

SEARCH CRITERIA

Model	Model C: Technological Development Model
Industry	Grains
Focus/Level	Industry
Purpose	Testing available knowledge, other
Outcomes	Development of a management practice Development of a decision support system
Special Interest Groups	other
Design and Implementation	Designed and managed by researchers/experts, Designed by researchers/experts managed by farmers/Community

1. PROJECT TITLE:

Grower Group Alliance

Reviewer - Fionnuala Frost and Debra Pearce

2. FUNDERS:

Grains Research and Development Corporation

3. PROVIDERS:

The Grower Group Alliance employs a coordinator to liaise between existing grain grower groups and researchers in Western Australia. The Executive Officers of the six grower groups involved in the project work with the Coordinator. A reference group comprising of the Executive Officers and one grower representative from each grower group and research representatives guides the project.

Organisations involved in the research include the Department of Agriculture, University of Western Australia (CLIMA and WAHRI), CSIRO, Co-operative Research Centre for Plant-Based Management of Dryland Salinity.

4. KEY CONTACTS:

Tracey Gianatti, Coordinator, Telephone (08) 9380 3410,

email - gianatti@agric.uwa.edu.au

Website - <http://www.grdc.com.au/growers/gga/index.htm>

5. INDUSTRY/ISSUE/GEOGRAPHY

The development of the Grower Group Alliance began in 2001 when a number of growers recognized the existence of a significant amount of research but poor extension and adoption of that research in the grain farming community. An initiative emerged whereby the growers wrote to the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) with a proposal to form a network between grower groups, research providers and agribusiness companies throughout Western Australia.

The Grower Group Alliance was funded by GRDC in response to this request, for two years, commencing 2002/03. The project aims to “enable growers to access the latest information and research, which will allow them to make the best possible decisions for their farming businesses.” It proposes to do this by “establishing formal communications pathways between growers, researchers and industry, and developing collaborative projects with industry, based on key research issues identified by Alliance members.” The vision of the Alliance is to *enhance the value of*

agricultural research, development and extension through the alliance of grower groups and industry.

6. PROJECT CONTEXT

The Alliance project emerged from a context of a large amount of research but limited impact in terms of the transfer of knowledge to the growers and the implementation and adoption of that knowledge. Growers knew that information was “out there” and needed a mechanism for finding suitable research.

7. PROJECT NICHE

The need to foster improved communication between grower groups and between growers and researchers provided the niche from which the Alliance concept emerged. The use of grower groups as a focus for extension rather than a broad-based approach is seen as an essential part of this approach.

8. PHILOSOPHY/APPROACH

The approach taken is to link existing researchers and grower groups to encourage innovation in the grains sector. The Alliance Coordinator acts as a conduit for transferring research priorities from the various grower groups to the researchers, and for transferring research to appropriate potential users. The Coordinator does not work with growers directly, but with the Executive Officers working with those groups, in efforts to combine supply and demand in relation to grains research.

“For researchers, the Grower Group Alliance offers the opportunity for valuable feedback from growers on future directions of research and field testing of new technology. Through the alliance coordinator, researchers now have access to growers across the state in a range of environments.” (Grower Group Alliance website).

“Growers within the Alliance have the opportunity to identify important local issues and present these to researchers in the form of collaborative projects. The relevance and grower ownership of these trials and their results will be greatly increased through this system.” (Grower Group Alliance website).

9. RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING STRUCTURES

The Grower Group Alliance is staffed by the Coordinator, who receives guidance from the Alliance Reference Group. The Reference Group comprises the Executive Officers of the grower groups, farmer members of the grower groups and other representatives of the research organizations. The Executive Officers are compensated for their travel and time whilst on Reference Group activities, as the Officers are employed for purposes not necessarily including Alliance involvement. A smaller “management group” assists in the day-to-day activities and provides support to the Coordinator.

The Alliance is supported by a sound budget and good operating expenses, to ensure research flows back to the grower groups.

10. PROCESS/METHODS USED

The role of the coordinator is to work with the Executive Officers of the existing grower groups to link the groups to each other and to link the groups to relevant researchers and research programs. Formal communication between the grower groups is encouraged to avoid the “re-invention of the wheel.” In doing so, the Coordinator links the Executive Officers with the relevant researchers then “steps back”.

Six grower groups were originally involved in the project. These groups were selected due to their local focus and existing successes or “runs on the board”, and also due to their small size limiting their ability to act on a larger scale. Large, statewide grower groups, such as the Kondinin Group, were not originally included, but relationships with such groups have grown and very good linkages now exist. The Coordinator now liaises with more than ten grower groups of various sizes.

11. IMPACTS TO DATE

The Grower Group Alliance has only been operational since the employment of the Coordinator in October 2002. During this time, the activities have largely involved establishing the project and relationships and networks within it and raising awareness.

A significant component of the Alliance is an annual gathering of growers and researchers. The first of these is planned for October 2003. Collaborative training courses which will build communications between the grower groups are also being considered.

12. EFFECTIVENESS

A six-month review is scheduled for May 2003. As the project has only been operating since October 2002, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness at this stage, however early indications are very positive. The emergence of the project in response to limited effectiveness of some existing research extension programs indicates that there is a demand which will contribute to the outcomes fostered by the Alliance.

13. PROJECT DOCUMENTATION AVAILABLE

Visit the website <http://www.qrdc.com.au/growers/gga/index.htm> for project documentation.

14. ISSUES

Current issues for the project include the time-lag in developing proposals, specifications, “waiting for rain”, waiting for results, etc. The initial two-year funding for the project is a short timeframe which may limit visible tangible results, however by building relationships within the industry, the outcomes may extend well beyond the initial funding period.

A further issue is the difficulty in evaluating the impact of such projects in terms of measuring the qualitative outcomes – awareness raising, capacity building, etc. Quantifying the network that is built through the project provides additional challenges.

For the Coordinator, questions relating to day-to-day operations and personal abilities and achievements also arise. This is largely due to the position (and project) being so new. The Coordinator is setting the benchmark, and as such has little to compare to at this point in time.

15. COMMENTS/CONCLUSIONS

The overall impression obtained is that the potential success of this project is enormous. The personal skills, attributes and enthusiasm of the Coordinator will contribute significantly to this.

16. REVIEW METHODS

Telephone interview with Ms Tracey Gianatti, Coordinator. Review of website and relevant documentation.

