



RURAL JOBS AND SKILLS ALLIANCE

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION WORK PLACEMENT PROGRAM

Changing the world from the ground up

The Challenge

Food security, market supply, workforce capability, technology, policy and sustainable management across the supply chain are key challenges facing the agriculture sector. To meet these and be future-ready, the sector must be underpinned by robust problem solving, innovative and competent people.

The Market Gap

The right person with the right skills is in high demand for regional employers in Australia, particularly in the area of supporting producers. There is more need than ever for effective and skilled extension services and advisors to provide relevant, up-to-date advice that supports growth in productivity, profitability and sustainability.

Evolving technology, management practices and regulations requires specialist advice and skills, with agricultural advisors increasingly being called on to be industry knowledge brokers and innovation coaches. However, there are skill shortages in extension across agriculture and while the demand is great, staff numbers are low. This means there is a large gap to fill.

The challenge for the education and training system is to ensure that agriculture’s extension workforce is well-equipped and ready to meet the ever-changing conditions of responsible and sustainable farming.

The Opportunity

This is where the **Agricultural Extension Work Placement Program (AEWPP)** comes in. Over three years (including one pilot year), the program has already supported 21 graduates to develop work-ready skills and networks. All graduates gained employment in agricultural extension and farm advisory services across the grazing, grains, sugarcane, horticulture, cotton and dairy industries.



The graduates are not the only ones to have benefited. The 14 host organisations gained additional resources to support clients, deliver agricultural projects and build capacity in mentoring, staff management, new services and expertise (e.g. in digital technologies).

Those investing in the program had the foresight to focus on growing extension capacity in the Reef regions. This was and is crucial to not only deliver improved agricultural practices with healthier bottom lines for businesses, but also water quality outcomes for the Great Barrier Reef.

The AEWPP is flexible enough to allow industries and programs to meet their needs through co-design. This could be technology uptake, productivity, water resource efficiency, relationship building, technical skills, mentoring and network development to grow extension and business capacity.

“Working with the graduates helped me to understand ‘what a mentor is’ and provided the ‘chance to see things through fresh eyes’ as well as meet people/mentors from other industries.” (Mentor)

“This program has provided an unparalleled introduction into the field of extension and agriculture...[it] has taught me that to conduct extension effectively and support meaningful practice change really means understanding the farming system as a whole.” (Graduate)

“[It has] incredible human and organisational legacy with the potential to keep giving for a very modest investment compared to many other programs – and [adds] value to other programs.” (Stakeholder)

Your organisation could be involved. This is how.



Be Our Partner

2020 – AEWPP and land management in Reef catchments

The AEWPP 2020-22 is being delivered by the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance (led by Queensland Farmer's Federation (QFF)) and funded through the Queensland Government's Reef Water Quality Program. With the 2020 program starting in October, QFF is looking for industry partners to co-invest and enhance AEWPP's reach in Reef catchments, by increasing the number of graduates who can benefit.

For example, a co-investment of \$90,000 will provide placement of one extra trainee with:

- The host organisation receiving \$60,000 towards covering part of the trainee's salary, mentoring and organisational support.
- The trainee taking part in all the program activities as part of a cohort, supporting their professional development and networks.
- The program is comprehensively managed, providing recruitment assistance, training and support for the whole cohort of graduates.

This investment gives you a stake in the program's outcomes (along with the host organisations) and an invitation to be on the Steering Committee providing program governance and guidance. Other partnership options can also be discussed.

You are also investing in improved extension delivery services. The AEWPP is building an effective framework to guide the delivery of future work placement programs for organisations targeting land management improvements.

2021 – across the state

Looking further ahead there is the opportunity for partners and investors to support the growth of capacity in agriculture industries. AEWPP's next iteration will explore extending and adapting the program to support agricultural industries across the whole of Queensland.

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To register your interest, discuss more investment options or find out more, contact Diana Saunders, Project Manager Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance, (07) 3837 4726, AEWPP@qff.org.au

Benefits of Investing

There is demand

The AEWPP was established as a result of the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance exploring opportunities to innovatively build extension capacity that addresses the increasing demands of Australian agriculture. Its innovative approach aims to attract, employ and retain skilled people in rural Australian towns and has already been successful in bringing young professional people (and their partners in some cases) into agriculture and regional areas.

Your investment helps support regional economies, respond to the workforce demand, and highlights the opportunities that agriculture and regional Australia offers those looking for something new.

It benefits many

The benefits of the AEWPP's integrated workplace training and development program extends across the graduates, mentors, host organisations, extension providers, industry, producers and regional communities. This is because:

- Early career extension officers are supported to improve their employability and work readiness.
- Knowledge is transferred from experienced members of the organisation and extension staff to trainees.
- There is a ready-made network of well trained, enthusiastic and motivated extension officers.
- In-house management skills and mentoring capabilities around delivering agricultural outcomes are enhanced.
- There are more people on the ground delivering organisational and industry outcomes during the placement program and beyond.

It is holistic

The AEWPP is essentially a fast-tracked pathway building the capacity of early-career agricultural advisors to assist landholders improve their practices. Through a 15-month paid placement with a host organisation, it provides the framework for graduates to move into a regional location with support and peers who they can build and share experiences and skills with.

The graduates are mentored by experienced extension advisors, provided relevant technical and extension training, and introduced to networks (e.g. the Australian and Pacific Extension Network (APEN)). At the end of the program, they have a strong holistic understanding of issues impacting agricultural practices and the skills and tools to work confidently with producers on effective and sustainable farm management practices.

Increasing the number of skilled extension advisors on the ground allows agricultural organisations to assist growers more effectively. This means more support for the adoption of improved land management practices, increased productivity and increased adoption of technologies and innovation.

It is industry supported

In 2017, the Queensland Government's Reef Water Quality Program funded six trainees as a pilot. Extension capacity challenges in the Great Barrier Reef catchments at that time included insufficient skilled extension advisers, funding limitations and the need for improved coordination across local delivery organisations.

The evaluation of this pilot demonstrated that it developed extension capacity and provided important insights to improve the process. This led to the 2019 Agricultural Extension Work Placement Program (AEWPP) starting with two cohorts of graduates (15 in total) placed across the Reef catchments.

The program was delivered by the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance (led by QFF) and funded by the Queensland Government's Reef Water Quality Program and the partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.

It was developed in consultation with funding bodies and partners such as the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF), APEN, the University of Melbourne, Ag Consulting Co, and Coutts J&R. Industry extension providers and advisors were also engaged in the AEWPP's design.

It works

Evaluations of the pilot program (2017) and the AEWPP (2019-2020) highlighted its success in helping organisations increase their extension service capacity. Program participants interviewed during the evaluation process observed that its structure could offer practical insights into an adult learning framework that could be used to support trainees and address gaps in the training system.

The program has positively impacted on the capacity of graduates, mentors and host organisations, with regional communities also benefitting. All the graduates have continued to work in agriculture with most continuing with their host organisation.

“Through this program I have learned so much about working effectively with landholders to deliver better outcomes for people and for the Reef. I can now confidently provide support and advice to landholders on many topics that were very new to me this time last year. This means that landholders get better support to improve the water quality impacts from their land, my host organisation increases its capacity to partner with landholders, and I get a great launchpad for a career in extension.” (Graduate)

IMPACT ON GRADUATES

Graduates said they benefited from:

- ✓ Increasing their understanding and skills including farm management, pesticide use, agronomy and trial design.
- ✓ Developing strong networks in the agricultural, Natural Resource Management, private and research sectors.
- ✓ A launching pad into and a foundation for an extension career.

“It allowed me to develop more technical skills in grazing land management and GIS.”

“A lot of us might not have been exposed to agricultural industries [and] we wouldn’t have had the perspective of an extension officer, we wouldn’t have had training, extra capacity and capability.”

IMPACT ON HOST ORGANISATIONS

Host organisations said they benefited from:

- ✓ Producer relationships developing further.
- ✓ Work-ready employees able to move to other existing projects.
- ✓ Strengthening networks with other organisations.
- ✓ Keeping up with attrition rates.
- ✓ Improving organisational processes.
- ✓ Upskilling the next wave of professionals through subsidised training and using experienced mentors.

“The Program had facilitated further development of grower relationships and provided extra trial work with limited supervision.”

“It has been a good investment from our business, agricultural and employment perspective. [We] have been involved in other grad programs [but] this one is streets ahead. The right value was given for all the training and delivery plus on-costs. Other programs have been hard work, underfunded and have not got the results that this program has.”

IMPACT ON MENTORS

Mentors said they benefited from:

- ✓ Improving their mentoring and coaching skills.
- ✓ Enhancing their extension skills.
- ✓ Expanded networking opportunities with other mentors and graduates.
- ✓ Succession planning.

“I have gained new skills and awareness about better supporting new employees.”

“The program was ‘an absolute must and must continue – we need this next generation.”