

The Effect of Project Initiators in Participatory Research Partnerships

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Abstract. Participatory research that encourages multi-stakeholder engagement is widely advocated as an approach to research that can foster joint knowledge production between farmers and scientists to facilitate collaborative and collective learning towards more sustainable agriculture. With a political appetite in New Zealand for greater connection between the science and farming sectors to drive sustainable innovations, there is increasing interest in how scientific and local farming knowledge is integrated in projects. This paper, which presents findings from the authors' PhD research, explores project partnerships in six micro-level agricultural innovation projects in New Zealand. To investigate the notion of partnerships, a novel approach to enquiry was utilized that grouped partnerships according to the actor group that initiated the project. Project partnerships are shown to be a dynamic union between farmers, scientists and funders and their institutional frameworks. Project initiators had a marked effect on the shape of project objectives and partner relationships. Science-initiated projects had the greatest difficulty engendering collaboration, fostering relationships and creating shared meaning through communication and negotiation. The research identifies the main dynamics that shaped partnerships and outlines the key dynamics that create positive partner relationships. The paper's key learning extends understanding of the notion of partnership beyond its principal focus as a contractual entity, to conceptualizing partnership as a relationship between project partners to build shared understanding and to provide an enabling environment for collaborative learning.

Keywords: participatory research, partnerships, relationships, collaborative learning.

Biography

Marie McEntee has just submitted her PhD thesis investigating farmer/scientist engagement and learning in participatory research partnerships. Marie is an undergraduate lecturer at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. She is a recipient of a 2015 National Tertiary Teaching Award, having been recognised for 23 years of sustained excellence in teaching science communication and science innovation. She has research interests in agricultural extension, public engagement in science and science in the media. Marie McEntee can be contacted at the University of Auckland, Private Bag 92-019, Auckland 1142, New Zealand or via email at: m.mcentee@auckland.ac.nz.