



New project to improve extension services

A project conducted by RIRDC will independently examine Australia's agriculture extension process. SRA is a participant in this project.

Led by RIRDC business development manager Vicki Woodburn, the 18-month \$1,715,000 project will examine Australia's extension system, a system that has the potential to improve productivity and profitability across Australia's farming and fishing sectors.

Ms Woodburn says one of the goals is to create an online 'hub' that consolidates and organises existing knowledge, tools and resources.

"There is a lot of 'noise' around extension at the moment," she says. "With the ongoing withdrawal of government investment in extension activities, some people feel the system is in crisis.

"So the second major goal is to independently look at the system and see what is working, where problems are emerging, and make recommendations on ways we can improve it."

For example, the project will consolidate existing knowledge to draw out what works and why in relation to business financial performance, responsiveness to markets, natural resource challenges, on-farm practice improvements and adoption of new technology.

It also aims to understand what lessons can be shared across Australia's agricultural industries. "This is particularly useful during this time of change where some industries are already using a greater portion of private extension services than others; and some have, or are trialling, new technology-driven approaches that could be relevant for other sectors."

Ms Woodburn says the target audience is those making investment decisions, such as a farming systems group or the private sector.

"We are aiming for cultural change in how we invest and plan extension programs. Australia has extensive knowledge and expertise on extension options, implementation and needs, but it is not effectively being used to inform decision making about optimising extension delivery."

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Above: This collaborative research project is looking at the many ways that industries are looking to improve extension services to farmers, helping to deliver important information to them.