Variety of information.
- ✓ Good organisation.
- ✓ Presentation of multiple aspects on given subjects.
- ✓ Presenters who provided clear management recommendations.
- ✓ One day duration.
- ✓ Inclusion of many different speakers.

On the other side of the coin there were some areas of concern expressed by grower participants at the Regional Crop Updates examined. On the whole these related to the delivery and environment, rather than the information itself. For example, participants identified the following areas as being those they would like to see improved:

- ☛ Speaker delivery so that all participants can clearly hear every speaker.
- ☛ Comfortable chairs and venue (eg air-conditioning/heating).
- ☛ Use of visual materials such as pictures and slides.
- ☛ Better access to food, lunches etc.
- ☛ Need for succinct presentation with direct recommendations.
- ☛ Possibly concurrent sessions where participant numbers are high.

Interestingly participants experienced no difficulty identifying changes they would make to their operations as a result of information obtained during the Updates. These ranged from 'broader thinking' to altering operational activities such as fertiliser, lime and spray applications and crop sowing times.

The overall assessment of 'final customer' opinion indicates that with continued monitoring and evaluation, input from participants can be used to further develop the entire Crop Updates series. It is the intention of Crop Updates to base development around primary customers (growers) and that involvement of primary communicators always reflects this.



***Regional Focus Groups – AGWEST Summary information***

<b>Issues grouped on frequency</b>	<b>Group suggestions</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>	<b>CENTRAL</b>	<b>NORTH</b>
Need for Crop Updates to be part of existing local extension activity – not increase duplication.	Co-ordination needed.	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓
Need for financial analysis on new technology, profit/risk implications.	Involve Consultants and Market specialists.	✓✓	✓✓✓✓	N/a
Need for growers to be able to select what information is needed and provided.	Growers consider that grower groups can represent their views.	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	**
Concern over supplier bias especially the packaging of varieties and chemicals (GMO's).	Use competitors to get balance in views.	✓✓	✓✓✓	N/a
Need new information to have been tested locally. Grower groups to be able to exchange results.	'Shared Solutions' approach.	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
Want AGWEST involvement for independence and resource support for grower groups.	GRDC/AGWEST funding support.	✓✓	✓✓✓	N/a
Need recognition of growers' different needs and demand.	"Farming styles and farming sub cultures".	✓✓	✓✓✓	N/a
Local 'cell groups' forming within larger grower groups.	Will Crop Updates support this process?	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Follow up during the growing season on tactical issues.	Maybe Telecentre hookups.	-	✓✓	-
Need to combine some single issue events.	Eg. Durum extension is mostly not "stand alone".	-	✓✓	N/a
Trial results give information overload unless interpreted on implications for local production system.	Trial results to be delivered <u>with</u> regional interpretation.	✓✓	-	-
GPWA and AWB Ltd, AGWEST and Agribusiness sometimes clash.	Grains Industry Calendar	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Existing Updates – problem of going to every reseller day in case of missing something.	Grower groups invite range of resellers.	✓	-	✓✓

*\*\*Regional Focus Group – North: the consultation with growers cannot be achieved until after harvest. Results above are from service providers to grower groups.*

**Recommendation - CUSTOMERS**

**A clear picture needs to be established and widely circulated to clarify the Crop Updates customer groups, from Primary Communicators at the Perth Conference to growers at Regional Updates.**



## **Delivery Partners**

Crop Updates has set an extremely effective example of working with the private sector and building alliances that use the best of AGWEST and the private sector in delivering information where it is required.

As a snapshot, Crop Updates understands the composition of primary communicators state-wide to be:

- 35% Company agronomists (agribusinesses)
- 30% Consultants (private)
- 25% AGWEST (Research Officer and Development Officer teams)
- 10% Grower leaders/innovators

At the same time it is acknowledged that the balance within each region varies, as does the level of involvement each group has in delivery of Crop Updates information.

The Regional Crop Updates series introduces another level of communication and involvement. The pilot Regional Crop Updates confirmed that in some areas, such as the northern region, the primary communicators are very independent 'delivery partners'. They have the infrastructure and systems in place to coordinate and deliver Crop Updates-generated information to growers with minimal support from the agency. In other regions, such as the south of the state, there is a greater need for agency involvement.

Management and communication are vital to securing the success of a program using such a wide range of delivery partners and forums.

AGWEST can take steps to maximise the use of Crop Updates information by primary communicators and ensure it is adequately branded to acknowledge its original source.

If the agency takes a stronger position in producing material and putting it within reach of primary communicators it will be more widely used and carry appropriate Crop Updates branding.

Primary communicators have demonstrated their interest in Crop Updates information through participation in the Conference over the past four years.

To date the primary communicators have not received:

1. A clear statement of how the agency expects them to deliver Crop Updates information (issues such as recognition, acknowledgment, branding).
2. Specific requests for feedback from the growers they are delivering to.
3. An introduction to how they can work within and benefit from an initiative such as the Regional Crop Updates series.

Addressing each of these issues would enable Crop Updates to secure greater grower feedback and build a stronger relationship with primary communicators; this in turn would enhance the success of the Regional Updates.

The meeting and resulting '1999 Crop Extension Program for the Grains Industry' demonstrates the benefits of primary communicator collaboration. This meeting was held in December 1998 and drew together agribusiness and Agriculture Western Australia with the objective:

*To exchange extension plans and develop an integrated and cooperative approach to extension activities in the 1999 season. This involves incorporating both the programs of commercial organisations and those of Agriculture Western Australia.*



Participants in the meeting included the agency, private consultants, Wesfarmers, RTC, Grain Pool and CSBP. As a result of the meeting a listing of more than 50 planned 'extension' days for the 1999 season was made.

This type of forum provides exactly what Crop Updates requires to coordinate a truly regional series and so should become an annual event in the Updates calendar. It also provides a platform from which primary communicators can 'shop' for additional resources such as guest speakers they may wish to include in Updates they have planned.

In establishing a more structured approach to the Regional Crop Updates a gathering such as this forms a vital component to ensure success.

Grower feedback clearly indicates the number of 'information events' available for them to attend FAR exceeds the time they have available for such activities. Growers need to have an efficient way of obtaining information by attending events they know will be relevant and beneficial to their business.

**Appendix 5** lists more than 70 existing grower groups throughout the state. These groups and other gatherings of growers such as major community field days, Research Station field days and Agribusiness Field Walks all form part of the diverse avenues through which grains industry extension operates.

Coordination of speakers and event resources is a large issue. Often single speakers are in high demand and therefore unable to attend all the events to which they are invited. However with coordination and cooperation it may be possible to ensure speakers who are highly relevant to a large area or region speak at larger events, rather than being committed to a single small group at the exclusion of others. Similarly, there are options that can be explored in the delivery of the information that may enable other 'deliverers' to present a package of information from a popular speaker with participants able to follow up specific questions directly at a later stage.

Access to information at different levels is also an issue, with growers being at different stages of understanding on a particular issue. Services such as a detailed 'contacts' list has helped many growers and grower groups to go away from larger information events able to follow up their specific requirements directly with a researcher later in the season.

Allocation of a coordinating resource emerges as being vital to improving the management of such issues. Through this person or people it will be possible to operate in a more cooperative and coordinated fashion, improving the delivery of cropping information on all levels.

As was recommended in the 1998 Crop Updates Evaluation Report that the Crop Updates structure needs to utilise and strengthen the delivery links established for 'year-round' information transfer beyond the set Crop Updates days. Specifically: for any R&D outcomes which are processed during the year by Crop Updates partners it is suggested the Primary Communicator network is advised and has access to materials or tools to distribute the information throughout its own network.

### **Recommendation - PARTNERSHIPS**

**Primary communicators (public and private sector) need to be provided with a clear picture of how the Regional Updates Series will operate, what is in it for them and what the agency expects of them.**

### **Recommendation - RESOURCES**

**Providing a service to primary communicators by preparing appropriate materials that can be used in delivering Regional Crop Updates.**



## **Overall Crop Updates program**

The Crop Updates Operational Structure diagram (page 4) best illustrates the layout of the program and context in which the Regional Updates operate.

Clearly the Regional Crop Updates need to maintain the quality and image of the Perth based conference.

They form part of the loop that sees information fed back to the R&D arena and hence contribute to decision making regarding future research investments.

Under the current structure the pilot program of Regional Updates was driven by the Crop Updates Working Group and future expansion of the regional program would follow a similar process.

The Regional Crop Updates will need to perform self-evaluation in a similar way to the Perth conference and the continued sharing of results can be used to benefit the entire Crop Updates initiative.

Of particular interest is the need to allow information to reach researchers. They have an interest in knowing how their research is received and adopted by growers. Feedback to researchers can in turn help refine the information generated by future research, its suitability to growers and on-farm application.

The entire Crop Updates program should gain value from the inclusion of a Regional series as should the agency and GRDC.

The Regional Crop Updates Series needs to meet the overall objectives of the Crop Updates program and all parties involved. Without adequate measurement of performance these requirements will be difficult to justify.

Performance indicators are often participant based but this is in fact only one indication. In addition to recording grower participation in the Regional Updates, the Working Group should invest in establishing some productivity measures to assess the performance of the series.

## **The leadership role**

Crop Updates has worked since 1996 to bring together the best players in delivering grains information to identify ways to fast-track information to the hands of growers – where it is needed most and can generate the greatest benefits. In doing this Crop Updates has been the catalyst for building new strategic alliances and working relationships between the public and private sectors.

Having successfully assumed the 'leadership' role for the delivery of information to primary communicators, there are many benefits in carrying this over to the Regional Updates Series.

The delivery of the Regional Updates requires a leader. By acting in the position of 'leader' AGWEST can ensure the Regional Crop Updates series achieves the initiative's key criteria:

- Co-hosted and potentially co-directed by grower groups.
- Delivered in a partnership.
- Standardised format and promoted as part of the series.
- Address required objectives using core material developed through the R&D exchange.
- Receive catalytic support and funding including access to existing Crop Updates resources and \$7000 per region in direct funds to each working group.
- Accurate labelling of R&D sources to enable effective grower feedback.
- Promotion of key stakeholders to gain return on investment.
- Needs driven.

AGWEST has to sell the fact that everyone benefits from working together with a degree of coordination and a shared understanding of the objectives to deliver information to grain growers. The agency is packaging and presenting the information; primary communicators have a business in delivering it to growers with tools from the agency that make the task easier; coordination through a central point eliminates duplication; leading experts can be used in a wide range of places; feedback can be coordinated to deliver fast meaningful results; and the industry can experience benefits directly attributable to the combined efforts of all players.

## **Recommendation - MANAGEMENT**

**To support the agency's focus on regionalisation, the Regional Crop Updates program requires a dedicated coordinating resource to support all forms of 'regional updates' throughout the state.**

## **Structure**

Overall there is a feeling that the Regional Updates lack structure which results in an impression of complacency to participants and researchers. No doubt this stems from the fact that 1999 has been a 'pilot' phase for the Regional Updates series.

Agriculture Western Australia staff involved in the Regional Updates are dedicated to their individual work and the efforts of the program but there is a lack of coordination of the 'overall' effort. Rather than being viewed as one product the Regional Updates seem to have been treated as individual projects, each somewhat isolated from the next. The individuality should at least be maintained, in other words local relevance must underpin the planning of regional update



initiatives, however there is considerable scope for greater collaboration in the link between the state and regional activities.

The Perth Crop Updates has been highly successful and is widely recognised but it cannot be assumed, either directly or indirectly, that this achievement will be extended to the Regional Updates. The success of the Regional Crop Updates series calls for planning and management separate to the Crop Updates conference. In the same way that the Crop Updates conference has benefited from evaluation and thorough analysis of results, the Regional series can enjoy benefits by adopting a similar approach.

Currently there is a considerable lack of formally captured information regarding the outcomes of the pilot Regional Updates. The lack of information includes the number of events and participants as well as feedback from customers and information deliverers. It is recommended that a process to capture this information and apply its findings is implemented to arm the Regional Series so it achieves success similar to the Crop Updates conference.

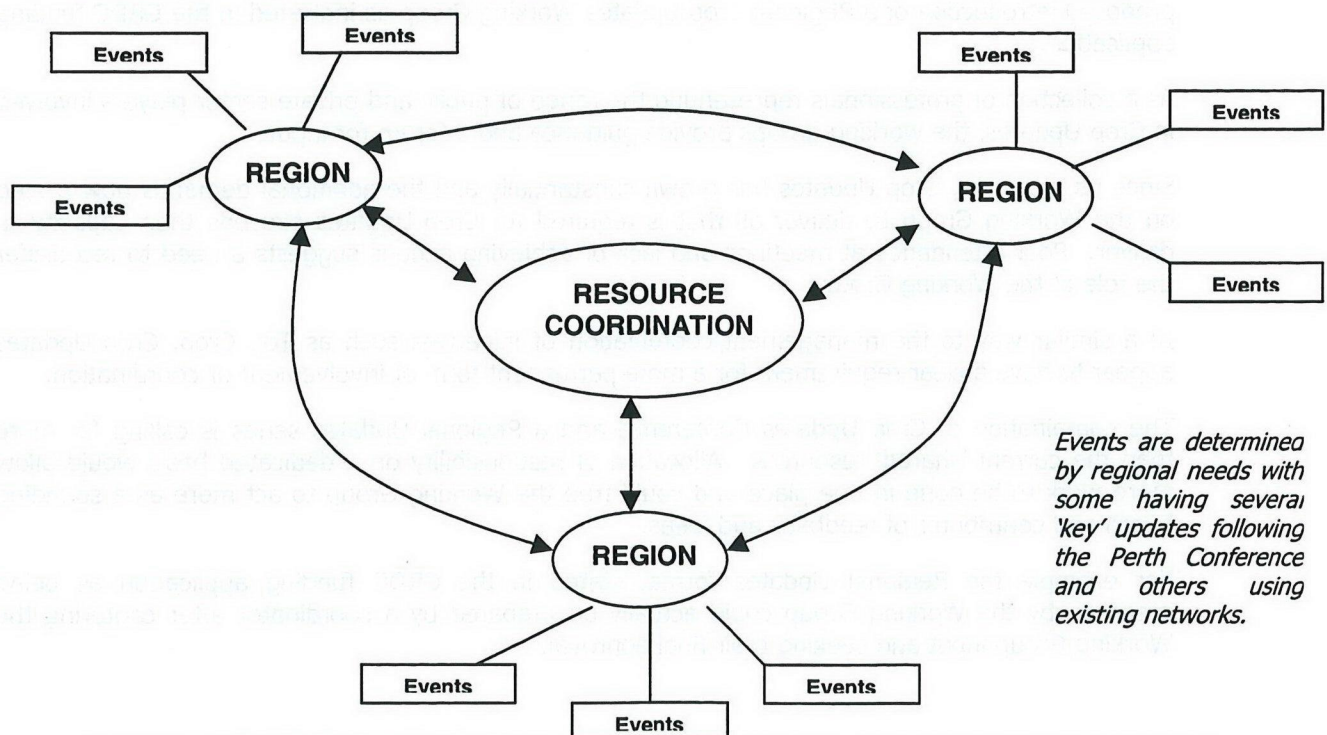
The Regional Crop Updates series involves working relationships between the private sector and AGWEST on a wider scale than the conference event.

The success of the pilot Regional updates in each region suggests this is a suitable structure to follow. Delivery of Key Regional Updates within each region as soon as possible after the Perth Conference will enable the bulk of information relevant to each region to be delivered in a single time and place. *It may be necessary to have more than one of these Key regional updates in order to service the large regions but the intention is to deliver the information with wide interest to the region.*

The use of Key Regional Updates will help reduce duplication as smaller grower groups, and primary communicator events may then break away and tap into agency Updates resources throughout the season to present more specific information.

Within this type of a framework, the Regional Crop Updates would have to maintain the ability to respond to immediate seasonal needs such as an outbreak of disease or a particular pest.

The Regional Crop Updates series will not achieve maximum results on its own. AGWEST is ideally positioned to continue to perform in a leadership role, managing and driving the Regional Crop Updates series, acting as a central point.





## **Delivery support - assistance**

As indicated in the application for funding from GRDC for the Regional Updates series, there is a need for a format or outline that can be used by primary communicators.

This would not only apply to agency-linked grower groups but be available to any primary communicators on a range of levels. There is a great deal of middle ground between telling primary communicators how to do their job and standing back and watching them. The agency, through Regional Crop Updates, can provide a range of support and assistance that all primary communicators can take advantage of. The benefits of such an arrangement would be mutual.

By acting as a 'contact' and 'resource point' for primary communicators – providing a standard format and range of support tools - AGWEST can:

- ◆ Help raise the standard of information delivered – eg report summaries, speakers and handouts.
- ◆ Increase the level of acknowledgment of Crop Updates and other stakeholders.
- ◆ Reduce duplication of information delivery.
- ◆ Obtain far greater feedback by accessing 'groups' other than those directly linked to the agency.

Developing a 'standard format' would mean it could be used by those groups and primary communicators who found it relevant. Within each region there are specific needs and certainly different groups have different needs. These unique needs could still be aided by sharing information, feedback and Crop Updates resources (such as printed material and visual aids) through a single point.

Coordinating the delivery of Crop Updates regional information should also be carried forward to the collection of feedback and participant surveying, as detailed in the section on 'evaluation'.

## **Crop Updates Working Group**

Given the weaknesses identified in the management and 'ownership' of the Regional Updates series it may be necessary to reconsider the load placed on the Working Group along with the proposed introduction of a Regional Crop Updates Working Group as indicated in the GRDC funding application.

As a collection of professionals representing the range of public and private sector players involved in Crop Updates, the working groups provide guidance and a forum for input.

Since its inception, Crop Updates has grown substantially and the additional demands now placed on the Working Group to deliver all that is required for Crop Updates exceeds their capacity to deliver. Poor attendance at meetings and lack of achieving actions suggests a need to reconsider the role of the Working Group.

In a similar way to the management/coordination of initiatives such as Top Crop, Crop Updates appear to have a clear requirement for a more permanent form of involvement or coordination.

The combination of Crop Updates Conference and a Regional Updates series is calling for more than the current 'shared' resources. Allocation of responsibility on a dedicated basis would allow more work to be done in one place and could free the Working Group to act more as a sounding board and contributor of feedback and ideas.

For example the Regional Updates format stated in the GRDC funding application as being prepared by the Working Group could actually be prepared by a coordinator after capturing the Working Group input and seeking their final approval.



The Working Group response to the e-mail survey distributed by *Agknowledge* suggests:

- ♦ Crop Updates is not a high priority to all members.
- ♦ Some members may need to be offered a way out.
- ♦ If individuals do not have the time to meet the Group's needs they could perhaps identify another individual within their organisation who can participate more actively and report back.
- ♦ The level of understanding amongst members is varied.

Responses to the survey questions and associated comments indicate very mixed levels of understanding amongst Working Group members. For example, responses to Recommendation 4 which details the tailoring of information to suit grower needs ranged from 'needing to do more work on the area' to 'forms part of the information provider's job'.

Similarly the survey respondents could rate the degree of implementation for each recommendation on a scale from one to five and in many cases their responses spanned four levels which suggests some very different opinions of where things are.

In looking at the specific recommendations several are of great significance to the Regional Crop Updates series.

Recommendation 3 deals with the provision of information throughout the year so that it is available at the most relevant time. This relates directly to the aims of Regional Updates yet the degree to which this was implemented rated very poorly.

Recommendation 6 reflects growers' interest in more visual material (such as videos) for inclusion in the workshops yet its implementation rated 'not at all'.

Seeking input from information providers to help strategic planning the year before 'delivery' was covered by Recommendation 7. Given the close working relationship Regional Crop Updates calls for between the agency and primary communicators, this is of high importance. According to the ratings of the Working Group members who responded to the survey the degree to which this has been implemented is relatively low.

A summary of survey ratings and the detailed recommendations and comments appear in **Appendix 1**.

### **Recommendation – Working Group**

**Review the role of the Crop Updates Working Group in light of changes in recent years and the proposed establishment of a Regional Working Group.**

### **Branding**

Adopt clear minimum branding practices to ensure consistency of the 'product', recognition of all parties involved and attach a label of 'professionalism' in the minds of participants.

Set minimum standards that can be easily and effectively used in all workshops regardless of who is responsible for presenting. Develop a professional image to the information package and those associated with it in addition to recognition of the agency, GRDC and Crop Updates.

Branding on material provided for primary communicators to use in delivering to a wider audience should clearly carry recognition of Crop Updates. For example overheads and pages within conference proceedings should carry Crop Updates labelling.



Internally there needs to be clarification. For example on the AGWEST web site Crop Updates is presented as *Cropupdates* and this sort of inconsistent branding can lead to confusion and lack of recognition as the same program, particularly when considering the web site is a global point of contact.

### **Recommendation – BRANDING**

**Crop Updates materials need to be more frequently and consistently branded so that recognition is gained at all forms of Regional Updates from the Key Regional Updates to grower groups and private consultants.**

### **Evaluation**

The evaluations completed by participants at the 1999 Regional Badgebup, Narrogin and Liebe Crop Updates can generate valuable information. There is a need to capture information from Updates run by primary communicators outside the agency.

AGWEST could prepare a standard survey with room for deliverers to add their own questions. This would provide a reason for grower groups and primary communicators to contact the agency and share information about their planned Regional Updates. Allowing them to ask their own questions helps them benefit from building the relationship with AGWEST.

Grower participants also need to be encouraged to share feedback on future research requirements.

Similarly the primary communicators running Regional Updates need to have an avenue to share their thoughts on improving the service to growers and relationship with the agency.

The Crop Updates Conference has proven the value to detailed customer focus and service.

The Regional initiative will benefit from applying the same diligence to evaluation.

### **Recommendation – EVALUATION**

**AGWEST modify the current Crop Updates monitoring and evaluation processes to include Regional Updates, capturing maximum useful information without duplication.**

### **The Future**

As the Regional Crop Updates series expands there will be a greater requirement for customer feedback to maintain the standard and relevance of information delivered in the Updates. For example, once established the Regional Updates may find value in offering segmentation such as farming type or size to enable targeted information and audiences of appropriate size.

The current segments such as cereals, pulses and oilseeds may extend to the size of the business or level of technology adoption. Grain producers are only going to continue to refine their information requirements and become better at seeking exactly what they require. While attending a one-day grains workshop may once have been appropriate, farmers are moving towards specific information sources such as a half-day demonstration of cereal yield monitoring.

Information delivery by primary communicators must always stay abreast of the direction farmer/grower needs are heading in. As the force behind Crop Updates information and delivery, AGWEST has an obligation to drive this, hence ensuring Crop Updates is associated with the delivery of leading edge information.



## **Appendix 2**

# **REPORT ON FARMER CROP UPDATE METHODOLOGY**

**2000 and 2001**



Department of Agriculture  
Government of Western Australia



**GRDC**  
Grains  
Research &  
Development  
Corporation



# **Farmer Crop Update Series**

## **Western Region**

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Report on Farmer Crop Update  
Methodology

2000 and 2001

Mike Kelly

Development Officer

Dryland Research Institute, Merredin



## **FARMER CROP UPDATE SERIES – WESTERN REGION**

### **Comparison on methodologies used during 2000 and 2001.**

#### **Introduction**

A key priority of the Department of Agriculture and GRDC is to ensure that growers have access to the latest research and development in their region. One vehicle for this too occur has been the introduction of the regional Crop Update series.

The regional growers update series was initiated with the following aims:

- Provide regional forums for updating growers with the latest R&D in cropping systems and grain production.
- To foster participative R&D through effective interchange between agency based R&D groups, agribusiness, R&D groups and grower based groups with potential to participate in R&D at a range of levels (from merely providing feedback to linking broadscale on-farm tests with the research).
- To reduce research segmentation by fostering a climate of mutual benefit in R&D exchange. There is already emergence of research segmentation from proprietary research. However, apart from an initial proprietary advantage (within a single season) the mutual benefits from R&D exchange far outweigh these initial gains.

Forums are held in each region and are linked to the highly successful Agribusiness Crop Updates. The regional Crop Update Series (Farmer Crop Updates) have the potential to accelerate the dissemination of cropping systems information and directly target specific information needs.

In 1999, a number of information updates were held for growers during the autumn period in various regional areas. It was identified that these types of events could be delivered more widely under the Crop Update banner. A needs analysis was conducted in 1999 to explore this further. The needs analysis\* confirmed that there were opportunities for regional updates, and a focus on building capacity of growers should be encouraged.

A methodology that featured building grower capacity was trialed in 2000. Regional launches were held in the Northern, Southern and Central regions at Three Springs, Jerramungup and Corrigin respectively. The aim of the regional launch was to show case to grower group delegates the type of information and presenters they could access if they organised a Crop Update for their group. There was an expectation that the grower group delegates would promote the idea to the groups they represented which would lead to more Farmer Crop Updates.

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\* Agknowledge, 1999. Needs Analysis, Examining the Regional Crop Updates Program.



These Updates were to be:

- Co-hosted and potentially co-directed by grower groups
- Delivered in partnership (agribusiness and Department of Agriculture) i.e. inclusive not exclusive proprietary client days.
- Standardised format and promoted as part of the series
- Address required objectives using core material developed through R and D exchange
- Receive catalytic support and funding
- Accurate labeling of R and D sources to enable effective grower feedback
- Promotion of key stakeholders (including GRDC) to gain return on investment
- Grower group driven

While there were a few co-hosted events following the regional launch, they were initiated by the Department of Agriculture. The concept of empowering groups to host their own days, through the regional launch mechanism was not effective.

In 2001, an alternative approach was used, where the Department of Agriculture would organise and provide Farmer Crop Updates throughout the regions. To ensure that there was community ownership and support for events, reference groups were used to set the structure and content for individual events. Reference group consisted of Department of Agriculture staff, agribusiness and farmers.

The aim of this paper is to evaluate and compare the methodology used for the 2000 Farmer Crop Update Series and 2001 Farmer Crop Update Series.

## **Methodology**

The most effective means to compare the two methodologies was to question individuals involved in organising the events. Semi-structured interviewing techniques were used to gauge both individual and group involvement and attitudes towards the regional Crop Updates and methodologies used. A semi-structured interview is a “guided conversation in which only the topics are predetermined and new questions or insights arise as a result of the discussion and ... analysis”.

The questions used as guides related to perceptions of how well the co-hosting structure worked and how this would compare to the reference group role.

All the Farmer Crop Update Series events were investigated, however interviews were only conducted where the co-host relationship was used. Those that used reference groups or were organised solely by Department of Agriculture staff were not examined in detail and do not form a large component of this study.



The events that were examined by interview were:

- Wongan Hills Crop Update, co-hosted by AWARE
- Corrigin Crop Update co-hosted by the Corrigin Farm Improvement Group.
- Jerramungup Crop Update, co-hosted by JERAC
- Avon Districts Crop Update, co-hosted by Meenar Mortlock Catchment Group
- Esperance Crop Updates, co-hosted by SEPWA.
- Mingenew - Irwin Group Crop Updates

After interviewing, the results were compiled and commonalities across the event determined.

## **Results and Discussion**

The results of the interviews have been summarized into main findings, and recommendations made where appropriate.

### **1. The level of involvement in the organisation of the event by the grower group varied significantly.**

Of the ten Farmer Crop Updates held in 2000, five were held in collaboration with a grower group. The other five used reference groups. Guidelines in the Crop Update Series Information Package (for grower groups who wished to co-host an Update) stated that support from the Department of Agriculture was to include assistance with

- Defining the final update program
- Packaging and promoting the event
- Nominating appropriate speakers
- Provision of presentation equipment
- Participant Surveys

The support given to the grower groups in most cases went beyond just providing assistance. Grower group involvement was generally limited to input on topics and speakers during a series of meetings (number of meetings varied from group to group) or telephone conversations with key group members. Realistically this does not differ dramatically from the role of a reference group. The Corrigin Farm Improvement Group was more involved in an organisational sense with setting up, advertising etc. The level of involvement could be attributed to three reasons.

#### ***Activities of Department of Agriculture Staff***

The level of involvement is likely to be directly related to the activities of Department of Agriculture staff involved in the co-host relationship. Having people with the resources and contacts to pull these events together (Department of Agriculture staff) took the pressure of the grower group. There were no situations where there was not significant involvement by Department of Agriculture staff. Farmers involved in the co-host relationship made comments that "having a person who has contacts and resources is extremely helpful"

#### ***Lack of guidelines to illustrate requirements of the co-host arrangement***

Under the co-hosting procedures as set out in the Crop Update Series Information Package, no guidelines exist as to the required level of involvement in the

organisation of the Updates. The support that was given to the groups, by Department of Agriculture staff tended to be more than just assistance or guidance.

***Functionality of the grower group involved/motivation of the group***

In some instances the grower groups may have been experiencing a lull period or had time restrictions due to harvest and farming activities, hence organisation defaulted to Department of Agriculture staff.

If the co-host model is to be used in the future then

- Clear guidelines on the requirements of the co-host arrangement are required early in the planning process.
- Grower groups that are experiencing a lull period should be avoided or discouraged from co-hosting a crop update series.

Under the reference group model, clear guidelines of agency and GRDC requirements are required early in the planning process to avoid confusion on topics and speaker selection.



**Table One: Summary of Grower Group/Reference Group Involvement.**

	Co-Hosted/Co-Directed	Reference Group	Level of Involvement
<b>2000</b>			
Three Springs C.U. (Regional Launch)		Lake Indoon	Limited
Wongan Hills C.U.	Co-hosted with AWARE.		Sub-committee of AWARE formed
Corrigin C.U. (Regional Launch)	Co-hosted with Corrigin Farm Improvement Group		Informal Meetings with group to decide on topics/speakers
Narrogin C.U.		Working Group	
Avon Districts C.U.	Co-hosted with Meenar-Mortlock Catchment Group		Informal Meetings with group to decide on topics/speakers
Esperance C.U.	Co-hosted with SEPWA		SEPWA not involved in organisational sense
Katanning C.U.		Working group	Topics, Speakes, Presntations
Jerramungup C.U. (Regional Launch)	Co-hosted with JERAC		Used as reference source not organisational
Liebe Group C.U.		Undisclosed	
Mingenew-Irwin Group C.U.		Undisclosed	
<b>2001</b>			
Moora C.U.		Reference group	Topics, Speakers
Geraldton C.U.		Reference group	Topics, Speakers
Mukinbudin C.U.		Reference group	Topics, Speakers
Hyden C.U.		Reference group	Topics, Speakers
Brookton C.U.		Reference group	Topics, Speakers
Esperance C.U.		No formal reference group	Various groups consulted
Katanning C.U.		Reference Group	Topics, Speakers, Presentations
Jerramungup C.U.		No formal reference group	Various Agency and growers consulted.
Ravensthorpe C.U.		No reference group	Organised by Agency
Mingenew Irwin		Reference group	
Liebi		Reference group	



## 2. Impact of Co-host relationship v's reference group

There was negligible impact on the end product of using a grower group compared to a reference group. Those surveyed felt that there was no notable change in the level of information presented. Both methodologies resulted in selections of topics that were locally and regionally relevant. This can be attributed to the fact that the role of the grower group did not differ dramatically to the role of the reference group.

Those interviewed thought that the topics and speakers formed the main drawing power of an event. The attendance data (Table Two) is inconclusive and does not show any trend either way. Evaluation data from the individual events does however illustrate that both years events were well received.

Attendance will depend on topics presented; therefore local versus regional delivery needs to be considered. Comments were made that some topics during last year's events were not relevant to all attendees; e.g. presentations on oats and hay at the Brookton event were not as relevant to Corrigin attendees. Requirements to have GRDC funded projects and a grain focus highlighted at Farmer Crop Update events can limit topic selection to a degree. Comments were made to this effect.

These events were widely publicised in rural media and by mailout, however those interviewed thought that the advertising efforts particularly the topics and speakers were started to close to the event. Given that this forms the main drawing power of the event, then this should be publicised as early as possible.

**Table Two: Attendance for 2000 and 2001 Crop Update events**

Location	2000	2001
Three Springs	75	Not held
Wongan	25 growers	Not held
Moora	Not held	50
Geraldton	Not held	124
Corrigin	58 farmers, 10 AgWest, 5 Agribusiness	Not held
Narrogin	130	Not held
Avon Districts	70 + 20 intermittents.	Not held
Mukinbudin	Not held	53
Hyden	Not held	65
Brookton	Not held	100
Esperance	?	95 (minus presenters)
Katanning	128 (minus presenters)	140 (minus presenters)
Jerramungup	74 farmers	106
Ravensthorpe	Not held	66
Leibi	?	120
MIG	? (range in 90-140)	130



### **3. Co-host relationship: impact on grower group**

The sample size to test the impact of the co-host relationship on grower groups was low. This was mainly due, to the lack of involvement from most groups in an organisational sense. However those that were involved felt that the co-host relationship was worthwhile for the grower group and region in which the event was held. While this was not explored in great detail, the groups do receive wide spread publicity as a result of the event. The Corrigin Farm Improvement Group felt that if they were given the opportunity to run another event then they would do so. However this would be dependant on the level of support (funding and organisational) given to the group. The group felt that this was the main factor in determining the success of the co-host relationship. It was the groups opinion that if the organisational role took over to the point where they couldn't attend or be present during the event then they would have to reconsider involvement. This arrangement could be defined as a reference group.

### **4. Were groups empowered after the regional launches to hold their own event?**

The Crop Updates information package was widely distributed to farm improvement groups, L.C.D.C.'s and at regional Updates. Despite this, there were no applications from grower groups to receive funding and support, which were not initiated by the Department of Agriculture. Department of Agriculture staff initiated all of the events that occurred after the launches, which were co-hosted by grower groups. The fact that there were no self-motivated groups could also account for the lack of involvement in the organisation of the event by many of the groups. Self directed grower groups such as the Mingenew - Irwin Group and the Liebi Group are good examples of empowered groups that have organised their own updates (by employees of the group). These groups are likely to continue to host events irrespective of involvement in the Crop Updates Series and support given by Department of Agriculture staff.

One possible reason for the lack of applications from self-motivated groups was that the closing date for application was two days after the last launch, which did not allow enough time for group meetings, and planning an event.

However the lack of interest shown by grower groups in 2000 does support the move made to reference groups.

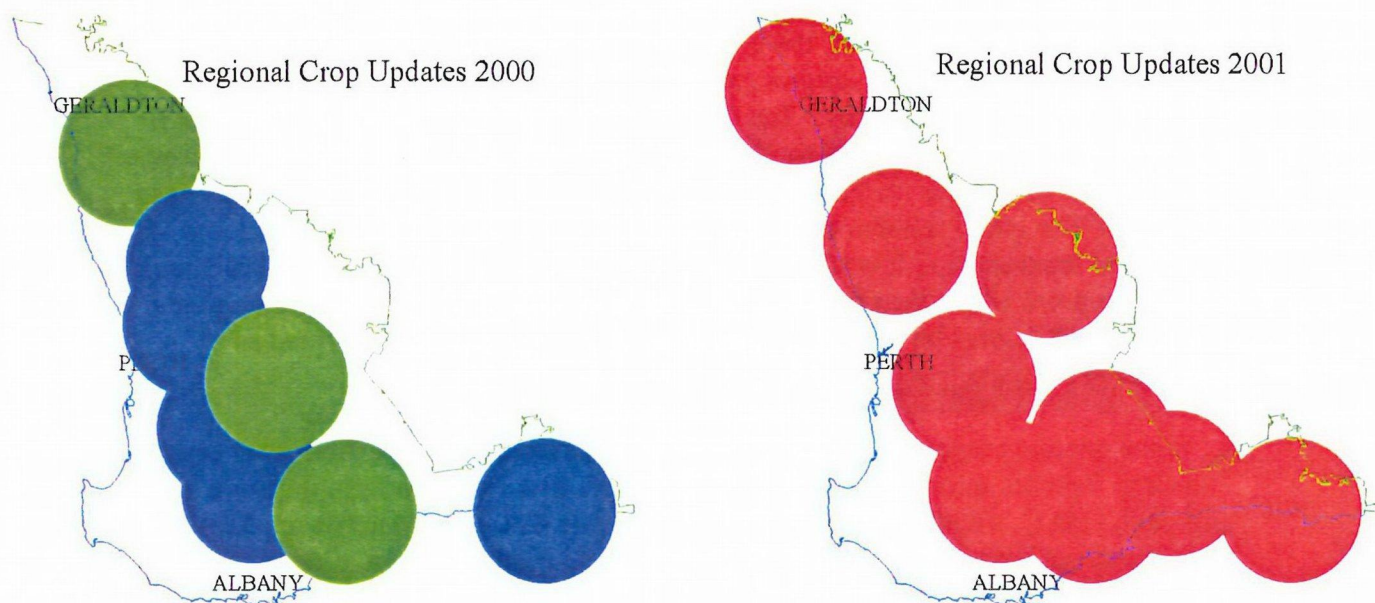
### **5. Impact of Location on events**

There is a need to consider the impact of location on attendance numbers. Moving the event prevents the event becoming recognised and there is a limit to how far people will travel and cross district boundary influences ("will travel more to one location than another").

Those interviewed thought that the limit of how far a landholder will travel to an event of this nature is approximately 100km. Figure One illustrates the likely range you could expect attendees to travel. There is some degree of overlap in some areas, and areas that are not covered at all. The impact of location factors on attendance should be considered. Maybe there is a need for more events to cover the shortfall. The level of servicing by agribusiness and Department of Agriculture at any one location needs to be considered as over servicing does led to apathy towards these kinds of events.



**Figure One: Likely range of attendees at Crop Update Events**



Does not include private grower group days ie Leibe or Mingenew Irwin.

## 6. Future Evaluation

Evaluation of events after the event has occurred becomes cloudy if systems have not been put in place to allow adequate exploration of the event. It is recommended in the future that evaluators strongly consider:

- Ability to obtain an appropriate sample size to give the study rigour.
- Methods to remove introduced bias from those who were heavily involved in organising the event.
- Adequate means to allow comparisons between methodologies. Baseline data and means to investigate changes in attitudes are required.

A meta-evaluation (evaluation of an evaluation) could be completed to learn about evaluation design and methodology, to ensure continuous improvement of the Department of Agriculture evaluation efforts.



## **Conclusion**

This study has shown that the co-host relationship in most cases did not vary significantly to the role of a reference group. There are some benefits for the grower group involved, which should not be dismissed. Given the involvement of Departmental staff, it is likely that the grower group will default to a reference group, which is probably more suitable for both parties given restrictions placed on growers time.

There is scope to improve the reference group system to ensure the objectives of the Farmer Crop Update Series are met. Some attention is required to ensure:

- that the Grower Updates do link with the Agribusiness Crop Updates
- location factors are considered when choosing events
- advertising begins early.

This study did not give any insights into what the most appropriate methodology for ensuring objectives are met. This could form the basis of continuing evaluation into the Farmer Crop Updates.

## Appendix

### Appendix One: Summary of Crop Update events, planning methodology and attendance.

	LOCATION	
1999	2000	2001
Agribusiness Crop Updates (Key growers invited)	Agribusiness Crop Updates (Key growers invited)	State Grower Update (event for growers)
	<i>Northern Grower Update</i>	<i>Northern Grower Update</i>
• Liebe	• Three Springs • Wongan Crop	• Moora • Geraldton
	<i>Central Grower Update</i>	<i>Central Grower Update</i>
• Narrogin	• Corrigin • Narrogin • Avon Districts	• Mukinbudin • Hyden • Brookton
	<i>Southern Grower Update</i>	<i>Southern Grower Update</i>
• Badgebup	• Esperance • Katanning • Jerramungup	• Esperance • Katanning • Jerramungup • Ravensthorpe
	<i>Grower Group Update</i>	<i>Grower Group Update</i>
	• Liebe • Mingenew – Irwin • Tenindewa • Casuarina • Pindar / Tardun • East Tenterden • WANTFA Northam • WANTFA Katanning • WANTFA Geraldton	• Mingenew – Irwin • Leibe
PLANNING METHODOLOGY		
	<b>Southern Grower Update Katanning</b>	<b>Southern Grower Update Katanning</b>
<b>Badgebup</b>	• Working Group: Agency, local agronomists and consultants, farmers. • 4 Meetings with working group to organise and discuss content, refine presentations. Attendance 128 (minus presenters)	• Working group: Agency, local agronomists and consultants, farmers. • 3 meetings to organise and discuss content, refine presentations Attended 140 (minus presenters)
• ??? Planning		
• Attendance 91 (minus presenters)		



**Jerrumungup**

- Co hosted with Jerac

Attendance 74 farmers

**Esperance**

- Co-hosted with SEPWA

**Jerrumungup**

- Organised by small committee of agency people.
- Growers other staff used as reference group

Attendance 106

**Esperance**

- Organised by a small committee of agency staff.
  - Other groups were consulted.
- Attendance 95 minus speakers

**Ravensthorpe**

- Organised by a small committee of agency staff.
- No reference group

Attendance 66

**Northern  
Liebe**

**Northern  
Liebe**

**Northern  
Liebe**

- Reference group: Liebe committee members
- Attendance 120

**Three Springs**

- Organising Committee: Agency.
- Strategic planning with working group Lake Indoon though little follow up
- Launch only available to grower delegates

Attendance: 75 people

**Moora**

- Reference group: Dept. of Ag., agribusiness, agro's/consultants.
- 4 breakfast meetings to discuss content, logistics.

Attendance 50

**Geraldton**

- 2 Agency internal meetings.
  - 3 reference group meetings – Agency, Farmers, Agribusiness, Agro's/consultants.
- Attendance 124

**Central  
Narrogin**

**AWARE – Wogan Hills**

Subcommittee of AWARE group formed to organise the event. Subcommittee was comprised of Department of Agriculture staff and Agribusiness

**Central  
Narrogin**

- Joint venture between Agency, agribusiness and consultants, AIAST, GRDC and topcrop.

Attendance 130

**Avon Districts**

- Cohosted with Meenar/Mortlock Catchment Group.
- Agenda/Content developed in meetings with group

Attendance: 70 growers + 20 other in some sessions

**Corrigin**

- Co-hosted with CFG
- Agenda/content developed in meetings with group.

Attendance: 58 farmers, 10 AgWest, 5 Agribusiness.

**WANTFA – 4 locations**

- Organised by committee
- Numbers 348 (main), 142, 200, 140 over four locations

**Mingenew-Irwin**

- Reference group of MIG management committee members

Attendance 130

**Central  
Mukinbudin**

- Phone interviews with farmers to suggest topics
- Reference Group: Ag Dept, Agribusiness, consultants – refined topics

Attendance 53

**Hyden**

- Phone interviews with farmers to suggest topics.
- Reference Group: Ag Dept Agribusiness, consultants – refined topics

Attendance 65

**Brookton**

- Phone interviews with farmers to suggest topics.
- Reference Group: Ag Dept Agribusiness, consultants – refined topics

Attendance 100



## **Appendix 3**

### **FARMER CROP UPDATE SERIES**

#### **Evaluation Report 2001**



Department of Agriculture  
Government of Western Australia



**GRDC**  
Grains  
Research &  
Development  
Corporation



# Farmer Crop Update Series

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## Evaluation Report

## 2001

Mike Kelly

Development Officer

Dryland Research Institute, Merredin



## **FARMER CROP UPDATE SERIES – WESTERN REGION**

### **Evaluation Report**

#### **Introduction**

A key priority of the Department of Agriculture and GRDC is to ensure that growers have access to the latest research and development information in their region. One vehicle for providing this information has been the introduction of the regional Crop Update series.

The regional growers update series was initiated with the following aims:

- Provide regional forums for updating growers with the latest R&D in cropping systems and grain production.
- To foster participative R&D through effective interchange between agency based R&D groups, agribusiness, R&D groups and grower based groups with potential to participate in R&D at a range of levels (from merely providing feedback to linking broadscale on-farm tests with the research).
- To reduce research segmentation by fostering a climate of mutual benefit in R&D exchange. There is already emergence of research segmentation from proprietary research. However, apart from an initial proprietary advantage (within a single season) the mutual benefits from R&D exchange far outweigh these initial gains.

The regional Crop Update Series (Farmer Crop Updates) have the potential to accelerate the dissemination of cropping systems information and directly target specific information needs.

This report brings together the common threads for the following Farmer Crop Updates that were held in 2001.

- Moora
- Mingenew Irwin Group
- Leibi
- Geraldton
- Mukinbudin
- Esperance
- Hyden
- Brookton
- Katanning
- Jerremungup
- Ravensthorpe

In this report individual events have not been evaluated rather the focus is on the series as a whole.

## Results and Findings

The evaluation sheets distributed at each individual event varied which has limited the analysis that could have been conducted. In future it is suggested that a standard set of questions common on all Crop Update events is used. These questions can then be used to analyse the event as a whole and form a long-term data set.

### 1. Demographic Information from Farmer Crop Update Series Events.

	<b>Grower</b>	<b>Dept. Ag.</b>	<b>Agribusiness/ Industry Rep*.</b>	<b>Presenter Chair</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total Attendance</b>	<b>Surveys Returned</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Moora</b>	32		18			50	26	52
<b>MIG</b>	90		40			130	41	31
<b>Leibi</b>	86		34			120	65	54
<b>Geraldton</b>	88		36			124	39	31
<b>Mukinbudin</b>	28		25			53	22	41
<b>Esperance</b>	72			27	13	112	44	39
<b>Hyden</b>	43	15	7			65	22	34
<b>Brookton</b>	70		30			100	55	55
<b>Katanning</b>	120	6	11	19	3	159	73	46
<b>Jerramungup</b>	63	22	21			106	48	45
<b>Ravensthorpe</b>	53	12	1		6	72	18	25

\* Depending on the breakdown, this category may include Department of Agriculture staff.

The demographic information illustrates the wide range of attendance at these events across the various locations. To allow comparisons to be made of the drawing power of these events, further information is required. The percentage of farmers from a defined distance around the event who attended would allow for some degree of comparison to be made.

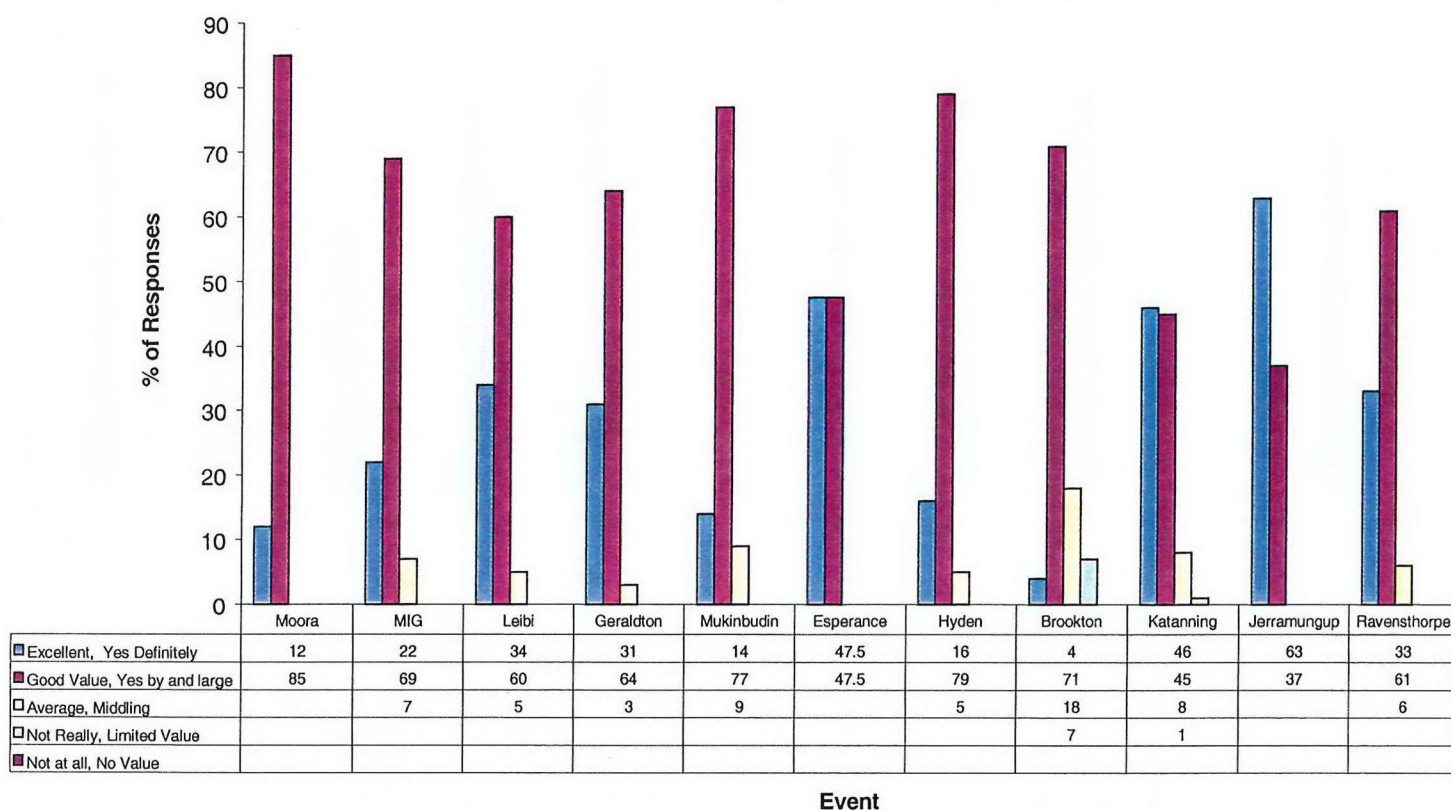
It is recommended that in future evaluations, thought is given towards who we are surveying. Given the target audience is farmers, bias is introduced by including Department of Agriculture staff who attended and those who presented in the evaluation.

There were some inconsistencies in how the demographic information was recorded on the evaluation sheets. Depending on the demographic information required, some attention should be paid to this in the future.



## 2. How would you rate the value of the update, was attending worth your while?

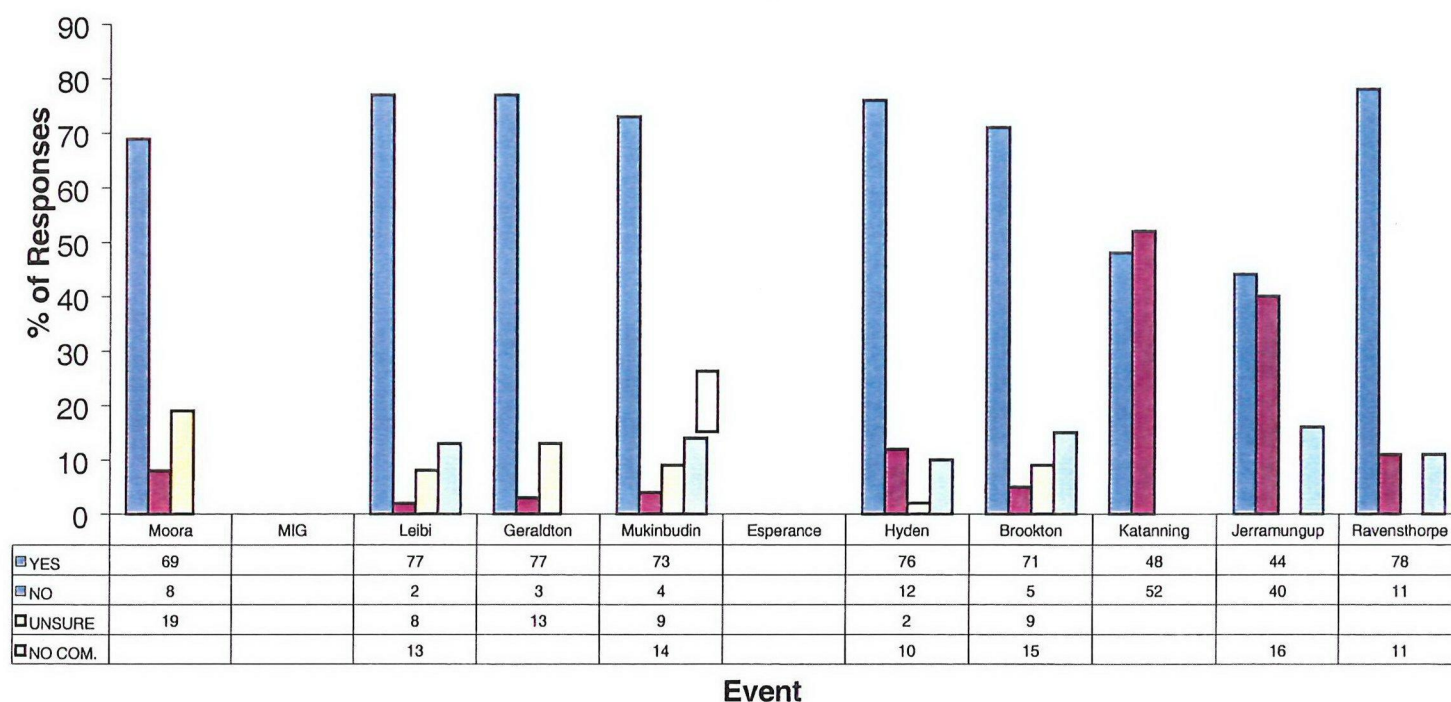
Q. How would you rate the value of the update, was attending worth your while?



The results from this question show that the Farmer Crop Update events were perceived to be excellent and good value. A small proportion felt that the events were below average to average. This result is positive and supports the decision to continue holding these events.

### 3. Would you like to hear from farmers/growers about their R and D results?

#### Would you like to hear from growers at these events?



A majority of the attendees who answered the evaluation sheets would like to hear from growers at these events. The response for the Katanning and Jerramungup event is inconclusive. Growers should be given the opportunity to speak at these events were applicable.

### 4. Why did you attend?

Data for this question has been taken from the Mukinbudin, Hyden, Brookton and Geraldton Crop Updates.

The total number of responses were 158.

Response	Number	(%)
No comment	5	3
Unsorted	10	6
Speaker, Chairperson...	9	6
Information, Knowledge, Ideas	96	61
Specific Information Needs	32	20
Curiosity	3	2
Networking and Information	3	2

Most growers attended Crop Update events to gather information, knowledge and ideas. This is a similar result the Agribusiness and State Grower Crop Updates. Data



from previous questions indicates that the value of the events were good, therefore it is likely that the attendees needs were met.

### **5 How could the events be improved?**

Data for this question was taken from Mukinbudin, Hyden, Brookton, Ravensthorpe events.

The total number of responses was 138.

Response	Number	(%)
Unsorted	8	6
No comment	76	55
Suggestions on venue, location....	9	6
More Time, less concurrent	11	8
Format, Agenda good	10	7
More farmer talks, researchers outside agency	7	5
More trial, results detail	7	5
Specific info required	9	6

The data from this question is inconclusive. While there are no major suggestions for improvement of the series as a whole, individual events should be evaluated to ensure that local events are improved to meet local needs.

### **Conclusion**

The main reason for attending the updates was found to be for information, knowledge and ideas. Most who attended Crop Update events found the updates to be worthwhile, though many would like to hear from growers at these events.

It is suggested that individual events be evaluated locally to allow for local improvement.

In future, evaluation of these events needs to be standardised to ensure comparisons across events can be made.

**Appendix 4**

**SUMMARY OF 2001 CROP UPDATE  
PROMOTION ACTIVITIES**

**Press Releases**



## SUMMARY OF 2001 CROP UPDATE PROMOTION ACTIVITIES

### Press Releases

Title	Personnel	Date
Crop Update planning underway	Nicole Kerr	9 June 2000
New format for Crop Updates 2001	Nicole Kerr	30 October 2000
Grain growers urged to sign up for Crop Updates	Nicole Kerr	15 January 2001
New blackleg management package to be launched at Crop Updates	Ravjit Khangura	22 January 2001
New cropping phase pastures a feature of State Grower Crop Update	Clinton Revell	25 January 2001
State Grower Crop Update profiles 2001 season	David Stephens	2 February 2001
Crop Update conference shows growers how to cut cereal disease costs	Jat Bhathal	2 February 2001
Follow that tramline	Paul Blackwell	8 February 2001
Latest information at Esperance Crop and Livestock update	David Eksteen	13 February 2001
Test as you grow kit released at Crop Updates	Jeff Russell	21 February 2001
Down to business on the farm	Nigel McGuckian	23 February 2001
Managing ryegrass resistance	Alex Wallace	23 February 2001
Is technology driving grain prices down?	Ian Wilkinson	23 February 2001
Regional Crop Updates start soon	Nicole Kerr	27 February 2001
Pastures under the microscope for new phase pasture systems	Keith Devinish	13 March 2001
Lupin disease warning for 2001 Crop	Geoff Thomas	14 March 2001
Narrow points and press wheels boost canola crops	Rafiul Alam	29 March 2001
Nutrient carry over and fertilising strategies after a dry season	Bill Bowden	11 April 2001
AGWEST trial evaluates IT and TT canola	Paul Carmody	14 May 2001

Sixty articles about Crop Updates were printed in rural and regional newspapers.

## Advertising

### Agribusiness Crop Updates and State Grower Crop Updates

Date	Activity
18 January 2001	Countryman – full page
25 January 2001	Farm Weekly – full page
1 February 2001	Countryman - ¼ page Farm Weekly - ¼ page
8 February 2001	Countryman - ¼ page Farm Weekly - ¼ page
15 February 2001	Countryman - ¼ page Farm Weekly - ¼ page Countryman – Calendar of Grower Crop Updates
22 February 2001	Countryman – Calendar of Grower Crop Updates
1 March 2001	Countryman – Calendar of Grower Crop Updates
8 March 2001	Countryman – Calendar of Grower Crop Updates
15 March 2001	Countryman – Calendar of Grower Crop Updates

### Regional Grower Crop Updates

Adverts were placed in the following regional papers:

- Geraldton Guardian
- Central Midlands & Coastal Advocate
- Pingelly Times
- Beverly Blarney
- Kondinin Calendar
- The Fence Post (Narembeen)
- Muka Matters
- Great Southern Herald
- Wagin Argus
- Woody Wongi
- Pingrup Post
- Nyabing News
- Albany Advertiser
- Gnowangerup Star
- Esperance Express



## **Other activities**

- Individual letters to past grower attendees of the Agribusiness Crop Updates
- Advert in regional AgMemo's
- Contact with ABC Landline
- Advert / information in agricultural organisation newsletters
- Article in Ground Cover (Brendon Cant)
- Radio – ABC rural report and Radio West interviews, read outs for ABC and Radio West
- Information sent to AGWEST offices and Development Officers asking them to pass this onto growers
- Direct mailout of State Grower Crop Update brochures to growers (using CBH mailing list)
- Website – brochure information, downloading registration form
- Agbrief articles
- Telemarketing
- Flyers sent to growers for regional Grower Crop Updates

## **Appendix 5**

### **PRESS COVERAGE SUMMARY**



## PRESS COVERAGE FOR 2001 CROP UPDATES

Topic	Central Midlands													Great				Total
	Countryman	Farm Weekly	Geraldton Guardian	Mid-West Times	& Coastal Advocate	Wheatbelt Mercury	York Chronicle	Narrogin Observer	Wagin Argus	Southern Herald	Kalgoorlie Miner	Albany Advertiser	Esperance Express					
Agribusiness CU	1										1	1		3				
State Grower CU	2	3	1	2	3	2	1	2		2	1	1	2	22				
Regional Grower CU			2	1					1					4				
Tramline Farming			1	1						1			1	4				
Seasonal forecasting													1	1				
Cereal Diseases		1											1	2				
Commodity Outlook		1											1	1				
Herbicide Resistance	1													1				
Test as you grow	1	3	1	1				1	1	1	1	1		9				
Wild Radish	1													1				
McGuckian			1											1				
Mingenew / Irwin CU			1											1				
Flexi N		1												1				
Windrows	1													1				
Green Bridge		1												1				
Pasture Phases		1								1			1	3				
Blackleg	1	1								1	1			4				
Total	8	12	7	5	3	2	1	2	1	6	4	3	6	60				