SRDC Research Project Final Report

Title of the Project:	Farm Management Systems for the Sugar Cane Industry, Sub-program 4: Options for auditing and certification of FMS
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Name(s) of the Research Organisation(s):	Agricultural Reconnaissance Technologies Pty Ltd, Trading as AGRECON
Principal Investigator's name(s), contact phone number, address and Email address:	Mr Don Chambers Ph: (08) 8370 1000 C4ES PO Box 32 Aldgate SA 5154 don@c4es.com.au Mr Simon Holloway Ph: (02) 6201 2552 Agrecon 170 Haydon Dr Bruce ACT 2617 simonh@agrecon.canberra.edu.au

The Farm Management System (FMS) Framework program is managed by the Sugar Research and Development Corporation (SRDC) on behalf of the Australian sugarcane industry. Funding is provided from the Natural Heritage Trust. *The Australian Government's $3 billion Natural Heritage Trust is Australia's largest ever environmental rescue package.*

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Executive Summary:

Key stakeholders within the sugar industry, surrounding community and Government are concerned over the potential impact of sugar production on the environment in general and the highly sensitive world heritage listed neighbouring ecosystems in particular. An increasing number of growers are responding by upgrading management practices and seeking relevant training opportunities.

An industry wide system for certification, accreditation and auditing of farmers and properties would add value to individual enterprises, demonstrate stewardship, raise the industry profile, reduce community concern, attract project related grant support, win financial rewards from banks, insurance companies and regulators and bestow advantages within niche markets for environmentally sustainable high quality products.

This project reviewed approaches, systems and implementation options for certification, accreditation and auditing across a range of other industries. We reviewed documents and held wide ranging discussions with other industry sectors as well as sugar industry, government and community representatives.

Having regard to the unique circumstances and diversity of regional environments across the industry, we favour a structured though flexible auditing and accreditation system. This would accommodate industry wide consensus in favour of voluntary compliance and ensure that Sugar FMS programs deliver outcomes that are accountable and responsive to community demands.

Our proposal includes:

- Definition of a standardised process
- Four alternative modes for assessing management practices and performance of individual growers
- A three-tiered audit structure
- Consideration of other issues

The absence of industry wide benchmarks and the industry's regional focus enhances the merits and applicability of a "Champion", mentoring or peer group assessment of individual grower performance, since this focuses on the value proposition of FMS at individual enterprise scale. It is equally important that the value proposition benefits are not achieved at the expense of ensuring compliance with accepted industry wide management practice standards and outcomes.

Our preferred mode of performance assessment is reflected in our case study approach to training through a regional delivery program. Our revised training proposals include detailed case studies of growers in each region to provide options appropriate to the circumstances of any region, group or individual grower.

We have given due consideration to underlying concerns over the traditional structured, systems-based approach that has surfaced during our review of alternative approaches promulgated by government agencies and other industries and.

The process of linking FMS to narrowly focused EMS frameworks runs the risk of FMS being regarded by growers as just another stand alone system that offers little of productive value at grower and farm level and falls well short of providing the industry with a broadly based, integrated information system to underpin sustainability.

Our proposed approach as described on the Sugar FMS Tools website (www.srdc.gov.au) will be reviewed in conjunction with regional FMS training programs to determine the feasibility of implementation.

Outputs from this sub-project include:

- A Sugar FMS auditing and accreditation proposal built around a conventional though flexible system-based approach
- Due recognition that the industry is far from ready for a full-blown certified and auditable process based system
- A set of guidelines regarding accreditation and compliance options that appear to favour a "Champion", mentoring or peer group assessment mode of an individual grower's performance since this will focus on the value proposition of FMS at the individual enterprise scale
- A regionally focused approach to training using restructured FMS materials supplemented by selected case studies that is highly compatible with these accreditation proposals, the regional emphasis and circumstances of the industry at this juncture
- A process that recognises the existing state of confusion and lack of consensus across the industry over the role, scope and focus of FMS and the appropriate approach to performance assessment. This process will facilitate ongoing feedback regarding these issues through broad based industry wide consultation, FMS forums and subsequent training activities
- A mechanism to facilitate expression of preferences by various industry sectors and stakeholders, to harness that expression and provide direction through industry based leadership along the path of stewardship to sustainability of natural resources through a broadly based and well integrated data acquisition, reporting and assessment system
- A discussion paper that raises a long term alternative and more innovative approach for the industry at the appropriate time.

Once the preferred system is agreed upon by the industry there should be reasonable adoption levels by growers if they are convinced of the value proposition of FMS, that best management practices are beneficial rather than an added burden on their enterprises and that assessment, evaluation, accreditation and auditing it is not too difficult or too expensive to implement.

The industry has an opportunity to develop a unique and worlds best practice management system that would link properties, farmers and processors within a whole of industry framework and provide a platform for production, economic, social and environmental sustainability across the industry.

Background:

Demonstration of sustainable farming is clearly becoming essential to maintain and improve access to input products, resources, services and markets. This is confirmed by an increasing shift from production incentives to environmental incentives from funding and subsidy strategies, reflecting the change to this approach by governments and regulatory authorities.

This change has brought with it the development of means of assessment, audit and verification which range from informal assessments on a local scale, to formally assessed, national and internationally accredited systems such as the ISO 14000 series of standards.

In Australia, considerable effort is currently being directed at developing ways in which to demonstrate sustainable use of natural resources in Australian agriculture. The "Pathways to EMS"

funding has encouraged work in this area, although it has focused all attention and direction on a system-based approach.

A major weakness of these approaches (including ISO-accredited systems) is that accreditation and audit with subsequent certification is ***of the system itself and not of the effectiveness of the system in improving sustainability***. Recent assessments have shown little evidence of improvements in sustainability in even formally-accredited and externally audited systems (Australian Productivity Commission 2002).

Many of these approaches are being developed to define and implement EMS, FMS, Environmental Indicators and Best Practice Management of natural resources, but not all frameworks require consideration of on-ground practices in any real terms of "impact."

Other options for certification mechanisms are Codes of Practice, Management Practices, Product Certifications, Education and Training and Government Regulations.

However, few accreditable guidelines are being developed to ensure consistency with sustainability outcomes at the level that has the most actual effect – the farm business.

The Safe Quality Food (SQF) program has attempted to do this and now has a number of voluntary options for matters in addition to food safety and quality, including Worker Welfare, Environment, Animal Care and Food Security, but again falls short of sustainability.

The Sugar industry now has a unique opportunity to consider, develop and implement a consistent and verifiable mechanism for certification that promotes the viable production of sugarcane and the sugar products, based on credible sustainability principles. The most widely accepted approach to this is based on 'triple bottom line' (TBL) reporting.

Objectives:

The aim of the first 3 FMS subprograms is to provide sufficient tools and skills to growers to assist in implementing the FMS. This subprogram aimed to evaluate the overall success of the program by providing easy to use auditing guidelines and tools. This would have been acceptable if the industry wanted to proceed with an EMS, however, they wanted an FMS which contained much more than just the EMS components.

The research also showed that the industry was not ready for this nor was there any consensus on which of the approaches was preferred - to develop something based on a system alone would in fact not deliver something the industry would use.

In addition, the research found that the industry would benefit greatly from firstly identifying the most acceptable and beneficial approach and from there revisit the indicators required and then the tools needed to support the various industry sectors.

Methodology:

This project considered the certification process that would allow assessments and auditing of growers and properties in a responsible and acceptable manner to develop an Environmental Policy and be incorporated into a Whole of Industry Environmental Framework. However, in addition this project explored the options available to demonstrate sustainability, which was a preferred outcome based on industry consultations.

The sustainability approach was of direct benefit to the growers and industry as well as providing growers and the industry the ability to demonstrate environmental stewardship, whereas the system based approach was limited in benefits to the farmer.

The first step was a review of the various frameworks developed and identified by NSW Department of Agriculture, CANEGROWERS and Queensland Farmers Federation, plus the variations of accreditation and auditing already existing in the sugar industry.

The Process Based Systems such as Australian Landcare Management System (ALMS), Agricultural and Environmental Management Systems (AEMS), ISO14001, ISO9000, ISO22000, AS4804 as well as Great Grain, Grapes to Glass and the Australian Pork Industry Quality Program were considered.

In addition to the above we looked at Codes of Practice based systems, a number of the 'CARE' programs, as well as the Cotton Industry of Australia 'BMP program', Stockfeed Manufacturers Association 'Feed Safe', EurepGAP and Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Point program (HACCP).

Product Certification programs were also reviewed as well as Training and Education, particularly the Irrigation Industry Association Certification program.

Following the review of the various systems and approaches the industry based programs (COMPASS, LWMP's, Chemcert and the many other industry courses and initiatives) were considered in relation to how they could be integrated and used as an integral part of any Certification scheme.

Outputs:

The main Outputs from this project are as follows:

- A Sugar FMS auditing and accreditation proposal in the form of a more usual system-based approach (Attachment A). NB. This is the process on the Sugar FMS Tools on-line (www.srdc.gov.au) but for the reasons discussed above, it could be replaced with a process more appropriate for the sugar industry.
- The realisation that the industry is far from ready for a certified and auditable process based system, and to base an accreditation system on a process does little to encourage implementation of best management practices needed to farm in a sustainable manner
- The understanding that there is confusion and certainly no consensus on the preferred approach, however, there has been feedback and support for various inclusions or considerations
- The conclusion that there is benefit in understanding and developing an approach that will satisfy the various industry sectors as well as providing direction and leadership for the whole of industry through stewardship of the natural resources and a balanced reporting system.
- A discussion paper titled "Sustainable Sugar" reviewing the issues and providing innovative recommendations on the way forward for the sugar industry (Attachment B)

An auditing and accreditation proposal in the form of a more usual system-based approach was developed for the Sugar FMS program and is provided in Attachment A. The proposal includes

- the process to be undertaken by growers using the Sugar FMS program tools
- four levels of adoption that can be achieved by growers
- a three-tiered audit structure

- some industry issues that need to be addressed

The proposed approach is being reviewed as part of the ongoing FMS regional training program to determine the feasibility of its implementation.

The research also identified that a sustainable accreditation program may provide more benefits to the industry as it matures and comes closer to the market. The sustainability approach would be linked directly to a standard set of indicators which in turn could be used to reward farmers who are farming responsibly and improving their practices.

The sustainability approach would provide benefits in 3 major ways:

- Assuring the farmer they are managing their farm business, producing their goods and managing the natural and human resources in the best possible way
- Assuring the consumer that the goods were produced with agreed sustainable principles
- Assuring the public and regulators that the industry is fulfilling its duty of care

Based on feedback from the growers and discussions with other industry sectors there appeared an opportunity to integrate all sectors for overall whole of industry benefits.

There were a number of key principles identified upon which the system would be based, including:

- industry participation at all levels, including system development with linkages to existing farm and industry initiatives as well as potential ones
- sustainability as a process of ongoing improvement, based on best farm management and processing principles
- performance standards and targets relevant to the farm and process businesses
- alignment with existing industry, regulatory and quality assurance schemes
- initial standards and assessments would be set for major farm management and processing issues with practical, flexible and realistic transaction costs
- a phased and tiered approach where the operator is able to control the level of adoption

TBL reporting systems track performance in a more balanced manner, addressing the growing view that environmental and social issues are equally as important as financial returns in assessing the impacts and returns from farming and production enterprises but allowing the industry to keep them all in perspective.

TBL is reported against practical indicators operating at farm scale in order to allow impacts to be assessed at a property level and comparisons made between farms, regions or catchment areas.

These indicators could be used to:

1. Focus the industry on sustainability priorities rather than compliance with systems;
2. Establish the basis for targets and goals in all 3 areas of TBL reporting;
3. Manage and evaluate the outcomes and impacts of management practices; and
4. Report performance at the farm, region or industry level.

Indicators must be measurable and generally accepted by the industry, governments and the communities. The information can be drawn from specific property data, surveys and aggregated industry or regional data and be used to assess both management effort (inputs) and performance (outcomes).

Financial indicators could provide a measure of the on-farm costs and returns such as those generated through the GPP or FPIP as well as the benefits associated with the operations within the

region and the community. Indicators to measure financial health could relate to farm business size and gross margins.

The contribution to regional economies is often used as an indicator of an impact of farming on society. Indicators to measure social health could relate to employment, participation in volunteer groups and increased personal capacity.

Environmental benefits often stem from an increased understanding of environmental issues and improved capacity to manage natural resources. Indicators to measure environmental health could relate to water use efficiency and native vegetation condition.

Intellectual Property:

Nil

Environmental and Social Impacts:

The general public and the regulators would be satisfied with a comprehensive system that reported against indicators that measured progress towards sustainability.

Expected Outcomes:

Once the preferred system is agreed upon by the industry there should be reasonable adoption levels by growers if it is not difficult or expensive and can prove real benefits to them. It is anticipated that there will be significant long term benefits from the adoption of an accreditation and auditing system by the Australian sugar industry. Benefits to growers will include identification and remediation of deficiencies in their current practices, an objective defence mechanism for any unfounded criticisms of their farm operations, along with potential avoidance of increased Government regulation and sustained access to increasingly demanding markets. These benefits will also flow on to the broader industry as well as the local environments and communities.

The proposed process-based system, whilst being compatible with the more usual approach currently being adopted by many other industries, is not believed to be the most effective path to industry sustainability as discussed above.

By following the approach recommended from this report the sugar industry would have a more beneficial program with each of the sectors linked and working together in an integrated manner. Operators would be able to demonstrate and be rewarded for their stewardship approach to sustainability. The industry would be recognised as a leader in addressing and meeting internal and external expectations.

Potential Benefits

We foresee significant long term benefits arising out of the adoption of an accreditation and auditing system by the Australian sugar industry. Benefits to growers include identification and remediation of deficiencies in their current practices, an objective defence mechanism against unfounded or unwarranted criticisms of operational practices and outcomes, removal of the necessity for mandatory Government regulation, preferential and sustained access to increasingly demanding and discerning markets. These benefits will flow through to the industry as a whole, the local, regional and national community as well as to the environment.

Future Research Needs:

The implementation of the recommended approach would be subject to a new project to:

- further develop and integrate the principles outlined above (and in Attachment 2) and picking up on aspects of
    - existing industry based options
    - certification criteria
    - audit protocols
- establish links and steering groups to oversee the development and implementation

There would need to be particular attention paid to the determination of boundaries of social, environmental, financial and sustainable assessment criteria. Questions would also arise in relation to whether this process would be farm, product or industry based and would it encompass a 'Corporate Social Responsibility' ethic. At the very least the 'stewardship to sustainability' model should be considered.

Recommendations:

As part of the 'Review' of the FMS program it is recommended to revisit the 'what was the question' and develop some industry consensus for a way forward.

A suggested project could be developed in several phases as follows:

- Phase 1
    - design and cost the required activity and secure resources
    - confirm and collate existing programs and develop a matrix outlining current and potential outcomes
    - develop an industry consultation mechanism and terms of reference
    - develop draft issues papers for consultation and resolution with industry and other stakeholders
- Phase 2
    - develop suitable outcome measures related to phase 1, but specific to the industry and the region
    - develop system principles
    - develop farm management and milling issues together with the standards and indicators
    - develop and focus training requirements based on phase 1
    - consider potential integration with other industries
- Phase 3
    - consider simple but meaningful labels, logos etc
    - look at integrity issues and legal protection
- Phase 4
    - develop and implement promotion and communication
    - progressive rollout through industry and value chain

List of Publications:

Nil

Attachment A – Overview of auditing and accreditation options for Sugar FMS

The following overview of a Sugar FMS auditing and accreditation system is based on the more usual system-based approach to EMS/FMS.

Context

The basic FMS process leading to auditing and accreditation is summarised as follows:

1. Rank current adoption rates of best management practices (Review questionnaire)
2. Identify and prioritise regional risks appropriate to the farm, and to the management issue being addressed (Risk analysis)
3. Identify and prioritise improvements in best management practices to reduce the highest risks (Risk analysis)
4. For priority actions (i.e. improved practices) determine action plans with relevant indicators (Action plans)
5. Document the farm risks, current risk levels, planned reduction in risk levels and action plans to achieve the planned risk levels (Reports)
6. Consider auditing and accreditation options
7. Regular review

Audit levels

The FMS process forms the platform for a multi-tiered assessment system. The proposed audit levels have four tiers, or levels of adoption, as follows.

Tier 1 – self assessment

The self-assessment audit process is done by the grower themselves. The Sugar FMS Tools web site includes instructions on how to do a risk analysis, propose improvements to best management practice adoption to reduce higher levels of risk, and develop action plans with indicators to assess improvements. This process can be reviewed as often as the grower feels necessary.

Tier 2 – champion or peer group assessment with farm walks

Once the audit process has become established in a region selected growers can be given basic training to become peer auditors. It is proposed that 25% of participating growers would be peer assessed every year, with the intention that each grower would be audited every four years. This is a low cost approach which can also provide useful advice to growers from their peers.

Tier 3 – industry assessment

Industry assessment is an external audit by an auditor accredited by the industry covering a sample of farms previously audited at Tier 2 level. The sample size would be determined by the industry and the cost spread across all growers in the accreditation scheme within the region being sampled.

Tier 4 – external assessment of sample from tier 3

An external audit by an independently accredited auditor would cover a sample of farms previously audited at Tier 3 level. The sample size would be independently determined and the cost spread across all growers in the accreditation scheme within the region being sampled. Individual growers seeking this level of audit could also arrange this independently of the industry.

Audit Structure

The proposed audit structure has 3 audit levels as follows.

Level 1 - Internal compliance report

Internal compliance is based on the self-assessment audit process, from which a report including the risk assessment and action plans can be produced. It is recommended that a report be prepared annually every February.

Level 2 - Industry certification to assess change

Industry certification is used to assess grower's annual internal compliance report and any change from the previous year. This considers the appropriateness of new action plans, progress of action plan implementation and the resulting changes in risk levels. There would be an emphasis on auditing of actual improvements not just the system itself. It is recommended that the industry certification be completed annually every May, but not necessarily every farm every year.

Level 3 - Industry surveillance to cover certification process

Review of the auditing and certification process including likely changes in requirements of the industry.

Issues

Issues to be considered

- Who develops the documentation?
- Who keeps the records?
- Who conducts the audits?
- What level of auditing/certification is required of/by the industry and how is the information for individual farms aggregated?
- Who monitors the changing requirements for the industry auditing and accreditation program and how are these changes implemented?
- Is this process-based system sufficient to deliver real improvements in industry sustainability?

Acknowledgements
This proposal is based largely on the model adopted for the Australian cotton industry, progress from the MAS001 Partnership for Sustainable Sugar project, and has been influenced by a range of other documents and feedback from individual industry representatives.

Attachment B - SUSTAINABLE SUGAR

Demonstration of sustainable farming is clearly becoming essential to maintain and improve access to input products, resources, services and markets. This is confirmed by an increasing shift from production incentives to environmental incentives from funding and subsidy strategies, reflecting the change to this approach by governments and regulatory authorities.

This change has brought with it the development of means of assessment, audit and verification which range from informal assessments on a local scale, to formally assessed, national and internationally accredited systems such as the ISO 14000 series of standards.

In Australia, considerable effort is currently being directed at developing ways in which to demonstrate sustainable use of natural resources in Australian agriculture. The "Pathways to EMS" funding has encouraged work in this area, but it has focused all attention and direction on a system-based approach.

A major weakness of these approaches (including ISO-accredited systems) is that accreditation and audit with subsequent certification is ***of the system itself and not of the effectiveness of the system in improving sustainability***. Recent assessments have shown little evidence of improvements in sustainability in even formally-accredited and externally audited systems (Australian Productivity Commission 2002).

Many of these approaches are being developed to define and implement EMS, FMS, Environmental Indicators and Best Practice Management of natural resources, but not all frameworks require consideration of on-ground practices in any real terms of "impact".

Other options for certification mechanisms are Codes of Practice, Management Practices, Product Certifications, Education and Training and Government Regulations.

However, few accreditable guidelines are being developed to ensure consistency with sustainability outcomes at the level that has the most actual effect – the farm business.

The SQF program has attempted to do this and now has a number of voluntary options for matters in addition to food safety and quality, including Worker Welfare, Environment, Animal Care and Food Security, but again falls short of sustainability.

The Sugar industry now has a unique opportunity to consider, develop and implement a consistent and verifiable mechanism for certification that promotes the viable production of sugarcane and the sugar products, based on credible sustainability principles. The most widely accepted approach to this is based on 'triple bottom line' (TBL) reporting.

TBL reporting systems track performance in a more balanced manner addressing the growing view that environmental and social issues are equally as important as financial returns in assessing the impacts and returns from farming and production enterprises, but allows the industry to keep them all in perspective.

TBL is reported against practical indicators operating at farm scale in order to allow impacts to be assessed at a property level and comparisons made between farms, regions or catchment areas.

These indicators could be used to:

- focus the industry on sustainability priorities rather than compliance with systems;

- establish the basis for targets and goals in all 3 areas of TBL reporting;
- manage and evaluate the outcomes and impacts of management practices; and
- report performance at the farm, region or industry level.

Indicators must be measurable and generally accepted by the industry, governments and the communities. The information can be drawn from specific property data, surveys and aggregated industry or regional data and be used to assess both management effort (inputs) and performance (outcomes).

Financial indicators could provide a measure of the on-farm costs and returns such as those generated through the GPP or FPIP as well as the benefits associated with the operations within the region and the community. Suggested indicators to measure financial health could include:

- farm business profit
- business size
- gross margins
- return on capital

The contribution to regional economies is often used as an indicator of an impact of farming on society. Suggested indicators to measure social health could include:

- employment
- economic linkages
- participation in volunteer groups
- increased personal capacity
- development and use of Property Management Plans

Environmental benefits often stem from an increased understanding of environmental issues and improved capacity to manage natural resources. Suggested indicators to measure environmental health could include:

- ecological footprint
- water use efficiency
- groundcover
- greenhouse emissions
- recycle pits
- integration of environmental Issues in on-farm decision-making
- native vegetation

To establish a truly sustainable whole of industry there needs to be commitment and support from all sectors and all levels incorporating and demonstrating stewardship. The key principles used to develop the system would include:

- industry participation at all levels, including system development with linkages to existing farm and industry initiatives as well as potential ones
- sustainability as a process of ongoing improvement, based on best farm management and processing principles
- performance standards and targets relevant to the farm and process businesses
- alignment with existing industry, regulatory and quality assurance schemes
- initial standards and assessments would be set for major farm management and processing issues with practical, flexible and realistic transaction costs
- a phased and tiered approach where the operator is able to control the level of adoption

The implementation would be subject to a new project to:

- further develop and integrate the principles outlined above and picking up on aspects of
    - existing industry based options
    - certification criteria
    - audit protocols
- establish links and steering groups to oversee the development and implementation

Appendices

Existing Certification/Accreditation Examples

1. NRMW

The development of the framework has been guided by a range of desired outcomes identified during the early stages of the framework's development, such as:

1. Accreditation sought for a range of property-level regulatory requirements (i.e. one program could satisfy more than one regulatory requirement)
2. Whole programs, or program section(s)/ module(s) could be accredited by government provided that the whole program or program section(s)/ module(s) addressed all the relevant regulatory requirements
3. Government should consider approving accreditation for a period of up to 10 years
4. Once a program or program section(s)/ module(s) are accredited the non-government organisation would be capable of certifying that a property-level FMS meets or exceeds the natural resource and environmental management practice standards and/ or outcomes of the particular regulatory requirement
5. Certification against an accredited program should enable the property-level FMS to satisfy the particular regulatory requirement(s) for which accreditation had been gained

2. Cotton

The Australian Cotton Industry's Best Management Practices (BMP) Information Pack is to assist growers arrange and participate in a BMP Certification Audit. A Certification Audit is required to be initially certified as a BMP cotton farm and for subsequent Random Surveillance Audits. To become Certified for BMP, a two step process is required as outlined below:

> ***Step One: Pre-Certification Assessment*** - This assessment can be conducted by a Cotton Australia Grower Services Manager or a BMP Auditor. The objective of the Pre-Certification Assessment is to ensure that the basic requirements of BMP have been identified and a system adopted for implementation on the farm. In particular, the Pre-Certification Assessment will check that the current BMP manual and modules are in place, farm practices are accurately reflected in completed self-assessment sheets and action plans have been developed. At this stage Certification Standards are identified. These are the minimum standards required by the BMP program.
>
> ***Step Two: Certification Audit*** - The Certification Audit focuses on farm improvements since the Pre-Certification Assessment, assessing a farms' compliance to Certification Standards as identified in step one.
>
> ***Step Three: Surveillance Audits*** - The Surveillance Audit reviews the farm's BMP management system to ensure ongoing continual improvement and commitment to BMP Certification Standards.

3. IAA Certification Program.

This is a voluntary industry recognition program for those in the irrigation industry who are committed to implementing best practice and whose practice supports sustainable water use. The new program offers certification to irrigation managers, contractors and installers and there are plans to extend certification to a range of other industry occupations by 2010.

The new Certification Program can cover all people who work in an occupation regardless of system type or use. It also differs from the previous certifications on offer in that it is linked directly to the national vocational qualifications in irrigation but unlike a qualification, certification focuses on specific essential competencies.

Benefits of certification

Certification will benefit both individuals and the irrigation industry. The program will:

- Lift the skills and knowledge of everyone in the industry
- Set and develop industry standards
- Drive industry involvement in training and qualifications
- Provide job satisfaction, personal recognition and support a career pathway
- Reward and recognise those operating at best practice
- Assist the industry control its own future
- Ensure sustainability for the industry

Once fully established the program can be used to facilitate industry water reform by:

- Promoting water use efficiency and resource sustainability
- Providing customer and government confidence
- Drive industry involvement in policy and research
- Promote credibility with regulators and set a frame work for industry self regulation.

How to become certified?

To become certified you will first need to qualify in three areas:

1. **Industry experience.** At the time of application, people interested in certification are expected to be actively working in the irrigation industry and be able to provide evidence of this. They will also need to provide evidence of accumulated industry experience.

2. **Irrigation skills and knowledge.** Applicants must provide evidence that they are competent in a discrete set of irrigation related skills. This is most easily done by gaining the relevant competencies through a Registered Training Provider either by completing a training course or by Recognition of Prior Learning.

   Competence can most easily be demonstrated with a Certificate of Attainment from a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) for each of competencies listed.

   Most RTOs offer more than one method of gaining competence. Some of these methods are:
   - Face-to-face delivery - course work usually conducted in a classroom situation.
   - Distance learning - done by correspondence, internet, phone – any method that is not classroom based.
   - On-the-job training - training conducted in the workplace.
   - RPL - recognition of prior learning – both formal and informal learning (no matter how it was acquired) is assessed toward a qualification.

3. **Commitment to ongoing professional development.** To retain Certified status, each successful applicant will need to show that they continued to update and upgrade their

irrigation skills and knowledge. Guidelines will be made available listing the acceptable learning activities over a two-year period. It will include items as diverse as formal training, short courses, conference attendance and demonstrating industry leadership and the required frequency for these.

Note: To encourage those in the program to complete further competencies to build towards a full Certificate IV or Diploma in Irrigation, points gained for completion of accredited competency units will be weighted more heavily than attendance at field days or conferences.