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GROWER GROUPS VALUE THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

How do grower groups collaborate with researchers, agribusiness, funders and government to create real value and success for farmers? This was the question to be answered at the 2016 Grower Group Alliance (GGA) Annual Forum held on Friday 19 August 2016.

110 people convened at the Rendezvous Hotel in Scarborough for the Grower Group Alliance Annual Forum, an event held each year in August. The event was a unique opportunity for grower group staff, members and key industry stakeholders to come together to talk about their successes, challenges and above all to develop solutions that will lead to improved regional RD&E delivery and a more profitable and sustainable agricultural sector.

Peter Cooke, AgKnowledge, presented early in the day, emphasising the importance of science and innovation as well as collaborations and partnerships within the industry. He highlighted areas where grower groups excel, and touched on the challenges and opportunities facing grower groups and the broader agrifood industry in the next ten years.

Themes that resonated throughout the day revealed communication, good leadership, the importance of strong networks and relationships, and developing trust all as essential factors in successful collaborations and successful groups. Attendees were able to hear stories of success from researchers, industry leaders and grower groups from across WA and nationally.

Keynote speaker Alexandra Gartmann, CEO of Rural Bank, wrapped up the day with an encouraging message to groups, stressing the power and importance of networks and relationships for successful groups and successful collaborations.

“Grower groups are there to enable vibrant communities, and to help them prosper”, Ms Gartmann said. “Developing networks and working with those networks requires rigour, relevance and relationships for successful collaboration.”

Previously an invitation only event, this year the GGA Annual Forum was open for registrations from across the industry. Attendees represented grower groups from around WA, Victoria and South Australia, as well as research institutions, private and commercial agribusiness, state and local government and others from the agricultural and not-for-profit sectors.

In line with the GGA’s aim to improve the networks and capabilities of grower groups across all primary production industries in WA, the 2016 forum saw participation from new groups in the network including Scott River Grower Group and Kimberly Pilbara Cattleman’s Association, as well as representatives from vegetablesWA and WA Livestock Research Council.

GGA Project Leader, Rebecca Wallis, said that the new format was in response to the increasing demand for industry to connect with grower groups, while including groups and industries outside of broadacre agriculture allows the network to expand their linkages and grow their understanding of the WA agri-food sector as a whole.



"The 2016 Annual Forum was a great example of how we can come together as an industry to discuss relevant issues around local RD&E and develop new ideas and connections to tackle the opportunities and challenges ahead," said Ms Wallis.

"With the theme being 'Collaboration – Value – Success', it was fantastic to see so many people making new linkages, being inspired by new ideas, and focusing on how we can work together to become more efficient and effective in the delivery of agricultural RD&E."

An exciting addition to the Annual Forum in 2016 was the inaugural *Grower Group Award for Excellence*, proudly sponsored by the Grains Industry Association of WA (GIWA) and presented to Yuna Farm Improvement Group (YFIG) to acknowledge their community spirit and peer to peer collaborative learning style, while being a strong contributor to local RD&E.

Clancy Michael, Chair of the GGA Strategic Advisory Group, utilised the 2016 Forum to announce his resignation as chair after 14 years of involvement with the Grower Group Alliance. Mr Michael's contribution over the years has been outstanding, providing leadership and guidance to the project since its inception in 2002. The GGA are now seeking to fill the vacant role which is open for expressions of interest until the 14 September.

The 2016 Annual Forum concluded with a networking sundowner, proudly sponsored by Gold sponsor CBH Group. A coffee cart providing barista coffees to attendees throughout the morning was sponsored by Bronze sponsor GRDC Online Farm Trials.

The Grower Group Alliance is a funded project connecting grower groups, research organisations and agribusiness in a network across WA. The project is funded by DAFWA through Royalties for Regions.

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Photo 1: Keynote speaker Alexandra Gartmann, CEO Rural Bank, presenting on strategic partnerships and collaborations at the 2016 Annual Forum.

Photo 2: Peter Cooke of AgKnowledge presenting on the future challenges and opportunities for grower groups at the 2016 GGA Annual Forum.