

Filling the innovation gap – Dairy Industry responses to the loss of government extension services

Neil Webster, Dairy Australia

Purpose: Australian agricultural industries have moved into a new era of extension following the decline in public extension services. Industries such as the Dairy Industry are responding to this gap to ensure that the innovation process is not held back by the lack of extension services. The New Zealand dairy industry faced this challenge much earlier and has responded by implementing its own extension system. Dairy Australia is using a more collaborative framework while attempting to keep the momentum for innovation and change. This paper explores Dairy Australia's approach with reference to the similarities and differences with DairyNZ

Methodology: This paper documents the changes made with Dairy Australia with reference to those documented in the New Zealand dairy industry. The author draws from internal documentation, and interaction within the industry to analyse the changes and implication for the innovation system.

Findings: Funded by dairy farmer's levies Dairy Australia is assuming more responsibility for the provision of effective extension services to the Australian dairy industry and is moving to a model involving multiple actors and partners. New Zealand's dairy industry saw the exit of public extension more than 20 years ago. DairyNZ, also a levy funded industry good organisation, is also responsible for using farmer levies for the delivery of effective extension services. While there are many similarities in their strategies there is a difference in the level of investment made in staff dedicated to the provision of extension services, with DairyNZ having a large team of Consulting Officers while Dairy Australia is investing in a blend of staff and contracted technical expertise and is seeing the emergence of the 'broker' role in achieving extension outcomes.

Practical implications: The approaches taken will position the organisations differently as they continue to strive towards the establishment of effective Agricultural Innovation Systems.

Originality: This paper documents an emerging response to the challenge of the loss of government extension in the face of an on-going need to maintain the health of the innovation system in the dairy industry in Australia. It also discusses the emergence of the broker role in the delivery of extension outcomes. It has direct application to other industries and countries facing similar challenges.