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GGA Annual Forum Champions Grassroots Innovation

Communication, collaboration and innovation were the big themes at the 2015 Grower Group Alliance (GGA) Annual Forum.

The 12th Annual Forum, 'Practice Change to Profit: Supporting Effective Grower Groups', demonstrated the huge role that regionally based grower groups play in driving innovation, and focused on how groups could support research to be effectively extended into on farm change and adoption.

With Australia's agricultural growth declining, and increasing competition from Black Sea Countries, Canada and Brazil, the Australian agricultural sector needs to foster a culture of innovation, starting at the grass roots right up to the highest levels, said GGA Project Officer Tom Lamond.

"Grower groups are essential to driving grassroots innovation as they [the groups] provide the first and last link in the chain, when it comes to the development and utilisation of new research," Mr Lamond said.

The GGA Annual Forum provides a unique opportunity for grower group staff, members and key industry stakeholders to come together to talk about their successes, challenges and to above all develop solutions that will lead to a more profitable and sustainable agricultural sector.

Opening the conference, the Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia (DAFWA) Executive Director, Mark Sweetingham said that grower groups are going to be playing an increasingly central role in directing and delivering on ground development and extension activities.

"DAFWA is always looking to partner with and support regionally based grower groups directly or through the GGA wherever it can. Working together will foster the exchange of ideas, provide growers with the latest R&D information and encourage the uptake of research results," Mr Sweetingham said.

Forum delegates heard firsthand how agriculture was not alone in its struggle of getting research out of the lab and into practice, with health professional and knowledge translation expert Tamika Heiden providing an insight into the world of knowledge translation and implementation science.

Tamika described how the field of knowledge translation took a lot of its initial inspiration and learnings from agricultural extension, highlighting that in the health sector it takes around 17 years to get a research into clinical practice.

"Tamika's presentation was enlightening, it really highlighted that some of the challenges that we face in agriculture are similar to those other industries are trying to tackle. What was even more fascinating was that the agricultural industry has been, at many times, the leader in this field," GGA Strategic Advisory Group Chair and Mingenew farmer, Clancy Michael said.

Attendees were also given an insight in to the business models of other grower groups with Southern DIRT Executive Officer Pip Crook and Fitzgerald Biosphere Group's Anne Sparrow sharing their findings from the recent GGA tour to Victoria and South Australia.

"The big revelation from going on a tour such is this is that there is no two grower group business models the same, they all have different strengths and strategies in how they service their grower members and extend information," Southern DIRT Executive officer Pip Crook said.



The event also provided an in-depth look at a range of specific livestock projects, hearing from Clayton South about how he is implementing electronic identification (EID) technology into his Dhone Merino flock, so that he can better monitor key herd characteristics, ensuring long term genetic gain for his flock.

Focusing on the grains sector, delegates heard from DAFWA soils researcher Stephen Davies discussing how he has worked with various grower groups to understand the best way to ameliorate subsoil constraints through tactical liming and tillage.

Wrapping up the day, networking specialist Robyn Henderson gave a dynamic presentation on how to develop meaningful connections and the importance of networks professionally and personally.

Robyn encouraged attendees to develop a systematic approach to networking and reiterated that personal networks can play a pivotal role in finding solutions to individual needs but also to those of peers.

“Robyn’s presentation was an excellent way to finish the day, having all her networking tips fresh in my mind when the sundowner started was a real bonus,” Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network (RAIN), Executive Officer Elisa Spengler said.

The Annual Forum is GGA’s premier event, but it is just one way the Alliance works to support regionally based grower groups and their communities to drive on farm innovation for a profitable and sustainable agricultural industry.

The GGA also supports grower groups by providing training, communication, project collaboration, and event and operational support, to ensure that groups can continue to deliver the most up-to-date and locally relevant information to their members.

The Grower Group Alliance is a non-profit, farmer driven organisation connecting grower groups, research organisations and agribusiness in a network across WA. The GGA is funded by DAFWA.

The Annual Forum was sponsored by the Department of Agriculture and Food WA, CBH Group, the Grains Industry Association of WA (GIWA), Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), the Council of Grain Growing Organisations (COGGO), WAMMCo and Australian Pacific Extension Network (APEN).

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Photo Caption (A): CBH Group Community Relations Advisor Amie Bolton (L) and GGA Strategic Advisory Group Chairman and Mingenew farmer Clancy Michael (R) at the GGA Annual Forum Sundowner.

Photo Caption (B): Graeme Manton (Facey Group) and Clayton South (Wagin) swapping stories at the GGA Annual Forum Sundowner.