

SRDC Research Project Final Report

Grower Group Network

GGN001

Grower Group Services

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Australian Government

**Sugar Research and
Development Corporation**

Grower Group Services wish to acknowledge receipt of project funding from the Australian Government and the Australian Sugarcane Industry as provided by the Sugar Research and Development Corporation.



Australian Government

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Development Corporation**

Grower Group Services is not a partner, joint venturer, employee or agent of SRDC and has no authority to legally bind SRDC, in any publication of substantive details or results of this Project.

Body of the Report:

Executive Summary:

(Maximum 800 words. This should provide a non-technical overview of the project which could be used to communicate project outcomes in media such as the SRDC website. It should cover the following:

SRDC commenced funding Grower Group Innovation Projects (GGIPs) in 2005 engaging with Grower Groups, this new funding stream required a higher level of support and management services, than had been traditionally offered by SRDC.

In 2008, after a review of the GGIP program, Grower Group Services (GGS) were formed, successfully applied for SRDC funding, and took over the role of the 3 part time SRDC project officers previously employed.

The four year project titled “Grower Group Network” (GGN) continued the roles as delivered by the Project Officers, but also delivered additional outputs designed to increase SRDC’s return on investment in the GGIP program, and maximise the potential benefits that this exiting funding steam offers the Australian Sugarcane Industry.

The project established a range of new communication pathways to increase awareness and involvement in the GGIP process. These included: contact database for all relevant growers, groups, researchers, industry staff, agribusiness and funding bodies; regional reference panels in each growing region; grower group services web site; e-newsletter; annual trial results booklet; GIVE conferences; twice annual visits to all active and potential grower groups and trial sites; Rise & Shine training for new groups; training and engagement with all industry support staff; personalised support for new and existing groups with project applications, management and reporting; ongoing administration of milestone reports on behalf of SRDC; refinement of the application and reporting processes.

Key outcomes from the project include: continued high levels of support for the GGIP program; increased awareness and interest in the GGIP program; increased capacity of growers that participated in the GGIP program; increased complexity and rigour in the R,D &E undertaken by GGIP’s; over 50% increase in the number of organisations partnering with GGIPs to undertake projects; over 100% increase in the number of support personnel in the industry actively engaging with GGIPs.

This project has increased the level of partnership between industry, agribusiness and grower groups, resulting in higher quality R&D outcomes. These outcomes have been more effectively communicated throughout the industry via the Grower Group Network, contributing to higher rates of practice change and technology adoption, and the capacity of participating grower groups to apply for, undertake and report on complex R&D projects has increased.

Background:

(Including technical information and existing knowledge concerning the problem or research need addressed by the project)

SRDC commenced funding Grower Group Innovation Projects (GGIPs) in 2005 engaging with Grower Groups, this new funding stream required a higher level of support and management services, than had been traditionally offered by SRDC. In acknowledgment of this fact, 3 part time Project Officers were appointed as SRDC internal staff. These project officers provided assistance to Grower Groups with the development of funding proposals, project planning and management, milestone reporting, milestone assessment, and technical issues such as trial design and assessment. In 2008, after a review of the GGIP program, Grower Group Services (GGS) were formed, successfully applied for SRDC funding, and took over the role of the 3 part time SRDC project officers. The four year project titled "Grower Group Network" (GGN) continued the roles as delivered by the Project Officers, but also delivered additional outputs designed to increase SRDC's return on investment in the GGIP program, and maximise the potential benefits that this exiting funding steam offers the Australian Sugarcane Industry.

Objectives:

1. Significantly enhance the existing GGIP program in terms of grower participation, R,D&E outcomes, innovation, capacity building and self sustaining industry partnerships.
2. Establish functioning and self sustaining partnerships with grower groups and agribusiness, R,D&E providers, and other grower groups.
3. Establish a Grower Group Network to make groups more accessible and relevant to researchers, allow for better flow of information and ideas, and allow for joint development of knowledge and practices involved in managing technologies to meet industry challenges.
4. Utilise the Grower Group Network to deliver improved extension of research outcomes, and provide researchers with opportunities for impact well beyond a partnership with just one or two grower groups.
5. Provide coordination, training, and support services to SRDC's Grower Group Innovation Projects (GGIP's).

Methodology:

In order to establish and maintain new communication pathways, GGS:

- Collated a contacts database on: all grower members of grower groups; potential grower members of grower groups; industry and government staff involved in R,D& E; relevant non industry representatives; relevant agribusiness service and banking providers, and alternate funding providers. This database has been used as a tool to expand the impact of GGIP research and attract involvement, funding and support for GGIPs.
- Establish Regional Reference Panels comprised of Grower Group representatives, RD&E representatives, funding body representatives, GGN representatives from other industries, and agribusiness representatives. These reference panels were used to generate more involvement and ownership of the GGIP program, provide regional guidance into the GGIP program and GGN project, and to create networks between industry groups within and across regions.
- Established & maintain the Grower Group Services website - growergroupservices.com.au. The purpose of this site is to offer background information about the GGN project as well as

GGIP's. The site also provides summaries of GGIP activities such as GIVE, Trial Results, and Final Reports.

- Distribute a regular e-newsletter to relevant persons or organisations on our Contacts Database. The e-newsletters are typically brief and provided quick summaries regarding GGIP activities/results/achievements/promotional activities etc. The purpose of the e-newsletter was to keep people regularly informed about GGIP's, without overloading them with pages of information. Using this method people are more likely to read snippets of information to stay informed, and if they required further, more detailed information, they were provided contact details to follow up with.
- Twice a year, GGS conducted visits to each sugar cane region to meet with:
 - GGIP representatives – to support the GGIP's and ensure project activities were progressing, assist with project administration queries, develop networks between GGIP groups (within the same region as well as groups with similar interests across regions), monitor the support person input
 - Regional reference panel members –provide reference panel members the opportunity to provide input and recommendations for improvements to the GGN project, and GGIP process.
 - Support personal –to offer support in regards to facilitation techniques, extension processes, undertaking on-farm trials, and any other assistance we can provide to “support the supporters”
 - Industry and RD&E representatives –researchers, extension officers, agribusiness personnel and industry representatives were provided updates on the results and activities of GGIP's operating within and outside their region.
 - Industry leaders – were regularly visited to promote the success and opportunities for their staff and growers to become involved in GGIP's. In Coutts and Botha review (2008), industry staff cited lack of time, interest and resources as reasons for not being involved in GGIP's.
- Produce and distribute an annual Trials Results Booklet. In the early years this booklet took the form of an A4 brochure, and by the end of the project the 2012 Trail Results Booklet was compact, glossy and professional with advertising space within the booklet sold for the 1st time.

With regards to the expansion and continued success of the GGIP program, a needs and constraints assessment was undertaken across the industry, with the outputs from this assessment guiding and prioritising the project workplan.

All existing industry “support staff” across each region were identified, recorded and formally engaged in the project.

Professionals were engaged to assist with the development of Business Plan for GGS. The purpose of this was to increase GGS' ability to continue to provide support services to grower groups and industry in a future absence of SRDC funding.

A specific effort was made to engage with non traditional R,D & E partners to assist grower groups and the GGIP program. This successful effort saw a greater pool of project partners open up to grower groups, and a series of benefits that stemmed from this more diverse pool of activity.

Throughout the life of the project, GGS continued to provide Milestone Management Services to SRDC. This involved receiving and reviewing all milestone reports from each GGIP. Providing assessment and feedback on each report to the grower group. When the report was ready for submission, GGS then forwarded the report and a formal recommendation to SRDC on whether or not the report should be accepted and the requested payment made. Unlike professional industry research staff, Grower Groups are typically not familiar with processes of formal research, assessment and reporting, as such a high level of support has been required.

To improve GGIP participants understanding of formal research, assessment, reporting, communication requirements, and group processes, GGS ran a “Rise and Shine” training activity at the commencement of each funding cycle. Any group commencing a new project was required to attend.

Throughout the life of this project, the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Grower Innovation Virtual Expo’s (GIVE) have been held. In the 2nd GIVE, GGS was the organising committee and ran the event. For the 3rd and 4th GIVE’s, GGS provided a high level support and coordination to the organising committees.

Like most extension projects, it is not easy to accurately measure the effectiveness of the work that has been completed, however baseline surveys were conducted at the beginning of the project and repeated at the end of the project (a copy of the 2009 and 2012 survey and results provided in Appendix 1 & 2). All relevant stakeholders were involved in the surveys, and the surveys looked at: awareness of the GGIP program; the effectiveness of the GGIP program; interest levels in the GGIP program; capacity of GGIP participants, and the effectiveness of GGS activities.

Relevant data was also recorded, such as; number of support people engaged in the GGIP program, number of non traditional R,D& E providers engaged in the GGIP program, and number of non traditional funding bodies engaged in the GGIP program.

Outputs:

(Including knowledge, skills, processes, practices, products and technology developed)

The outputs produced by this project include:

- Rise & Shine training for each group at the commencement of their project
 - Rise and Shine Induction Manual updated each year to be used by group members as a reference throughout the life of the project
 - Rise and Shine Induction presentations and activities presented during the workshop
 - Project details workplans are also an outcome of the Rise and Shine workshop’s
- Milestone support services provided to groups and SRDC
 - In many cases this involved in-depth involvement and assistance in the actual compilation of the report
- Trail Results Booklets produced in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
- GIVE Mackay 2008, GIVE Ingham 2010, GIVE Yamba 2012
- GGIP milestone proforma modified in 2008 based on the results of the independent Coutts review of the GGIP program, and then further modified in 2012 to better suit current SRDC requirements
- Dedicated GGIP website detailing grower group results, activities, presentations, brochures, media releases, photos etc
- Widely distributed e-newsletter

Intellectual Property and Confidentiality:

(Detail any commercial considerations or discoveries made, and means of protection (eg patents) undertaken or planned. Specify any information that is to be treated as confidential, to whom and for how long.)

NA

Environmental and Social Impacts:

(Including any expected or actual adverse or beneficial environmental or social impacts of conducting the project and/or implementing its findings)

Numerous environmental benefits have been created by the GGIP projects, however the GGN project cannot claim to be responsible for these.

In social terms, the GGN project has assisted a number of grower groups to form and function. We have provided training in group dynamics and processes which has assisted groups to form and function effectively. Many of the groups we have worked with formed at the commencement of their 1st GGIP project. Since then they have gone on to successfully complete numerous GGIP projects and engage in other non SRDC project activities. The effectiveness and potential of grower groups in agriculture is well documented by many, and the GGN project has assisted the development of the grower group movement in the Australian Sugar Industry.

Data collected in our survey showing that 80% - 90% of respondents believe the GGIP process has increased the capacity of participating growers indicates the GGIP process and the work of GGS has contributed to building the capacity of Australian sugar growers.

Expected Outcomes:

(Including assessment of the likely impact for the sugar industry in Australia and elsewhere and where possible the cost and potential benefit to the Australian sugar industry and/or the community. Qualitative and/or quantitative baseline data collected in the early stages of the project and compared with data collected towards the end of the project should be analysed and presented to demonstrate impact, learnings and additional outcomes of the project.)

Results from the surveys can provide some insight into the outcomes from this project.

Key results and discussion from the identical surveys conducted in 2009 and 2012 are listed below.

Full copies of the survey results are attached in Appendix 1 & 2.

- In both surveys, 100% of respondents felt that SRDC should continue to fund GGIPs. This indicates the interest and demand for the GGIP program has not reduced over the life of this project.
- 87% of the respondents in 2009, and 88% in 2012 felt that their understanding and awareness of the GGIP program had increased over the last 12 months. This indicates the extension and awareness activities conducted by GGS is effective
- 78% of respondents in 2009 and 83% of respondents in 2012 felt the GGIPs addressed local R&D priorities. This indicates the selection of GGIP proposals is effective in addressing local R&D issues
- 86% of respondents in 2009 and 83% of respondents in 2012 felt that the GGIPs addressed industry wide R&D issues. This indicates the selection of GGIP proposals is effective in addressing industry wide R&D issues
- 46% of respondents in 2009 and 67% of respondents in 2012 felt that there had been increased interest in growers to participate in the GGIP program. This indicates the efforts of GGS to promote the GGIP program and engage growers is effective.
- 92% of respondents in 2009 and 82% of growers in 2012 felt that participation in the GGIP program had increased the capacity of participating growers. In 2009 3% of respondents disagreed with the above statement. In 2012 0% of respondents disagreed with the above statement. The decrease from 2009 to 2012 was a result of more respondents selecting “not sure”.

- 84% in 2009 and 75% in 2012 felt that GGS had been effective in assisting growers groups apply for, undertake and report on their projects. The decrease from 2009 to 2012 was a result of more respondents selecting “not sure”
- 89% of respondents in 2009 and 77% of respondents in 2012 felt that GGS had been effective in promoting the GGIP program and outcomes

A summary of the above data concludes that a very high percentage of industry believe that GGS has been effective in promoting the GGIP program and its outcomes, while increasing awareness and understanding throughout the industry. The GGIP projects have been effective in addressing both local and industry wide issues, and have grown the capacity of participating growers. GGS has been effective in supporting groups, in terms of proposal development, project management and reporting, and an increasing number of growers are interested in participating in the GGIP program.

Additional communication data collected shows that the GGS web site has been viewed by almost 3500 people since its creation.

Project outcomes

There are a number of very significant GGIP project outcomes that have occurred over the life of the GGN project. These include the development and refinement of numerous improved farming practices delivering profitability and sustainability outcomes, that have been widely adopted by industry post GGIP project for example; Banded mill mud is now widely practiced throughout our industry by both private and commercial applicators, and this was a concept developed and refined in GGP015 - Development of a precision mill mud applicator for a new farming system, conducted by the Maryborough Precision Farming Group

While the GGN project can not specifically claim to be responsible for any of the significant outcomes produced by the Grower Groups, we have in many cases assisted greatly to get these projects initially funded, and then assisted with the management and reporting throughout the lives of these projects, and then continued with the promotion of the project results during our regional visits. The extension of the project results has been a key outcome of GGS activities.

Partnerships

At the commencement of the project we collated the number of organisations that had partnered with GGIPs. In 2009 this number was 30. In 2012 we collated the number of organisations that had partnered with GGIPs, and this number is 46. During the period of the GGN project, the number of organisations that had partnered with GGIPs has increased by more than 50%. It is important to note that many of the organisations that had partnered with GGIPs back in 2009, are still actively involved in GGIPs in 2012. This demonstrates that the pool of partnering organisations is significant and continues to grow. This pool of partnering organisations increase the effectiveness of the R&D conducted, and provides additional resources to the projects, which are both key objectives of the GGN project and delivers increased return on SRDC’s investment.

The scale of project partnering also continues to grow – some key examples of this are GGP044 (Enhancing Nutrient Placement: Sub-surface application of cane specific compost), Advanced Nutrient Solutions group which demonstrate excellent partnering with Reefcatchments, Agri-serve Central and Hodge Industries where a prototype sub-surface applicator was designed, built and tested leading the way in sub-surface application of compost and mill mud in the Australian Sugar Industry. GGP063 (Investigating renewable feedstock’s such as (Hibiscus Canabinues – Kenaf and Crotalaria Juncea – Sunn Hemp) for co-generation at Mackay Sugar Limited) Mackay Fibre Producers which also demonstrates excellent partnering with Bayer Crop Science, Mackay Sugar, Agriserve Central and Sammut Engineering where a co-generation feedstock is being produced and tested as a energy source.

Support personnel.

At the commencement of the project we collated the number of support people that currently are, or had been involved in GGIPs. In 2009 this number was 21. In 2012 we collated the number of support people that currently are or had been involved in GGIPs and the number is 46. During the period of the GGN project, the number of support people involved in GGIPs has more than doubled. It is also important to note, that many of the research, extension or other technical professionals that were supporting projects back in 2009, are still actively involved with new projects in 2012. This demonstrates that the pool of research, development, and extension professionals contributing to GGIPs is significant and continues to grow. This pool of support people increases the effectiveness of the R&D conducted, provides additional resources to the projects, which are both key objectives of the GGN project, and delivers increased return on SRDC's investment.

Future Research Needs:

As proposed in our recently unsuccessful Research Project application, we believe the next step to develop Grower Group research & development in the Australian sugar industry is for Groups to partner with Agribusiness at a higher level than has been achieved thus far. To commence this process and establish this as a regular contributor to R&D in our industry, additional dedicated resources are required in the short term.

The data collected by the project clearly demonstrates that very high percentages of our industry want Grower Groups to continue to have access to project funding, and that the current GGIP model is addressing both local and industry wide R&D priorities.

Recommendations:

(Including activities or other steps to further develop, disseminate or exploit the Project Outputs, and/or to achieve benefits)

GGG has provided recommendations to SRDC throughout the life of the GGN project. A summary of these previous recommendations that are still relevant are provided below.

- Improved communication with GGIP's during the signing of the contract phase is required. This process is typically lengthy and confusing for GGIP participants.
- The GGIP process will continue to require a higher level of service and support than is provided to other research streams, if it is to continue to be effective.
- The GGIP process and associated extension and awareness activities conducted by GGS and SRDC, have been effective in raising the profile of SRDC. In the absence of these services being provided, SRDC will require other efforts to maintain their perceived relevance to the growers
- Consistently the feedback has been that GGIP's allow for locally relevant issues to be addressed, that have otherwise been ignored by traditional R&D providers. At the same time, our feedback concludes the GGIP process has been effective in addressing industry wide priorities. On this basis, and the fact that 100% of respondents in both surveys agree, the recommendation is that the GGIP process should continue to be funded
- While significant increases in the number of support people engaged in the GGIP process has been achieved, there is still insufficient in kind human resources available to support the projects entirely in many regions. Given the GGN project has been effective in increasing the number of support people participating, it is recommended that the processes used by GGS continue to be applied, so that in future, the industry will have adequate support for the GGIP

- The GGIP project call is made during one of the busiest periods for growers. This has consistently been reported as a barrier to project applications being submitted. It is recommended that the project call be moved to a more appropriate time of year. The outcomes from GGIP projects that engage groups from multiple regions have exciting potential. GGS has worked hard to encourage and facilitate these types of projects. We now see projects like “united soybean grower group” that has growers in Central, Herbert and Burdekin, linked with soybean researchers in NSW, UQ university and Toowoomba. The processes used by GGS to support the development of such projects should be continued.
- The working party that assess’ GGIP proposals needs to be effective in distinguishing the difference between grower led GGIP, and researcher led GGIP’s. Grower led GGIPs deliver the higher rates of practice change and adoption that the industry is seeking. Increasingly we are seeing projects disguised as “grower led” when in fact they are researcher led with some grower names attached to the proposal.
- For the more experienced and capable grower groups, the pathway to engage in larger scale projects needs to be clearer. Groups have always had the ability to apply for SRDC R&D project stream, but do not engage in this process, largely due to the complexity and time demands involved in project application. Changes to this system are required to engage these experienced and capable grower groups, otherwise their potential will continue to be lost due to procedural barriers.
- Throughout the life of the GGN project we have had consistent feedback that the reporting process is a barrier to engagement in the GGIP process. SRDC and GGS have made a number of changes to address this, however this process will require continuous refinement and improvement.
- Throughout the life of the GGN project SRDC and GGS have made a number of changes to ensure the research and development conducted in the GGIP process has a high level of scientific rigour. This process will require continuous refinement and improvement.
- The level of scientific rigour produced by the grower groups has clearly increased over the last 4 years and continues to increase. This higher level of rigour comes at higher cost than the work previously conducted with less rigour, however the maximum budget for GGIP’s has not increased to account for this. In some projects this financial restriction will either impede the group’s ability to conduct rigorous R&D, or significantly reduce the scale of activity conducted by the group. Again, the pathway to engage in larger scale projects needs to be clearer.
- GIVE has become one of our industries key extension and training events. All efforts should be made to ensure that GIVE continues into the future using the current successful model that has now been applied in 4 regions.
- Significant administration efficiencies for SRDC, GGS and groups can be achieved with improved selection of milestone criteria. It is recommended that GGS or others in similar role assist the groups to develop their milestone criteria prior to project signing. Currently GGS have no project engagement with groups until their contract is signed, by which time criteria are set.

List of Publications:

(Copies of substantive publications from the project should be included as Appendices. Where the project involves a student and the thesis is relevant to the project this should be referred to in the report and an electronic copy of the thesis sent with the report or as soon as it is available.)

- 1. Trial Results Booklet 2009 (Appendix 3 provided on disc)**
- 2. Trial Results Booklet 2010 (Appendix 4, provided on disc)**
- 3. Trial Results booklet 2011 (Appendix 5, provided on disc)**
- 4. Trial Results booklet 2012 (Appendix 6, provided on disc)**

Appendix 1 – 2009 Survey and responses

Summary of evaluation results

Overall the results from the survey were positive. We received some valuable feedback which we will consider in order to improve our effectiveness over the next 3 years. The main issues we think need highlighting are:

- 100% of respondents indicated that SRDC should continue to fund GGIP's
- Varieties only made up 6% of comments listed as the RD&E priority that GGIPs should focus on in their region into the future. It should also be noted that 75% of those who listed varieties were from the far north.
- 92% of respondents thought the involvement in the GGIP program had increased the capacity of growers
- 89% of people believed that GGS had been effective in promoting the GGIP program and project outcomes
- While the regions are keen to get projects operating (which we observed through regional visits, and through the survey), there seems to be a lack of industry personnel to be able to provide support to the groups. On ground staff numbers have decreased over time due to lack of resources and/or qualified people, and this could potentially threaten the success of the GGIP program. Many groups have overcome this issue by engaging non-traditional sugar industry organisations. During regional visits we came across many potentially beneficial GGIP projects, however most of these will not be submitted due to lack of time and assistance from regional staff. It may be beneficial for SRDC to consider providing extra resources for the regions, to assist with project application completion.
- During the regional visits there was concern that the project call is made during the busiest time of the year. Previously the project call was made in January, which is a quieter time of the year. This then generated issues with the projects starting in July during the crush. If the number of projects submitted decreases, it may be due to this reason, and not due to a lack of interest or lack of valuable ideas.

Survey Background

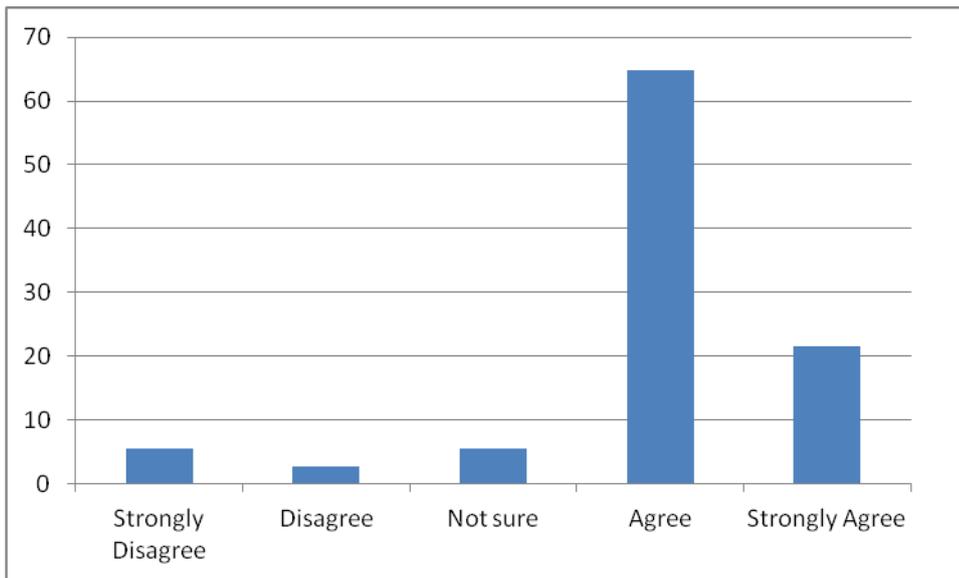
During the regional visits, we conducted industry meetings with growers and industry representatives, and also visited each of the GGIP's to inspect progress. During these meetings and visits, people were asked to complete a survey which evaluated the GGIP program itself, as well as the activities of Grower Group Services.

An email was also sent to all of our contacts asking for them to complete and return the survey. A total of 37 people across the industry returned the survey. The results include qualitative and quantitative responses. The quantitative results are presented as a percentage of the respondents who ticked a certain box, while the qualitative results are presented as a summary of the responses, and also include actual comments.

It should be noted that some of the questions were not applicable to all respondents. There are questions more tailored towards different groups of people within the industry (eg GGIP participants, or support people) and that explains why there are some "Not sure" responses.

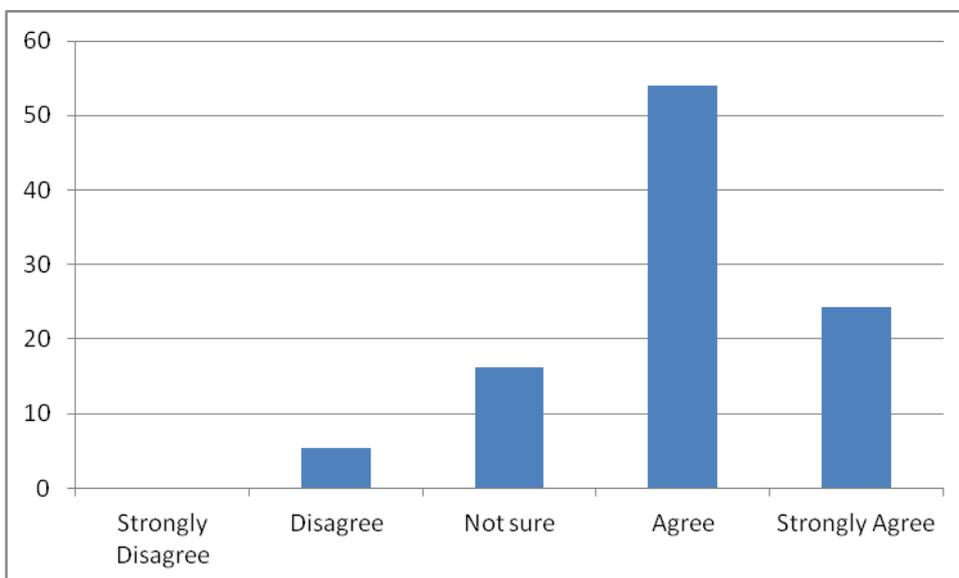
The Quantitative results are as follows:

Q1. My understanding and awareness of the GGIP program increased in the last 12 months

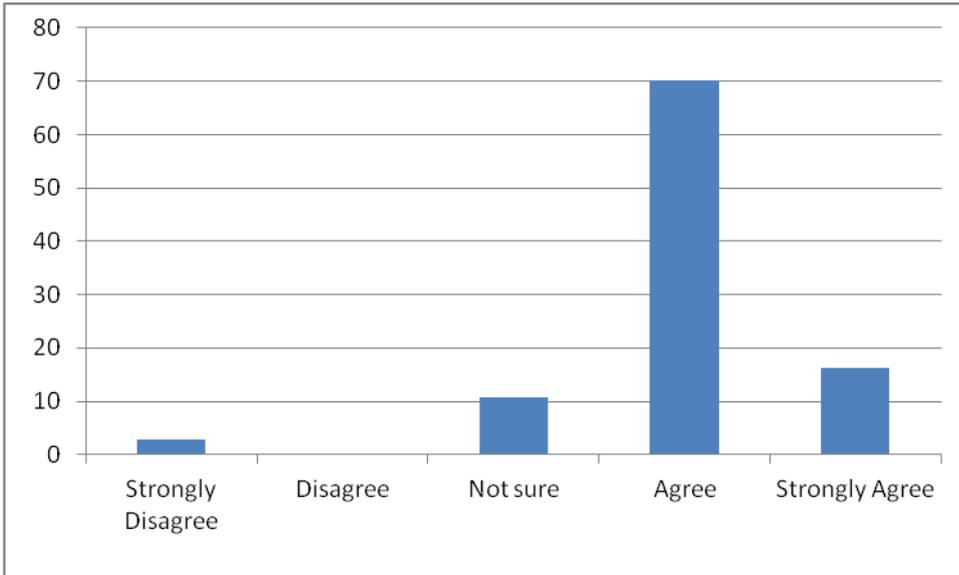


We were surprised to find people who ticked strongly disagree and disagree for this question. We went to the surveys and found that these respondents were people who had been involved with a GGIP project and therefore already had a detailed understanding of the program.

Q2. The GGIP program addressed local R&D priorities in my region

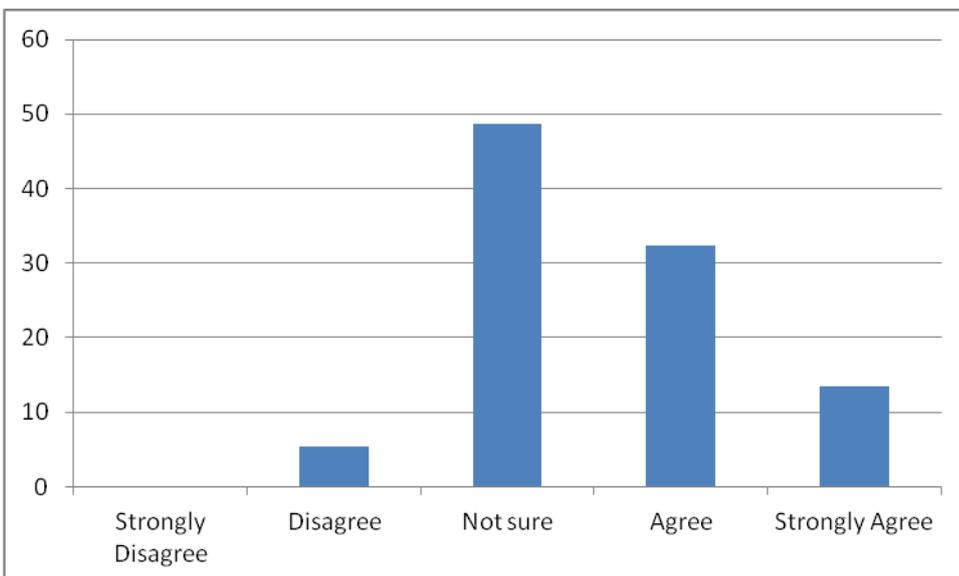


Q3. The GGIP program has addressed industry wide R&D priorities



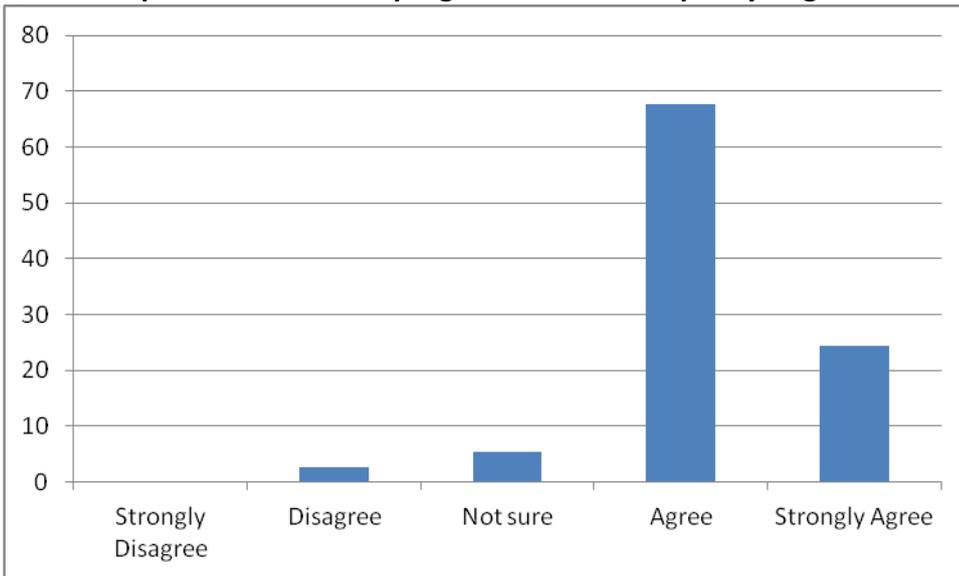
It is encouraging to see that 86% of people either agree or strongly agree

Q4. In the past 12 months has there been more interest from growers to participate in the GGIP program



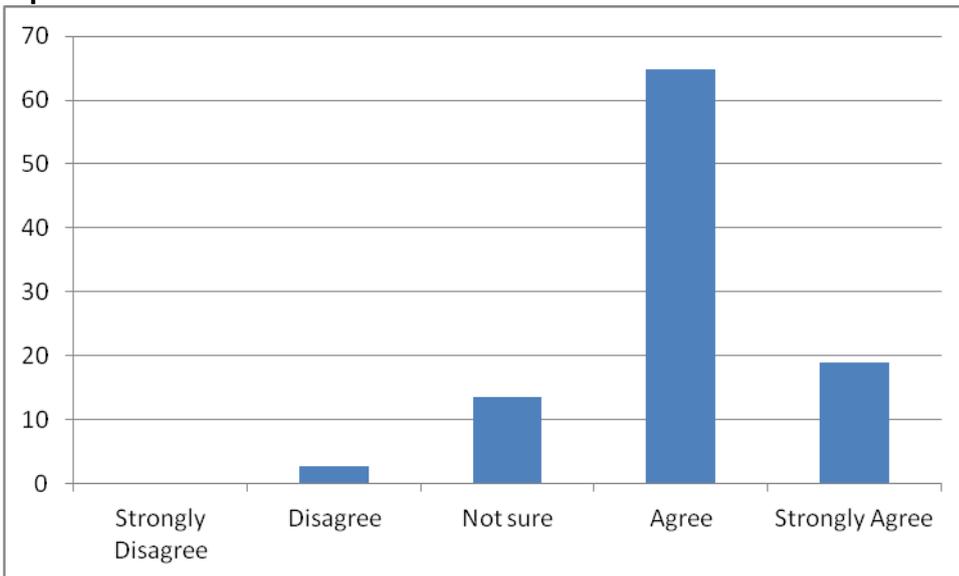
Again we were surprised to get some disagree responses for this question. However, upon further investigation we found that these 2 respondents were from the Mackay region. Mackay has been very successful in the past in regards to getting a large number of GGIP projects funded. There has been a decrease in the number of projects being submitted from this region, which we believe will also be noticeable in this current project call.

Q5. Participation in the GGIP program increased capacity of growers



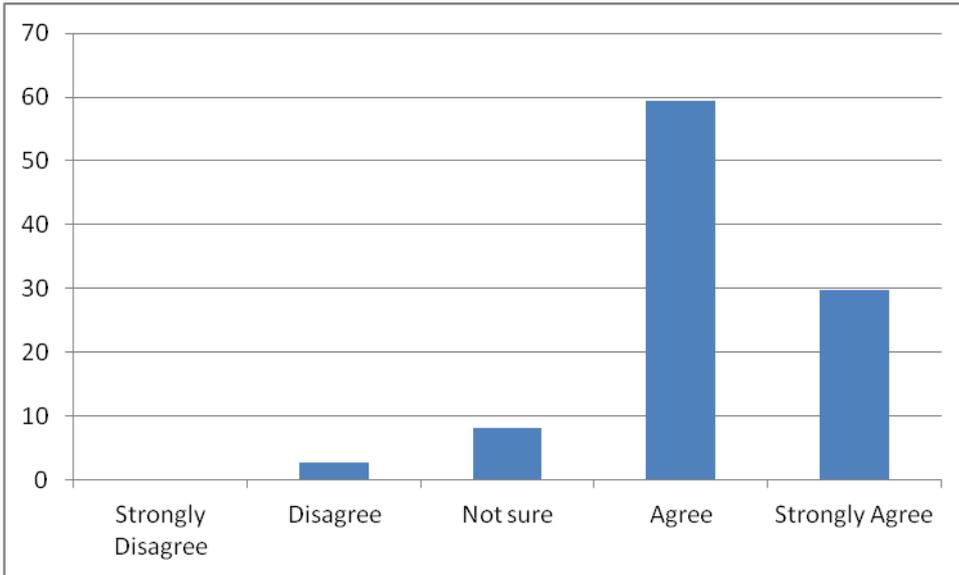
92% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that grower's capacity had increased as a result of being involved in the GGIP program. We had 1 respondent who disagreed, and 2 who were not sure.

Q6. The GGS team have been effective in assisting grower groups to apply for, undertake and report on their GGIP



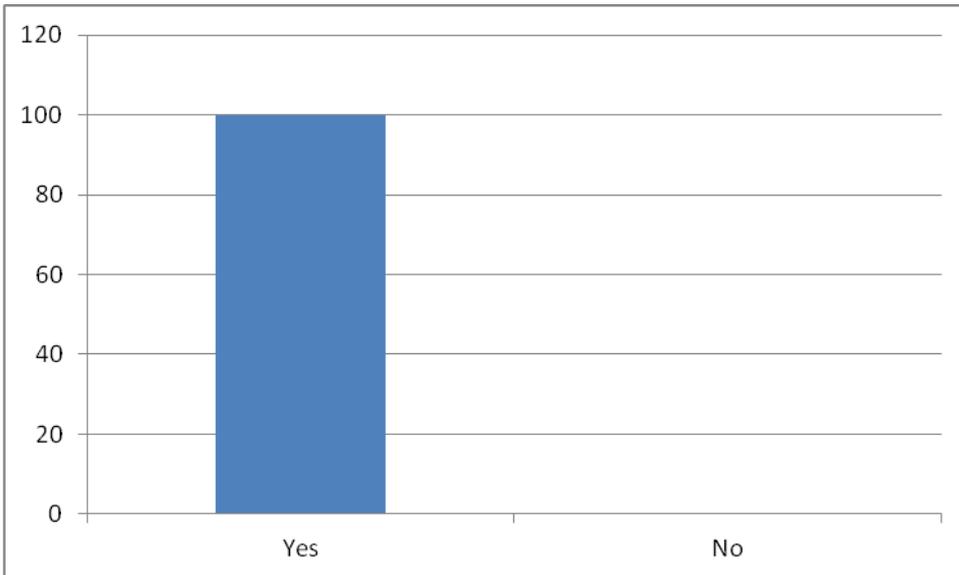
We had 84% of people who agreed or strongly agreed that GGS had been effective, while 1 respondent disagreed.

Q7. The GGS team have been effective in promoting the GGIP program and project outcomes



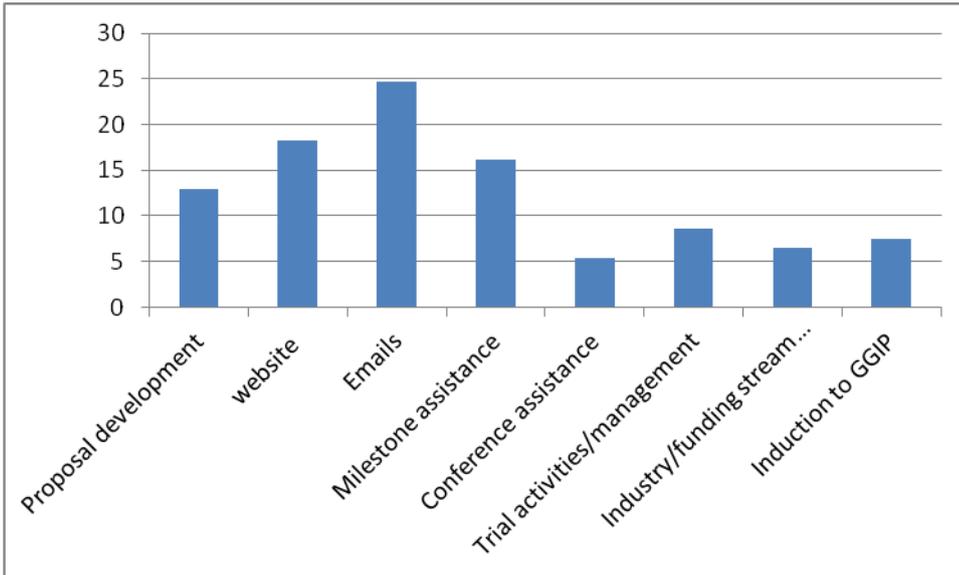
It is encouraging to see that 89% of respondents believe that GGS has been effective in promoting the GGIP program and outcomes. We had 1 person who again disagreed, and 3 who were not sure.

Q10. Should SRDC continue to fund GGIP's



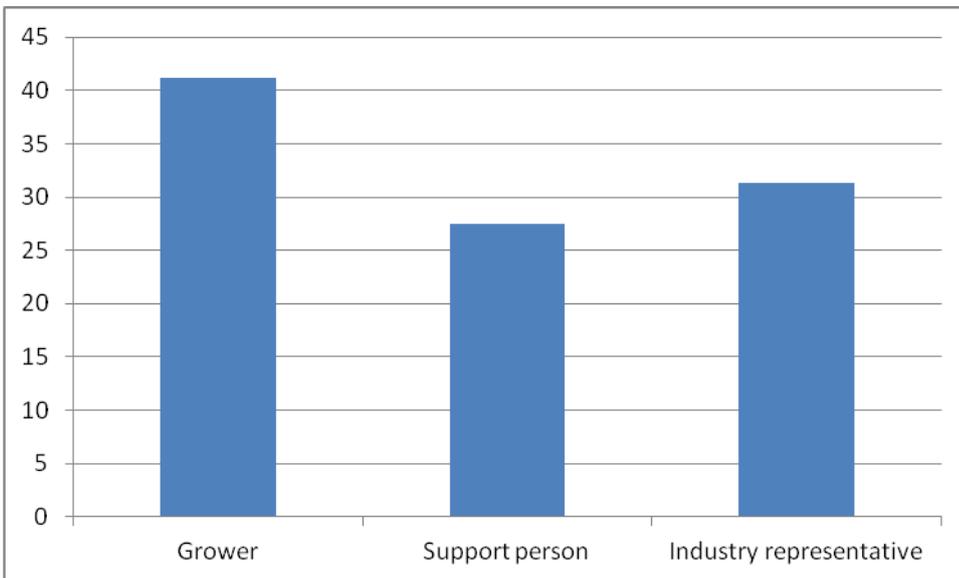
It is encouraging to see that every respondent indicated that SRDC should continue to fund GGIP's.

Q11. What services from the Grower Group Services team do you use?



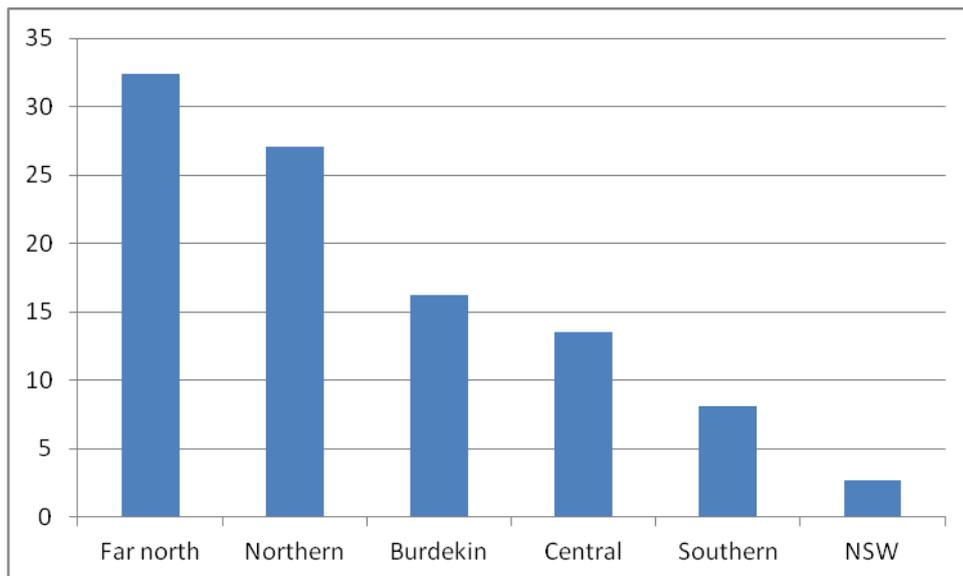
As can be seen there are a variety of services offered by Grower Group Services that are utilised by growers and industry representatives.

Q13. Are you a grower, support person, industry representative?



This result indicates that we were able to get a fairly even distribution of growers, support people and industry representatives to provide feedback on the GGIP program and GGS activities.

Q14. Your region



The Qualitative results are as follows:

Q8. Into the future, what RD&E priorities should GGIPs focus on in your region?

It is interesting to note from the responses below that varieties were not the major issue highlighted. In most regions there was also a focus in refining the new farming system practices. During our regional visits it became apparent that while industry has generally accepted that controlled traffic has proved itself as a more profitable and sustainable system, there are still many regions with very low adoption rates (in particular the Burdekin, Mulgrave, Babinda and Innisfail). Growers are still not convinced of the research because it has not been conducted in their region, or under their different farming conditions. While we agree that more row spacing comparison work should not be funded through the GGIP program, perhaps projects that build on or add value to the work already done in other regions, while still comparing row spacing's should be funded in some regions (certainly not Mackay which already has a high controlled traffic adoption rate).

In all regions the issue of soil health and nutrient management were mentioned. These are obviously very timely topics given current legislative pressure and should perhaps be a focus of current and future project priorities.

Far North

- Composting x 1
- Varieties x 3
 - Variety x row spacing interactions
- Grubs x 2
 - Grub monitoring programs to ensure targeted control measures rather than broad scale treatments.
- Mapping x 1
- Nutrient management x 6
 - Nutrient requirements – what crop needs to maintain productivity according to highland farming; lowland farming; soil type; weather
 - Variable rate soil ameliorants according to soil type and test results
 - Mill mud distribution/application of mud ash x 2
- NFS x 3
 - Weed management and application to NFS

- Improved efficiency – harvesting, planting etc x 1
- Environmental concerns – water quality, run off etc x 1
- Management planning and record keeping
- Biosecurity x 1
- Planting and seed bed preparation x 5
 - Wholestick vs billet planting – effect on germination and crop establishment especially with double disc opener planters
 - Single row controlled traffic farming system in wet tropics
 - 1 metre row spacing and dual row
 - Strip planting

Southern

- Cane grubs – best management control practice
- Cane harvesting – formation and operation of grower cooperatives including other services for members.
- Projects inline with Reef Rescue Funding – Hooded sprayers; Irrigation systems; Controlled Traffic & GPS Guidance
- Legume break cropping systems, infrastructure & machinery – legumes are becoming an integral part of the cane industry
- Continue to develop a plan to take us from plough out cane to soybean or peanut fallow with minimal tillage and effort.

Northern

- Harvesting technologies should be a strong focus of grower groups as there is no longer a harvester manufacturer producing for Australian conditions. Harvester improvements have been fairly static over the last decade with the basic design remaining incorporating bigger components. Perhaps the people using these machines can develop a new concept to suit today's requirements.
- Soil health, balancing nutrition, compaction and microbial activity within the soil. How they all interact is so far open to interpretation
- Nutrient management
- Adding value to our fallows (crop rotations)
- What row spacing's suit which variety, to see that 1.8 or which row spacing suits the most common yield to row spacing, more trials in up to 30 varieties.
- Variety selection
- Measuring profitability
- Precision agricultural practices,
- Variable rate applications
- value adding to the crop,
- Value adding
- Practices that can reduce costs.
- Input recording for Reef Plan
 - Easy record keeping
- Biomass

- Priorities should be focusing on new standards being promoted by State government

Central

- Herbicide options (pre-emergent and post) for legume fallow crops
- The affects of mill mud application on legume nodulation and fixing of atmospheric nitrogen
- Yield response to varying nitrogen rates on plant cane and 1st ratoon; post soybean fallow cropping in different soil types
- Measure the decline in yield of ageing ratoons: by variety and soil type
- The affects of varying degrees of cultivation regimes on water infiltration rates and organic carbon levels by soil type
- If the GGIP programs are to continue they must have a regional focus in line with the priorities as determined by service providers such as BSES or the productivity boards. There are too many examples where funding has been provided to projects that do not align themselves with the regional needs.
- Possible ways to increase soil biology
- Whatever the grower's think is important and is within their capacity to research effectively.
- Fine tuning our new farming systems. Looking for new and innovative ways to make these new systems even more cost effective and sustainable. E.g., how can we source Nitrogen from other sources (bacteria, atmosphere, skip rows, inter-row planting of soybean, etc.) How do we apply products like lime and gypsum and effectively. How do we get the most out of next generation gps units? Improved data logging. And the list goes on.

NSW

For NSW I see the priorities as anything to do with whole cane harvesting, reducing mud in the cane supply, adoption of controlled traffic and anything that saves time on farm work. I suggest you also take guidance from the NSW Sugar Industry R & D committee and the Farming Systems Group.

Burdekin

- Variable rate application (PA adoption)
- Precision agriculture – adoption, use off, economics
- Nutrient application in relation to water quality
- Dealing with issues created by a transition from burnt cane to GCTB – irrigation, harvesting etc
- GCTB systems – heavy ones at that!
- Fine tuning New Farming System – problem etc solving
- Irrigation runoff
- Water holding capacity of soils (still lacking understanding)

Q9. Can you suggest any improvements to the GGIP program

There were a wide variety of issues that people highlighted to improve the GGIP program. We have separated these issues into topics that we can consider/address, and those that SRDC could consider. Response that GGS can address:

- Perhaps some guidelines on data collection eg what to look at/measure when assessing biomass, soil health etc. Remember growers are not scientists
- Involve a wide range of growers in meetings/workshops so that they get to appreciate the complexity of the research procedure and the challenges of securing funds
- Some more focus on getting groups together from separate regions to see firsthand some of the outcomes.
- Grower feedback on trials
- Ensure that trials and demonstration sites have adequate scientific robustness and that trial designs are well planned and implemented. Statistical analysis of collected data is an important component of trials. The projects should be aligned to the R&D priorities established by regional organizations such as BSES and Productivity Services

Responses for SRDC:

- Keep the projects grower based and address the educational level of the grower
- Amount of funding x 5 (Increase)
- I think there should be less emphasis on brand new ideas/practices and more emphasis on helping farmers modify/adapt ideas from other regions.
- Reporting requirements x 8
 - Too complicated and beyond the capability of most growers
 - The reporting is very difficult for some groups and they usually require assistance from extension and technical personnel employed in the area.
 - I feel many growers think about applying for funding and are then discouraged by the amount of paper work involved – make it simpler for growers!
 - timely response to reporting submissions
 - Sometime we seem to overlap on information in some questions.
 - Keep it as simple as possible. I think that insisting on an audit of all projects is going to put people off eventually
 - Keep reports short and concise
- Project timelines – My experience in the past has required some flexibility from SRDC's part for me to meet my milestones due to various reasons. While SRDC was very understanding, I have since refrained from making funding applications due to my inability to meet my obligations. I don't think it is right to begin a project knowing that you are already too busy to do it in a timely manner. Many growers would be like myself thinking that the funding opportunity to do the R & D you want to do is a good thing but then realizing there is also a significant amount of extra work commitment involved. The dedicated industry research people do have an advantage over GGIP in this regard.
 - Maybe more flexibility in project timelines eg same project 1-2 years and same project 4-5 years
 - January or February calling for funds/project applications would be better
- If the GGIP programs are to continue they must have a regional focus in line with the priorities as determined by service providers such as BSES or the productivity boards. There are too many examples where funding has been provided to projects that do not align themselves with the regional needs.

Q12. How could the services of the GGS team be improved?

This next question focused on issues that we could change to improve our effectiveness in supporting the grower groups, and communicating results. Some respondents ticked a topic but did not provide any specific improvement, while others offered ideas/suggestions.

- Proposal development x 4
 - Have a person(s) based in Nth Queensland to cover FNQ, Herbert and Burdekin.
- Website x 3
 - Have links to other sites of interest
- Milestone assistance x 4
- Trial activities/ management x 5
- Industry/funding stream connections x 3
- Emails x 2
- Conference assistance x 1
- Induction to GGIP x 1
- More regional meetings x 1
- More visits (not June to End of August – too busy) x 1

At the end of the survey, respondents were also given the opportunity to make any further comments. All of the comments made are listed below as they were written:

Other comments

- Good approach, keep up the good work
- I have some problem with my funds being used for projects that have no relevance to me
- Technology – bring it on
- We are hoping to advance a project this year which will require us to receive more of the assistance available from the GGS.
- GGIP is an essential program for growers to improve their operations. When a grower group forms, the reward of seeing growers test and try new and innovative operations is truly a joy to watch. GGIP is extremely valuable and should at all costs be supported and expanded.
- We haven't had a lot of direct contact (with GGS) apart from communication, mainly because there aren't many projects in this region
- Keep supporting from SRDC

The reasons why we haven't been involved to date are –

- No one has identified projects to research;
- Growers do not recognize the value of these projects;
- Lacking skill level needed to prepare proposal and application

Have some concerns that GGIPs are often driven by one member of the “group” and other team members have very little input or interest in the work program. It may be worthwhile for each team member to provide a brief report on ;

- How they contributed to the project
- What they learnt from the project
- How they would improve the work plan and design of the project if they were to do it again

Appendix 2 – 2012 Survey and responses

Summary of evaluation results

Overall the results from the survey were positive. We received some valuable feedback which we have included in our recommendations. The main issues we think need highlighting are:

- 100% of respondents indicated that SRDC should continue to fund GGIP's
- 82% of respondents thought the involvement in the GGIP program had increased the capacity of growers
- 77% of people believed that GGS had been effective in promoting the GGIP program and project outcomes, while 88% of respondents indicated that their understanding and awareness of the GGIP program increased in the last 12 months

Survey Background

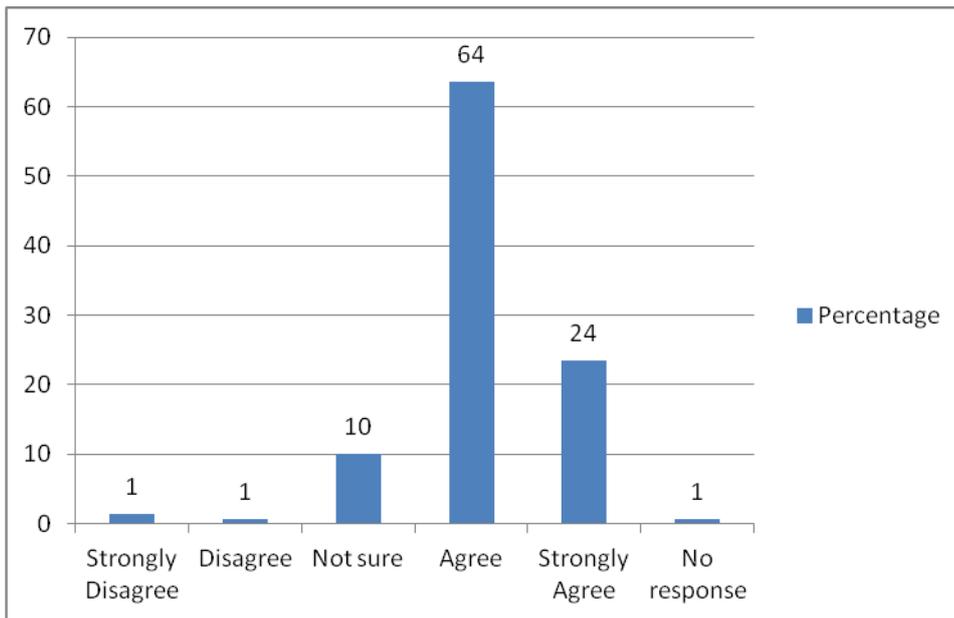
During our regional visits, we conducted industry meetings with growers and industry representatives, and also visited each of the GGIP's to inspect progress. During these meetings and visits, people were asked to complete a survey which evaluated the GGIP program itself, as well as the activities of Grower Group Services.

The survey was also distributed at the 2012 GIVE conference. A total of 140 people across the industry returned the survey. The results include qualitative and quantitative responses. The quantitative results are presented as a percentage of the respondents who ticked a certain box, while the qualitative results are presented as a summary of the responses, and also include actual comments.

It should be noted that some of the questions were not applicable to all respondents. There are questions more tailored towards different groups of people within the industry (eg GGIP participants, or support people) and that explains why there are some "Not sure" responses.

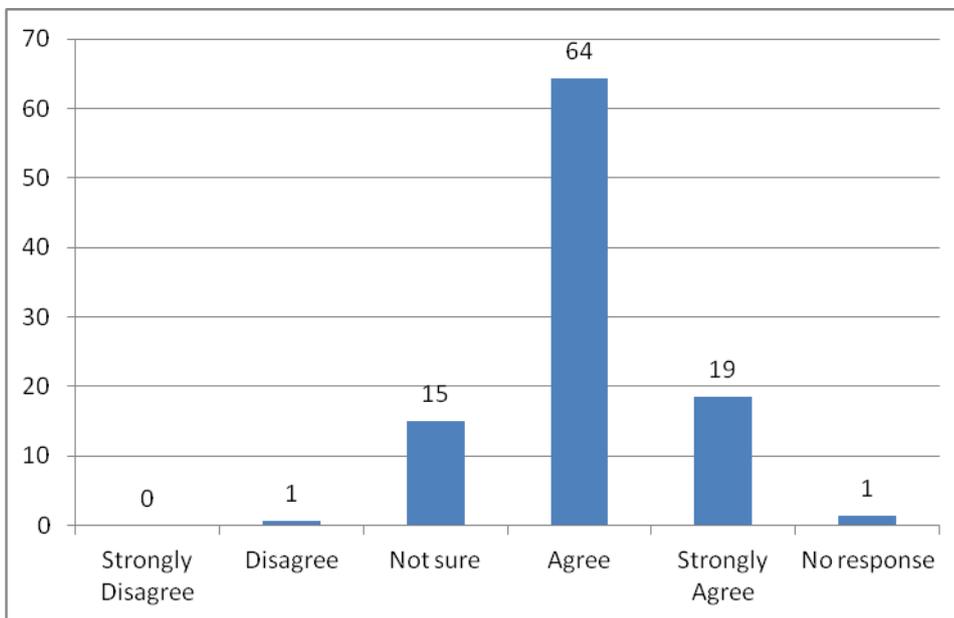
The Quantitative results are as follows:

Q1. My understanding and awareness of the GGIP program increased in the last 12 months

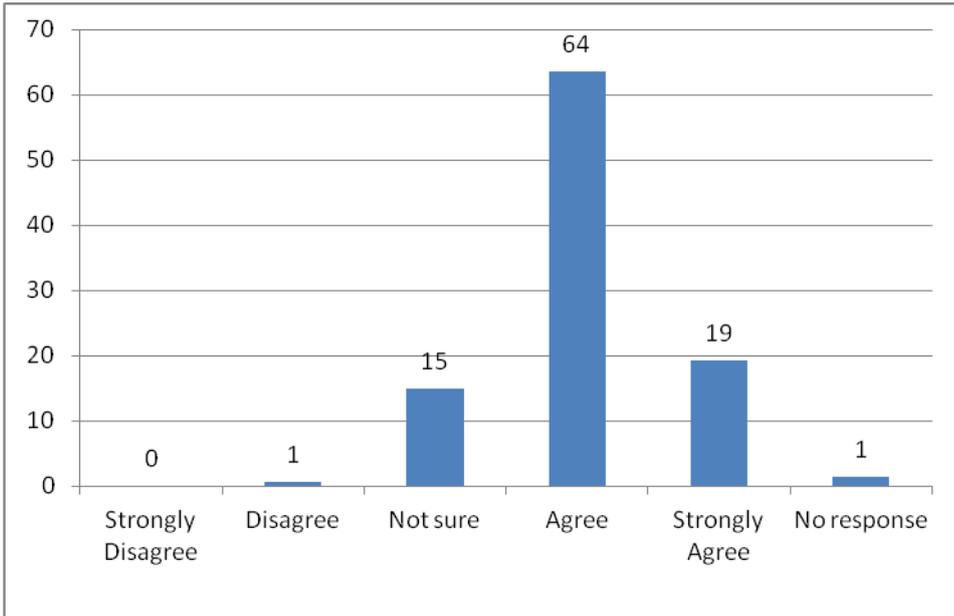


It is positive to see that 88% of respondents selected Agree and Strongly Agree, while only 2% (which is 3 respondents) selected Disagree and Strongly Disagree,

Q2. The GGIP program addressed local R&D priorities in my region

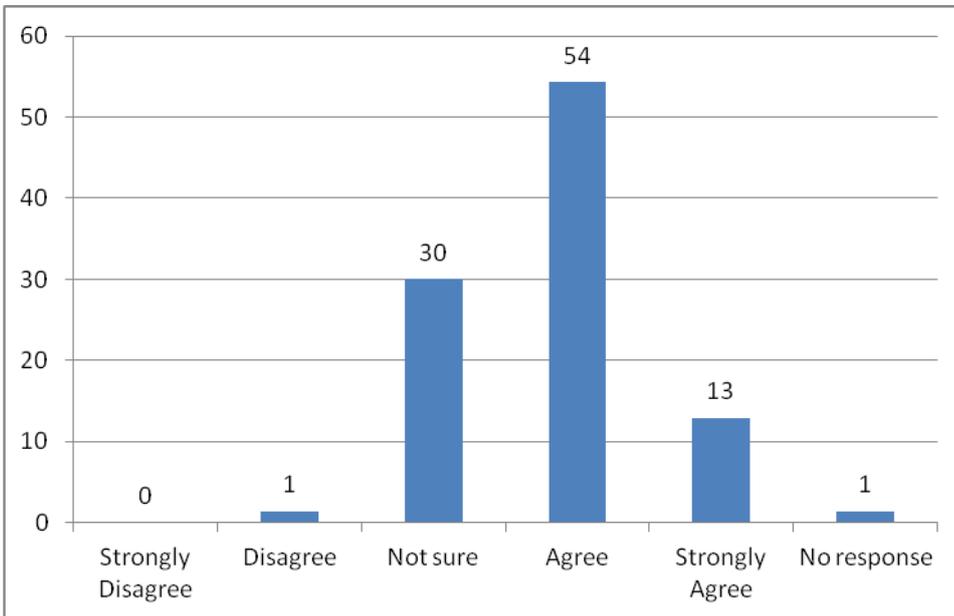


Q3. The GGIP program has addressed industry wide R&D priorities

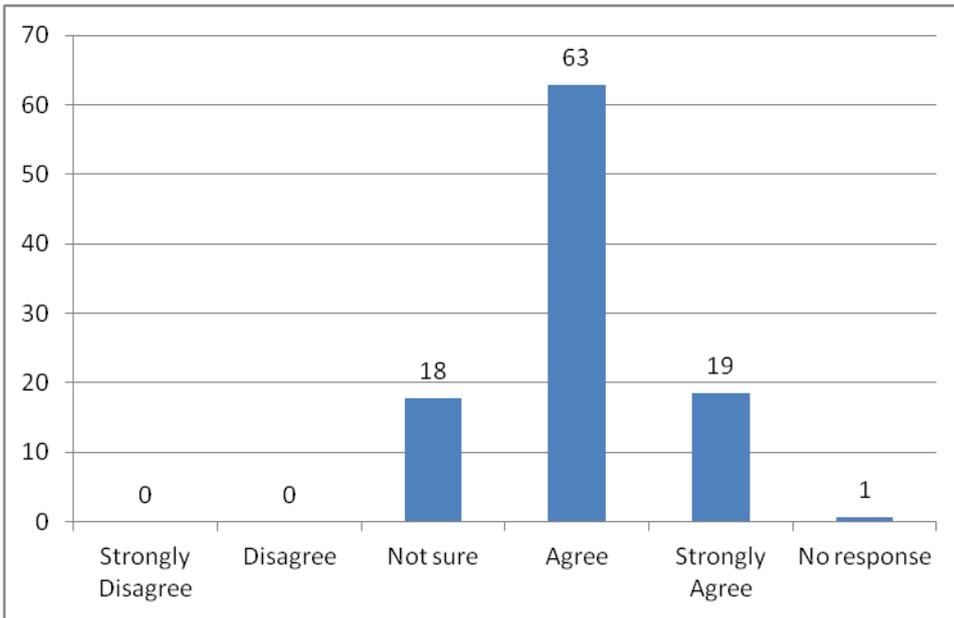


It is encouraging to see that 83% of people either agree or strongly agree that the GGIP program is addressing industry wide R&D priorities, as well as local R&D priorities in their region.

Q4. In the past 12 months has there been more interest from growers to participate in the GGIP program

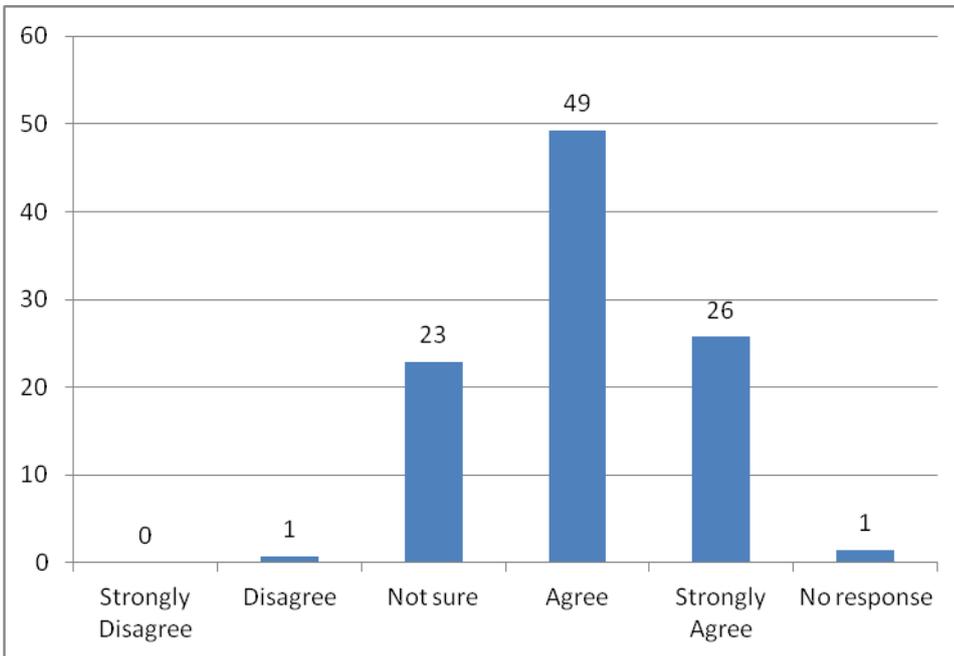


Q5. Participation in the GGIP program increased capacity of growers



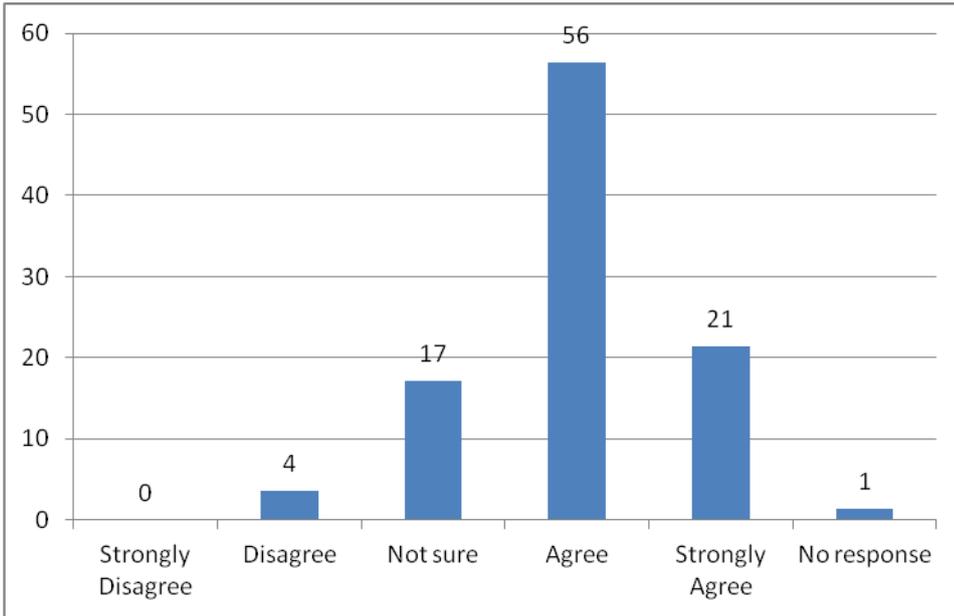
82% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that grower’s capacity had increased as a result of being involved in the GGIP program.

Q6. The GGS team have been effective in assisting grower groups to apply for, undertake and report on their GGIP



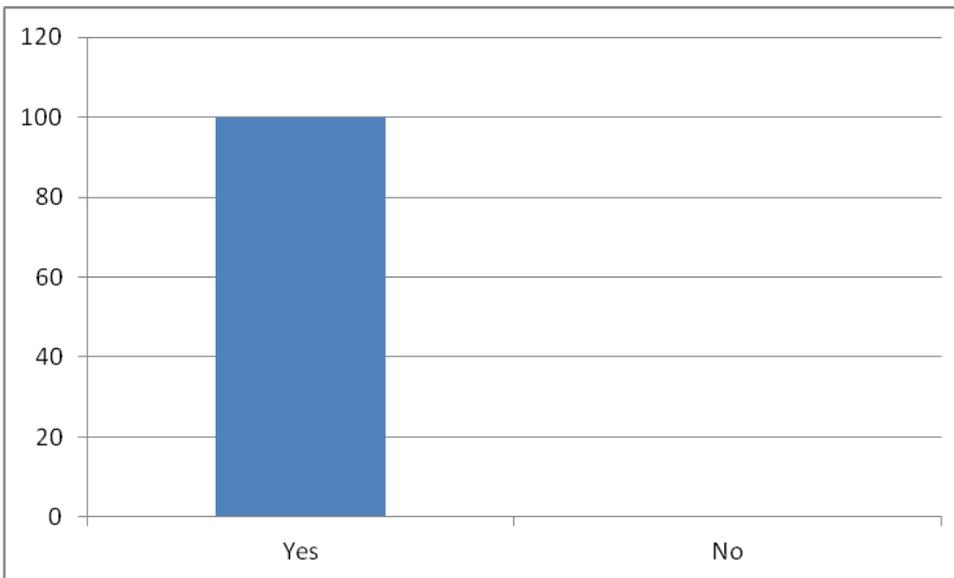
We had 75% of people who agreed or strongly agreed that GGS had been effective, while 1% (which is 1 respondent) disagreed.

Q7. The GGS team have been effective in promoting the GGIP program and project outcomes



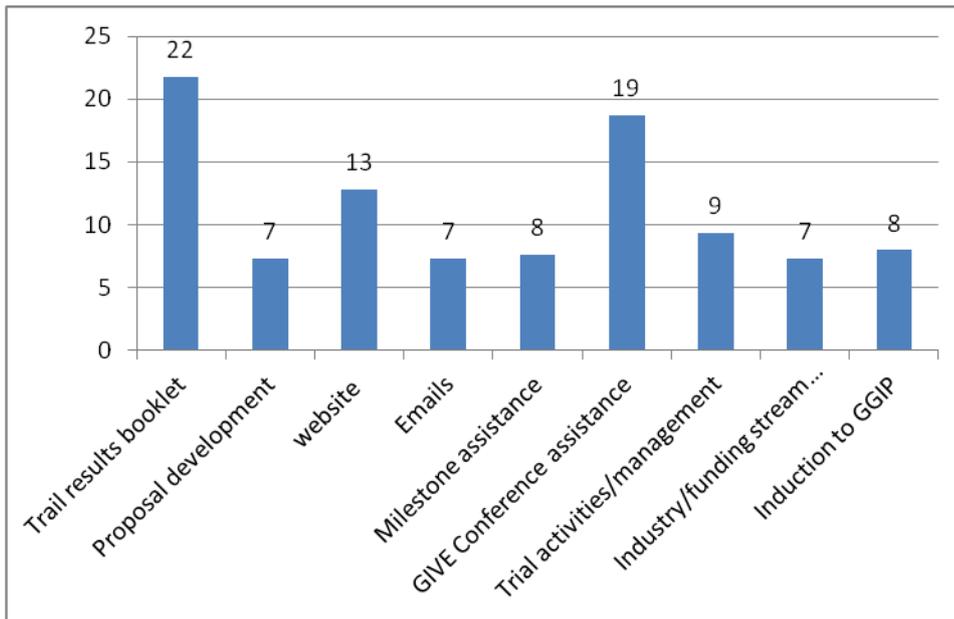
It is encouraging to see that 77% of respondents believe that GGS has been effective in promoting the GGIP program and outcomes. We had 4% who disagreed, and 17% who were not sure.

Q10. Should SRDC continue to fund GGIP's



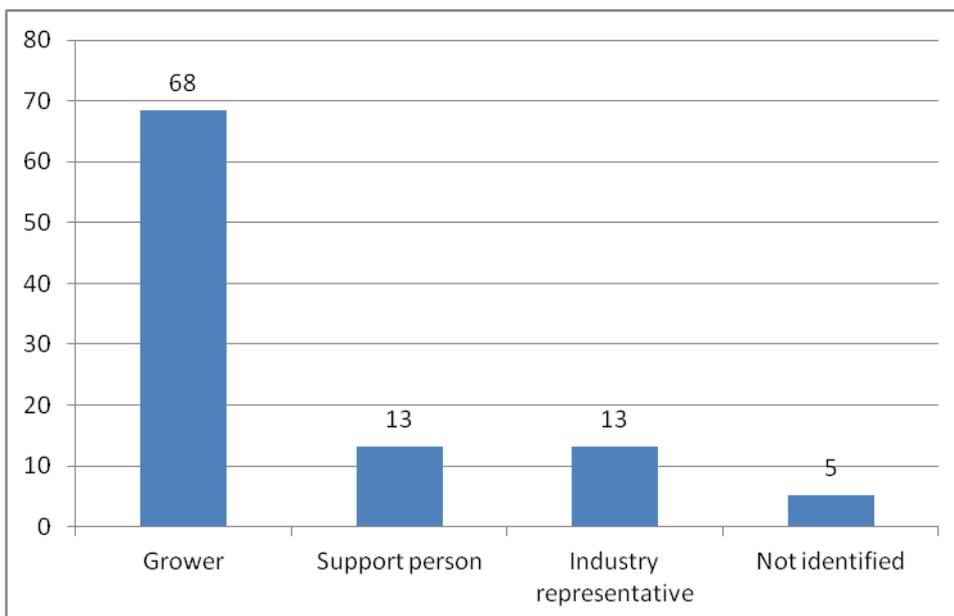
It is encouraging to see that every respondent indicated that SRDC should continue to fund GGIP's.

Q11. What services from the Grower Group Services team do you use?

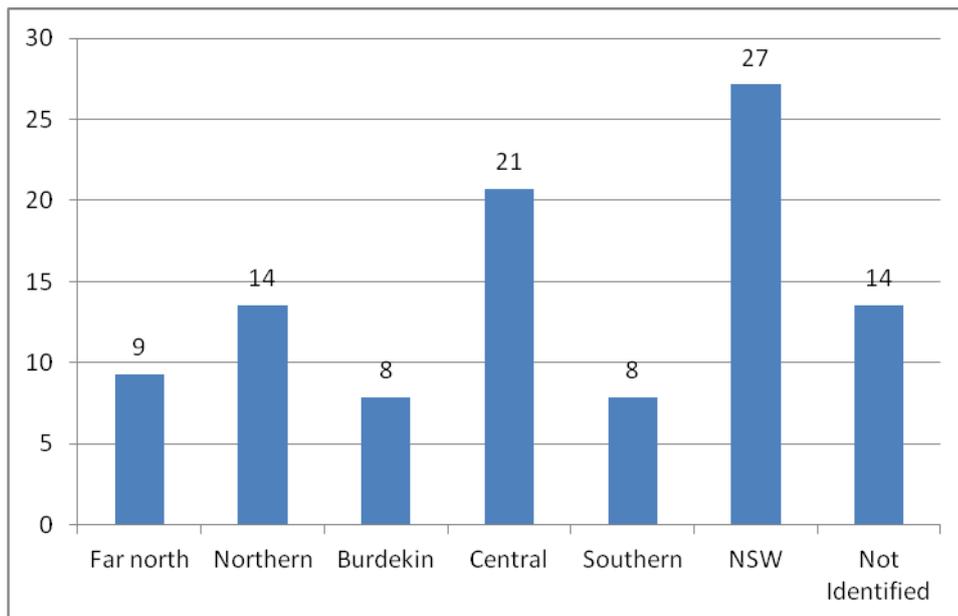


As can be seen there are a variety of services offered by Grower Group Services that are utilised by growers and industry representatives.

Q13. Are you a grower, support person, industry representative?



Q14. Your region



The previous 2 tables indicate that we were able to get a fairly even distribution of growers, support people and industry representatives, from across the regions to provide feedback on the GGIP program and GGS activities.

The Qualitative results are as follows:

Q8. Into the future, what RD&E priorities should GGIPs focus on in your region?

Far North

- Cane varieties.
 - Variety selection
- Sustainability.
 - Sediment runoff improvement.
 - Feral animal control.
- Focus on grower groups and encourage all young growers to get involved in the GIVE conference.
- New Farming System topics
 - Controlled traffic x 2
 - Dual row cane planting, legume crops
 - Alternate crops / fallow crops.
 - Alternative crops in very wet conditions, for rotation.
 - No till planting.
- Irrigation use efficiency.
- Chemical use topics
 - Weed control.
 - Herbicide use / alternatives for reef reg. Chemical restrictions.
 - Precision chemical application.
 - Slow release fertiliser
- The future of energy canes
- Harvest efficiency
- Ethanol focus, like the USA

Southern

- Any agronomy projects, especially machine design.
- Productivity.
- Break crops.
- Vertical expansion.
- Financing irrigation efficiency.
- Harvester group restructuring.
- Fill the gap in extension services.

Northern

- Varieties and e canes.
 - Biomass for NQBE factory.
 - Energy canes.
 - Cane variety.
 - Development of better varieties. Value adding. Focus on profitability.
 - Varieties, energy canes.
 - Bio-energy canes.
 - Varieties including energy canes.
 - Energy canes. Better varieties.
- Yield decline joint venture principles – people are scared of change in our district. Need evidence and re-assurance.
- Slow release fertiliser.
- Variable rate lime and other nutrient sources.
- Value adding
- Next generation of farmers
- Herbert – IWM – Young Farmers.
- In supporting any projects that will deliver good outcomes to whole of industry.

Central

- Chemical use. Reductions imposed by reef regulations means moving to unknown herbicides.
- The effect of our new chemicals in the cane e.g.: soccer & balance. Effect of round up in shields.
- Chemical applications.
- Yield improvements through variety selection and fertilizer application.
- Diversification.
- Fine tuning the control traffic reduced tillage system.
- PA farming systems.
- Machinery innovations.
- Various farming systems that other industries may use.
- More new varieties.
- Cane varieties.
- Varieties.

- It's up to the farmers whatever it is they have issues with. It seems a lot of agronomy trials have been looked at, what about breeding/variety projects. Is there no support from research for such projects? It seems to be a talked about PROBLEM, but not many/no GGIP's in this area.
- Cane varieties.
- Harvesting.
- Continue to gain efficient and effective harvesting and planting systems.
- Harvesting issues e.g. sugar losses. Irrigation issues e.g. increasing use of allocation (economics of water use).
- Harvesting - business cases.
- Carbon incentives.
- Pest management.
- Cane grubs.

NSW

- Nutrient use efficiently. Slow release N.
- Soil agronomy and how to repair sodic soils. How to move away from more conventional fertilizers to organic.
- Varieties
- Area specific varieties.
- Variety research.
- Promoting breeding disease resistant canes.
- Energy canes.
- Energy cane and ethanol.
- Frosting
- Improved frost and cold resistance – linked with strategic research.
- Frost problems in particular.
- Flood resistant cane varieties.
- Whole crop harvesting. Harvester / harvesting education – formal education requirements.
- Whole crop harvesting and trash management.
- Whole crop harvesting and transport bed planting.
- Double row harvesting / planting. Whole of crop harvesting.
- Cane compacting in harvest to mill transport.
- Cane loss at harvest – ground job. Not extractor loss. Harvester speed/throughput.
- Co-gen with green harvesting.
- Best harvesting practice and better weed control.
- Harvester Group Amalgamation.
- Renew bed profile after harvest.
- Sustainability.
- Growing cane.
- More planting research. Plant cane from seed.
- Whole crop processing. Harvesting. Milling.
- Crop rotation

- Composting.
- Need to go to growers who have different farrowing systems e.g. do not mount plant and why.
- Climate change and impacts on crop viability. Carbon credits.
- Yield forecasting models. Crop water use productivity. Plant health and growth through (evopotranspiration) monitoring.
- Pachymetra – include any relationship between no till and conventional cultivation.
- Soil health and nutrition. Pest and disease on particular varieties.
- Weed control activities – improve methods.
- Need more time to answer this question.

Burdekin

- Mill mud.
- Irrigation scheduling.
- Yes and look at new ideas, e.g.: bio char, alternative products.
- Harvester group power generation (Rotary Kiln).
- Zonal tillage.
- Energy and carbon issues
- More precision Ag.
- Land mapping.
- Nutrient management.
- Yield mapping.

Q9. Can you suggest any improvements to the GGIP program?

There were a wide variety of issues that people highlighted to improve the GGIP program. We have separated these issues into topics that we can consider/address, and those that SRDC could consider.

Response that GGS can address:

- Website.
- Better supply of info and results.
- Get more groups working together.
- More regional presentations like today's.
- Visit each district prior to call for projects.
- More assistance in putting together proposals for projects.

Responses for SRDC:

- More of SRDC budget to this program.
- More emphasis on harvesting needed.
- Wider appreciation of priorities' in areas (districts) not frequented by existing staff.
- Need millers to attend GIVE
- Get all capacity projects to show/present their experience and knowledge (travel and learning). Travel and learning best experience.
- Small gathering in districts between GIVE conferences.
- Make Ag politicians understand the benefits of the program.

- Promotion and understanding of the program. Build collaboration between commercial organisations within and outside of Australia.
- Ensure it continues and maintain the funds for new innovation.
- Easier Milestone reports.
- Further research on local sites more relevant to local areas.
- Bring growers from other sugar cane areas from around the world to speak on their systems and constraints.
- Must be careful not to fund projects that will infringe on already existing patented devices or ideas. This will give all parties a bad name once these infringements are dragged through legal proceedings.
- More feedback on project proposals.
- Visits to new farming areas. Access carbon levels and check draw down on soil carbon.
- Maybe better links with strategic R&D. I think GGIP and strategic R&D could work better together.

Other comments:

- On the right track.
- Works well as it stands.
- I think the program is already changing to being a further support to Growers Projects.
- All good.
- Keep it going.

Q12. How could the services of the GGS team be improved?

This next question focused on issues that we could change to improve our effectiveness in supporting the grower groups, and communicating results. Some respondents ticked a topic but did not provide any specific improvement, while others offered ideas/suggestions. It is encouraging to see the amount of positive comments here. Many of the suggested improvements involve doing more of what we currently do eg more results booklets, more regional visits. This at least indicates we are on the right track, and with more resources available to us, more of this work could be done.

- Tops.
- No comment required.
- All good.
- Website improvement. Facebook forum. Annual get together.
- Ensure people are there to visit farmers and maintain good communication.
- More booklets.
- Everything fine.
- All good.
- Access to the results of the groups.
- Writing applications.
- More visits. More communication to help uptake.
- Got it running smoothly now, so no suggestions.
- To me it is fairly good services.
- Getting to all growers regardless of lobby group membership.
- Linking growers with similar interests via email (email roster).

- Job well done.
- Probably things need more explaining of how they got to their ideas “centre pivot water saving”.
- Trial result booklet and website.
- Proposal development, website and emails.
- Proposal development.
- Proposal development, website and emails.
- Trial results booklet.
- Emails, milestone assistance, conference assistance and trial activities/management.

At the end of the survey, respondents were also given the opportunity to make any further comments. All of the comments made are listed below as they were written:

Other comments

- Go the “Falcon”.
- Keep up the good work.
- Well done, good job.
- Continue with the program. This program is really driving innovation.
- You are going in the right direction.
- I have gained very important information from this expo.
- It would be great if farmers could buy the equipment to enable them to move forward in adapting some of their practices. They haven’t seen any real money since year 2000. Making people aware, education in schools of the role of agriculture in today’s society. Focus on increasing profit margins enabling farmers to have a better future. Going to Govt and lobbying about the value of agriculture and stopping poor policies harming farmers.
- Look at any sugar cane failures. Look to move forward efficiently for small growers incentive and new grower funding. Shall return, enjoyed the program and presentations. Thank you.
- Good conference.
- Good effort in organising and running GIVE.
- Regional micro politics has reduced the GGS services team ability to stay in contact with all growers.
- As a new grower in the industry some questions not answered. But will be taking more of an interest through internet and also the groups and people we have met through this conference.
- I have been involved with a couple of projects and have always found GGS to be very helpful and efficient.