Integrating Knowledge from Research and Farmer Practice in the Development of More Productive Forage Systems for Dairy Farms in South-Eastern Australia

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Introduction The integration of knowledge from research and farmer practice in the development of innovation is crucial if agricultural industries are to present innovation to farmers in an accessible form . The 3030 Project in the South-East of Australia is currently exploring this problem through a multi-disciplinary approach aimed at building greater reflexivity into traditional research structures . The project seeks to achieve a 30% return on assets from a 30% increase in home grown forage for rainfed dairy farms . This paper outlines the approach taken by the 3030 Project in its exploration of this issue .

Methods The project is dependent upon a partner farm methodology in which selected farms are considered as partners in the overall research program , contributing as a central part of the innovation research team . These partner farmers have implemented forage practices , and participated in monitoring , adapting and assessing their efficacy on a whole-of-farm systems basis . The partner farmer is assisted by a farm consultant , a local extension advisor and a regional development group consisting of a number of local farmers and service providers . These groups are thought of as constituting Communities of Practice (CoPs) , in which the participants are engaged in the joint pursuit of a shared enterprise through learning as a social activity (Wenger 1998) . They form a central hub of the research on which scientific information from the 3030 research meets with agronomic perspectives , experiential bias and all of the complexities involved in operating a high functioning farm system .

Results & discussion As the research evolves , the data gathered concerning the operation of the partner farms and the decisions made by their CoPs throughout the last year is beginning to identify (a) key decision making triggers , (b) pivotal decisions and (c) key actions . The principles underlying these decisions , when seen alongside the operational performance of the on-farm forage plans and data from the project's traditional field trials and farmlet study , are beginning to emerge . It is with these principles that the research and extension team hope to provide the Australian dairy industry with the benefits of complementary forage practice innovations .

Conclusions The production and dissemination of knowledge concerning the implementation of innovative forage planning in south-eastern Australia is dependent upon a strong partnership between research and development , social research and extension . The strength of this whole of team approach lies in its ability to understand the complexities on on-farm adoption and adaptation of innovation while continuing to create high impact technological outcomes .

Reference

Wenger , E . (1998) *Communities of Practice : Learning , Meaning and Identity* . Cambridge : Cambridge University Press .