

Grower Group Alliance



Assessing the Value of Grower Groups

Final Report

An independent review and analysis of Grower Groups in Western Australia to determine the value (monetary and social capital) they provide to members, funders and partners.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DAFWA	Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia <i>Note: renamed Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development July 2017</i>
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EO	Executive Officer
EPZ	Esperance Port Zone
GGA	Grower Group Alliance
GRDC	Grains Research and Development Corporation
HRM	Human Resource Management
MLA	Meat and Livestock Australia
NRM	Natural Resource Management
RAIN	Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network
R&D	Research and Development
RD&E	Research, Development and Extension
RDC	Research and Development Corporation
ROI	Return on Investment
SEPWA	South East Premium Wheat Growers Association

Note: The term ‘grower’ is used generically in this report to also represent farmers, producers and pastoralists.

Acknowledgements

The *Assessing the Value of Grower Groups* project was conducted in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders across the grower group, farming, research, agribusiness and government sectors. We acknowledge and thank those who generously gave their time and experience to contribute to this project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During 2017 *Agknowledge*[®] was contracted by the Grower Group Alliance (GGA) to *Assess the Value of Grower Groups* in Western Australia to determine both their economic and social contribution to the industry, rural communities and the state.

The 45 grower groups in the GGA network are independent, self-directed groups of farmers who work together to address production and environmental issues to improve their farming systems. The groups range in both size and focus and have evolved to become fit for purpose to meet local expectations.

As funding models for grower groups come under increasing pressure and groups are asked to demonstrate their value, the GGA commissioned this project to provide an analysis of grower groups to determine:

1. where grower groups fit in a **grower's decision making** process.
2. the **economic benefit** (in terms of productivity, information, access to events and training) to growers and farm businesses and what aspects of activities drive economic value.
3. the **value provided to the agricultural RD&E industry**, in particular to funding bodies and agencies as a cost effective service provider and partner in delivery function, though greater adoption and ROI of projects.
4. their role in growing and **supporting human capacity** in regional WA.
5. the **value to the community**, in terms of productive business, social support and structure.

To address these questions the project began with a detailed desktop review to identify all relevant work to date. The review informed an extensive consultation process which was conducted across the various stakeholder groups including farmers, industry partners, research and development funders, researchers, agribusinesses, consultants and sponsors.

A further detailed survey of grower groups across the state provided key data on the operations and outcomes of group activities and formed the basis for an economic analysis. The whole process produced a substantial body of work which can be found in the Appendices 1-4 to this report. The Appendices provide a rich source of information to guide future improvement and opportunities for grower groups to enhance the relationships with their stakeholder groups.

The outcomes of this work have been distilled into this Final Report which is structured around the five key questions identified in the project's objectives. Each section clearly identifies the key findings and provides a brief summary of the detail which can be found in the associated Appendices.

To provide clarity this report begins with an overview in the form of a *Grower Group Value Report Card* and an *Assessment of Value to Stakeholders* table that comprise the executive summary.

Grower group value proposition:



Assessing the value of grower groups – value report card

WA GROWER GROUP VALUE REPORT CARD	Value	Trend	Assessment
Support grower decision making	A	➡	Highly regarded by members, relative to a group's lifecycle stage and priorities, each group's operations are locally fit for purpose.
Valued source of information	A	⬆	Recognised as creating demand for knowledge. High credibility and quality. Imperative to retaining a group's integrity.
Influence on best practice change	B+	⬆	Groups are a vital part of a multi-channel system influencing change, investment and adoption of best practice.
Driver of economic value	A	➡	With a benefit cost of 10, groups return \$10 of value for each dollar invested. \$12m/pa invested by GGA member groups generates \$120m/pa to the WA economy.
Efficient and effective R&D partners	B+	⬇	Determined by capacity, leadership, staff, business systems and the group's charter. Under threat from funders driving costs.
Value to R&D partners	A-	⬆	Drivers of relevant research priorities. Increasingly recognised as valued and necessary partners for R&D project delivery.
Delivery of extension	A	⬇	Groups are integral, but the cost is not adequately accounted for in funding models. Regional funding shifts will impact capacity.
Capacity of groups	B	➡	Dependent on leadership and HRM. Issues of continuation of funding and priorities for funding a significant challenge.
Collaboration vs competition	C	⬇	Competitiveness between groups is a challenge. Driven by funding mechanisms, industry value, group culture and priorities.
Value to investors / sponsors	B+	⬆	Highly valued conduit but requires ongoing relationship management to deliver value. Complacency can be a concern for sponsors
Regional development and employment	B+	⬆	Generator of regional employment and economic activity. Groups are also building regional and human capacity.
Contribution to rural communities	A	⬆	Important to the fabric and wellbeing of the local community. Provides a social hub and support by creating the 'soft infrastructure'.
Regional leadership	B+	⬆	Groups stimulate economic activity, engage in collaborative community behaviours and developing new business models.
Grower Group Alliance network	B+	➡	Provides a 'front door' for the network, capacity building for groups and support for smaller/newer groups. Challenge is to define its future role.

Note: Arrows indicate an improving, holding or declining position.

Assessing the value of grower groups to stakeholders

Stakeholders	Value	Value proposition of grower groups for stakeholders
Grower group members	HIGH	Access to trusted, independent, affordable information to assist decision making and practice change. Incubator for new ideas, identifying issues and constraints to production, opportunity to influence research priorities. Access to field days, events, visiting speakers and researchers. Peer to peer learning, social interaction, networking. Practical support in times of adversity. By farmers, for farmers.
Farmers – non-members	MEDIUM	Source of independent information, access to field days and events. Primary source of data that may be filtered/applied by their consultant/agronomist.
Consultants / advisors	MEDIUM	Source of independent data, paddock level validation of research, ideas incubator. Collaboration on joint research projects. Access to the network, events, visiting speakers and researchers.
Agonomists	MEDIUM	Source of independent data, ideas exchange, collaboration on projects, access to trial sites, access to farmers, professional development opportunities, networking, social interaction.
Researchers	HIGH	Access to farmers, trial sites, collaboration on projects, exchange of ideas on research needs and applicability to systems/regions, validation of research outcomes. Medium for extension and adoption of research.
Agribusiness	MEDIUM	Access to farmers, forum to promote/grow their business, opportunities to demonstrate expertise and new product developments, joint research/trial partnerships, access to visiting experts, events.
Grower group staff	HIGH	Professional and practical development, employment and career advancement. Opportunity to develop social and professional networks.
R&D corporations	HIGH	Research project delivery and outcomes, input to direct research priorities, access to farmers, extension delivery mechanism, facilitation of learning opportunities to support adoption of practice change. There is real value to R&D corporations and government in investing grower levies with growers.
Department of agriculture	HIGH	Access to an effective extension and adoption vehicle, access to networks of farmers, access to trial sites, collaboration on projects, alignment on project and policy priorities, building industry knowledge capacity of staff, access to information on current practices and constraints. Coordination of events, profiling of staff with speaker engagements, publications.
Universities	MEDIUM	Access for researchers to a network of farmers, industry feedback and alignment on research priorities, collaboration on projects, coordination of events that engage industry, access to farmers and sites for trials.
Students, industry entrants	MEDIUM	Access to farmers, mentoring to develop practical industry knowledge, networking opportunities, research/thesis opportunities, employment.
Sponsors	HIGH	Opportunities to engage with a farming network, participate in group events, presentations for corporate profile building, grow business and client networks, gain feedback on new product developments and service offerings. Opportunity to demonstrate community support.
Rural communities	MEDIUM	Economic stimulus, employment, attracting people to rural towns, supporting positive mental and community health, promoting the region, coordination during adverse events, fundraising support for charities, clubs, schools. Shared facilities and interaction with shire councils.
Rural media	MEDIUM	Source of news/content, contacts, networks, information, commentary on events/issues, industry induction/briefings.
Government	HIGH	Economic stimulus and industry growth, regional development, employment, community support, positive mental health outcomes, access to independent information to inform policy development, regional visits facilitation, coordination during adverse events.

1 The value of grower groups to farm decision making

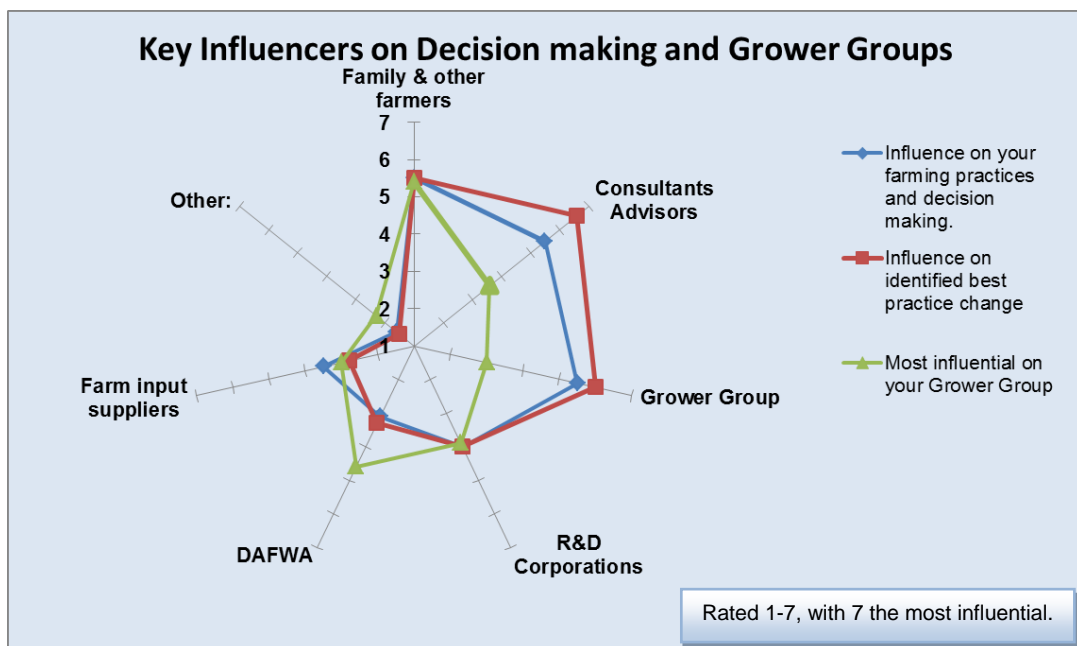
THE BRIEF:

Determine where grower groups fit in a growers' decision making process.

KEY FINDINGS:

- **The core value of grower groups is that they are driven by farmers, for farmers.** Groups are initiated around problem solving; a common desire to find answers attracts members and the outcomes and ongoing problem solving keeps members engaged; they do what they promise.
- **Grower groups are driven by an ethic of continuous improvement:** pushing the boundaries and challenging current practices to find new and better ways of farming productively and profitably.
- **Grower groups are recognised as an important source of information.** Farmers access new information from a wide range of sources to make production decisions; they weigh up the benefits and costs, the applicability to their system, and decide the time and investment to make a practice change, usually initially on a paddock trial basis to prove it up in their conditions for potential farm scale adoption.
- **Groups assist farmers to draw on a wide range of information to formulate their own 'best bet' scenario** to suit their conditions; they only get one crack at getting it right, once a year and in a constantly changing and dynamic system they often can't afford to wait for the science to catch up with a definitive solution to a new challenge.
- **Grower groups can influence practice change with their ability to demonstrate the benefits of a practice on ground, locally and in similar conditions to a grower's own farm.**
- Farmers look to a 'trusted advisor' – local **grower groups are a trusted, credible source.** The relationship and credibility is important, and groups allow the time and space for this to develop.
- **Grower group information is accessible, affordable, applicable and adaptable.**
- **There is complementary and positive crossover of consultants and advisors with grower groups** in providing information that influences practice change on farm. Consultants/agronomists provide a filter; taking information in the public domain and helping to apply it at farm level.
- **Ideas and impetus for change can be generated and stimulated through interaction with others;** the grower group, the consultant or advisor, the agronomist, family, local networks. Groups facilitate opportunities to bring growers and key influencers together, and when positive interactions happen it multiplies to the broader group.
- **Growers look to their group for strategic direction and as an incubator for ideas.** *"The grower group challenges where am I heading in the next five years, the group helps me find the ideas, then I run the idea that sparked my interest past my consultant to test the numbers and cast an eye over how it will fit in my system. I come back to the group for peer review, to compare what others found, to refine and change and take the next decision. Consultants are the reality check not the blue sky stuff, they can be reluctant to take a business in a different direction; they are the handbrake, not the stimulus. Groups are where you get the good ideas from your peers who are also prepared to push the boundaries."*
- **Grower groups provide valuable opportunities for peer to peer learning,** a proven method of extension to support practice change; informal benchmarking to compare your system to others.
- **Grower groups enable valuable interactions between researchers and farmers** which is essential for aligning research outcomes with on-farm needs and application.

- **Grower groups support the art of applied science in farming** in a continually evolving system, in which growers are constantly identifying and addressing constraints to production to manage risk to profitability. In WA broadacre cropping systems, financial constraints and managing risk are a critical part of the decision making framework and have a significant impact on the rate of adoption or practice change. The dilemma for growers is that issues in dynamic systems like broadacre cropping can evolve quickly; the challenge they need to address this season may not have been on their horizon two seasons ago. The quicker a decision can be made on practice change, the more value that is unlocked as delays erode value. Science targeted to address challenges in farming systems necessarily evolves on a longer time frame; from issue identification, methodology/trial design, funding application and approval process, research project delivery, replication and demonstration, peer review, publication. This is why growers are prepared to use 'best bet' strip trial information and shared farmer experiences as part of their decision making process: in the absence of pure/proven science, growers must make a call on addressing a problem for the next growing season in order to not repeat the result of last season.
- **GGA adds value to the network of grower groups that supports farm decision making** by providing capacity building, leadership, advocacy for the sector, and representation with industry partners, funders, decision makers and government.



CONTEXT:

To determine the value of grower groups to farm decision making extensive consultation was undertaken with a diverse group of 35 farm business operators from across Western Australia. With the detailed nature of this qualitative interview process and to ensure a diversity of views, farmers were deliberately selected from a number of networks to ensure a broad representative spread by location, age, gender, industry, and member/non-membership of a group. Of the farmers interviewed 42% were involved in the grains industry and 57% were in mixed farming (grains and livestock). The location of the farmers ranged from Northampton to Esperance. Across the respondents interviewed 25 different grower groups were represented including grower groups that are employing staff, groups engaging the services of farm consultants and groups relying solely on volunteers. Membership fees ranged from \$0 to \$6,000 per annum.

The full report on the farmer interviews can be found in Appendix 3 *Grower Group Value – Farmer Interviews Report June 2017*.

PROJECT OUTCOMES:

Extensive conversations with a diverse group of farmers from across the state confirmed that grower groups are valued by farmers as being highly relevant to their farm decision making and grower groups are an integral part of Western Australian farming. The farmers interviewed concluded that groups provide a critical link in extension and research for growers; importantly they address local issues and undertake local research; they are driven by farmers; they support development of human capacity; they provide social opportunities and support to learn from others; and groups perform an important social and economic role in their rural communities.

Value of local research to support farm decision making

The main motivating factor for farmers maintaining membership of their local grower group is their need to access locally relevant research to address production constraints. Across the state farmers are faced with a wide range of challenges influenced by soil type and rainfall, so research done locally can help address issues specific to an area and provide farmers with greater confidence that the practice changes recommended will work in their own conditions.

Locally based grower groups enable farmers to have **more direction and control over the research agenda and attract researchers to their region** to undertake trials or to share their knowledge with farmers at field days and workshops. Grower groups are valuable to the agricultural industry as they provide a **premier network and a great platform for industry and researchers to access farmers.** While there are other networks, they don't have the same footprint or impact as grower groups. Groups enable farmers to access industry experts at group events who wouldn't normally be as accessible to an individual grower.

Farmers believe grower groups keep the RD&E organisations **aligned with current research needs** and ensure that farmers' levy funds hit the ground and they get a **return on their investment.**

Driving industry development through information exchange

Farmers were unanimous that grower groups add significant value to the WA agricultural industry as they provide a **trusted source and conduit for growers to access information that may help to increase productivity and drive farm profitability.**

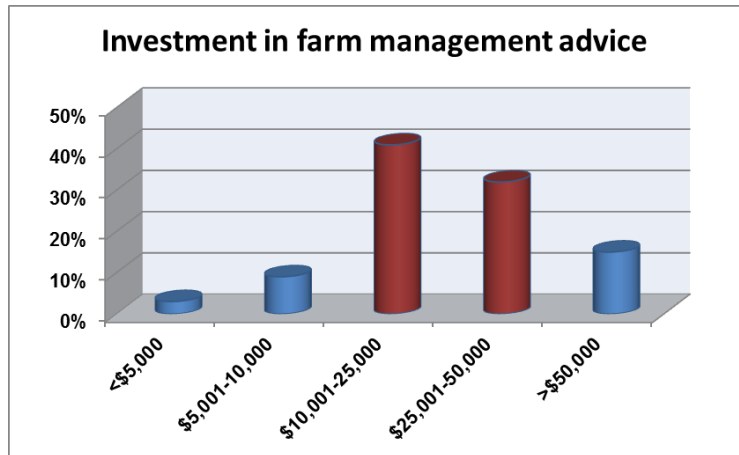
One of the greatest values of grower groups to the industry, according to farmers, is that they **tailor the information disseminated and the research is relevant** to their local area and member's needs. **Groups are viewed as independent and trustworthy, they enable farmers to have ownership of the RD&E, they advocate to ensure priority issues are addressed, they upskill farmers and retain the interest of young farmers in their industry.**

Grower groups make a significant contribution to industry development by delivering locally relevant research, development and extension, a role which has expanded as the Department of Agriculture and Food WA reduced its presence in the regions. Grower group members get the chance to view local trials established under conditions similar to their own farm and learn from other farmers addressing these issues through **peer-to-peer learning, which is proven as a very effective extension medium.**

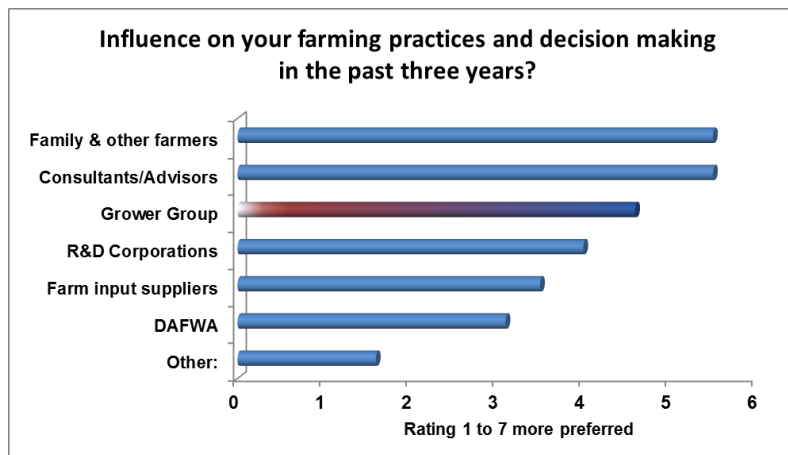
Investing in information and advice

An advantage to industry is that **grower group membership is very affordable and accessible** for all farmers as a means of accessing locally relevant information and research, compared to fee-for-service private sector sources. Grower group **members highly value the return on investment from their membership fees;** members value their access to locally relevant research and trial results and their group's ability to engage with growers. There is significant value placed on the credibility and quality of information groups provide, along with the professionalism of the groups.

Of the farm businesses interviewed for this project the majority invest more than \$10,000 in farm management advice each year: 41% spend between \$10,000-25,000, 32% spend between \$25,001-50,000 and a further 15% spend more than \$50,000. These farm businesses engaged an average of 3.41 advisors, ranging between 1-6 external advisors, which include farm consultants, agronomists, marketing advisors, accountants etc.



Evidence of the influence of private advisors in WA farming operations was that, together with other farmers and family, they were found to be the most influential source of information for farming practices and decision making; both averaged 5.5 in a rating out of 7. Grower groups were rated third and they were followed by R&D Corporations, input suppliers and then DAFWA.



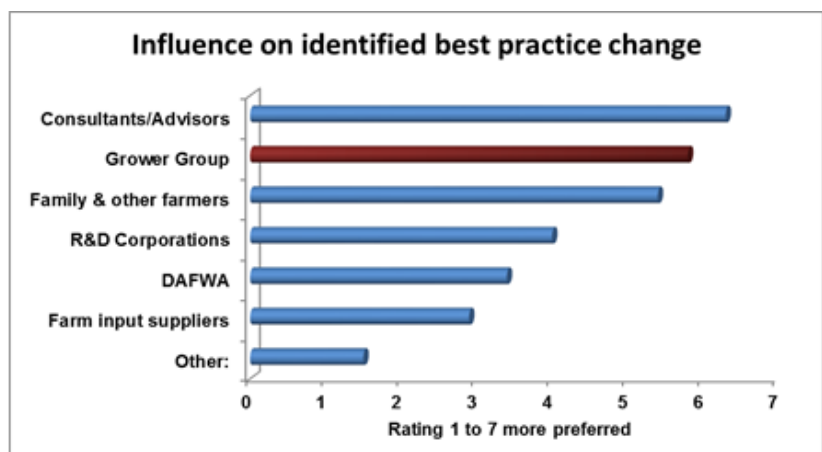
Importantly these results highlight that both advisors and grower groups are contributing to farm decision making, and there is a valued and complementary role for multiple information channels.

Influencing practice change

The farmers interviewed identified that over the past three years a range of information has been provided by their grower group that has influenced them to make changes to their farm business.

The most common practice change was crop variety selection, for which respondents attributed 74% of the information that influenced their decision was provided by their grower group. Other practice changes included agronomic investment with a 63% attribution to grower groups; controlled traffic farming 49%; soil management practices 41%; farm business changes 45%, and for livestock management changes 40% were made as a result of information provided by grower groups.

The most significant influence on practice change decisions was fee for service advisors while grower groups were rated second, with family and other farmers rated third.



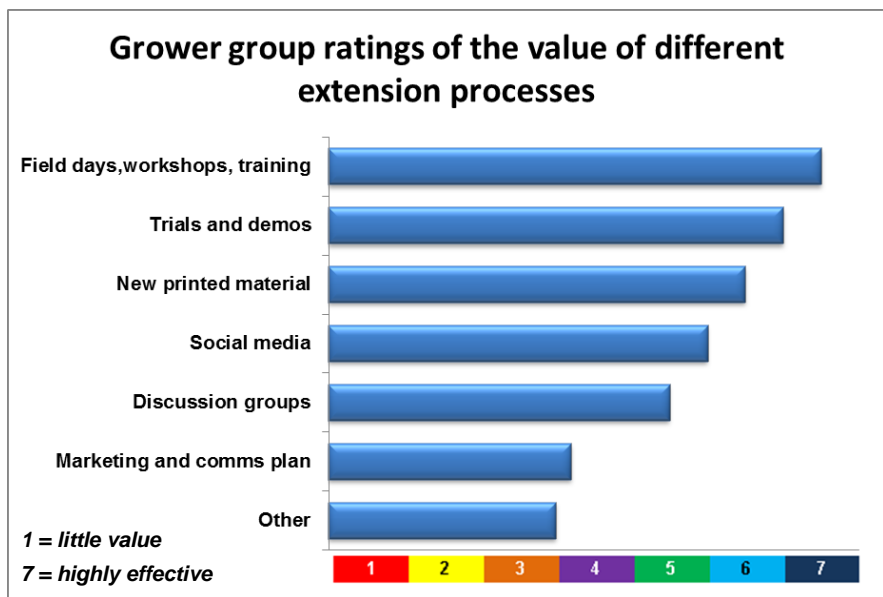
The value of groups as extension and adoption mediums

Grower groups are viewed as credible agents of extension and adoption as they are on the ground and independent, they filter information that is relevant to their local region and disseminate it through publications and events and through the use of visiting expert speakers. As a trusted source of relevant information, groups attract farmers to attend field days to learn from others, see a new practice in the paddock and return home motivated to adopt the practice change into their system.

The peer-to-peer transfer of learning that occurs at field days and events is invaluable as change and innovation regularly comes from other growers and grower groups provide the platform for interaction between farmers. Profit margins are powerful and appealing indicators to farmers along with the ability to visualise something in the paddock and on a broader scale in their own enterprise. The use of leading farmers as local champions of practice change to speak at events and in testimonials and case studies is also very effective.

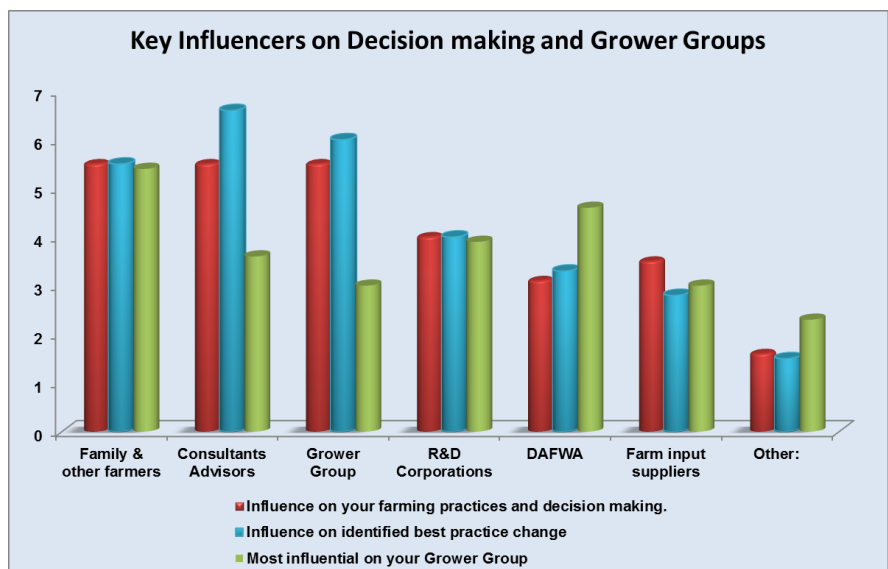
Grower groups were surveyed in this project to rate the effectiveness of extension processes for providing information to farmers on four case study farm management practices.

The value in direct contact and sharing of localised information is demonstrated by the high rating the groups placed on field days, workshops and training.



Grower groups were asked to rank the organisations or people that have been the most influential on their grower group (green bar in the graph below), and this was compared with the growers survey questions to identify influences on farming practices and decision making (red bar) and influences on the top three best practice changes which grower groups have had the greatest perceived impact on adoption (blue bar).

Comparing the influences on farm decision making identified that other farmers, consultants or advisors and grower groups are the main sources of information for grower groups, for farm businesses and for farm practice change. R&D corporations were rated ahead of DAFWA and farm input suppliers.



2 The economic value of grower groups

THE BRIEF:

Determine the economic benefit of grower groups (in terms of productivity, information, access to events and training) to growers and farm businesses. Identify what aspects of grower group activities drive economic value.

KEY FINDINGS:

- **Grower groups have supported practice change and adoption of new management and technologies which have led to improved farm productivity and profitability.** A case study of four farm management practice changes found a direct on-farm economic benefit of \$600m delivered over 25 years. Scaling up to all farm practices, this is estimated to have delivered a direct economic benefit of about \$2bn over 25 years.
- **Improved farm productivity has generated significant flow on benefits to the WA economy.** The same four practice changes were estimated to have delivered an indirect economic benefit (e.g. demand for fertiliser, machinery) of \$280m over 25 years, which scales up for all practices to approximately \$1bn over 25 years.
- **An indicative estimation of the total cumulative economic benefit generated by grower groups is \$3bn over the past 25 years, an average of \$120m/year.**
- **The economic analysis of grower groups identified a benefit cost ratio of approximately 10, which suggests that every dollar spent by grower groups (including in-kind contributions) generates an economic value to the Western Australian economy of approximately \$10, which is a very good return on investment in grower groups.**
- **Groups have influenced adoption of practice change and driven continuous improvement** through peer to peer learning and demonstrations and trials of new technologies and practices at field walks, events, in publications and newsletters.
- **Grower group annual turnover varies significantly between groups but total income and expenditure for all groups within the GGA was found to be in the order of \$10m/year.**
- **Total volunteer time and other in-kind contribution is approximately \$2m/year** for all grower groups in the GGA network.
- **Regional economies have been stimulated through the multiplier economic benefit** with improved farm productivity and profitability flowing through to accumulators/marketers, input suppliers, transporters, services and businesses through the increased spend in regional towns.
- **Grower groups have driven regional economic growth** through new business ventures, collaborations and attracting R&D funds to spend on regional projects.
- **Local towns have benefited from the economic activity generated by groups** through creating employment around project delivery, attracting project funds to be spent locally, conducting events that support local businesses and attract regional visitors who spend locally on food and accommodation.
- **Grower groups raise and provide funds to support community infrastructure, community groups and schools** which builds capacity in local towns.

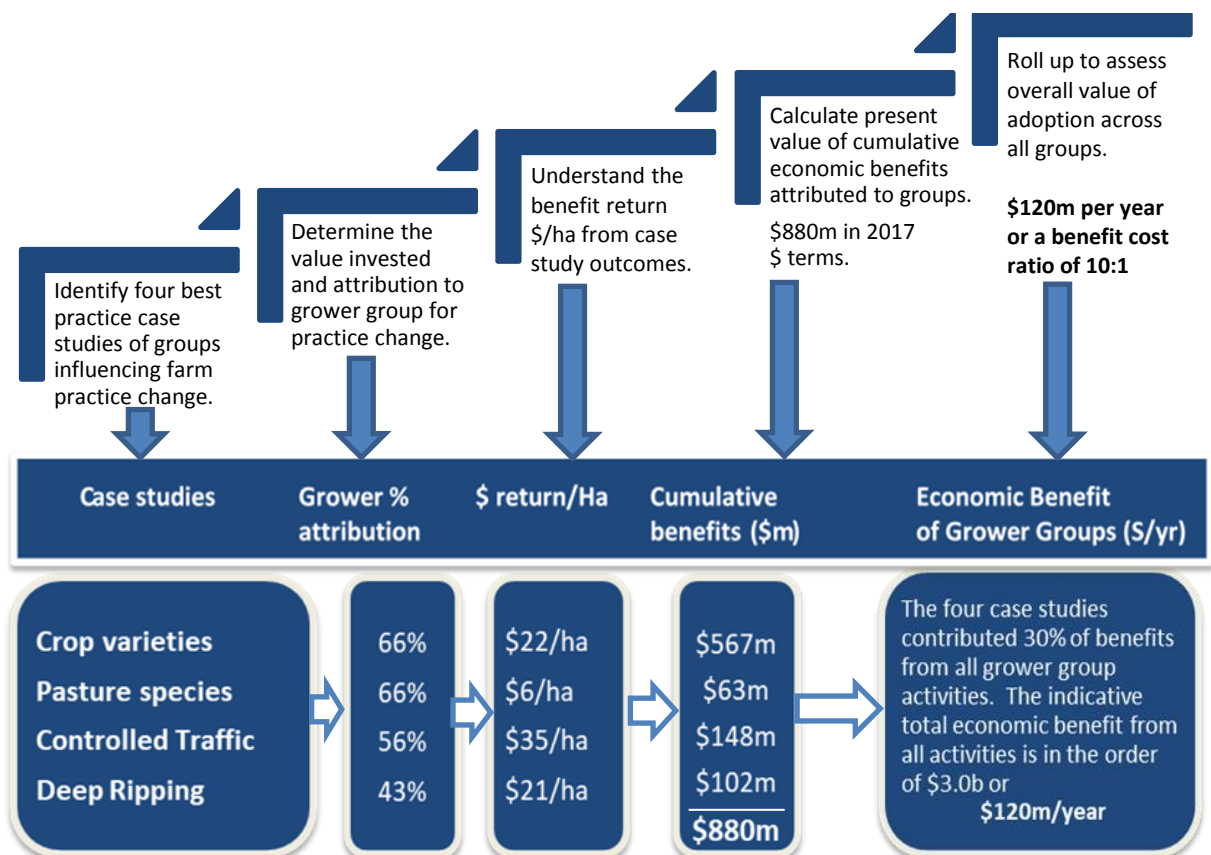
CONTEXT:

To determine the economic value of grower groups to growers and farm businesses, and identify the aspects of grower group activities that drive economic value, the grower groups through their executive staff were engaged to provide feedback and data to form the basis of an economic analysis. In collaboration with the GGA State Advisory Group a detailed questionnaire was developed and distributed to 41 grower groups in the GGA. The 23 completed responses provided data from 56% of the groups and the significant detail collated allowed for an analysis of the financial and in-kind contribution of the groups and their members. This information was correlated with information gathered during interviews with 35 individual growers which detailed their group’s impact on their decision making and their assessment of the value generated by grower groups.

The full reports can be found in Appendix 4 *Grower Group Value – Grower Group Survey and Economic Analysis Report July 2017* and Appendix 3 *Grower Group Value – Farmer Interviews Report June 2017*.

Methodology - using a ‘best practice’ case study approach

The diagram below outlines the methodology used to calculate the present value of the cumulative direct and indirect economic benefits of the four case study farm management practices attributed to grower groups (1990–2016 in 2017 \$ terms).



PROJECT OUTCOMES:

Grower group income and expenditure

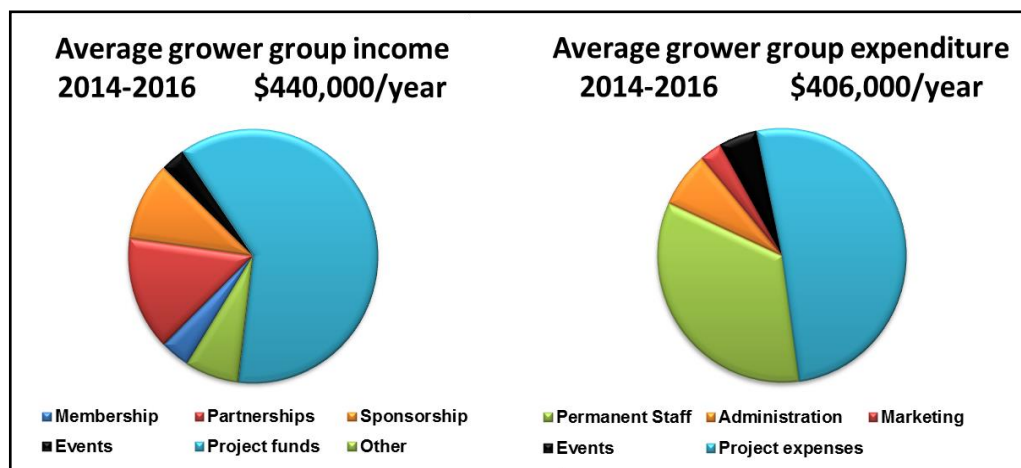
Grower group income and expenditure over the past three financial years for the 23 grower group responses were analysed to understand the direct economic activity generated through the business conducted by grower groups. Assuming these responses are typical of the GGA's 41 grower groups, it may be assumed that approximately 56% of income and expenditure is captured for all grower groups in the past three years. If this is the case, then **total income and expenditure for all grower groups in Western Australia is estimated to be in the order of \$10m/year**, which accounts for the full range of large and small groups.

Grower group annual turnover varied significantly across the 23 groups that contributed data, with total group annual income ranging from \$1,000 to \$1.5m. Turnover is significantly impacted by project funding cycles but **average project income for these groups was 62% of total income**. Project funding is the major driver for a group as the enabler to undertake projects and validate research, which assists farm decision making and ensures the group's relevance to its members.

With membership fees averaging \$163 per annum in this study sample, multiplied across an average group membership of 124 members this delivers around \$20,000 annually, which means **membership fee income delivers just 4% of total revenue for a typical group**.

Significant effort is expended by groups to source, service and retain sponsorship and partnership agreements to underpin group income. The **average income generated from sponsors and partners was 25% of total income** or around \$100,000pa per group.

Analysis of group expenditure found around \$180,000 or **44% of total expenditure was required to service staff, administration and marketing** while a further **51% of expenses are used to service projects**. Funding to maintain executive support remains a challenge for all groups, large and small.

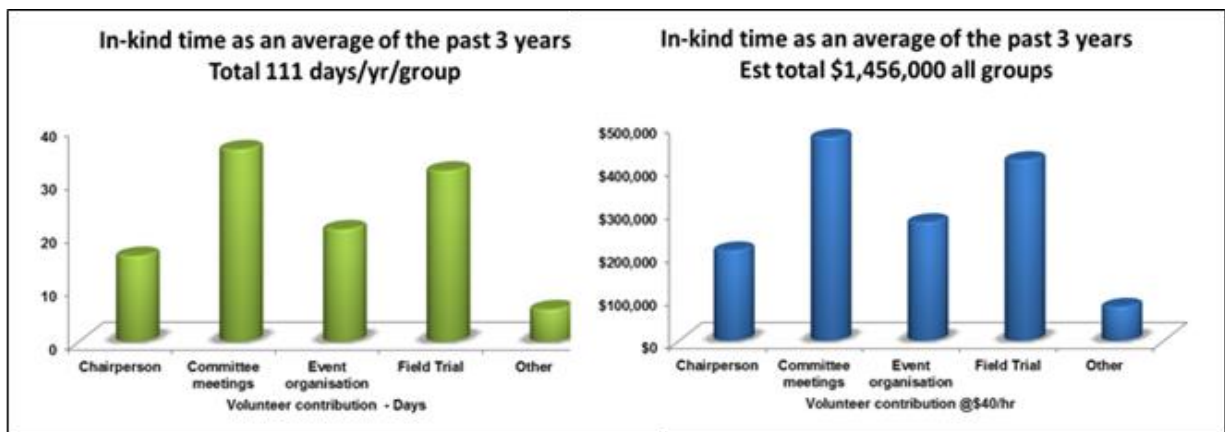


Volunteer and in-kind contribution to grower groups

A significant part of the activity generated by grower groups is sourced through volunteer and in-kind contributions made by growers. Groups were asked to account for this by providing an estimate of the days per year of in-kind time provided. **The survey found the average amount of time provided in-kind is approximately 111 days per grower group per year**.

Valuing in-kind time conservatively at a basic rate of \$320/day (\$40/hour) provides a value for time of \$35,500/year per grower group, or **approximately \$1.5m/year for all grower groups**.

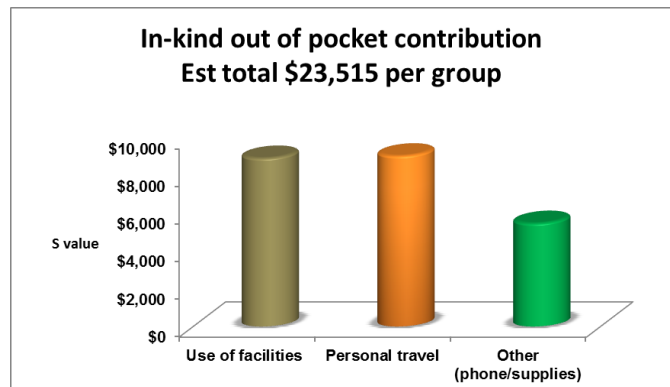
The total of in-kind time and other in-kind contributions is approximately of \$60,000/year per grower group, or approximately \$2m/year for all grower groups. Seventy per cent of this is voluntary time.



Totalling average financial expenses and in-kind contributions, total contributions made by grower groups are estimated to be approximately \$467,000/year per grower group, or \$12m/year for all grower groups. Approximately 85% of this is financial and 15% is in-kind contributions.

Comparing information from the *Farmer Interviews Report* and the *Grower Group Survey* there was a strong consensus that

suggests **members of a grower group who provide volunteer time to their group do so for between 11.1 and 11.7 hours/month**. Extrapolating this number further would indicate an in-kind contribution of between \$4-500 per volunteering member per month.



Influence on practice change

The Grower Group Survey conducted as part of this project requested groups nominate three farm management practices which they have had the most success in influencing adoption. Groups noted the year their group first provided information on that practice, the proportion of all expenditure spent on each practice, the proportion of members adopting the practice, and the proportion of total economic benefit to growers provided by their grower group due to each farm practice. The list of management practices identified by grower groups was similar to those provided in the *Farmer Interviews Report* also conducted as part of this project.

Note: See Tables 6, 7 in Appendix 4 Grower Group Value – Grower Group Survey and Economic Analysis Report July 2017.

Grower groups indicated they started providing information about the identified practices from 2007, that between 30 and 80% of members have adopted the practices, that grower groups have spent from 5 to 42% of their expenditure on these individual practices, which have contributed from 10 to 50% of the economic benefit to these groups.

Estimation of the economic value provided by grower groups in WA

This estimation of the economic value of grower groups in Western Australia in the role of influencing practice change utilises the concept of valuing the economic benefits of particular management practices that have been promoted by grower groups. To arrive at a current value underpinned by real experience and outcome, Dr Liz Petersen in conjunction with *Agknowledge*[®] completed an economic analysis on four case study land management practices identified by the groups surveyed:

1. controlled traffic farming,
2. deep ripping,
3. adoption of new wheat varieties, and
4. adoption of serradella/biserrula pasture species.

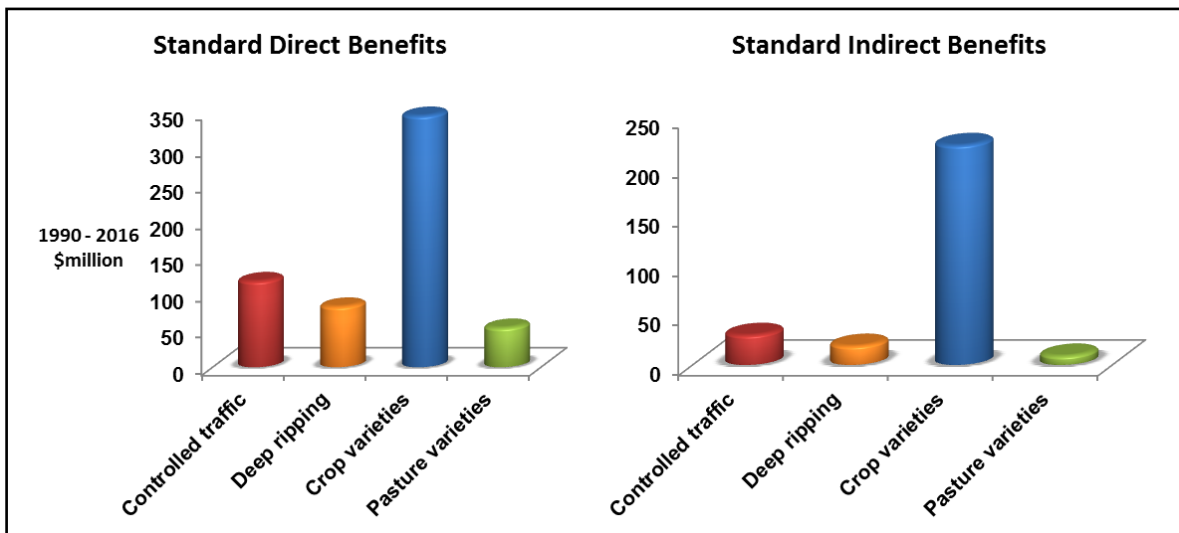
The study estimates that the grower groups spent approximately 35% of their budget on these four case studies of land management practices, and benefits to growers from these practices represent approximately 30% of total benefits of grower group activities.

Direct on-farm economic values are estimated through calculating the difference between current adoption and hypothetical adoption in the absence of grower group activities. The difference in gross margins as a result of adoption of the land management practice is multiplied by the additional adoption attributed to grower group activities.

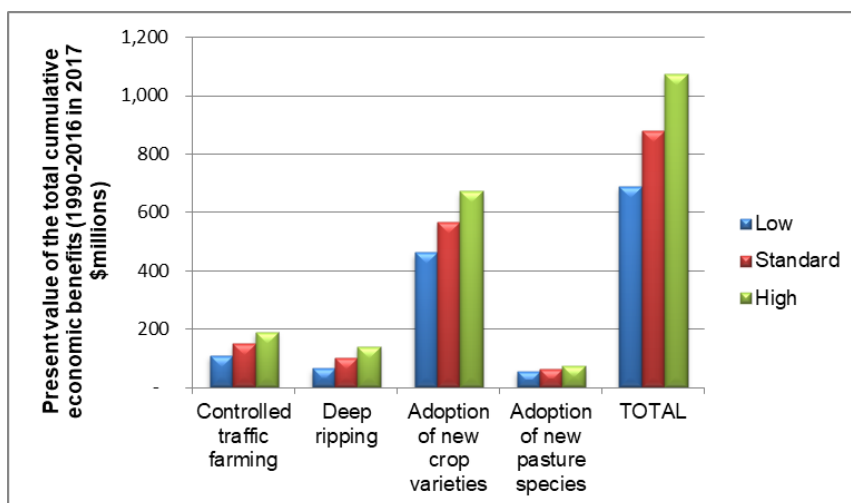
The total direct on-farm benefits, cumulative from 1990 to 2016 in 2017 dollar terms, are estimated to be approximately \$600 million (and may range from approximately \$450m to \$750m).

Indirect flow-on effects through the Western Australian economy due to growers' increased adoption of farm practices as a result of grower group activities are estimated using output multipliers. These multipliers estimate the flow-on value of increased demand for goods and services that supply inputs or service production (such as fertiliser, machinery, cartage) as well as increased expenditure of households due to increased incomes.

The total indirect flow-on benefits, cumulative from 1990 to 2016 in 2017 dollar terms, are estimated to be \$300 million (and could range from approximately \$200m to \$350m).



Present value of the economic benefits attributed to grower groups from four case studies



The total economic value of the four case study farm management practices is approximately \$900m.

Note: The full report by Advanced Choice Economics Pty Ltd and Agknowledge® can be found in Appendix 4A.

Scaling these benefits up to estimate the value of all grower group activities, **the cumulative total economic value is estimated to be \$3 billion over the period 1990 to 2016** (and could range from approximately \$2.3bn to \$3.6bn). Over the 25 year time frame, this is an average of \$120m/yr (ranging from \$90m/yr to \$150m/yr).

The results of the Grower Group Survey reveal that over the past three financial years, expenditure of all grower groups within the GGA is approximately \$10m/yr, and in-kind contributions value approximately \$2m/yr for a total contribution of \$12m/yr.

Present value of the cumulative economic benefits and costs of grower groups (\$m/yr)

Levels of adoption	Low	Standard	High
Estimated total benefits	92	117	143
Expenditure	10	10	10
In-kind contributions	2	2	2
Estimated total costs	12	12	12
Benefit cost ratio	8	10	12

Dividing the estimated annual average benefit per year (\$120m/yr) by the estimated costs (\$12m/yr) reveals **a benefit cost ratio of approximately 10** (ranging from 8 to 12).

This suggests that every dollar spent by grower groups (including in-kind contributions) generates an economic value to the Western Australian economy of approximately \$10, which is a very good return on investment.

Economic benefits provided by grower groups beyond practice change

The Grower Group Survey identified a range of economic benefits other than on-farm practice change that groups provide to their local community including employment, support of local businesses and providing funds for community infrastructure and groups.

When groups access funding for local activities and projects, business opportunities can be created for people living and working in the region. Many of the grower groups employ staff who may move into the region and in turn support local businesses and the community. Groups create permanent employment with executive officer and project officer roles, and casual employment to establish and harvest trials, run events etc.

Throughout the year groups generate direct local economic benefit by supporting local business through event catering; venue hire; transport hire; accommodation for speakers and advertising in local publications. Grower group events also attract farmers to town who spend on accommodation and at local businesses while they are in town. Grower group events generate expenditure in towns that helps to sustain local communities.

Community crops, facilitated by some grower groups, help to raise substantial amounts of money which allows those groups to support other local community groups through the provision of funds for local projects, schools or local infrastructure. Grower groups are active in representing their members on issues that affect their bottom line and provide a voice for farmers on R&D and local issues and for development of industry opportunities. Other benefits that grower groups provide to local communities included new business ventures; attracting research and funds into the region; promotion of agriculture through sponsoring local shows; retention of young farmers through succession planning and connecting the community through promotion of local events.

3 The value of grower groups to agricultural RD&E

THE BRIEF:

Determine the value provided to the agricultural RD&E industry, in particular to funding bodies and agencies as a cost effective service provider and partner in delivery function, though greater adoption and ROI of projects.

KEY FINDINGS:

- **Grower groups are efficient and effective research, development, extension and adoption partners.** The value to funders and research partners is through greater adoption and return on investment in projects, and the effective delivery mechanism for extension and communication. The project cites a group accessing 200 businesses, representing 70% of production in a port zone, as an efficient model for communicating and supporting adoption of practice change.
- Grower groups provide a mechanism to ensure **research priorities are driven by farmers as the levy payers** and that farmers have **'ownership' of the outcomes** when research is local and applicable to their system.
- **Research is relevant and timely** to real time challenges farmers are observing in their systems and locally relevant research outcomes are promoted directly to growers to support adoption.
- **Return on investment is enhanced by the rates of adoption achieved by grower groups: the economic analysis calculated that each dollar grower groups spent (including in-kind contributions) on the best practice case studies generated an economic value to WA of approximately \$10, which is a very good return on investment. (Benefit cost 10:1.)**
- **Research and development corporations and research partners value and need the extension capacity** that grower groups provide to support adoption of their outcomes.
- **There is great value in the in-kind and voluntary contribution of farmers to RD&E.** Farmers voluntarily contribute time, resources, land, machinery, management to local research initiatives. The project found on average a member may contribute 11 hours per month voluntarily to their group. Farmers bear an opportunity cost to support paddock trials: loss of land, traffic on farm, the time put in at the expense of farm operations; this needs to be valued by RD&E partners.
- **There is value in grower groups providing validation of research;** demonstrating science in practice and sharing paddock level outcomes with new knowledge generated by trials.
- **Grower groups provide the peer influence that is so important to adoption.** Groups share the learning from early adopters; once they demonstrate or champion a change there's capacity to get rapid adoption through group networks. **Grower groups can drive wide scale and rapid adoption of innovations.** For example, no till practices driven by local champions rapidly scaled up to state-wide adoption.
- **Collaboration between researcher, farmer and funder to find solutions has high value to RD&E.** Grower groups are the mechanism for conversation to flow both ways between researchers and farmers, which can be measured by the quality of research outcomes and the return on investment by the RDC. Grower groups inform scientists of what farmers want to know: what research is relevant, useful and applicable to local farming systems.
- **There is value generated for the industry by groups training / mentoring new RD&E industry entrants.** Access to learn from farmers and current farm practices builds future industry capacity.
- **Grower groups help fill geographical gaps** for DAFWA and researchers: research partners need groups to help access growing regions where they are unable to have a physical presence.

CONTEXT:

To determine the value of grower groups to agricultural research, development and extension extensive consultation was undertaken with research partners, funders, consultants, sponsors, and the Department of Agriculture and Food WA. This work was complemented by an economic analysis of the value of grower groups, which specifically examined four case studies of farm practice change adoption to determine a measure of the return on investment in R&D through grower groups. The full reports can be found in Appendices 2 *Grower Group Value – Industry Interviews Report June 2017* and 4 *Grower Group Value – Grower Group Survey and Economic Analysis Report July 2017*.

PROJECT OUTCOMES:

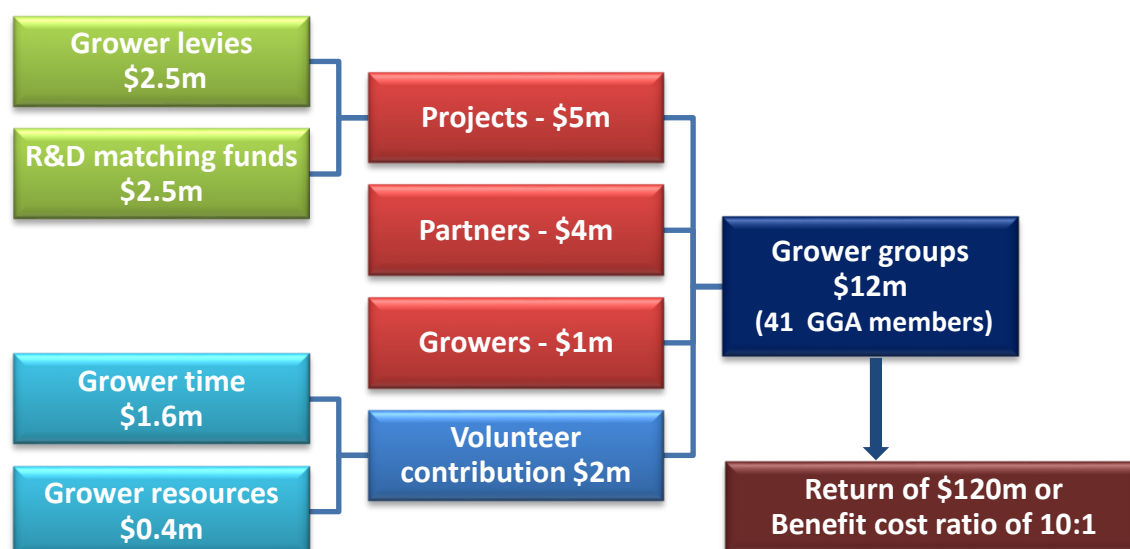
The project identified that across the agricultural RD&E sector there is strong support for grower groups in WA as partners believe groups play a crucial role and are a vital part of the structure for primary industry in the state. Industry believes **grower groups have filled an extension gap and have become a valued local conduit between farmers and the research and development sector.**

Grower groups are viewed as independently run and **valued for their role in disseminating information, organising extension and demonstration events, and facilitating practice change** which contributes to an increase in productivity and profitability. Grower groups provide a forum for farmers to come together to share ideas and gain information and knowledge to improve their farming businesses. For industry, **groups provide a pathway or network to engage directly with farmers for collaboration, research, development and extension purposes, and product development and service feedback.**

Return on investment

The survey of grower groups provided data to support an estimation that the total income and expenditure for all grower groups in Western Australia is in the order of \$10m/year. The groups surveyed identified that while turnover is impacted by project funding cycles, average project income represented around 62% of their total income. A further 25% of income was estimated to be sourced from sponsors and partners, and 4% from membership fees for a typical group.

The **groups estimated 51% of their total expenses were used to service projects.** Based on feedback from members on their in-kind contributions to their grower group, a calculation was made of time and other **in-kind contributions which was valued at approximately \$60,000/year per grower group, or approximately \$2m/year totalled across all WA grower groups.**



Source: *Agknowledge Grower Group Survey Appendix 4 and Farmer Interviews Report Appendix 3.*

This in-kind contribution must be valued by research partners as a major contributor to the efficiency and effectiveness of grower groups as research collaborators. If funders were to cost the true costs of project delivery, they would need to include an estimation and costing of time for trial establishment and harvesting, commercial rates on access to land, commercial rates on hire of machinery etc. which would add significantly to total research project costs.

The economic analysis set out to estimate the economic value of grower groups in influencing practice change by looking at the outcomes of four management practices promoted by the groups surveyed. The study calculated the total direct on-farm benefits of these practice changes, cumulative from 1990 to 2016 in 2017 dollar terms, were estimated to be approximately \$600 million while the total indirect flow-on benefits were estimated to be \$300 million. Scaling these benefits up to estimate the value of all grower group activities, the analysis estimated over the 25 year time frame an annual economic value of \$120 million per annum. Dividing the annual average benefit by the estimated costs resulted in a **benefit cost of approximately 10. This suggests that every dollar spent by grower groups (including in-kind contributions) generates an economic value to the Western Australian economy of approximately \$10.**

Funders

Funders believe **grower groups are integral to local RD&E** as they are focused on local issues that they can get traction on to increase the profitability and productivity of farmers. Funding criteria is based around the group's track record and ability to deliver the project, the capacity of staff, project feasibility, the methodology, risk, business strategy, the benefit to farmers and production systems, and collaboration with industry partners.

From a research perspective **the value of grower groups is seen to be in creating stronger projects by adding value to the research objectives and outcomes.** Another major value is that **groups provide a strong and credible vehicle for extension**, so researchers who partner with grower groups have more opportunity for impact with farmers in promoting practice change.

Partners

Partners such as universities, research organisations and consultants are involved with grower groups through trial programs, projects and various other opportunities that enable them to connect with farmers and link in with groups on projects and events. **Partners say they prefer to work with grower groups to reach more farmers and get better value from projects**, but they also bring agronomists and consultants into grower group research partnerships to access the value of their agronomic expertise and build capacity.

Grower groups provide **value for partners by making trial sites available for research; they enable partners to reach more farmers and achieve effective engagement through participative research and promoting practice change.** Increasingly researchers and agribusinesses are collaborating with grower groups to run events as they acknowledge the **groups have greater capacity to draw an interested and engaged audience.** Grower groups also provide an important link to enable students and new industry entrants to connect with and learn from leading farmers.

Department of Agriculture and Food WA staff recognised that **grower groups fill a void the department has left following cuts in the extension area**, and they **provide a conduit for staff** to liaise directly with farmers to determine what DAFWA should be prioritising. They also fill the gaps in the regions where the department does not have a presence.

Grower groups provide a strong network of growers which enables DAFWA to interact and focus on group issues, rather than reacting to individual issues. They also provide an opportunity for department staff to highlight their research through trials and presenting at grower group events.

DAFWA staff have a great working relationship with some grower groups in the regions where they are involved in sub-committees, attend meetings and provide briefings on projects and policy. According to DAFWA representatives it is a **deliberate strategy for the department to remain engaged with grower groups as they are recognised as a key stakeholder group**. DAFWA works in closely with a number of grower groups; over the years they have actively supported the development of groups and have worked closely with groups on projects. They provide in-kind equipment and support and co-host events, and may offer groups office space through co-locating.

The rigour of research undertaken by grower groups is critiqued by researchers and DAFWA staff who specialise in research. Generally it is viewed as farmer-based research and while it may lack scientific rigour, importantly the **work is seen as relevant and practical as it is driven by farmers**. The quality of the research is dependent on the capacity of the group to undertake trials.

To ensure more scientific rigour, it was suggested grower groups outsource trials and use partners who have research skills and can take the lead on projects. Groups could also support the development of staff skills in the trials area. DAFWA employees believe groups should stick with broad acre strip trials and not replicate what DAFWA does, unless they collaborate with researchers.

GRDC has moved to include a requirement for statistical support in trial design and analysis of results for all Regional Cropping Solutions Network investments and is negotiating an investment to provide additional statistical support to grower groups and other RD&E providers delivering trials through GRDC investment.

Consultants

Consultants value grower groups for their validation and demonstration of RD&E as consultants need to access information and results on issues that are topical, relevant and applicable to farmers. They believe grower groups have a role to work with larger groups of farmers, whereas consultants work one on one, so they are not seen as working in competition with consultants. Some consultants have their own farmer groups and run their own events. **Consultants recognise peer to peer learning is critical in agricultural extension and grower groups provide a valued forum for this.**

Sponsors

Sponsors of grower groups vary from large national agribusinesses, to state-wide organisations, and down to the local re-seller who works in with their local grower group. Some sponsor a number of groups and cash commitments can total up to \$125,000 a year. In addition there is significant in-kind sponsorship provided to groups which includes demonstrations/trials support, time commitments for engagement and speaker presentations, shared expertise of staff and event attendance.

One large sponsor of grower groups identified they had achieved a significant return on their investment over the past 15 years, which had been realised through active participation and hard work on behalf of both the sponsor and the grower group.

Sponsorship of groups is based on where sponsors believe they can get business growth, the involvement of leading farmers, membership size, the functionality of the group (including professionalism, governance and management framework), the influence of the group, the capacity of staff, the community, the company's resources in the region and the involvement of competitors.

As a sponsor, **the value of grower groups is perceived in the networking opportunities as well as in branding and business growth**, and they anticipate that greater brand recognition will result in new clients, more tonnes, or an increase in product sales. Some organisations review their sponsorship agreements on an annual basis to determine their return on investment. The larger companies are more readily able to measure their return on investment, whereas the smaller locally-based sponsor

finds it harder to measure direct value from their sponsorship but it remains part of their local marketing plan to support their community.

Sponsorship is not just about providing funds, but it is also about the **involvement of the company's staff members in grower group activities and demonstrating their knowledge and expertise while providing specialist services back to groups**. It is about **sharing knowledge on what they specialise in** and building relationships, which opens up communication lines with growers and in turn opens up business opportunities. **Grower groups also help develop the knowledge of new entrants to agribusiness**, as farmers share information about their systems and practices with new staff.

How grower group management views the value of grower groups to RD&E

Grower group management believes groups provide immense value and play an integral role in the WA agricultural industry as they represent the strongest connection to growers to undertake grower driven RD&E. **Groups are a vital link between researchers, industry and farmers and they empower producers by addressing local issues and facilitating local RD&E relevant to their members.**

With DAFWA withdrawing from extension, grower groups have become the main vehicle that actively facilitates adoption and extension of new research and technologies. Access to locally relevant information is an important part in ensuring that farmers can continue to improve their productivity and business profitability. As stated by one group, **'groups provide an important path for getting R&D opportunities on the ground and in linking growers and those involved there is potentially a greater return on the research investment as it is better focused, reaches growers more directly and is linked with other locally relevant research'**.

Grower groups are also viewed as contributing significant value to the industry as they facilitate the **sharing of information and encourage innovation through peer to peer learning; they provide capacity building opportunities which are specific and highly beneficial to members.**

They also play a valuable role in representing farmers to address issues as they are seen to be a powerful voice on issues that are important to their local members. Other successful roles that grower groups undertake are through providing networking opportunities which are highly valued for the social aspect, and some groups play a valuable role in conservation within their region.

Grower groups are viewed as an essential player in the WA agricultural industry as they **provide a service which is at minimal cost** compared to private advisors (and in the case of some groups is free) **that aids adoption, facilitates learning, connects industry with farmers and has a strong social benefit**. It was also identified that a properly functioning grower group can add enormous value to research, technology uptake and scientific rigour of farm trials.

Grower group management clearly articulated their value proposition to the RD&E sector in the *Grower Group Value – Grower Group Survey and Economic Analysis Report July 2017* (Appendix 4):

"Grower groups provide significant value to the WA agricultural industry. Farm profitability is strongly linked to the ability to adapt and change. For growers, having access to local R&D is an important part in ensuring that they can continue to improve productivity and business profitability. The grower group provides a forum that assists in attracting relevant R&D and expertise to the local area in a co-ordinated and more accessible way. Through grower groups we can clearly outline priority issues and identify activities that we can implement in the short term, but also longer term more strategic R&D that helps us adapt to changing circumstances.

The conversations that happen at grower groups through networking and sharing information amongst growers and agribusinesses can make a big difference on-farm. The groups provide an important path for getting R&D opportunities on the ground. By linking growers and directly involving them with R&D opportunities there is a greater return on the research investment as

research can be better focussed, linked to other relevant research and reach growers more directly to support adoption.”

How farmers view the value of grower groups to RD&E

Farmers view grower groups as delivering **significant value to the RD&E sector by efficiently sharing resources and collaborating to deliver local research projects, and they are very effective at bringing farmers together to share information to improve decision making** that may assist to improve productivity and/or profitability.

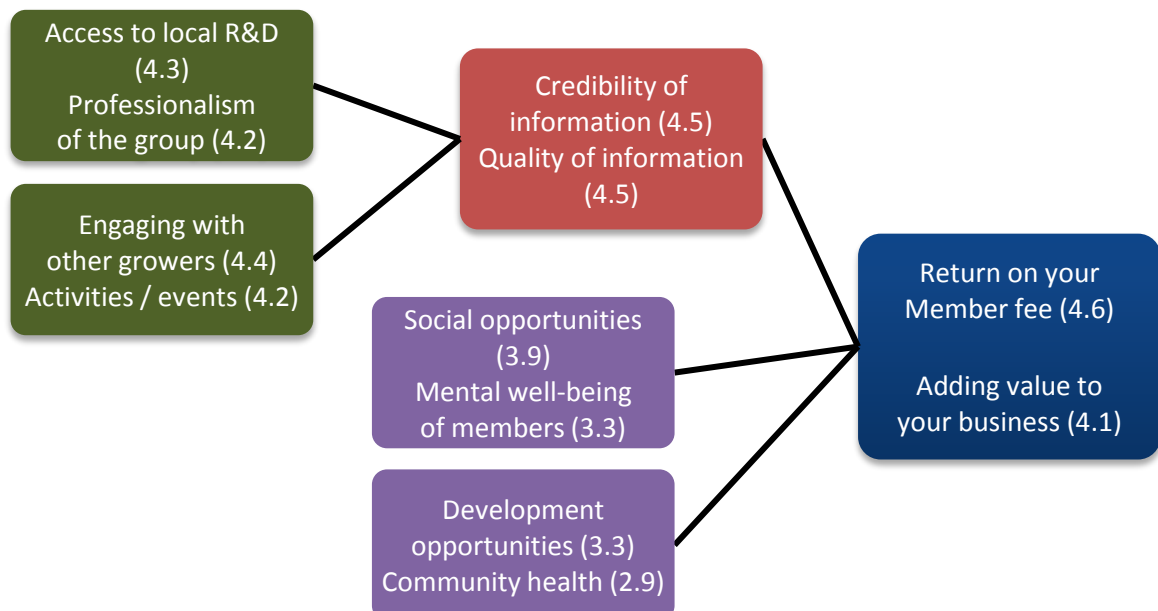
Grower groups are perceived to make a huge **contribution to a farmer’s bottom line and farmers get a good return on their time and levy funds investment when they attend group events**. Grower groups provide a valuable network for industry and researchers to access farmers and vice versa.

Grower groups **keep research relevant to farmers and provide trustworthy and independent information which is tailored and specific to their local area**. Groups **facilitate peer to peer learning** and allow farmers to have **ownership of the R&D outcomes**.

Farmers acknowledge that the grower group network (number of groups and scale geographically) across the state is unique to WA and is **an asset the industry should value** as it provides the mechanism to ensure that farmers’ levy money does hit the ground and that they are getting a return on their levies.

“Grower groups provide significant value to the WA agricultural industry by localising research and capacity building opportunities which are specific and highly beneficial to their members. WA grower groups have become localised learning hubs which cannot be replicated by the government or the private sector.”

Rating the value and benefits of belonging to a grower group



Question: rate the value and benefits of your grower group (1 = little value, 5 = high degree of return).

Source: Appendix 3 *Grower Group Value – Farmer Interviews Report June 2017*

4 The value of grower groups in regional capacity building

THE BRIEF:

Determine the role of grower groups in growing and supporting human capacity in regional WA.

KEY FINDINGS:

- **Peer to peer learning opportunities** are created by grower groups bringing farmers together to share information and experience.
- **Direct learning support** is provided for members when a group accesses researchers and visiting speakers or practitioners of new technologies.
- **Networks are created** by groups across regions to access and share information beyond the local area.
- **Mentoring and skills development** is supported for members through their voluntary roles on grower group committees and boards.
- **Social interaction** and events coordinated by groups support community and mental health.
- **Employment, mentoring and career support** is provided for young agricultural professionals working for and with grower groups.
- **Groups are a training ground for new industry entrants** and are recognised for their role in developing human capacity and providing a first start in agricultural careers.
- **Identifying and encouraging the next champion** to promote practice change to other farmers; it is human nature to share a good idea and farmers learn most effectively from other farmers.
- **Managing succession** - groups are constantly bringing new people into leadership roles and actively encouraging members from across a region to participate in running the group.
- **Strong collaborative relationships and networks** exist in groups with DAFWA staff, researchers, consultants, agronomists and agribusinesses.
- **Grower groups have filled a void in agricultural extension** regionally following a policy shift to withdraw public extension capacity.
- **Grower groups have attracted expertise and developed capacity within the regions** to deliver productivity improvements and sustainability.
- **Grower groups have driven local research initiatives** to address local production constraints and build production capacity.

CONTEXT:

To determine the value of grower groups in growing and supporting human capacity in regional Western Australia analysis was made of the feedback from the detailed interviews with growers, grower group management, partners, funders, sponsors and industry.

Participants were keen to contribute their views on the value grower groups provide in building human capacity, beyond purely economic or quantitative measures, and while they recognise this is harder to measure it is viewed as an equally important value that grower groups create in regional Western Australia. The full transcripts of the interviews can be found in Appendices 2-4 accompanying this report.

PROJECT OUTCOMES:

The farmers interviewed identified that being involved in a grower group can **build an individual's skills, knowledge and confidence which they may then transfer into other industry and community roles**. The **benefits of peer to peer learning** were acknowledged by grower group members who said they were constantly learning and interacting with other farmers and agriculturalists which helped them develop new skills and challenge their farming systems to continuously improve.

Grower group members said being involved in a grower group was one of the stepping stones to **developing their leadership skills and confidence** to be involved in community development. They cited capacity for improved communication, strategic planning and thinking outside the square as skills that flowed back into their farm businesses from their grower group involvement.

The **range of professional development opportunities** members identified from their grower group involvement included public speaking and presentation skills; understanding meeting procedures; project management; corporate governance; event organisation skills and developing industry connections and networks. Other skills developed included people management; group processes; leadership; agronomics; trial layout procedures; financial analysis and management; using technology; negotiating; mentorship; community development; capacity to pitch to sponsors; strategic planning; understanding working with government departments and industry bodies.

Practical skills are also taken back into farm businesses from interacting with others in a grower group including computer tools like using Dropbox and spreadsheets, farm office management and procedures, how to apply for and acquit funding grants, and shared experiences on managing different personality types in staff and family teams.

Grower group members also identified the **value from their grower group exposing them to constant conversations with adaptive and innovative people, supporting them to establish networks to source good information, and including them in a peer group of very good farmers which is very motivating**. Access to training courses on topics like corporate governance were cited as valuable capacity building opportunities that an involvement with grower groups had provided.

"Grower groups have given me more confidence and helped solidify my capacity and skill set. I have learnt a lot of agronomic skills that have played an integral role in my farm career."

Leadership roles farmers progress to from their involvement in grower groups

Many of the farmers interviewed for this project had been in leadership roles in their industry or community and **48% suggested this was directly as a result of their involvement in grower groups**.

Some of their industry leadership roles included the GRDC Regional Cropping Solutions Network Committee; the GRDC Western Panel; the GGA Advisory Committee; a CSIRO steering committee; the Sheep's Back Discussion Group; Nuffield Scholarship Committee; a Cabinet Select Committee; the Sheep Industry Leadership Council; the Rural Women's Award; MLA WA Livestock Research Council.

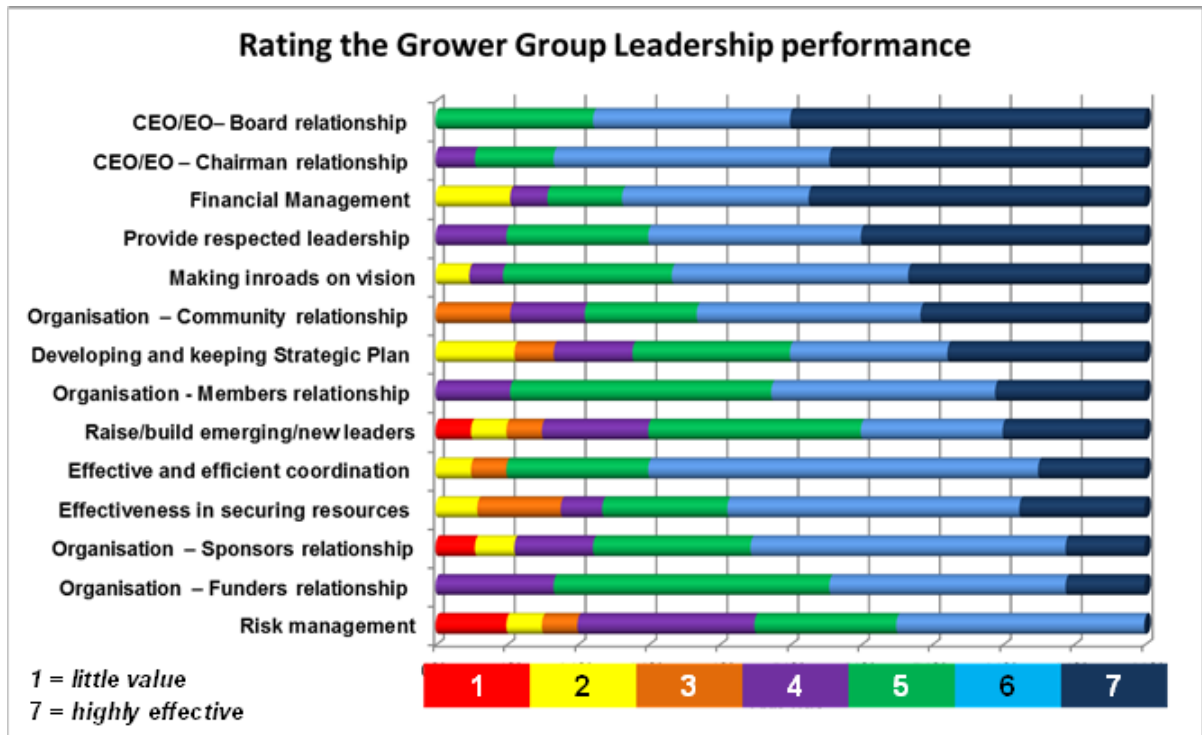
A further 16% of growers had progressed to leadership roles that they said were not directly related to their involvement with grower groups although it had helped them to progress, and 6% said they were still heavily involved in grower group roles today.

"I wouldn't have put my hand up to be involved in the community if it wasn't for my grower group involvement; it has given me the confidence to step up and keep moving forward."

"I've had numerous board positions and my grower group involvement has had some bearing on my leadership roles. I certainly use my experience from grower groups to develop rapport with people to be more relatable and credible, and farmers trust you more as a result. My involvement has undoubtedly helped build my leadership skills and I've used these in many different roles."

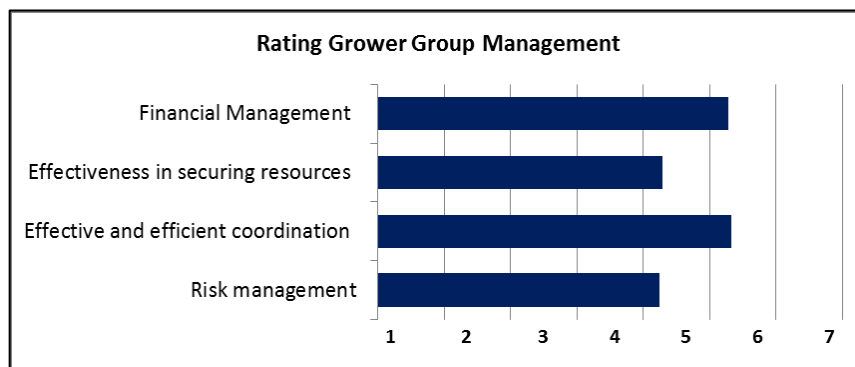
Grower group leadership capacity

The grower groups were asked to assess their current governance and leadership capacity as part of the *Grower Group Value – Grower Group Survey 2017* (Appendix 4) and the results are summarised in the figure below where groups rated leadership aspects on a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 = little value and 7 = highly effective. **The results reflect that effort has been made in capacity building for grower group executive committees and boards and there is confidence in how the groups are being run.**



Assessing the capacity that has been developed in the executive leadership of grower groups identified that **groups rate the board relationships, chairman relationship and the financial management of their groups as very effective. Groups also rated well for providing respected leadership, making inroads on their vision and in their community relationships.**

From a governance perspective a great deal of the voluntary contribution of grower group members on management committees is invested in providing oversight to the financial management of their groups. The executive officers rated their groups strongly on their financial management and for their effective and efficient coordination capacity.



A feature of the WA grower groups is that they have evolved over decades to become ‘fit for purpose’: there is no one size fits all formula; they form around a common purpose to solve issues in local farming systems, and they remain relevant to their members by continuing to provide outcomes that assist farm decision making. The results of the survey reflect the range of capacity and

size of the grower groups so it is not possible to generalise about the level of capacity building they have achieved as all the groups are at different stages of their evolution and maturity.

The diversity of the grower group model, the heterogeneity, is a key advantage in delivering value to members, but it is also a significant challenge for funding bodies and partners who interact with groups as they have a wide range in their capacity to collaborate on projects and deliver outcomes.

With the funding and delivery model for research, development, extension and adoption in Australia undergoing significant change in the past 20 years many grower groups in WA have evolved to become effective in aligning local needs with local research and development and translating outcomes to promote practice change. Other groups have chosen to remain focussed on their original charter and continue to fulfil local needs as determined by their members. **Both approaches are valid and valued by their members.**

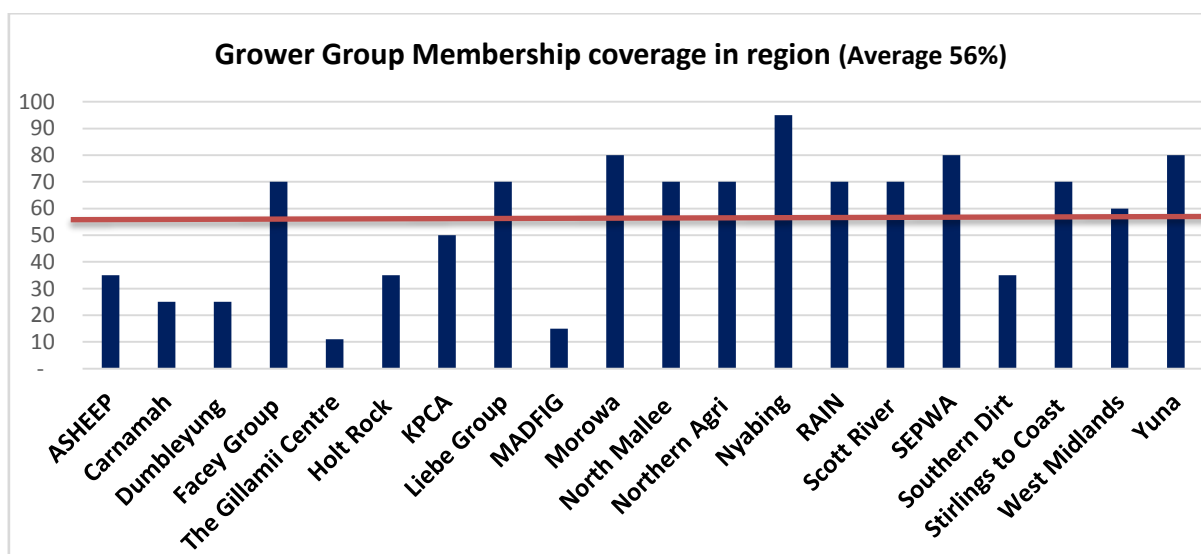
Grower group membership reach

Of the 23 grower groups that responded to the survey, the average number of members was 124 (ranging from 11 to 395), indicating the wide variance in the size of grower group memberships.

Membership coverage (the average size of membership as a percentage of the estimated number of farm businesses in each group's region) was 56% (ranging from 11 to 80%). When weighted by the size of the group, the weighted average coverage was 51%.

The average cost of membership for the groups surveyed was \$163/year (ranging from \$0 to \$600/year). When compared to the cost of membership identified during the earlier farmer interviews, which included members of a wider range of groups including fee for service consultancy groups with fees between \$2,500 and \$6,000, the average moved up to around \$600/year.

The more functional grower groups are not based on membership numbers but are driven by a committed group of innovative local farmers, have a particular focus (issue specific or regional focus), have dedicated support staff, a good management committee, they collaborate with industry, are conscious of relationship building, have good governance and are focused on their strategic plan. As stated by a sponsor 'the capacity of the group dictates the value you get as a sponsor'. It was mentioned that **successful grower groups need strong leadership, a strong community spirit, a culture of learning and sharing information and continual cross-pollination of ideas between older and younger members.**

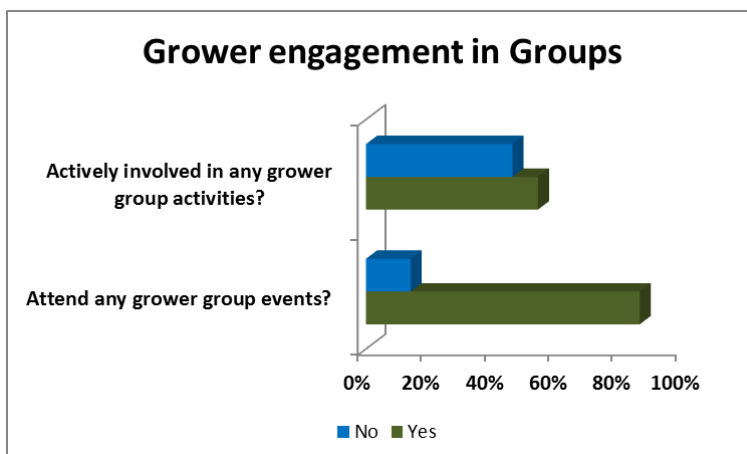


Source: Grower Group Value - Grower Group Survey and Economic Analysis Report July 2017.

Q: Please indicate your Group Memberships as a percentage of the farm businesses in your region

Building social capital in groups

The majority (86%) of growers interviewed regularly attended grower group events and 54% were actively involved in a volunteer capacity in their local grower group. Volunteers in grower groups contributed a range of 2 to 60 hours a month to their group, which equated to an **average of 11.7 hours per member per month**.



Grower group volunteer contribution

	Executive	Sub-committee	Events	Trials	Other*	Total
Total hours/month	155	15	10	13.5	28	223
# farmers actively volunteering						19
Ave hr/mth/volunteer member						11.7

*includes mentoring, grant applications, organising field trips

The volunteer contribution of the same farmers to their broader community was highlighted by the 74% of respondents who indicated they are involved in other community and industry groups and the average time contributed to these was another 12.9 hours a month. The majority of hours were attributed to broader industry groups (169 hours total for all interviewees), followed by sporting clubs (83 hours), community groups (58 hours) and school committees (13 hours).

Farmers' broader volunteer contribution

	Sporting club	Community group	School committee	Industry*	Total
Total hours/month	83	58	13	169	323
# farmers actively volunteering					25
Ave hr/mth/volunteer member					12.9

*includes GRDC Regional Cropping Solutions Network and Western Panel, GGA Strategic Advisory Group, Grain Industry Association of WA Wheat Council, Nuffield Association, Stud Merino Breeders Association, Australian Herbicide Resistance Initiative, National Variety Trials.

Grower groups are actively involved in their local community and have a **positive impact in increasing social capacity** through networking opportunities and supporting mental health, which in turn contributes to overall community health. By developing farmers' knowledge and showcasing the latest research, grower groups contribute to the productivity and profitability of farmers which has a flow-on effect to the capacity and profitability of other businesses in the community.

When times are tough and farmers are faced with fire, drought, floods or frost grower groups play an invaluable role in supporting their members by providing relevant information to **build capacity to deal with the situation, and they also support farming families and communities to manage the mental health impacts in times of adversity**.

Industry believes that all grower groups, big or small, have a role and a right to exist and some groups are more functional and effective than others. Groups that were formed by local, passionate farmers with a bottom-up approach may be more effective than those who originally had an environmental focus or were formed by a government organisation. Grower groups are currently undergoing a settling and maturing phase; those with capacity can attract funding for projects whereas others accept they are a social group and are not looking to attract funding or employ staff.

How groups share their capacity with their region and industry

Grower groups are a conduit for information, they act as a filter for an enormous amount of information to provide their members with relevant and topical information. They have a responsibility to be at the forefront of new technologies and innovations in agriculture and to be able to understand what will be of value to their members.

Aside from their core focus, many **grower groups contribute considerable capacity to their industry through advocacy on rural and regional issues**; hosting Ministers, groups or organisations; endorsing funding proposals; providing feedback on industry issues; responding to local issues; representing the region on boards/committees/groups; and applying for and attracting funding grants. A lot of these additional activities are not covered by normal funding sources.

A lot of grower groups, given they represent local farmers, lobby government on agricultural issues in the region or local government on land use planning and infrastructure requirements. The level of advocacy that is required to represent growers requires significant time and energy and groups are required to be progressive and raise the profile of their groups to ensure members' voices are heard at a higher level.

Many grower groups are asked to host various groups and organisations to show them their local area and issues which include the GRDC, MLA, DAFWA, politicians, students, study tours, visiting delegations etc. As one group stated due to the voluntary nature of a grower group's committee it places a considerable burden on the groups in regards to time and organisation.

Other additional demands include **administration work; compliance (biosecurity management); supporting local land care groups; connecting with tourism; local business development; raising the value of the group with funders; organising social events** and other ad hoc work.

Collaboration creates capacity

WA farmers have an inherent culture of collaboration and sharing information to improve practices that has continued to evolve since the 1940s. Challenging farming conditions and new farming systems that needed to constantly adapt drew farmers together in discussion groups and field walks to share what they had learnt and identify priorities for new research efforts.

Collaboration has always been natural for WA farmers as their competitive focus has been on the export market in broadacre farming, which is also why agricultural cooperatives have been an effective model in WA.

Farming groups have constantly evolved and adapted to meet farmer's needs, with early farm improvement groups formed to support adoption of new practices like sub clover establishment, superphosphate and trace element use, then ley farming groups encouraging crop and pasture production improvements. The Junior Farmer movement was strong in the 1950s-60s with a skills development and capacity building component in its group activities. From the 1970s tight seasons and margins shifted the focus of farming groups to financial performance and productivity with groups like the Two Tonne Club and farm management groups forming. New farming technologies drove the Kondinin Group to become Australia's iconic farm improvement group in the 1990s, attracting significant research funding and delivering major projects and publications.

The diverse range of groups now servicing Western Australian agriculture has evolved from a range of sources including farm improvement, natural resource management and landcare, biosecurity and management groups. **The value created by collaboration in its many different forms continues to advance the WA industry and build its capacity to adapt and innovate over time.**

5 The value of grower groups to their community

THE BRIEF:

Determine the value provided by grower groups to the community, in terms of productive business and social support, and structure.

KEY FINDINGS:

- **Grower groups build the soft infrastructure by providing a social hub that supports community wellbeing and development.**
- **Grower groups are valued for bringing communities together and keeping them alive and vibrant** by providing numerous networking opportunities and attracting people to the area.
- **Social interaction in grower groups contributes to the general wellbeing and mental health of rural communities.** *“Grower groups play a pivotal social role and the importance of that can’t be underestimated as there are fewer people and their occupation is isolating; groups support people’s emotional wellbeing.”*
- **Capacity building of volunteers on grower group committees flows on to benefit other community groups** by using the skills developed in meeting process, governance, people management, sourcing and acquitting funding, and leadership.
- **Group activities have a positive flow on effect to the broader farm family and staff on farm** for example with farm office skills development, events for women, young farmer events.
- **Employment generated by groups supports local communities** including staff, contractors, consultants, agronomists, researchers.
- **Practical and emotional support is provided by grower groups during and after adverse events** and grower groups are the go-to organisation in times of crisis e.g. fire, flood, frost, storms, drought.
- **Social support benefits flow to the broader community in times of adversity** with assistance provided to local schools and clubs, and to the extended family of members affected.
- **Social and economic stimulus from grower group events is generated for communities** through volunteering, catering, accommodation, transport etc.



CONTEXT:

To determine the value of grower groups to their community relevant feedback was drawn from detailed interviews conducted with growers, group management, partners, sponsors and industry.

While social value is hard to measure and often intangible, the project identified that value is generated by grower groups in many forms which need to be understood and articulated to understand the full picture of the contribution of grower groups to their regional communities.

Grower groups play a pivotal role in building social capital as they provide the 'soft infrastructure' of a social focal point and a support network for rural communities which contributes to general wellbeing and mental health in isolated rural communities. The full reports can be found in Appendices 1-4.

PROJECT OUTCOMES:

Grower groups in Western Australia are a significant part of the social or soft infrastructure of rural communities as they contribute to the prosperity and vibrancy of regional towns and communities across the state. They enable networking opportunities and social interaction that contributes to the overall community health.

Grower groups range in size and functionality from smaller groups run by volunteers who provide a community service and have a strong social focus, through to larger grower groups who also provide employment and economic opportunities by attracting major projects to their region.

Regardless of their size, groups provide a forum for the community to come together to share ideas and gain information to improve their businesses. By building the capacity and knowledge of farmers and showcasing the latest research, grower groups help contribute to the productivity and profitability of farmers which has a social and economic flow on effect to the broader rural community.

Building social capital

Grower groups play a pivotal role in building social capital as they provide a focal point socially and a support network for rural communities, which is invaluable during times of crisis when mental health can come under pressure. This can occur from seasonal events or issues such as droughts, fires, floods, frosts etc. when groups come to the fore to support their members throughout and after the event. Grower groups often become the go to organisation for industry and government agencies to contact, as groups step in to provide relevant information to farmers on how to best deal with the situation and they support their mental health in times of extreme stress.

Groups assist their members through social events, mental health workshops and provide information on how to rehabilitate the land or deal with the issue and the avenues for assistance. This support is invaluable for affected farmers as it ensures they don't feel isolated in dealing with an adverse event and it brings them together to support each other. They provide farmers with an opportunity to share the anxiety and let them know they are not dealing with the adversity alone.

It is important to note that this additional and very necessary community work remains unfunded.

The networking opportunities provided by grower groups are both formal and informal and allow for social cohesion in rural communities through educational events or social opportunities for farming families. Many grower groups hold specific social events like dinners, Christmas parties and family events in their local area to bring the community together.

Groups focus on encouraging women in farming businesses to be involved in capacity building and skills development through specific 'ladies days' and farm office groups which enable women to learn business skills in a supportive environment with like-minded people.

Sustaining local communities

The presence of a grower group in a country town can create a real sense of identity within the region and a reference point for farm innovation across the rest of the state. Grower groups can provide a central point or drop in centre in their local community which enables them to provide a venue for various meetings within the community and attracts external service providers to the region to service the local community.

Grower group events generate expenditure in towns and help to sustain local communities. They support local businesses through event catering, venue hire, accommodation for speakers, and they attract farmers and members to town for events and they inevitably spend while they are in town.

Many grower groups employ staff who live locally or they attract new people with the relevant skills to the area, who in turn support local businesses and the community. **Employment opportunities created by grower groups bring young people and new faces to town and progressive farming systems encourage young people to return to family farms and back into rural communities,** which is particularly important in isolated communities with declining populations.

There are also instances where **grower groups have made significant contributions to the development of declining communities and have stepped in to provide an opportunity for social cohesion within a community.** Other roles that grower groups play in the community include educating students about agriculture and upskilling them; supporting community events like local shows and annual fox shoots; cross promotion of local events, and attracting investment to the region through new business ventures.

The various events and workshops that **grower groups organise provide educational and professional development opportunities to upskill and empower members to contribute to community development** as they utilise their leadership skills elsewhere in the community through involvement in other groups.

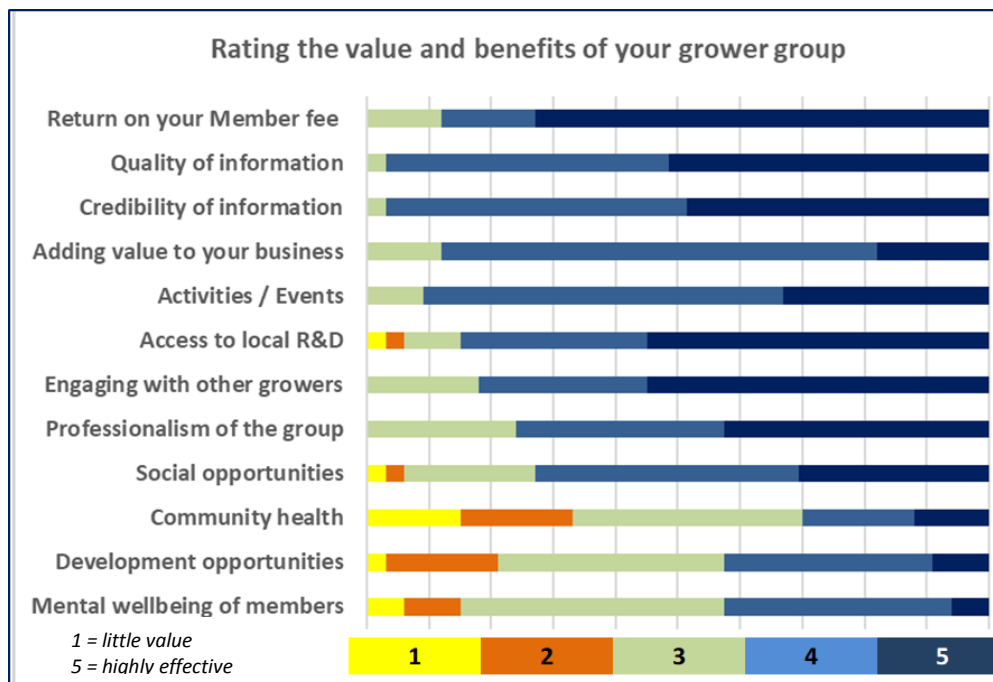
Most groups have a **mutually beneficial interaction with their local Shire** through funding, sharing facilities, support to attract resources and helping to deliver environmental outcomes through land rehabilitation programs.

The promotion of landcare ethics is also undertaken by some grower groups to maintain an environmental focus in their districts to help protect and conserve the local environment. Other social benefits generated by the presence of grower groups in regional communities include providing a drop in centre for information in town; a venue for various meetings within the community, and groups also help retain young farmers in towns with no pub as grower groups put on social functions to fill the gap.

Many **grower groups also provide an opportunity for local community groups to raise funds** through catering or running the bar at their events, and in some regions groups have their own community crops which enable them to become a provider of funds back to local community groups, sporting clubs, schools and for local infrastructure.

“We are very much the glue that pulls everyone together in our community and we are the go to place for local funding through proceeds from our community crop. This ensures that everyone stays involved in the group because we are more a community group than just a grower group and we make sure that the money is well spent. We probably spend about 40% of our time on research and 60% on the community.”

Grower groups also share their resources with their local community. Some groups have tree planters, pizza ovens or mobile cool rooms which are readily available for the community to use while other groups share and subsidise the cost of visiting guest speakers with local schools or community groups.



Members value their group’s social role in the community

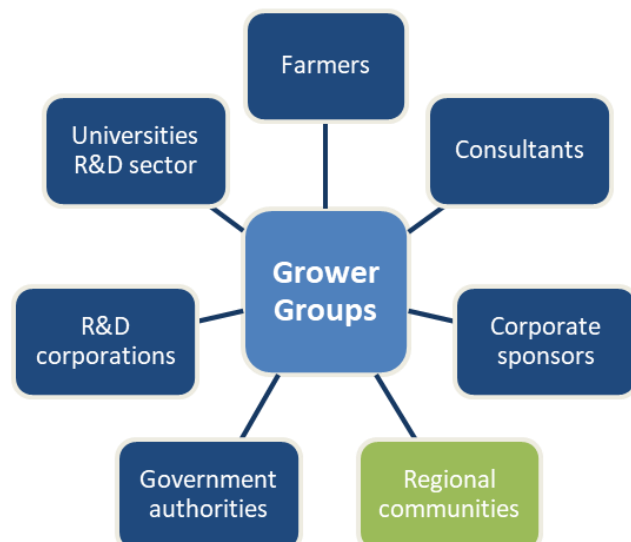
It was identified that voluntary groups provide and maintain a community service to bring people together to achieve outcomes as a group. **Grower groups are actively involved in and have a positive impact on their local communities through providing networking opportunities which increase the social capacity of the community and helps support good mental health, which in turn contributes to overall community health.**

“Our group is totally made up of volunteers and it is one of the group’s features. We take a different approach to other groups and that adds a new dynamic to what we are doing. We spend 75% of our time focussed on local research and 25% on the community.”

Advocacy is another role where grower groups step up to represent not only the agricultural industry but also their local communities by speaking out on local issues based around production, telecommunications, roads, environmental issues and future development. In many cases grower groups are viewed as the peak advocate in the district representing local farmers and promoting the interests and issues of their local region.

Grower groups identified that the various events/workshops/training days they host provide social benefits and learning opportunities through discussions and interaction which encourages farmers off-farm to actively participate in their local community.

Grower groups effectively harness opportunities for their regions and build capacity by attracting professional people, projects, funding and resources to the region from across the public and private sectors to provide a broad range of benefits from a social and business point of view.



Demonstrating greater value through group collaboration

SEPWA case study

A larger group embracing smaller groups to work together for their region

The Esperance Port Zone has a number of active grower groups, both large and small, and they are unique in their approach to cooperate and collaborate with each other. As the largest group in the area the South East Premium Wheat Growers' Association (SEPWA) has embraced working with and empowering other groups in the region.

Formed in 1993, SEPWA is one of the larger WA grower groups employing 3.4 FTE staff members, attracting around 30 sponsors, and servicing 270 grower members representing 80 per cent of the grain grown in the region. Its vision is to improve the profitability and sustainability of the grains industry in the Esperance Port Zone (EPZ).

There are a number of other active groups in the EPZ including: North Mallee Farm Improvement Group with 16 farm enterprises, Neridup Soil Conservation Group with 20 members, Cascade/Coomalbidgup Farmer Group, Condungup/Beaumont Farmer Group, Munglinup farmer group, Jerdacuttup Top Crop Group with 21 members, Lakes Grower Group with 30 members, Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network (RAIN) with 310 members, Pulse Association of the South East (PASE) with 136 members, Association for Sheep Husbandry, Excellence, Evaluation and Production (ASHEEP) with 121 members, Women in Farming Enterprises (WIFE) with 20 Varley branch members.

Six years ago SEPWA moved to become more inclusive of other groups that are also active in the region.

As SEPWA represents the whole of the EPZ they are conscious that they work together and co-operate with other groups to benefit the region and local farmers.

"The industry and the region is too small to be working against each other, we are much more effective if we work together to complement each other," Niki Curtis, SEPWA Executive Officer.

Most of the smaller groups in the EPZ are run by farmer volunteers and the groups have limited capacity, sponsors and funds so SEPWA is happy to step in to support them however they can.



SEPWA works in closely to assist the North Mallee Farm Improvement Group with their field day and local trials.

SEPWA is mindful of letting each of the groups run their own agenda and supports them through the provision of funds, local variety trials and where applicable they are also included in funded projects.

SEPWA provides each group with \$500 to help with their local spring field days and assists with providing speakers to some groups and organising their event.

Every year SEPWA conducts a number of wheat, barley and canola variety trials which are spread geographically throughout the region to cover the different soil types and rainfall zones. SEPWA works to support members of the smaller local groups to host some of these trials and they supply the seed and assist with harvesting the trials.

The SEPWA Executive committee consists of farmers representing the various areas within the region so they can drive the priorities and the group endeavours to hold meetings throughout the EPZ.

RAIN is a large local group which SEPWA works in closely with and they sponsor the RAIN Crop Update through project funding and provide speakers at various events. The SEPWA variety trials are also hosted by RAIN/SEPWA members and RAIN is provided with a page in the bi-monthly newsletter to promote their activities.

SEPWA has combined with RAIN and the North Mallee Group to negotiate with GRDC for funding for three Update events across the EPZ and they work together to share speakers.

While SEPWA's focus does not cross over with ASHEEP, WIFE or PASE they do communicate with each other and promote their activities to members.

SEPWA also has a close working relationship with the Esperance Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA) and they are co-located in the local office. Both parties co-host the region's main spring field day at the Esperance Downs Research Station and SEPWA promotes local DAFWA research and works in closely with the DAFWA staff.

"This model works well because SEPWA is very inclusive of everyone in the port zone and is completely transparent with everything the group does," Niki Curtis, SEPWA Executive Officer.

SEPWA believes this model could easily be applied to other areas, but it needs clarity on each group's role and what they are trying to achieve to ensure everyone is on the same page and it must be transparent. Currently there is no written agreement in place for the groups working together, but SEPWA believes "actions speak louder than words".

According to SEPWA some of the benefits to the smaller groups include more stability for the group, extra funding support, assistance to help organise events, locally based trials and an ability to feed local issues into a larger group with the capacity to seek funding to address them.

The biggest risk for SEPWA is if the relationship with one of the groups soured. The EPZ is large with a 300km radius and SEPWA (based in Esperance) believes it would be foolish for them to assume they can cover the needs of all members in the EPZ effectively given it is a lean and not-for-profit organisation.

Each region has different issues and needs and in having the smaller groups which feed into SEPWA through the Executive, the region is better serviced. This model is what SEPWA says it a true 'grower group': driven from the ground up to be relevant.

RAIN's perspective

As RAIN is based in Ravensthorpe which is quite remote to other areas, they find that strong linkages with neighbouring groups and industry bodies are essential to obtain and share information and expertise. They are happy with the arrangement with SEPWA as it gives them a broader network to disperse their findings and updates.

RAIN finds that SEPWA's expertise as a larger group can be extended to their members and staff through publications and projects, the provision of speakers visiting the region and opportunities to be involved in funding applications that SEPWA puts up.

It also gives them an opportunity to have input to SEPWA on trial ideas that are relevant to their members and their different soil types.

"We definitely see mutual benefit working with SEPWA as we have a shared vision of increasing the profitability and sustainability of our members. Both organisations have a better holistic port zone view because of the collaboration," Elisa Spengler, RAIN.

RAIN does not feel threatened by SEPWA as it is a strong group in its own right with years of successful operation and it also has an NRM focus, which is a bit different to SEPWA's focus. RAIN also assists SEPWA to reach the western part of their membership base.

RAIN does not charge a membership fee nor engage in sponsorships whereas SEPWA does, but there is a risk if RAIN did go down this avenue of funding as it may reduce SEPWA's income with only a certain pool of sponsorship funds for the port zone.

Sponsor's perspective

Rabobank is a long term sponsor of SEPWA and they find it beneficial to have one relationship with SEPWA and one communication point that gives them access to the whole of the EPZ.

"As a sponsor, a collaborative model enables us to easily service the Esperance Port Zone and saves us time as we are only dealing with one group and it ensures that we get good exposure for our investment," Ryan Meldrum, Rabobank.

The Zone is fortunate that Esperance is the central location for the region whereas in other regions there are numerous service centres which can make it harder, more fractured and often there are a number of individual groups doing their own thing.

Rabobank believes the structure is a proactive model from SEPWA that allows people to come together as a Port Zone and then localise to deal with local issues.

It provides an ability to keep it broad and regionally based and also has the capacity to nail it down to a farmer's local patch along with networking opportunities that enable farmers to get together and interact with people from outside their common area.

DAFWA's perspective

DAFWA has a good working relationship with all of the grower groups in the Esperance Port Zone and they recognise the different focuses of each.

SEPWA is a specialist group focused on the grains industry and their core objectives are not duplicated by a group like RAIN, which focuses on other issues and encompasses NRM and biosecurity.

While the bigger grower groups are more efficient in terms of capacity and organisation, the smaller localised groups are preferred by some communities and they can feed up the local issues that need to be addressed.

DAFWA believes the various groups work well together as they interlink and communicate which removes any misunderstanding, and the groups recognise the partnership and they are not trying to compete against each other.

Their differentiation helps in the various grower group's offering, otherwise this model wouldn't be as successful and with groups working together on behalf of growers throughout the EPZ, SEPWA can legitimately be a truly representative organisation.

SEPWA also has the capacity to be successful with tenders, whereas other local groups struggle, so it is advantageous for the groups to partner up and work together to address local issues.

DAFWA recognises that all groups serve a need and they say it makes it easy when everyone gets on and they can easily work with a group to address a particular issue, as happened in 2017 when they set up a response to the flood event in the local RAIN office in Ravensthorpe.

Tips for group collaboration

- ✓ Grower groups need to have strong input from their members (the growers) and clear direction (strategic planning) in order to be relevant.
- ✓ Groups need to work together to get greater traction – alone they can do a little but together they can do so much.
- ✓ Clarify what each group's role is and what you are trying to achieve to ensure everyone is on the same page.
- ✓ It is important to be transparent.

THE AUTHORS

Agknowledge®

Agknowledge® is a small company providing strategic management advice to a range of agribusiness companies and farming enterprises across Australia. *Agknowledge®* principals Peter Cooke and Nicol Taylor work nationally from a base in Western Australia, and combined they have over 60 years of involvement in agribusiness at all levels from strategic planning for agribusiness companies, government and industry policy, research, succession planning and business development.

Agknowledge® has extensive experience of working closely with agribusinesses to assist in the development of individual business units and overall group strategy. *Agknowledge®* has a reputation for bringing clarity and depth of thinking to complex situations and for identifying viable strategic pathways that will build value and stand the test of time.

Our advice and contribution is informed by:

- **Extensive specialist knowledge of key industry sectors** and the issues that are driving operational and strategic change, a significant first-hand experience of working in roles with responsibility for strategic development, and the practical factors that may constrain the implementation of strategic initiatives.
- **Government strategy development experience:** *Agknowledge®* has completed many successful strategy and innovation engagements with government. We also bring practical experience of how to develop strategy in the government context.
- **Industry and infrastructure experience.** We draw on our team's strong knowledge of regional industries as well as our numerous engagements in conducting industry analysis and building strategic business cases. Our robust quantitative analysis supports the qualitative perspectives, underpinned by strong analytical capabilities.

Julia Ashby has worked with *Agknowledge®* since 2014 conducting one on one industry interviews on topics including: performance of the Southern Dirt grower group, citrus industry consumer research, surveillance needs for invasive species, consultation for the WA Wild Dog Action Plan, and risk management in the Western Rock Lobster industry. Julia has been involved in the agriculture industry in a professional capacity for more than 20 years. With a Bachelor of Business in Agriculture Julia is a former ABC Reporter who has also worked with grower groups in a communications role in Mingenev and Esperance. Julia took up the reins as the first employee for the South East Premium Wheat Growers' Association, based in the Esperance Port Zone of WA. Over thirteen years with SEPWA Julia worked as sponsorship officer, group development officer and media officer. Julia now runs a communications consultancy business where she provides her media and communications expertise to a range of agribusiness, industries, farmers and agricultural projects.

Advanced Choice Economics

Dr Elizabeth Petersen has a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (Hons) and a PhD in Agricultural Economics from the University of Western Australia. Liz has held research positions at the Australian National University and the University of Western Australia. She is currently an Adjunct Senior Lecturer at the University of Western Australia and an Economist at the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. Liz founded *Advanced Choice Economics Pty Ltd* in 2000.

Liz has extensive experience developing Benefit Cost Analysis for Project Assessment, including projects relating to wild dogs, soil biology, strategies for managing subsoil constraints, options for sustainable farming systems, and the Western Shields Aerial Baiting Program. Liz has contributed to the drafting of DAFWA's Declared Pest Policy and Impact Assessment of Declared Plants, and has experience collating Demographic and Economic Profiles of WA's rural towns. Recently she provided a quantitative estimation of the economic impacts of investment in National Landcare Program activities over the last 25 years for the Australian Department of Environment and Energy.

Grower Group Alliance



Assessing the Value of Grower Groups

Appendix 2 Industry Interviews Report

June 2017

Agknowledge®

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ABBREVIATIONS

AWI	Australian Wool Innovation
BCG	Birchip Cropping Group
COGGO	Council of Grain Grower Organisations Limited
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
CRC	Community Resource Centre
DAFWA	Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia
EFOM	Esperance Farm Office Management
EO	Executive Officer
FBG	Fitzgerald Biosphere Group
FSG	Farming Systems Group
GGA	Grower Group Alliance
GIWA	Grain Industry Association of Western Australia
GM	Genetic modification
GRDC	Grains Research and Development Corporation
KPCA	Kimberley Pilbara Cattlemen’s Association
LCDC	Land Conservation District Committee
LIFT	Lakes Information and Farming Technology
MADFIG	Merredin and District Farm Improvement Group
MIG	Mingenew Irwin Group
MLA	Meat and Livestock Australia
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSFS	Mallee Sustainable Farming Systems
NACC	Northern Agricultural Catchments Council
NAG	Northern Agri Group
NEFF	North East Farming Futures
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NVT	National Variety Trials
PA	Precision Agriculture
PGA	Pastoralists and Graziers Association
R&D	Research and Development
RAIN	Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network
RBG	Recognised Biosecurity Group
RCSN	Regional Cropping Solutions Network GRDC
RD&E	Research, Development and Extension
RDC	Research and Development Corporation
RfR	Royalties for Regions
SEPWA	South East Premium Wheat Growers Association
VRT	Variable Rate Technology
WAFF	WA Farmers Federation
WALRC	Western Australian Livestock Research Council
WANTFA	WA No-Till Farmers Association
WIFE	Women in Farming Enterprises
WMG	West Midlands Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During May 2017 Agknowledge® was contracted by the Grower Group Alliance (GGA) to interview 23 agricultural industry representatives as part of a broader project to *Assess the Value of Grower Groups in Western Australia*. The participants ranged across consultants, research partners, funders, sponsors of grower groups and employees of the Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA). Participants were asked about the value of grower groups to their organisation; how groups may provide better value; and to identify potential opportunities; the future role and model for grower groups, and their views on the GGA. Direct interview quotes are included in bold in this summary.

The extensive conversations identified that across the supply chain involved in agriculture in WA industry are unanimous in their support for grower groups as they believe groups play a crucial role and they are viewed as a vital part of the structure for primary industry in the state. Industry believes that with the diminished role of DAFWA, grower groups have filled a gap and have become a local voice and conduit between farmers and the research and development (R&D) industry.

“Grower groups provide grass roots research, development, extension and capacity building to growers and they provide a strong social network for growers and regional communities. They also help build the industry leaders of tomorrow.”⁽¹⁴⁾

Grower groups have their ‘finger on the pulse’ locally and they have developed a level of rapport amongst farmers in their regions. Industry views the groups as independently run and say they are valued for their role in the dissemination of information, the organisation of events, and that they facilitate practice change which contributes to an increase in productivity and profitability.

Grower groups provide a platform for the community to come together to share ideas and gain information and knowledge to improve their farming businesses. Grower groups also play a pivotal role in social capital as they provide a focal point socially and a support network for rural communities, which is invaluable following adverse events.

“Grower groups play a pivotal social role and we can’t underestimate the importance of that as there are now fewer people and their occupation can be very isolating. Grower groups help drive people’s emotional wellbeing.”⁽¹⁷⁾

For industry, groups provide a pathway or network to engage directly with farmers for research, development and extension purposes, product and service feedback, brand development, collaboration and for supporting rural communities.

Consultants

Consultants value grower groups for their validation and demonstration of research, development and extension (RD&E) as consultants need to access information and results on issues that are topical, relevant and applicable to farmers. They believe grower groups have a role to work with larger groups of farmers, whereas consultants work one on one, so they are not seen as working in competition with consultants. Some consultants also have their own farmer groups and run their own events. As stated by one consultant, peer to peer learning is critical in agricultural extension and grower groups enable that. There is some concern that some of the bigger groups are now becoming more business focused and are in competition with some private consultancy businesses.

Funders

Funders believe that grower groups are integral to local RD&E and they are focused on the local level issues that they can get traction on which can increase the profitability and productivity of farmers. Therefore if a project is in line with their specific requirements and meets the criteria, they are happy to fund it. Selection criteria is based around the group’s track record and ability to deliver the project, the capacity of staff, project feasibility, the methodology, risk, business strategy, the benefit

to farmers and production systems, and collaboration with industry partners. It can be by default that larger, more established grower groups receive funding over those groups who are run by volunteers as they may have a lower capacity to oversee projects which require time and effort.

“We have no preference for a big or small grower group. We do like to see a group with some executive clout to make sure the project is completed (by default it may be a bigger group because of their capabilities), but we would also happily fund a smaller group.”⁽⁸⁾

Sponsors

Sponsors of grower groups vary from large national agribusinesses, to state-wide organisations, and down to the local re-seller who works in with their local grower group. Some sponsor a number of groups and cash commitments can total up to \$125,000 a year. In-kind sponsorship, which includes demonstrations/trials, time commitments, expertise of staff and event attendance, also adds up.

“We have tipped over \$1m commitment (cash and in-kind) to grower groups in WA in the last 15 years and we have achieved a significant return on that investment. But that is realised through active participation and hard work on behalf of the sponsor and the grower group.”⁽¹⁰⁾

Sponsorship of groups is based on where sponsors believe they can get business growth, the involvement of leading farmers, membership size, the functionality of the group (including professionalism, governance and management framework), the influence of the group, the capacity of staff, the community, the company’s resources in the region and the involvement of competitors.

“Our sponsorship provides us with advertising, recognition and networking opportunities. We have a presence at Committee meetings and get feedback on key issues, and it also helps us shape and be involved with decision making for the communities in which the group operates.”⁽¹⁴⁾

As a sponsor, the value of grower groups is perceived in the networking opportunities as well as in branding and business growth, and they hope that their brand recognition will result in new clients, more tonnes, or an increase in product sales. As quoted by one sponsor “if we can get a new client out of our sponsorship every couple of years from each group, it helps pay for it and it would be cost neutral”. The larger companies are more readily able to measure their return on investment, whereas the smaller locally based sponsor struggles with getting any real value from their sponsorship but it remains part of their local marketing plan. Some organisations review their sponsorship agreements on an annual basis to determine their return on investment.

Sponsorship is not just about providing funds, but it is also about the involvement of the company’s staff members in grower group activities and demonstrating their knowledge and expertise while providing specialist services back to groups. It is about sharing one’s knowledge on what they specialise in and building relationships, which opens up communication lines with growers and in turn opens up business opportunities.

“We sponsor groups to support grass roots research, development, extension and capacity building being delivered to WA grain growers. Our sponsorship also supports a strong social network for growers and regional communities and helps build the grain industry leaders of tomorrow. It also gives us alignment with an influential and progressive grower network.”⁽¹⁴⁾

Sponsors are wary of not using their sponsorship to do a ‘hard sell’ to launch new products or services; their approach is to be actively involved and keep their name out there, and sponsorship also has a community support element. It was also mentioned that sponsorship of grower groups can consume significant time relative to the investment, and that some groups have expressed a sense of ‘entitlement’ regarding the ongoing provision of sponsorship funds.

“Grower groups think having our logo up is a privilege for us, but having a banner on display and a speaking opportunity doesn’t give us a lot of value. We could drive for 400km to get a 10 minute slot; we are not interested in that. I want groups to provide opportunities to get to know our staff and for this to have a knock on effect to enable us to connect with growers.”⁽¹²⁾

Partners

Partners such as universities, research organisations and consultants are involved with grower groups through trial programs, projects and various other opportunities that enable them to connect students with groups to showcase the industry and link in with educating potential future employees.

“From a research perspective the value of grower groups is in creating stronger projects as they have a strong base to their groups and that can add value to the research objective and outcomes. The other major value is that they provide a strong vehicle for extension and by partnering with a grower group there is more opportunity for impact with farmers and promoting practice change.”⁽¹⁶⁾

The value that grower groups provide partners is through making trial sites available for outside research; they enable partners to reach more farmers and achieve effective engagement through participative research and promoting practice change. They also enable students to connect with leading farmers. As stated by one partner ‘we wouldn’t keep engaging with grower groups if it wasn’t working as it costs money and is time consuming, but all of our projects have benefited greatly.’

“We prefer to work with grower groups to reach more farmers and get better value. Agronomists and consultants have the agronomic expertise that adds value and is what some groups may be lacking, and that is why we also bring them into grower group research partnerships.”⁽¹⁶⁾

Grower groups were also viewed as a competing force for projects, by one partner, who believed that groups appear to have the upper hand in the eyes of the collaborators because they are a stronger force with greater ability to extend the information. It was also mentioned that the days of an individual or small business running events are long gone as they are competing with grower groups for the same audience.

Employees of the Department of Agriculture and Food WA recognised that grower groups fill the void their department has left following budget cuts in the extension area, and they provide a conduit for them to liaise directly with farmers to address their needs and to determine what DAFWA should be prioritising. They also fill the gaps in the regions where the department doesn’t have a presence.

“The value for DAFWA in working with grower groups is in developing relationships and partnerships to achieve the best outcomes. Grower groups provide us with a place to connect with growers and showcase research and extension on R&D technology.”⁽²¹⁾

Grower groups provide a strong network of growers which in turn allows DAFWA to interact and focus on group issues, rather than reacting to individual issues. They also provide an opportunity for department staff to highlight their research through trials and presenting at grower group events.

“It would be a lot harder to work without grower groups as we would have to sort out our own networks and would perhaps have to use consultancy networks.”⁽²²⁾

“The ability for our staff to get their information out locally is very valuable and also talking at field days helps promote their profiles and the DAFWA state-wide profile.”⁽²⁰⁾

DAFWA staff have a great working relationship with grower groups in the regions and they are involved in sub-committees, they attend meetings and provide briefings on projects and policy. According to DAFWA representatives it is a deliberate strategy for the department to remain engaged with grower groups as they are recognised as a key stakeholder group.

DAFWA works in closely with a number of grower groups; over the years they have actively supported the development and establishment of groups and have worked closely with groups on projects. They also provide in-kind equipment and support and co-host events, and in some cases they offer groups office space through co-locating.

Concern was expressed that DAFWA was not recognised for their support and investment as a lot of their work is behind the scenes, and given they are not an official sponsor they do not receive the same recognition at events. This is a challenge for grower groups moving forward as to how they promote other partners like government departments that also provide support to groups.

While DAFWA works closely with grower groups they are not trying to protect their turf as they recognise that growers pay levies and funders like GRDC will take that into consideration, and that grower groups will have more pull than DAFWA at a local level.

Industry believes that grower groups are generally pretty good at attribution of research and they acknowledge funders and partners in publications and at events. One interviewee mentioned there was an opportunity to recognise funders more aggressively as some public funders are pushed aside for the more commercial sponsors who expect to see their brand in lights.

“Attribution is always a hard one and we tend to work on the premise of contribution rather than attribution; it’s about holding hands. Usually we share logos if we talk at an event; it is more about the timeslot attribution rather than the overall attribution.”⁽²²⁾

The rigour of research undertaken by grower groups is questioned by researchers and DAFWA staff who specialise in research and therefore they critique it closely. Generally it is viewed as farmer-based research which lacks scientific rigour, however it is still seen as relevant and practical as it is driven by local farmers. The quality of the research is also dependent on the capacity of the group to undertake trials. It is very difficult for grower groups to undertake livestock research and trials as they would require animal ethics approval.

To ensure more rigour, it was suggested that grower groups outsource trials and use partners who have research skills and can take the lead on projects. Grower groups could also support the growth and development of staff skills in the trials area. DAFWA employees believe groups should stick with broad acre strip trials and not replicate what DAFWA does unless they collaborate with researchers.

GRDC has moved to include a requirement for statistical support in trial design and analysis of results for all Regional Cropping Solutions Network (RCSN) investments and they are also in the process of negotiating an investment in ‘Statistics for the Australian Grains Industry’ which will provide additional statistical support to grower groups and other RD&E providers delivering trials through GRDC investment.

Staff

Grower group staff are crucial for the operations of a group and quality staff can easily set a group apart from others and make the group more attractive to partners and funders. A lot of funders look at the capacity of the people behind the proposal prior to funding a project.

“An issue with growers groups is that their staff are often very young, so we don’t always have that rapport with them, they resort to email communication to request sponsorship but there is nothing better than having a phone conversation or meeting people to build rapport. They will attract dollars if they become personable, but they have moved away from that and that is probably because they are under-resourced.”⁽¹²⁾

Groups do have limited time and resources available which makes it difficult to build relationships, but as stated by industry representatives it is a two way street and regular communication is important with partners, funders, sponsors and others. Groups need to be personable and avoid email communication when developing relationships and seeking sponsorship.

Industry identified that grower groups often offer lower wages and therefore attract graduates who are inexperienced in the field and who are typically female. In a male dominated industry it can be intimidating for young females to lead projects and present at events. It was raised that for grower groups to be effective in extension and research they require more experienced staff who are good communicators, who can be an expert on their topic, have charisma, the confidence to speak and who will remain with the group for a longer term. Staff require significant mentoring and support to ensure they have the capacity to undertake their roles.

Industry also raised the issue that grower groups are variable at extension and staff are the key to delivery. It was also mentioned that given groups mainly employ young graduates who don't have the skills, it leaves a hole in extension in WA according to a partner, and this is being taken over by private agronomists and consultants who are more experienced and knowledgeable. Therefore they pose a risk to grower groups as consultants are building relationships and accessing growers. They view themselves as the grower voice for the farmers they represent and therefore they are removing a lot of companies from having direct contact with their clients.

“Grower groups are not doing extension as much as they used to as they lack the skills and that has been taken over by private agronomists. There is a hole in extension in WA as there are not a lot of people who can extend the message; you need to be sharp on your topic, charismatic, not afraid to talk on the subject and be an expert on your topic. Then if you are you may be poached by an agronomy company or someone else.”⁽¹⁵⁾

It is a double-edged sword that once staff are equipped with the skills, they are lost along with their knowledge to the corporate world as they progress their careers. It is rare to find an experienced person working in a grower group as there is little career progression and pathways for staff. As outlined by a consultant, staffing issues within groups make it hard to retain information and maintain consistency within projects and build relationships and rapport, whereas that is easier for a private consultant to manage.

It was also viewed that the role of grower groups appears to be changing with the growing role of advisors and with the ability to get information very quickly from the internet, there is a decreasing need for groups. Another challenge for groups in extension is the difference in the younger and older members and targeting each group specifically.

“Grower groups are a good platform for extension as not everyone accesses agronomists and consultants because they have a price tag attached. It is easier to get info through to grower group coordinators than all the different consultants as there are lots of them.”⁽¹⁷⁾

“Extension is one the grower group services and industry can't monetize it as it is a community-wide benefit. If funders go to the private sector they risk the information going out preferentially to clients.”⁽²⁰⁾

To address staffing issues it was suggested that groups should look for in-kind arrangements to provide technical expertise for trials and to upskill staff; form partnerships or collaborate to ensure they have the capacity; offer salary packages that attract staff with suitable skills; and provide more training and mentoring to de-risk their investment.

Challenges for grower groups

Industry believes that all grower groups, big or small, have a role and a right to exist however some groups are more functional and effective than others. Groups that were formed by local, passionate farmers and have a bottom-up approach may be more effective than those who originally had an environmental focus or were formed by a government organisation. It appears that grower groups are currently undergoing a settling and maturing phase; those with capacity can attract funding for projects whereas others accept they are a social group and are not looking to employ staff.

The more functional grower groups are not based on membership numbers but are driven by local farmers, have a particular focus (issue specific or regional focus), have dedicated support staff, a good management committee, they collaborate with industry, are conscious of relationship building, have good governance and are focused on their strategic plan. As stated by a sponsor 'the capacity of the group dictates the value you get as a sponsor'.

The Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network (RAIN) group was highlighted as one of the more successful groups and it was mentioned they have become a 'one-stop shop' and anyone who wants something would rather go to them than an agency as they have the scope and network. However it was mentioned that while it is a gift, it is also a curse as they are not remunerated for it.

***"If grower groups were to disappear, they would be missed and people would then realise their value. Everyone wants to hang off them and while it does provide opportunities, there are also compromises in terms of delivering value to sponsors and members."*⁽¹⁾**

While grower groups are approached endlessly by industry, the group has to determine if a request is in line with what their members want and their strategic plan. It can be easy for grower groups to lose sight of their focus and chase funding to maintain their capacity. A lack of long term strategic planning can also be a reflection of the board's ability which can easily be addressed with further training to ensure they have the necessary skills.

***"They are all money hungry to maintain capacity; they have to have a good strategic plan so they know what they want to compete for. Groups can have a tendency to pursue projects to maintain staff whereas it may not fit their strategic plan; it may just be a churn project. They risk resources going where they are not supported by the group and then they may lose relevance."*⁽²⁰⁾**

Concern was raised about the risk of conflict of interest and if groups organise a commercial deal with sponsors, they risk losing their independence so they require a good sponsorship policy to ensure that they remain independent. It was also raised that a lot of sponsorship packages are not within the range for companies that don't have the resources or staff readily available, so some would prefer to sponsor events rather than be a full sponsor as they find blanket sponsoring is diluted. A further criticism was that grower groups are not completely inclusive with their sponsorship model and that they exclude people from being more involved as sponsorship controls their agenda. This in turn eliminates others from participating and sharing their knowledge or expertise on a subject.

***"They are not completely inclusive with their sponsorship model; in some ways they exclude people from being more involved as sponsorship controls the agenda. They are too much aligned with sponsors. If you are not a sponsor you don't get an opportunity to present, if I have something interesting or relevant it is excluded from the program. At the end of the day it is about extending the best possible message that will benefit farmers and increase efficiency and productivity regardless if someone is a sponsor."*⁽¹⁸⁾**

Sponsors value face to face contact with farmers and even if they don't sponsor a particular group, they may still attend events to be involved. As outlined by one sponsor, they are looking for a point of difference from their competitors and are more focused on targeting community events that encourage exercise, promote men's health and enable their staff to interact with the community and build rapport.

Other issues that were raised by industry in dealing with grower groups in the past include lack of direction and focus of grower groups, lack of passion and enthusiasm from members, volunteer burnout and that there are still some geographical gaps for grower group coverage and hence those areas suffered a lack of productivity and miss out on locally relevant research. It was raised that a risk analysis would enable grower groups to identify their risks and identify who could help them manage

and address those risks and would enable the group to move forward. As stated by one industry member, the risk at the moment is that grower groups are becoming undervalued and are being taken for granted, the challenge is to demonstrate how valuable they are.

Opportunities for grower groups

Opportunities for grower groups include the need to invest more time into stakeholder relations work; the adoption of social media for communicating; the ability to voice the views of members on topical issues; initiate benchmarking groups or smaller farmer groups who are willing to share information and learn from each other, and initiating more interaction with university students.

As traditional project funding is changing and getting harder to access, it was emphasised that grower groups should be looking at innovative ways to access funding and having value conversations with potential partners. They could look beyond the farm gate at value and supply chains and develop in-market partnerships, as this is viewed as an area with a lot of potential that will deliver value back to growers. It has been a feature of other sectors, but not broad acre farming and there is currently a lack of skills to fully develop supply chain links.

“Grower groups could organise themselves into more investable groups; they need to access capital to develop processing and other capabilities. They could look for large scale funding through investment companies/equity companies if they are going to attract millions of dollars to develop capabilities (i.e. include robotics and various degrees of automation to reduce the cost of labour).”⁽⁷⁾

It was identified that there are opportunities for grower groups to form partnerships and share resources to ensure they do have the capacity to maintain relevance to farmers. Bigger groups could engage with the smaller localised groups to do the ground work which would enable them to focus on the business side whilst providing the structure, support and attracting the research funds. This further complements the suggestion that groups could be doing more peer to peer learning and running smaller regional discussion groups that enable farmers to learn from each other in the paddock and within the business.

In the future industry is adamant that grower groups will continue to be a part of the agricultural landscape in Western Australia. Their role will become more important as the landscape changes with fewer farmers and isolation factors increasing, support networks will be even more important. However it was emphasised that it is important the farmers continue to have ownership of their local groups and that they are not driven by government or any other organisations.

“If anyone from the outside tries to drive a specific model for grower groups in the future, they will get pushed back. Government don’t fund them so they can’t dictate what they want, plus farmers won’t have ownership if it change is driven externally.”⁽²⁰⁾

Industry believes there will be some rationalisation of grower groups which may see some fold or merge, and the more professional and functional groups that have the capacity to deliver and maintain their relevance will remain. However groups should keep a broad focus to allow for engagement and partnership but remain independent and not driven by the agenda of sponsors and their providers. With limited funding available and groups competing for funds, it was mentioned that groups will have to become more innovative and given it is a small industry, they will need to work collaboratively.

In terms of a model for the future, it was suggested there was a shared services model that would reduce the replication of resources and enable smaller grower groups who don’t necessarily have their own capacity to work in under a larger group to create a super group. It was thought this could be the GGA or another grower group or a combination of groups, not necessarily all of them together. The larger group could provide the strategic direction and oversee the growth of the group

and the smaller groups would enable the group to be driven by farmers and maintain the group's relevance. The model as proposed could also help older groups who have become stagnant to look at growth opportunities. It was also mentioned that as grower groups become more capable and fewer in number, their reliance on the Grower Group Alliance could lessen as they seek to take on their own development.

“There is a lot of replication of resources in grower groups so maybe moving forward there could be a super group. You could have a central group that could run a number of groups and be overarching; they could provide the strategic direction and oversee the growth of the group. It still needs to be driven by growers and the committee. Local ownership is a key driver and will see things remain as they are.”⁽²¹⁾

The Grower Group Alliance (GGA) is viewed as the ‘front door to grower groups in WA’ by industry as it is a valuable conduit between the various grower groups and industry and provides support and resources to assist groups, their staff and management committees. Industry believes the GGA is valued for representing the critical mass of grower groups, assisting groups to coordinate guest speakers, providing an industry calendar of events, supporting the capacity of groups, providing networking opportunities and connecting industry with grower groups.

The relevance of the GGA for bigger grower groups was questioned in terms of the value they receive from being a member; the benefit was more as a point of coordination. However it was felt that if grower groups were left to their own devices they have the potential to fall apart quickly without the support of the GGA. Another challenge for the GGA moving forward is to make sure they are not competing with grower groups for funding.

“I get the feeling that the GGA is a top down approach versus bottom up driven and grower groups aren't all on board in driving towards making the GGA something. The GGA has evolved and is still evolving; there are opportunities to drive more support from the bottom, currently it is a token membership of the alliance.”⁽²¹⁾

Future suggestions for the GGA include offering more training in extension, project management and technology along with mentoring and training to ensure more scientific rigour. Opportunities include assisting groups to look at post farm gate opportunities; oversee training for grower group boards and management committees; provide more support and supervision for inexperienced staff (personal development) and determine how grower groups can retain and train staff members. Given the GGA works across industries, there is also an opportunity to learn from other industries like horticulture.

It was raised that perhaps the GGA could facilitate the creation of a super group and drive better partnerships and collaboration between groups as they appear to keep to themselves and focus on their own survival rather than the bigger picture.

If the GGA can continue to increase the capacity and capability of groups, it is believed that it will continue to maintain its relevance but there is also the risk that if they are successful in upskilling groups, it could phase out its own role. Longer term, it is envisaged there will still be an overarching role for the GGA given that grower groups will be around for a long time.

“The future of the GGA will depend on its ability to evolve into an independent organisation that can attract funding from sources that do not compete with grower groups.”⁽⁹⁾

Growing the value of groups – from an industry perspective

Broad industry feedback provided general consensus on the value of grower groups in Western Australia while also identifying a constructive range of areas for improvement which may continue to grow the value of groups and ensure their relevance into the future. Key points identified during the extensive industry interviews are outlined below.

Trials

- To ensure more scientific rigour in trials, grower groups could outsource trial work, collaborate or develop partnerships with research organisations. A partnership approach will help give critical oversight.
- Look for in-kind arrangements to ensure the group has the technical expertise for trials and provides opportunities to upskill their staff.
- Grower groups should stick with broad scale strip trials unless they collaborate with researchers.

Staff

- Grower groups should support the growth and development of staff skills in the trials/ research area and form partnerships to help upskill them.
- Determine the feasibility of providing more competitive salary packages to attract and retain staff with suitable skills and experience.
- Provide career progression opportunities and a range of salary packages.
- De-risk staff investment and provide training and mentoring for staff.
- Ensure staff are capable and fully trained to extend the message through public speaking, building relationships, knowledge, confidence, charisma etc.
- Upskill staff through training and partnerships to have a better understanding of the supply chain and forming partnerships.

Grower group focus and governance

- Develop a strategic plan that is in line with members' and the group's objectives and long term vision.
- Be guided by the group's strategic plan and members, when approached by industry and applying for projects/funding grants, to maintain the group's relevance to members.
- Ensure the board is equipped with the necessary skills and training required to oversee the group's management.

Grower group operations

- Undertake a risk analysis to determine the risks that grower groups face and identify how to manage them and who can help address them.
- For funding, groups should look at innovative ways to access funding and have value conversations with potential partners beyond the farm gate as it is viewed as an area with a lot of potential that will deliver value back to growers.
- Continue to provide social opportunities for farmer members and rural communities.
- Utilise the opportunity to voice the views of members on agricultural production issues.
- Collaborate and form partnership to ensure the group has capacity (staff, trials, projects).

Extension

- Adopt a range of communication methods in extension, to target both the older and younger members of the group.
- Adopt and utilise social media platforms more readily in extending information.
- Provide more peer to peer learning opportunities and run smaller regional discussion groups that enable farmers to learn from each other in the paddock and within the business (groups that focus on areas of interest i.e. machinery replacement, benchmarking).

Partners / Funders / Sponsors / Industry

- Invest more time into stakeholder relations.
- Recognise funders more aggressively, as often they are pushed aside for more commercial sponsors.
- Continue to work in closely with DAFWA and promote partnerships through recognising their support and involvement in grower groups.
- Regularly communicate with partners, funders, sponsors, DAFWA and industry representatives to build and maintain relationships.
- Seek face to face contact and communication in pursuing sponsorship funds to build rapport.
- Ensure the group has a good sponsorship policy to maintain their independence and make sure they are not compromised by any commercial deal.
- Provide other opportunities for organisations to sponsor or be involved with the group through events and activities (other than blanket sponsoring).
- Be inclusive of industry and ensure that the group's sponsorship model does not control the agenda of events and activities. Allow industry representatives to share their knowledge and expertise regardless if they are a sponsor or not and focus on delivering the best possible message that will benefit farmers.
- Review sponsorship arrangements annually and determine how the group can work with sponsors to provide value for both parties.
- Investigate opportunities to provide value for smaller, locally based sponsors.
- Work in with private consultants/agronomists and build rapport to maintain relationships.
- Develop relationships with farm lobby groups who represent farmers on agri-political issues.
- Connect with universities to mentor and interact with university students and promote career paths, agriculture and to showcase the industry.

Future

- Ensure farmers maintain ownership and continue to drive grower groups.
- Look for opportunities to work collaboratively with other grower groups to share resources. Investigate partnerships with other groups to attract large scale funding and to access capital to develop processing and other capabilities.
- Look beyond the farm gate at the value and supply chain for future opportunities.
- Develop market partnerships, build relationships and ensure groups have the capability to produce a consistent product that will meet the needs of the market.
- Future model - form partnerships and develop a shared resourced model to form a super group with other grower groups to ensure that they have the capacity and maintain their relevance to farmers. Larger grower groups can engage with smaller localised groups who can do the ground work while they provide the structure, support and attract research funds.

GGA

- Continue to be the 'front door' to grower groups in WA.
- Look for opportunities to provide more value to the more established grower groups.
- Provide grower groups with more training in extension; project management; technology; board management; staff support and personal development; trial rigour etc.
- Assist groups to look at post farm gate opportunities and develop them.
- Maintain a close working relationship with all grower groups and encourage a bottom up approach.
- Drive better collaboration and partnership between groups.
- Promote the benefits of being a member of the GGA.
- Evolve into an independent organisation that can attract funding from sources that do not compete with grower groups.
- Investigate the success of other industries and determine what grower groups can learn from them.
- Facilitate creation of a super group model.

INDUSTRY INTERVIEWS

This report captures industry views on the perceived value of grower groups from interviews conducted during May 2017 with 23 agricultural industry consultants, funders, sponsors and partners. Participants were asked about the value of grower groups to their organisation; how groups may provide better value; they were asked to identify potential opportunities; the future role and model for grower groups, and their views on the Grower Group Alliance. The stakeholder interviews averaged 36 minutes; this report represents over 13 hours of conversation.

CONSULTANTS

Consultants believe that grower groups are a very necessary and vital part of the structure of primary industry in Western Australia. Groups provide a pathway towards greater self-determination and direction for producers through opportunities for knowledge sharing and practice advancement. Grower groups also play a vital role in supporting and developing the social capital in agriculture.

Consultants noted that grower groups have their finger on the pulse locally and they have developed a level of rapport amongst farmers in their region. Following the demise of DAFWA's extension capability, grower groups have filled the gap and taken on a role of dissemination of information and paddock learning.

The value of grower groups to consultants is more about the validation and demonstration of RD&E as consultants are always scanning for new information and results on issues that are topical, relevant and applicable to the farmers they service.

Grower groups have a different role to consultants as they work with larger groups of farmers, whereas consultants work one on one, so they are not seen to be working in competition. However some consultants are now setting up their own farmer groups and running their own events.

As stated by a consultant 'peer to peer learning' is critical in agricultural extension and getting new ideas through the system. However the consultant believes the bigger groups are not undertaking this critical role as they are more business focused and they are now in competition with private consultancy businesses.

According to consultants both the larger and smaller grower groups have a role and a right to exist, but they have to evaluate what they are there for, their value and what they are delivering. The groups that were formed by local passionate farmers with a ground up approach are more effective than those that originally had an environmental focus or were formed by a government organisation.

It appears that grower groups are currently going through a settling and maturing phase and groups with a strong driving force can attract national and industry funding, while other groups understand that they are essentially a social group sharing knowledge and are not gearing up to employ staff.

The more functional grower groups are able to separate out their governance requirements from their management requirements, they employ staff, have experienced board members, communicate well and take a whole of industry view, rather than chasing funds to cover their bills.

Grower groups like Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network (RAIN) have become a 'one-stop shop' and anyone who needs information would rather go to them than an agency as they have the scope and network to respond. It was recognised that this accessibility is also a curse as the group is not remunerated for its effort.

Consultants also recognised that grower groups are approached endlessly by industry to collaborate but they have to be careful to respond appropriately in line with what their members want. It is easy for them to lose sight of their focus in favour of obtaining funding to enable them to retain their

staff. They need to be aligned with their strategic plan as it sets the priority to determine what they should be working on.

Consultants believe grower groups vary in their capacity to deliver extension but they also recognise it is a challenging task to deliver extension to both young and older members as they have different needs and expectations.

A lack of rigour in trials was identified as an issue for grower groups and this was attributed to a lack of skills and experience in their staff. Consultants suggested partnerships with the research sector on trial design and delivery would help give clinical oversight to research outcomes.

A risk analysis would enable grower groups to identify their risks and identify who could help them manage and address those risks, and this would include trial rigour.

The functionality of the group depends ultimately on the capacity of the staff as executive support can make or break a group. Staff turnover in groups makes it hard to retain information, maintain consistency within projects and build relations and rapport, whereas that is easier for a private consultant to manage.

Grower group staff are typically recent graduates and require mentoring and support to give them the capacity to undertake their roles. There are opportunities for groups to look for in-kind arrangements to provide technical expertise for trials and to upskill their staff. Improved salary packages and professional development opportunities would better attract and retain skilled staff.

Opportunities for grower groups, as outlined by the consultants, include the need to invest more time into stakeholder relations work; the adoption of social media for communicating; the ability to voice the views of members on topical issues; and the ability to get involved in value adding, supply chain work, biosecurity and health issues.

There are opportunities for grower groups to form partnerships to assist other organisations to get penetration into the region. As traditional project funding is changing and getting harder to access, groups should be looking at innovative ways to access funding and having value conversations with potential partners.

It was also identified that bigger grower groups could engage the smaller localised groups to do the ground work so that they can focus on the business side whilst providing the structure and support. This further complements the suggestion that groups should be doing more peer to peer learning and running smaller regional discussion groups that enable farmers to learn from each other in the paddock and within the business.

It was harder for the consultants to identify any one model for grower groups in the future as they believe it is up to the local communities and they have to be driven by farmers to ensure ownership. It was mentioned that they should keep a broad focus to allow for engagement and partnerships.

Consultants believe grower groups will continue to be part of the agribusiness landscape and it is critical that they remain because the landscape is changing with fewer farmers and isolation factors increasing so these support networks are increasingly important. While groups are running a business and competing for funds, they still need to work collaboratively as it is a small industry with limited funding.

Consultants questioned the relevance of the Grower Group Alliance (GGA) for bigger groups, but indicated the GGA was still required to provide support to groups to ensure that they have the capacity and capability to service their members through training for staff and executive and in extension, marketing, business, social media and technical skills (i.e. trial rigour). As it was felt that if grower groups were left to their own devices they had the potential to fall apart quickly.

The key points from the interviews with individual consultants follow.

Participant 1

- The world has changed from 20 years ago and it is now very different with many grower groups and lots of information available to farmers. All grower groups are there to deliver value to their members. When they employ staff the focus can shift to managing people and they lose sight of what value they deliver. BCG has been through that and is now maintaining group focus.
- Grower groups are common sense as there is value in numbers in an industry where there are fewer farmers. There is enormous value in sharing experiences, as they are not in direct competition in business. The question is do they deliver value like they used to? If they were gone they would be missed. We need to figure out where they deliver value and what growers want. The problem is that everyone wants to hang off them (sell stuff to them and do stuff for them) and while it does provide opportunities, the groups are also compromised in trying to deliver value to the sponsor and the growers may not be interested.
- Group size and relevance is an emerging issue: MIG members are questioning its relevance in the work undertaken and where is the value, so there is some disconnect in that group. Bigger groups are businesses and they are chasing projects for money to retain their staff. While these projects might be of some value, they are a lower priority to members. Members start to question this approach: it is not stupid to have the resources but you have to be careful as to how that is communicated to members. The risk is that you can end up with an Executive Officer who has limited direct connection with members and then they start to wonder about that person. Smaller groups like Yuna still rely on volunteers (rotated around the younger members) and they are still relevant and seem to be sustainable. Groups should be investing more effort each year into understanding their members and how to add value and not lose sight of that.
- There is value in the work grower groups do and the value that we see as consultants is different to how value is perceived by a member; for a consultant most of the work is validation and demonstration in which there is real value. For the grower there is enormous value in the network and opportunities to come together and learn. There is great opportunity for the young crew to go to a field day. If farmers were to lose the group, they would then realise the value. Social media has changed the way we are communicating and allows everyone to access information instantly and the younger generation are embracing that.
- Growers are good at sharing what they do at a paddock level but they are more closed on a business or operational level. The business level has never been fully capitalised on and is a missed opportunity because people aren't too sure how to go about it. There is certainly opportunity and perhaps they may have to outsource to consultants, but there is potential for smaller groups to focus on areas of interest for example machinery replacement etc.
- Through groups growers can have a voice on agri-political issues but groups are sensitive about getting involved. They could be involved to some degree in voicing the views of their membership (e.g. on the GM canola issue they could have identified the per cent that support it via a survey, as it was a topical issue that needed to demonstrate an industry view).
- A lot of trials are done with rigour, most are done in collaboration with other organisations with linkages to grower groups. As consultants you want nice clear information and results on issues that are topical and relevant. Trials are more relevant to an agronomist, but certainly if they are relevant and apply to farmers then we do take them on board.
- What don't groups do very well? Business - they don't do well and some don't do it all. Grower groups are unbelievably variable at extension: all grower groups should have ongoing extension and marketing training education (perhaps through someone like Peter Newman) as some do it poorly and some are not conscious of what they are doing. What does the membership want?

Some want printed information while the young use social media – it is a very challenging task to deliver to all of your membership because the older ones pay the bills and are still in control. Having young staff members in a grower group can alienate some of the older members.

- Grower group attrition will see some groups go and others debate if smaller or bigger is better. If bigger you can attract resources and staff. They have to evaluate what they are here for, their value and what are they delivering. If a group is big you have to drill down to smaller sub groups – geographical or areas of interest (have to respect diversity across the membership).
- Group origins and culture impacts value; if groups were formed because locals thought there was value and the approach was from the ground up, those groups remain relevant. A group formed by DAFWA or a government organisations was doomed to fail. With ground up, it is driven by someone local and passionate and farmers are driving the process. Groups like MIG and Facey evolved from land care groups. They have a different history and initially they were easy to fund but they had to carefully switch from an environmental focus to production and this disengaged the Land Conservation District Committee (LCDC) stalwarts and engaged farmers. MIG has done too much in the environmental area which has attracted certain staff members and sometimes has an airy fairy approach.
- I don't view grower groups as competitors as we work one on one and grower groups work on mass so we have totally different roles.
- Future of grower groups – a bigger group overseeing smaller groups was tested by North East Farming Futures (NEFF) and it was probably never done well. Smaller groups do like their independence and if they are under a bigger entity then they would need to be mindful of that culture of the smaller groups. MIG did debate years ago about incorporating Morawa and Mullewa but provincialism can get in the way of making the right decision. It will vary from region to region and depend on what farmers want in their areas. It is a big ask to say one model will fit everyone, it is up to local communities.
- Future model for the GGA – I don't have one, I had very clear views at the start that sharing and networking was important and value in numbers applies at that level. I don't have anything to do with the GGA now but there was concern earlier that groups like Liebe felt they were giving and not receiving anything back from the GGA. I do receive the Calendar of Events.

Key messages

1. Grower groups do deliver value to their members, but they need to continually evaluate what they are there for, their value and what their growers want them to deliver.
2. Consultants value grower groups for their validation and demonstration trials which produce topical information they can apply for their own farmer clients.
3. Grower groups need to be wary of chasing funding to retain staff/structure or compromising the group's direction and priorities in trying to deliver value to sponsors and partners.
4. Grower groups are good at sharing paddock level knowledge, but there is also an opportunity to encourage small focus groups to share business decision making knowledge e.g. machinery replacement.
5. Grower groups could be using their membership to canvas opinions on topical issues.
6. Staff need ongoing extension training to improve delivery and effectiveness.
7. Larger groups need to respect the diversity across their membership and drill down to smaller sub groups around geographical or specific areas of interest to engage members.
8. GGA needs to be aware that some groups feel they are giving and not receiving much back from the GGA.

Participant 2

- Grower groups are a very necessary and vital part of the structure for primary industry in WA. They are important because they are part of the pathway towards greater self-determination and direction for producers through the opportunity for knowledge sharing and practice advancement. I think they play a vital role in building and supporting the social capital. I work with individual grower groups and help with strategic planning and their operational planning. I am also involved in industry issues and run workshops or initiatives where a number of grower groups are involved.
- The value of grower groups has been expressed as grower groups providing the necessary social interaction for an industry. In the past it was provided by agencies (which were well funded to run extension, field days, and project officers to help catchment groups) who were funded on a state and federal basis and allowed producers to come together to share problems and provide support. That has dropped away and many producers have become isolated and unsure of where they sit in terms of issues and advancement etc.
- Grower groups provide enormous value in peer support for individual producers, secondly there are advantages in the scale of a number of like-minded producers who can clearly articulate an issue or an improvement or policy that needs change; grower groups can provide a strong platform to do that and advance those issues. Grower groups can also be strong in advocacy and representation of views as they can be heard and seen.
- There is enormous potential for grower groups to move in and fill a layer where there is a vacuum and sub regional groups can provide support and assist others in the absence of agencies. Groups like Southern Dirt, MIG and Facey are filling the gap and providing a sub-regional platform. It was something the Catchment Council was doing but grower groups have a wider remit. Grower groups also have the potential to be creating economic development (i.e. jobs) within their regions. Higher level groups like the Kondinin Group moved to a value creation position rather than being membership based.
- Groups have moved from being obsessed with a lack of budget and what they should charge for a membership fee to regarding the membership fee as a percentage of income along with project work. We are now seeing a settling and maturing of grower groups and those with the driving force can attract national and industry funding. Other groups are very accepting and understanding that they are a social group (provide support and peer support, place for social interaction) and they are not gearing up to employ staff members. They have a simple and clear mandate to provide opportunities to bring members together to listen and catch up. Either focus is fine as not every group needs to be big. Earlier on the message was that a smaller group was going to fail but size doesn't matter now – there is a role for both.
- WANTFA works in the R&D area and they have had many discussions on what space they should be in. Other groups have farmer trials on the ground. A classic partnership approach will help give clinical oversight and assist with trial rigour. It is about identifying the risks and managing them and who can help them address that risk and extend their trials.
- It is important that groups become the best they can and get to a stage where they are strong and vibrant and able to service the R&D and get stuff done on the ground and work with a number of smaller satellite groups. This is what the maturing is now. Scott River work in with Southern Dirt which allows them to get the basics done and make sure they are legal i.e. they provide an administrative role, the bigger group provides structure and they have the scale and provide overall support as they won't get that from agencies ever again. Kondinin Group has shown they can do things, WANTFA hasn't quite got there but MIG has managed to do that and get results.

- For those groups who are organised and think about it there are the resources and capacity there but they are not in the places they traditionally were (i.e. no longer support from DAFWA). Groups attract funding from a wide range of sources and they need to become good at sourcing funding and identify what value they can provide and what partnerships they can provide. For WANTFA it is clear that they have identified they shouldn't try to duplicate and they must differentiate themselves, provide leadership as to who they need to work with and identify who to work with. They can say 'we can deliver you xyz trials on the ground and get your information to farmers – you need us, we need you' and utilise the resources to take a partnership approach. This is unlocked by having value conversations with large organisations that need something done (including commercial bodies) and there will inevitably be some uneasy partnerships.
- Good grower groups can separate out their governance requirements from their management requirements (taking an overall view of where it is and where it needs to go and what is important) and are refraining from being actively involved in doing it. They need to source the people to do it and good board members can take a whole of industry view – where we really need to be positioned and what we need to be working on, rather than chasing the pot of money to cover bills. It comes back to the focus of their strategic plan and their ability and desire to do that, and that needs to come from good leadership and governance.
- Opportunities are as wide as a group wants to take on and are based around capacity and time. There are opportunities in value adding, biosecurity and looking at social capital which is important. There are opportunities for grower groups to form partnerships that spill towards health and other areas that will help other organisations to get penetration into the region and they need to look outside of the normal core funding – look for partnerships and benefits they could offer. There is a dimension around men's health and suicide prevention, there is scope to think wider as long as the group is focused on their overall purpose.
- RAIN has become the contact point (one stop shop or defacto agency) for information i.e. the recent floods, they have the scope and network to contact people and if someone needs to know something they would rather go to them than an agency. It has got to a level of being sub regional, they are wider than ag innovation. They are now starting to move into biosecurity.
- Grower groups will continue to be part of the agribusiness landscape, and it is critical that they are there because the landscape is going to change with less farmers and isolation factors increasing. Grower groups can still provide a real viable benefit to farmers who want to create support networks. Support networks are important.
- Future model – Grower groups need to keep a broad focus because there is opportunity for all sorts of engagement and partnerships. They are a kind of facilitative group where the buck stops on the ground. They can be all things agriculture in their area and play more of a bureau function (like South Australia) and expand as the population changes and become more widely spread geographically. The Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) model is worth looking at for the future of grower groups as it has interesting governance.

Key messages

1. Grower groups are a necessary and vital part of the structure for primary industry in WA.
2. Grower groups are an important part of the pathway towards greater self-determination and direction for producers through the opportunity for knowledge sharing and practice advancement, and they play a vital role in building and supporting social capital.
3. There are advantages in the scale of a number of like-minded producers who can clearly articulate an issue or an improvement or policy that needs change, and grower groups can provide a strong platform to advance those issues.

4. Grower groups need to identify their risks and identify who can help them manage and address those risks (i.e. trial rigour requires a partnership approach).
5. It is important that groups get to a stage where they are strong and vibrant and able to service the R&D and get stuff done on the ground and work with a number of smaller satellite groups. Bigger groups can provide the structure and they have the scale to provide overall support to smaller groups i.e. administrative role, governance etc.
6. Groups need to become good at sourcing funding by identifying what value they can provide and what partnerships they can provide.
7. Good grower groups separate out their governance requirements from their management requirements and refrain from being actively involved in the day to day running.
8. Opportunities are in value adding, biosecurity and primary health.
9. Grower groups will continue to be part of the agribusiness landscape, and it is critical that they are there because support networks are important.
10. The CRC model is worth looking at for the future of grower groups.

Participant 3

- Grower groups have a tough gig; most groups are really at the behest of funders, trying to get from project to project and are under stress. Grower groups need good executive support as that can make or break them. There is some innovative and heartening stuff that I come across. My experience is that the rubber hits the road more from grower groups than NRM groups as they are more aware of where their value is derived from and who they need to please so they do trials and projects to improve farming in their region.
- I facilitate strategic planning and governance workshops, provide financial oversight and reporting and do some project specific and extension training.
- Grower groups have their finger on the pulse locally and more than other institutions like DAFWA which has lost its extension capability. They are locally established networks with a good level of rapport. RAIN is a one stop shop for grass roots intelligence, even the local Esperance DAFWA person approaches them for information but while that is a gift it is also a curse because they are not remunerated for that. Grower groups are pulled from pillar to post. Their strategic plan allows them to determine what they should be working on. Some groups have more time to work on projects.
- Smaller groups need to package what they can offer and proactively set up arrangements, if they need technical assistance for their Executive Officer (to upskill them) they need to look for in-kind arrangements to provide technical expertise for trials and show that they will work with others, rather than be reactive and negotiate things as they pop up. Grower groups have to hustle and play a consultancy role because traditional project funding is changing and getting harder – therefore groups should be moving towards supply chain work and that is not their usual space – how do we do that, will it be of value to our members?
- Grower groups have a more organic structure than DAFWA, MLA and GRDC and they are always going to provide value in being the bridge between the community and bigger groups.
- There is opportunity with some bigger groups moving away from being on the ground, for the smaller groups to slot in there and be of value as the bigger group can't fund people to be in the region to do the ground work.

- Grower groups have the capacity to set up to do trials, run projects and are quite technical but it is a real mind shift for them to do stakeholder relations work. Groups need to have their finger on the pulse and be quite proactive and look for opportunities for example if someone is pulling out, they can slot in there.
- Some grower groups have a really hard working EO who is doing everything and the committee don't assist them much so they end up doing all the roles that are outside of what they originally got together for. Volunteer members suffer burn out and have a business to focus on as well so it is hard for them. Volunteering Australia and Volunteering WA have done studies on the value of volunteers to the economy.
- There are some groups in the central wheatbelt who do it well – they are more informal and have cut the red tape and they try to add value by bringing the community together on a single topic forum every month.
- Social media – people have gone crazy over Twitter and especially the younger generation who are used to being online. However the decisions are being made by the older generation who want a more formalised process.
- Younger people like to use SLACK, an app used by businesses for internal messaging. For farmers sitting on a GPS enabled header and if they have got reception, they check on Twitter while they are working. There is great ability to get information in smaller bits, consistently, and concept marketing – being the authority for that information in that space. This technology is all good stuff but it is not what gets paid through project funding.
- There is opportunity for groups to move towards a model where they have to source income from all sorts of innovative angles because they have managed to pull together a good local network (i.e. like RAIN has). An example would be in the men's health area, if they sell it on the fact that their membership is based on 80% male farmers and then approach the area health service to see if they want to run a project. The group can then say we can bring them to you (i.e. you can have access to our members) and set up a memorandum of understanding.

Key messages

1. Grower groups are under stress: they are at the behest of funders, trying to get from project to project, and if successful they are pulled from pillar to post trying to service requests.
2. Grower groups need good executive support as that can make or break them.
3. Grower groups need to be mindful of their strategic plan as that drives their priorities.
4. Groups need to look for in-kind arrangements to provide technical assistance for their Executive Officer (to upskill them).
5. There is opportunity with some bigger groups moving away from being on the ground, for the smaller groups to slot in and be of value by doing the ground work.
6. Groups need to invest more time in stakeholder relations and be more proactive. Grower groups have to hustle because traditional project funding is changing and getting harder.
7. Social media can be an opportunity, but decisions are being made by the older generation who want a more formalised process. Technology has to be managed so it doesn't alienate or exclude some members.

Participant 4

- I enjoy working with small grower groups in the paddock and that type of peer to peer learning is critical in ag extension and for getting new ideas through the system. That is the basis of grower groups but to be honest the bigger models are not doing that critical role, they are a business and they are in competition with my private consultancy business. Bigger groups do the communication well and organise field days and have newsletters, they do an awesome job whereas I run consultancy groups, one on one and do one on one extension.
- The role of grower groups is based more on dissemination of information and in the paddock learning. The value of grower groups is to allow farmers to get together to learn about issues, peer to peer learning which is not happening otherwise.
- Extension should be broken up into communication and extension (creating change on farm). The core underlying principal that is required and is critical in talking through issues on farm, is that it is with trusted people.
- Sometimes the staffing with grower groups makes it hard to get consistency in a project as with one of my projects which was delivered through a grower group there were 3 changes in staff over a 3 year period. As a private consultant there was no staff churn. As a project manager it makes it hard to get learning amongst growers and there is no chance to build relationships with whoever is doing the trials. SEPWA has consistency in staff and they have been good. It is a real issue for grower groups and industry as a whole. It's catch 22 – if you pay graduate salaries because you are not-for-profit, it is a learning position but it also puts pressure on farmer management committees who are volunteers. They are not involved in the process and they don't have the ability to mentor people in those roles. Given the high staff turnover there is not a lot of longevity in trials and information to carry forward.
- There is still value in the local R&D and in the ability for university and CSIRO researchers to run their trials with their research (with a like-minded grower group) and that is still the biggest value. Along with information and communications (field days). The social aspect is particularly important in poor years, say with a drought it enables everyone to get together to have a beer and that value should never be underestimated (e.g. Corrigin had a blokes' breakfast following the frost event). Grower groups are good at bringing people together to talk about a topic and that then gives everyone an idea of who was there and who wasn't which enables them to support those that need it and to allow them to realise they are not alone.
- The areas I believe grower groups shouldn't be involved in is project management, they will do it, but that is my business. The true blue sky research you need CSIRO in there. If you look at Southern Farming Systems and Birchip they are running that research. A lot of group trials don't have rigour as the staff don't have the skills. Whereas groups in the East have people with the skills and background that enable that to happen. The groups over here don't have it, the West Midlands are starting to put that in place but they need experience and a bigger salary package.
- As a consultant I work in with grower groups in terms of presentations, give them ideas, strategic planning sessions and assist them with delivery in certain areas or know of groups keen to do work on certain topics. Grower groups are approached to death by researchers but at the end of the day it has to be in line with what their members want.
- Grower groups will remain in the landscape, they are mature now – they're a deliverer of services rather than a traditional grower group who deliver peer to peer learning. Smaller groups are still focused on what farmers need whereas the bigger groups who are employing staff are looking for projects.

- Grower groups are aiding the communication network so there is not so much peer to peer learning, and you can't do this at a large field day as the groups are too big. Groups need to run smaller regional discussion groups (maximum 20 people) where farmers get to talk about what they are doing on farm and farmers actually get to present what they have learnt rather than researchers – this is one of the key aspects and they get to ask questions of others and an opportunity to talk through that.
- Grower groups will stick around but they are in a state of flux. The bigger grower groups are very competitive and there is some angst between some of them. Some newer ones are competing for funds. There is a need to continue to support and train up grower groups (staff and executive) and give them some support (business and technical skills) through the GGA or another industry body. If they are left to their own devices they have the potential to fall apart quickly. We can do better with the way we support them.
- In the future we will get more grower groups and some smaller discussions groups will potentially start up as an issue arises in a region, but they may come and go. We need to think about how we can provide the support for the big ones with a business approach and who is providing services to their region, and still have little ones that are farmer managed. Both have a role, both have a right to exist – there is no one model that is a be all and end all. The biggest challenge is getting the support right.
- In terms of the future of the whole of ag industry, I have seen a lot of consultants setting up their own groups and running their own events in the last couple of years (client field days, crop updates, client newsletters, small focus groups for agronomy and business). I think they are going to push new ideas still and be a one stop information shop.
- Researchers like CSIRO will still go to and need grower groups to deliver on the ground as well as DAFWA, whereas the sheep industry run their own separate almost parallel groups. Grower groups have a different role, they need to recognise what is going on and work with it – they have got their favourite researchers, agronomists and banks but they can't be too precious.
- It is agreed that the role of the GGA is still to provide support for groups but the big concern is that groups don't want it and don't value it – they keep rocking up and telling us that they do get value but it could be more based on their fear of missing out. DAFWA and CSIRO and universities want the GGA there as an easy inroad to access growers.
- Grower groups are competing for funds – they are running a business and need to make money but they still need to work collaboratively which is better for industry. It doesn't matter who they are working for, it is a small industry and they need to work together.

Key messages

1. The role of grower groups is based on in the paddock learning and the real value is to enable farmers to get together to learn about issues, peer to peer learning, which is not happening in the bigger groups now.
2. Bigger groups do the communication well and organise field days and have newsletters, they do an awesome job.
3. The core principal critical in talking through issues on farm is that it is with trusted people.
4. Staffing issues within grower groups make it hard to retain information and maintain consistency in a project.
5. If you pay graduate salaries the staff are learning on the job, which puts pressure on the management committee to mentor people in these roles.
6. A lot of group trials lack rigour as the staff don't have the skills or experience.

7. There is still value in the local R&D and in the ability for university and CSIRO researchers to run their trials with a likeminded grower group.
8. The social aspect of grower groups is particularly important in poor years to support farmers.
9. Groups should be doing peer to peer learning and running smaller regional discussion groups (max 20 people) where farmers get to talk about what they are doing on farm and farmers actually get to present what they have learnt, rather than researchers.
10. There is a need to continue to support and train up grower groups (staff and executive) and give them support (business and technical skills) through the GGA or another industry body.
11. Consultants are now setting up their own groups and running their own events (client field days, crop updates, client newsletters, small focus groups for agronomy and business).
12. Grower groups are competing for funds – they need to work collaboratively which is better for industry. It doesn't matter who they are working for, it is a small industry and they need to work together.

FUNDERS

Funders believe grower groups play a crucial role in Western Australian agriculture and especially with the diminishing role of DAFWA the groups have become a regional and local voice and conduit between farmers and the R&D industry. Grower groups understand their local issues and socially they also play a very important role in small rural communities.

Grower groups have moved into the R&D space with a focus on local issues that are driven by farmers and so funders are happy to fund groups to undertake R&D as they see local benefits and it also enables industry to commission projects.

The major funder of the work done by grower groups in WA is the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) whose purpose is 'investing in R,D&E to create enduring profitability for Australian grain growers'. The organisation is moving from a 'funder' point of view to an 'investor' point of view, they are unable to provide core funds for organisations but can fund any organisation to deliver an RD&E outcome. As an investor the GRDC assesses each tender against their selection criteria which includes value for money, track record, capacity to deliver and risk.

The GRDC does not invest in grower groups but invests in RD&E that may be delivered by grower groups. Return on investment varies greatly, depending on the type of project delivered, but a key measure for running workshops or extension activities is demonstrating the quality of the delivery (i.e. evaluations) as well as intentions to change practice as a result of the extension event.

DAFWA encourages economic development of the state's agricultural industries and the department is an in-kind contributor to grower groups through project management and administration services.

DAFWA recently made funding available specifically for grower groups across the industry sectors of livestock, grains and horticulture. These economic development grants were focused on the supply chain and the applications were independently assessed on the feasibility of the project, the capacity of the group to deliver, the methodology and the business strategy. DAFWA funding was directed to groups that employ staff as the projects required time and effort well beyond a volunteer's role.

Each year the Council of Grain Grower Organisations Limited (COGGO) calls for applications for their 'research fund' which invests in RD&E projects that address issues affecting the profitability of WA grain producers and which have a public good outcome. The funding is open to anyone and projects are judged on their own merit, regardless of who has put up the project if it is a grower group or consultant. Projects are assessed by an expert panel of industry representatives on the benefit to farmers and production systems (50%), the capacity of the people behind the project (30%) and their ability to deliver the project.

Grower groups are funded every year by COGGO; it varies on the quality of the projects but on average there would be 6-8 groups funded annually out of 15-20 projects. There is no preference for a big or small grower group however they do need some executive capacity to ensure the project is completed and therefore it falls back to the bigger groups by default because of their capabilities. COGGO does not expect a dollar return from their funding, however they are about to change their policy around copyright and intellectual property in order to get some financial benefit if a product should have a significant financial return.

Funders seek attribution for their investment to demonstrate how their funds are invested and grower groups acknowledge them in newsletters, print media and at events. On acquittal of grants a final report is prepared for funders. The final results of RD&E projects are made publically available through the funder's and grower group's websites. One funder mentioned there is opportunity to recognise funders more overtly, as some public funders are pushed aside for the commercial sponsors who like to see their names up in lights.

Other challenges identified by funders included that grower groups have limited time and resources which makes it difficult for them to build relationships; they need to improve their communication and work more collaboratively with other groups with common goals and objectives.

Groups also face the risk of conflicts of interest in funding; if they do a commercial deal with sponsors they risk compromising their perceived independence, unless the sponsor only wants their name promoted through advertising and then the group can remain relatively independent.

Another issue identified was a perceived lack of rigour in grower group trials, mainly attributed to staff lacking capacity. In a bid to address this GRDC has included a requirement for statistical support in trial design and analysis of results for all Regional Cropping Solutions Network (RCSN) investments. They are also in the process of negotiating an investment in the 'Statistics for the Australian Grains Industry' which will provide additional statistical support to grower groups and other RD&E providers delivering trials through GRDC investment. The recently established Regional Research Agronomy project, led by Vanessa Stewart at DAFWA, will in time become an additional resource that will assist with capacity building in the areas of trial design, statistical design and rigour of regionally-based trials conducted by grower groups, consultants and agribusiness.

Other opportunities for grower groups to increase the capacity of their staff are for the GGA to provide guidance in training and awareness and for groups to collaborate with industry partners. DAFWA is encouraging a 'project management' course to be run through the GGA and they have had discussions with them about other types of training they might commission for grower groups to access. The GGA has the ability to bridge those skills and to efficiently commission a course that lots of groups can access, rather than grower groups trying to do this on their own.

With DAFWA pushing for grower groups to focus on the supply chain, they would like to see groups develop in-market partnerships, build relationships and ensure that growers have the capability to produce a consistent product that meets the needs of the market. Market engagement has not been a feature of broad acre farming in the past whereas other sectors have done that, and there appears to be barriers to developing the grains processing value add opportunities. There is also a lack of skill set to fully develop the supply chain and links which can be addressed in forming partnerships to help fulfil roles and add value. Grower groups could organise themselves into more investable groups to attract large scale funding and access capital to develop processing and other capabilities. According to DAFWA there are lots of opportunities in that area and there has to be intensification of what farmers do on their land or an increase in the value of the product they sell; it is not about doubling the hectares.

Some grower groups are more effective than others and it comes down to those groups that are run like a business, who have lots of members (bigger is better), adequate funding, an influential board and quality staff. That is not to detract from other locally-focused groups; while they are run by volunteers and have a fairly low capacity to conduct projects, they appear to have greater engagement and ownership by their members.

Funders believe there is still a role for grower groups to play in the future but that will depend on their capacity to deliver and their relevance to members. In terms of a particular model for the future they find that harder to define as there are different levels of groups which include industry groups, issue specific groups and locally relevant groups. There is still a role for grower groups to play in extension and lots of opportunities to bring the market closer to the producer and bridge the gap in the supply chain. Government recognises the value of grower groups and has made some funding available to groups.

In the future funders believe a rationalisation is inevitable as farmer numbers drop some groups will fold while the more professional and functional groups will remain. It was mentioned by one funder

that the challenge as the grower groups become more capable and fewer in number is that they may seek to take on their own development, so as they get larger their reliance on GGA will lessen.

Currently the GGA is a good front door to grower groups in WA. It is viewed as a valuable conduit between the various grower groups and it provides support and resources to assist new and existing grower groups, their staff and management committees. Currently the GGA is funded by DAFWA which is pushing for the alliance to stand alone in the future, so the future of the alliance will depend on its ability to evolve into an independent organisation that can attract funding from sources that do not compete with grower groups.

A challenge for the GGA moving forward is to make sure they are not competing with grower groups for funding and as identified by funders, there is a minefield in competition for funding. If the GGA can streamline that process as well as provide relevant training and workshops for groups to increase their capacity in the future, then it is believed that the GGA will have a role in the future. However as mentioned by one funder, they don't see value in a national GGA as while it works in WA it would dilute the alliance's effectiveness if they were to spread themselves too thinly.

Participant 5

- Grower groups play a crucial role in WA agricultural systems and with the diminishing role of DAFWA they are a regional and local voice and conduit for producers for R&D and information. They are important because DAFWA is not there in independent RD&E. There is R&D done but it is by companies selling a product. Groups are able to access funding through Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) to do independent RD&E.
- Grower groups understand local and regional issues well, they understand local and regional people and the seasons really well and generally speaking, most groups are good at extending information.
- Grower groups are not necessarily well enough equipped to do the actual research themselves; some do have skills in that area, but generally they are not the ones who can do the science. In the livestock arena it is very limited. Some groups may have an ex agronomist as a Project Manager and they are capable of doing measurements.
- They really struggle to get committee people to commit to their role, there are some great committees but they leave a lot up to staff. That comes down to paid versus volunteer as producers are busy running their own farming businesses. Members are not good at understanding what groups can do for them.
- Some groups are looking at different models in order to sustain them in the long term so that they are not so reliant on project funding. They are getting better at engaging with funding bodies and spending more time in building relationships with funding bodies.
- One of the big challenges is that groups have limited time and resources which makes it difficult for a national funding body based in the East to build relationships. Some groups are good at doing it and those groups succeed. They could engage better and in doing so they could achieve better adoption of R&D as that is not effective enough now.
- Grower groups need to be better at communication and working with other groups with common goals and objectives. It is easier in the grains industry – you can measure things and you can get a result in 12 months with new varieties, for example. Whereas in the livestock industry it is difficult to do and there are animal ethics approvals which has stopped a lot of good research in the past. It is hard for grower groups to undertake livestock trials as the WA animal ethic rules are particularly draconian compared to elsewhere.

- Grower groups could improve on their attribution. They are good at putting logos on things where required and they have improved in their attribution at events and make mention of funders and in their publications. But they could actually ask us for material / brochures to put out at events, for example.
- Most grower group work is collaborative so I would expect there would be acknowledgement.
- Producer members that are very active and proactive and engaged in a group make it functional, ASHEEP is an example – they know their ideas are coming from producers. They are doing regional or locally relevant work and are not doing it just to get funding. We have money available as a funder and we can make it fit with producer priorities.
- There is a real difference between those groups that are run like a business compared to a more locally focused group which is a more successful model – but that’s not to detract from the others who do some great work. The local ones have more engagement and ownership by their members. SEPWA is an exception as they have a completely different model and they have a very clear purpose and have done some great branding and marketing. The business focused grower groups are chasing the pot of money because they are so big and they have lots of projects and staff. They could be successful in the long term and end up like BCG. However over here we have a lot less population density so farmers have to travel further and there are fewer farmers in an area.
- Grower groups are still integral to local RD&E provided they remain locally relevant – that’s the catch. Some have a state wide impact (Evergreen and WANTFA), they have a role from a state-wide perspective. There is no one model for groups as we have different levels of groups – industry, specific and locally relevant groups.
- There are three different groups of farmer members: 1) some farmers are members and they support the group because it is important to have, they are actively engaged and pay their membership, 2) pay their membership, they are interested but not involved, 3) then there are others who throw everything at it. It is getting a balance of members to be involved and not too many of those who pay their annual fee to keep numbers up but rather building the proportion of membership that have ownership and want to be actively engaged.
- Grower groups need to ensure that the farmers involved in the group are actively farming i.e. not only using the older generation who have left the farm to sit on their committees, at the expense of active farmers.
- The GGA is of value as it is a conduit between the groups, it is of value having the calendar. I see it provides real value to new staff coming into a group or new groups starting up as it can help to provide professional development for staff and members.
- The Western Australian Livestock Research Council (WALRC) through MLA relies heavily on the GGA and grower groups through the consultative strategy. Both have a very important role. We go to the GGA for the higher level to cover all the groups or if we are dealing on specific topics we may go direct to the group. The GGA as the overarching body can advise us as to who is best to talk to.
- Going forward the GGA must make sure they are not competing with groups for funding as I don’t see them doing the work and definitely don’t see value in a national GGA. It works in WA because there are a lot of groups and WA is so far advanced in what it provides so it would dilute the GGA’s effectiveness in WA if they were to spread themselves too thinly. They are a good front door to grower groups in WA.

Key messages

1. Grower groups play a crucial role in WA agricultural systems; they are a regional and local voice and conduit for producers for R&D and information sharing.
2. Grower groups understand local and regional issues well, they understand the people and the seasons and most groups are good at extending information.
3. Grower groups are not necessarily well enough equipped to do the actual research.
4. Groups are looking at different models to sustain them long term so they are not so reliant on project funding.
5. Grower groups need to be better at communication and working with other groups with common goals and objectives.
6. It is hard for grower groups to undertake livestock trials as the WA animal ethics rules are a barrier.
7. Local groups tend to have more engagement and ownership by their members, larger business focused grower groups have to chase funding to support their projects and staff.
8. The GGA is of value as a conduit between the groups, it provides real value to new staff coming into a group and new groups starting up.
9. Going forward the GGA must make sure they are not competing with groups for funding.

Participant 6 – pursued a number of times but unsuccessful.

Participant 7

- I am at the delivery end of R&D funding and I engage with grower groups who have grants and monitor their progress as they conduct the project. In my opinion I think there is a lot of enthusiasm and there is a vast range of capability in grower groups. There are grower groups like SEPWA who have lots of members and decent staff and Stirlings to Coast who are very capable in running projects and delivering, and at other end there are some grower groups run by volunteers and they have a fairly low capacity to conduct projects. They tend to be a little insular and it would be good for them to get out more. The projects we are running do facilitate collaboration with quality service providers (universities etc.) to encourage collaboration.
- The great value of grower groups is the concept of industry commissioning projects that are delivering the outcomes that their members need. The beauty of grower group grants is that they enable groups to engage agronomists and industry supply chain members in the project, it delivers contact with the rest of those groups as well. The key thing they need is capacity; they don't have the skills they need to fully develop their supply chain and develop links with in market partners. They are developing and that is a step wise project. I would expect grower groups to have partners in the supply chain who are fulfilling roles and adding value, they don't need to do the whole thing themselves.
- How is a grower group going to engage with Middle Eastern countries as customers? They don't have that relationship but they need to establish it, it is a matter of identifying appropriate partners and developing relationships over time, delivering consistent quality product to that partner and understanding nuances around the product. That market engagement has not been a feature of broad acre farming in the past whereas other sectors of industry have done that. There is not the skill set there and there is a lot of opportunity to improve the value of agriculture through value adding.

- The advantage is the application of the work, the objective of the project is in line with what the grower groups want, they develop the idea and they commission the service providers (unis and others) to produce the outcome and work in collaboration to realise the benefit and undertake the research. They are the users of the benefit and theoretically the advantage will be in a quicker uptake of the outcomes.
- We have rounds of funding specifically for grower groups, we split the application into sectors (i.e. livestock, grains and horticulture) and we have an expert panel for each sector who independently assesses the projects. We have commissioned a study called 'Pathways to Competitiveness' and the grants are economic development grants which are focused on the supply chain which is in line with the recommendations of the study.
- The criteria is the feasibility of the project, the capacity of group to deliver the project, the methodology, the business strategy, and the capability of the organisation (history, staff etc.). If a group is lacking in capability and commissions a university or another service provider to supply that capability then the project is well served by that collaboration.
- We have 74 collaborations in the 20 projects at the moment which brings the full range of capability to the projects. Collaborators include agronomists, consultants, universities, the Chemistry Centre, DAFWA staff etc..
- We don't fund any groups that don't have staff as they need to be able to put together a proposal and manage the projects over the years, which is not a volunteer's role.
- We ask grower groups to demonstrate value and identify the benefits that are expected to flow from the projects. We had 94 applications for the first round and funded 20 projects; it is a competitive approach that we use and the benefits that each project will state are comparable.
- We are looking for economic development of the State's agricultural industries. We are an in-kind contributor to the grant which means that we provide project management and administration services. My role is to monitor and assist projects to improve project management capabilities and to ensure they are delivering on time and suggest solutions where they may have difficulties, and provide upskilling as well.
- We are encouraging a 'project management' course to be run through the GGA in July and have had discussions with GGA about other types of training they might commission for grower groups to access, like food provenance, QA etc.. There is a raft of potential training that grower groups might avail themselves of. Potentially that is a key role for the GGA because as we see it they have the ability to efficiently commission one course that lots of groups can access as opposed to grower groups thinking of them themselves and finding someone to deliver. They have the efficiency and ability to put a structured program together and put it forward to their membership, they may or may not have a current understanding of those training opportunities and that is where the GGA has the ability to explore the full spectrum of development that the groups are undertaking and to deliver a program that helps them to bridge those skills gaps.
- The quality of staff separates the more functional groups aside from others, grower groups have a very small staff ranging from zero up to 6-8 but if you have a lower grade of staff member on average then you are not going to have the capacity to deliver. I would say there is also an influence of the board in terms of if the grower group management is progressive, or if they are insular, are they ambitious or are they just holding the course – that also matters. I think their membership size is important – some range from 30-380 – that is a factor; bigger is better and they have the ability to innovate.
- Innovative industries like the food sector probably have more scope than the grains sector, it seems there are barriers to developing the grains processing value add opportunities. There is a

lack of projects in that sphere that we would like to see. We are looking for downstream processing projects and we are not getting a lot of those in the grains area. That is where the value add is going to be. There has to be intensification of what we do on the land or increase the value of the product we sell, it is not about doubling the hectares.

- There lots of things that grower groups could do better: they could organise themselves into more investable groups, they need to access capital to develop processing and other capabilities. They could look for large scale funding through investment companies / equity companies to attract millions of dollar to develop processing capabilities (i.e. include robotics and various degrees of automation to reduce the cost of labour, then they will need large scale plants to process grain). They need to be organised into an entity so that they can attract that money. That's why they should be developing in market partnerships so they develop in the right way and ensure they have the capability and products that are meeting the needs of the market, not producing something and then looking around for someone to buy it. That is the ultimate. There are steps to that point and capability that needs to grow – partnerships, relationships and their own ability to produce a consistent product, access to technology and reducing their constraints.
- There is a great opportunity for the GGA to be providing access to those knowledge areas and to provide guidance to the grower groups in training and awareness. Even within each of the sectors / disciplines of training there are different levels from awareness to competence which will take time and needs to be coordinated and thought through.
- There is still a role for grower groups to play in extension, there's the production end which they are engaged in and that is extension and research projects and there's ever shortening supply chains that are bringing the market closer to the producer and their ability to bridge that gap is what I am talking about.
- Future model – it comes back to the size and the capability; there is a minimum that needs to be reached and without being fully across all of the grower groups that exist, I think there are sectors that are poorly represented liked horticulture. There needs to be more grower groups of a bigger size or perhaps amalgamation of groups. I think there will be a shakeout, maybe a polarisation; those grower groups that aren't interested in going down the development path will stay as they are and can do what suits them, those who want to get involved in the supply chain and market will need a larger capacity than most currently have. Some consolidation in groups would help as it would give groups a greater scale and more projects which would help them to be more sustainable.
- GGA relevance in future – I see a need for coordination and the channel to grower groups to provide them with guidance and training opportunities I see they could play a broader role in that. The challenge as the grower groups become more capable and fewer in number is that they may seek to take on their own development so as they get larger their reliance on GGA will lessen. But that is a question for larger grower groups – what services do they need?
- DAFWA is driving for the GGA to stand alone, there is lots of work to go in that space with the current project. DAFWA has reduced its capability from 1800 to 1000 people so it's hard to see government restoring funding but there is rhetoric in terms of DAFWA getting back into research more overtly than talked about in the past so there is the capacity to build agriculture.
- It is very important that the momentum developed through grower groups continues, otherwise what will happen when the funding stops? They can't employ staff and the whole thing unwinds.
- Grower groups do acknowledge DAFWA and RfR and publications etc. are co-badged.
- I do think it is a good model where grower groups are funded by government to produce the research that they think is important, to produce the capabilities they think are important for

their development. In terms of our role it is important that we bring the big picture thinking to them so they can consider how they might grow. We can provide support to conduct projects otherwise they would have no money or be able to employ staff.

- Supply chain development projects are a new area for many grower groups and they are learning as they go.

Key messages

1. Capacity to conduct projects is dependent on the capability of staff which ranges greatly amongst groups, with some groups totally reliant on volunteers.
2. If groups don't have capacity and skills they need to develop links with partners.
3. There is a great opportunity for the GGA to be providing access to knowledge areas and to provide guidance to the grower groups. GGA can bridge skill gaps by efficiently commissioning courses that many groups can access.
4. The quality of staff and the influence of the board characterises the more functional groups: are they insular, ambitious, or are they just holding the course? Membership size is important; the bigger groups have the ability to innovate.
5. We are looking for downstream processing as that is where the value add is going to be. There has to be intensification of what we do on the land or increase the value of the product we sell, it is not about doubling the hectares.
6. Grower groups could organise themselves into more investable groups, to access capital to develop capabilities. They need to be organised into an entity to attract funds.
7. Grower groups could develop in-market partnerships to ensure they have the capability and product to meet the needs of the market.
8. There is still a role for grower groups in extension at research at the production end.
9. In future groups may amalgamate or will need to get bigger to build capacity, there will be a shakeout and maybe a polarisation, those grower groups that aren't interested in going down the development path will stay as they are, those who want to get involved in the supply chain and market will need greater capacity than most currently have.
10. As grower groups become more capable and fewer in number they may take on their own development and lessen their reliance on the GGA.
11. DAFWA is driving for the GGA to stand alone; there is lots of work to do in that space with the current project.
12. It is a good model where grower groups are funded by government to produce research they think is important, and produce the capabilities important for their development. DAFWA has an important role to bring big picture thinking to groups.

Participant 8

- Grower groups fill in the space for R&D that bigger organisations have missed, they are focused on the local level and more specific R&D projects that they can get traction on that can help growers. That is why the Council of Grain Grower Organisations (COGGO) is happy to fund lower value R&D through groups because we see local benefit through groups.
- We fund grower groups every year, it varies on the quality of projects but on average there would be 6-8 groups funded annually out of 15-20 projects.

- We assess projects based on the benefit to farmers and production systems, the people who are running it and their ability to deliver the project. The project is 50% of the mark out of 100 and the people are 30%. Each project is judged on its own merit, it doesn't matter who is putting up the project if it is a grower group or consultant or whoever.
- We have no preference for a big or small grower group. We do like to see a group with some executive clout to make sure the project is completed (by default it does end up with bigger groups because of their capabilities), but we would happily fund a small group with capacity.
- The process for selection is firstly done by an expert panel of industry people put together by GIWA and they make recommendations to the COGGO Board and we review them for approval. We don't always take on board the recommendations, we may override their recommendations.
- We are not expecting a dollar return in any way from our funding. We are happy to fund projects that have public good outcomes, our mantra is to fund anything that benefits growers in WA; marketing, supply chain, initial R&D etc..
- Currently the rights of the project are held with the people who do the project, but we are beefing that up to have a share if it is successful. We have had a few applications that could have a significant dollar outcome if they come to fruition, and therefore we are changing our policy around copyright and intellectual property (IP). If a project is a major winner we would like to get some financial benefit; if it meets a certain financial level we can request a commercial return.
- The value in grower groups is that they are locally focused and they are focused on delivering outcomes for their members.
- As a funder we get acknowledged in newsletters, the print media, and at field days. We also ask for a final report to put on the website so it is publically available for everyone to see. We started off making it available to members only to encourage farmers to contribute to COGGO (only 15% - 20% of grain growers contribute). There is an opportunity to recognise funders more aggressively, we have never made a point of it. You see some publications in the rural press where we are not acknowledged and at times we get pushed aside for the commercial sponsors who want their name in lights, we are a public funder. It is incumbent on the groups to be more proactive in promoting their funders. Some get funding from lots of different funding sources so maybe they don't put the same importance on it. Recognition of the growers who contribute to COGGO as well would be nice, as without them we wouldn't exist.
- I think grower groups will remain, politicians are recognising their value and some major funding is going directly to grower groups. There are three levels of grower groups; more professional groups have an executive team to help them grow, there are ones in between with a staff member, and other groups have more of a social focus. There will be rationalisation as farmer numbers drop and the social groups may fall by the wayside. There are organisations keen to keep funding groups who are more professional and functional.
- Extension has become a bigger part of grower groups as it becomes less of a focus for DAFWA and GRDC. Groups will continue to increase their focus on that and they could become quite commercial if they want to provide members with other services, but that is up to the individual groups. If it is well funded and well operated and if they move into other areas they may become more relevant. But there is the risk of a conflict of interest; some funding conflict exists already and groups need to keep at arms-length – if they do a commercial deal with sponsors they risk losing their independence but if the sponsor only wants their name promoted through advertising it can remain relatively independent.

- Grower groups are important socially particularly in a small community. The smaller the community and the further from Perth, the more important a group is socially.
- In future the GGA will play more of a role but it hasn't been fully determined yet. At the moment COGGO is happy to deal with individual grower groups for specific purposes. If the GGA became more of a parent to grower groups then COGGO would work through them and let them do the work for the funding. It doesn't make a difference to COGGO who we work through.
- At the moment there is a mine field of competition for funding; GGA can play a role to streamline that and take the blood bath out of the competition.

Key messages

1. COGGO funds lower value R&D through groups because we see local benefit through groups. Grower groups fill an R&D space that bigger organisations have missed; groups are focused on local level specific R&D projects that can get traction to help growers.
2. We assess projects based on the benefit to farmers and production systems, the people who are running it and their ability to deliver the project. We like to see a group with some executive clout to make sure the project is completed, but if a small group has capacity we will fund it.
3. There is an opportunity to recognise funders more aggressively. Sometimes public funders get pushed aside for the commercial sponsors who want their name in lights.
4. Grower groups will remain; politicians are recognising their value and some major funding is going directly to grower groups. There will be rationalisation as farmer numbers drop and social groups may fold. There are organisations keen to keep funding groups who are more professional and functional.
5. Groups will continue to increase their focus on extension and they could become quite commercial if they want to provide members with other services, but that is up to the individual groups. If a group is well funded and well operated and if they move into other areas they may become more relevant.
6. Grower groups need to manage the risk of a conflict of interest with commercial funding and retain their independence.
7. Grower groups play an important role socially; the smaller the community and the further from Perth the more important a group is.
8. There is a mine field in competition for funding; GGA could streamline that and coordinate groups to collaborate rather than compete.

Participant 9

- Grower groups vary in their size, ability and capacity so you can't lump them all in together however when GRDC considers funding proposals we need to take this into consideration and if a grower group is deemed to address the selection criteria for a proposal or investment then it is deemed to be best value for money.
- The GRDC board has recalibrated their purpose to invest in RD&E to create enduring profitability for Australian grain growers. We are unable to provide core funds for organisations but we can fund an organisation to deliver an RD&E outcome. The capacity of grower groups will determine how we view them in that context and this is done on a case by case basis. Some groups in WA and interstate have the capability to deliver research, some can deliver development, some extension, and some are across all three.

- While we can accept proposals from any organisation we do need to put it out to open tender (even if they are ideas) and we don't automatically fund that group to deliver the work because the Commonwealth Procurement rule dictates that we need to have an open process and demonstrate best value for money. We look at how groups have addressed the selection criteria specific to the project, their track record, the staff and what their prior experience is which helps determine the ability and capacity to deliver.
- The GRDC Purpose is "Investing in RD&E to create enduring profitability for Australian grain growers" and the organisation is moving from the 'funder' point of view to the 'investor' point of view. Grower groups vary across WA and the country in their size, capacity and capability. As investors, the GRDC considers each organisation on a case by case basis and in the context of the potential new investment.
- In the 2016/17 financial year GRDC invested in approximately 33 projects with grower groups across Australia.
- As a Commonwealth Entity, the GRDC must ensure that each tender is assessed against the selection criteria listed in the investment description as well as ensuring that the Commonwealth Procurement Rules are adhered to, particularly value for money, track record, capacity to deliver and risk. Each organisation that submits an application to tender for a GRDC investment is evaluated in the same way.
- GRDC considers that grower groups have a role in RD&E but so do agronomists and others. There are some areas where there are no grower groups. We can't have projects with just one sector as it doesn't allow us to reach everyone, it is important to have a mixture.
- Recently GRDC identified there is not enough rigour in grower groups and included a requirement for statistical support in trial design and analysis of results for all Regional Cropping Solutions Network (RCSN) investments. The GRDC is in the process of negotiating an investment in the Statistics for the Australian Grains Industry which will provide additional statistical support to grower groups and other RD&E providers delivering trials through GRDC investment. The recently established Regional Research Agronomy project, led by Vanessa Stewart at DAFWA, will in time become an additional resource that will assist with capacity building in the areas of trial design, statistical design and rigour of regionally-based trials conducted by grower groups, consultants and agribusiness.
- Grower groups can demonstrate value to GRDC as a funder by outlining their capacity, capability and track record as well as their ability to address the selection criteria for each investment.
- The GRDC does not invest in grower groups but invests in RD&E that may be delivered by grower groups. Return on investment varies greatly, depending on the type of project delivered. In the case of running workshops or extension activities, groups need to demonstrate the quality of the delivery (i.e. evaluations) as well as intentions to change practice as a result of the event.
- The GRDC seeks attribution for investment in RD&E activities in order to demonstrate how levy funds are invested. The GRDC understands that attribution is important to demonstrate value to stakeholders of grower groups and other research providers. Attribution requirements are determined on a case by case basis and it depends on the nature of the investment and the type of agreement used. For example, grower groups that are on the Preferred Suppliers List have agreed to particular conditions regarding attribution.
- Grower groups can provide better value to funders by ensuring that the greatest consideration is given to the quality and rigour of all trial work, extension and communication, from the point of trial design, right through to publishing and presentation of the work. The GRDC seeks to work

with grower groups to undertake work that is beyond some of the criticism that has been levelled at grower group work previously.

- Grower groups are welcome to apply for new GRDC investments and should monitor the Current Tenders webpage for future opportunities: <https://grdc.com.au/Apply/Current-Tenders>
- The future depends on the grower group and their capacity to deliver. The GRDC does not seek to limit or define the role and fit of grower groups in the future as this will be dependent on each individual group or groups, their focus and the investments they make in their capacity and range of services provided, both in terms of human resources and physical resources. We do not seek to drive a 'race to the bottom' but rather encourage a drive for improvement.
- The Grower Group Alliance is an organisation that provides support to grower groups, facilitates networking opportunities between groups and can link researchers/industry with grower groups and vice versa. The future of the GGA will depend on its ability to evolve into an independent organisation that can attract funding from sources that do not compete with grower groups.

Key messages

1. GRDC invests in RD&E to create enduring profitability for Australian grain growers. It is unable to provide core funds for organisations but can fund any organisation to deliver an RD&E outcome.
2. While grower groups vary in their size, capacity and capability, as investors the GRDC considers each organisation on a case by case basis and in the context of the investment.
3. GRDC identified a lack of rigour in grower group projects and included a requirement for statistical support in trial design and analysis of results for all RCSN investments.
4. Grower groups can demonstrate value to GRDC as a funder by outlining capacity, capability and track record, and their ability to address the selection criteria for each investment.
5. Return on investment varies greatly, depending on the type of project delivered.
6. The GRDC seeks attribution for investment in RD&E activities to demonstrate how levy funds are invested.
7. Grower groups can provide better value to funders by ensuring the greatest consideration is given to the quality and rigour of all trial work, extension and communication from the point of trial design, right through to publishing and presentation of the work.
8. The future depends on the grower group and their capacity to deliver. The GRDC does not seek to limit or define the role and fit of grower groups in the future as this will be dependent on each individual group or groups, their focus and the investments they make to their capacity and range of services provided, both in terms of human resources and physical resources. We do not seek to drive a 'race to the bottom', but rather encourage a drive for improvement.
9. The future of the GGA will depend on its ability to evolve into an independent organisation that can attract funding from sources that do not compete with grower groups.

SPONSORS

Sponsors believe that grower groups provide grass roots research, development, extension and capacity building to growers and they provide a platform for farmers to come together to share ideas and gain information and knowledge to improve their farming businesses. They also provide a focal point socially and help build the industry leaders of tomorrow, and provide a support network for isolated rural communities which is invaluable following adverse events.

Grower groups fill the void in local and regional R&D, they take into account local conditions and provide a pathway for researchers to engage with groups to undertake R&D with farmer support.

Sponsors of grower groups vary from large national agribusinesses, to state-wide organisations and right down to the local re-seller who works in with a local grower group. Some sponsor a number of groups and cash commitments may be up to \$125,000 a year in total. In-kind sponsorship on top of cash sponsorship includes demonstrations and trials, time commitments, expertise of staff and event attendance etc..

Sponsorship of groups is based on where sponsors believe they can get business growth, the involvement of leading farmers, membership size, the functionality of the group (including professionalism, governance and management framework), the influence of the group, the capacity of staff, the community, the company's resources within the region and the involvement of competitors. Sponsorship provides sponsors with advertising; recognition and networking opportunities; a presence at group committee meetings which gives them feedback on key issues.

As a sponsor, the value of grower groups is in networking opportunities as well as in branding and business growth and they hope that brand recognition will result in new clients, more tonnes or an increase in product sales. As quoted by one sponsor "if we can get a new client out of our sponsorship every couple of years from each group, it helps pay for it and it would be cost neutral". The larger companies are more readily able to measure their return on investment whereas the smaller locally based sponsor struggles with getting any real value from their sponsorship but it remains part of their marketing plan. Some organisations review their sponsorship agreements on an annual basis to determine their return on investment.

Sponsorship is not just about providing funds, but it is also about the involvement of the company's staff members in grower group activities and demonstrating their knowledge and expertise while providing specialist services back to groups. It is about sharing knowledge on what they specialise in and building relationships, which opens up communication with growers and in turn opens up business opportunities.

Grower groups invite sponsors to speak at events, promote their brand/logo in their publications, display banners at events, offer opportunities to publish articles in newsletters and provide trial sites. One sponsor mentioned that grower groups believe that offering speaking opportunities and displaying logos/banners is a privilege but they indicated it doesn't give them a lot of value. They are also not interested in driving long distances for only a short speaking slot; sponsors are more interested in connecting with farmers. Sponsorship of grower groups can consume significant time relative to the investment and as outlined by a sponsor, some groups have expressed a sense of 'entitlement' regarding the ongoing provision of sponsorship funds.

Sponsors are wary of not using their sponsorship to do the hard sell on people or to launch new products or services; their approach is to be actively involved and to keep their finger on the pulse

and their name out there. Sponsorship also has a community support element and while there is no real value in supporting a grower group over a sporting club, sponsors believe it is about creating a presence in the field and it is community orientated. As outlined by one sponsor, they would prefer to be involved with grower group events and in the paddock as opposed to something like Crop Updates as it is a conference full of industry people.

A criticism around sponsoring grower groups is that there are a lot of sponsorship packages that aren't within range for companies that don't have the resources or the staff available to cover all the field days. Therefore some would prefer to sponsor events rather than be a full sponsor, as they find blanket sponsoring is diluted and it is hard to measure a return on investment.

Sponsors are not attracted to grower group days where they are put up against their competitors. Ideally they are after an opportunity to have face to face contact with customers and as one sponsor said "even if we don't sponsor, we often go to events and are involved in grower groups as a paying member". One sponsor outlined they are looking for a point of difference from their competitors and are more focused on targeting community events that encourage exercise, promote men's health and enable their staff to interact with the community and build rapport.

A further criticism was that grower groups are not completely inclusive with their sponsorship model and that they exclude people from being more involved as sponsorship controls their agenda. This excludes others from participating and sharing their knowledge/expertise on a subject. As stated by one participant, at the end of day it should be about extending the best possible message that will benefit farmers and increase their efficiency and productivity, regardless if someone is a sponsor.

In the eyes of sponsors, the more successful grower groups are driven by local farmers, have dedicated support staff, a good management committee, their succession is sorted, they cover 1-2 major communities, they collaborate with researchers, utilise social media, engage with industry leaders and they are also conscious of relationship building with sponsors. The capacity of the group dictates the value they get as a sponsor.

Issues that have arisen for sponsors in dealing with grower groups in the past include young and inexperienced staff, poor communication, lack of direction and focus of grower groups, lack of passion and enthusiasm from members and volunteer burnout.

One sponsor identified a risk for industry in that consultants are moving in on grower groups and are starting to take a big piece of the pie with relationship building and accessing growers. They view themselves as the grower voice for those farmers they represent and they are removing companies from having direct contact and building rapport with growers.

A future opportunity identified by a sponsor was for grower groups to initiate benchmarking groups or smaller farmer groups who are willing to share information and learn from each other along with the delivery of more regional capacity building.

Sponsors believe grower groups are here to stay and it is important farmers retain ownership of them and that the groups are independent and not driven by the agenda of sponsors and funders.

While each grower group has its own merit, it was thought that some groups may merge as farm consolidation continues while groups who remain relevant and continue to be an active pathway for R&D will survive. A shared services model was also suggested which would allow smaller groups without capacity to work with a larger group with capacity which could be GGA or another group.

Participant 10

- From an industry point of view groups are filling the void in local and regional R&D and they take into account the local conditions. But they are also a pathway for supply chain participants to undertake R&D with farmer involvement. Increasingly input suppliers are undertaking R&D through grower groups. A by-product of grower groups is that they provide a reason for the community to come together and other initiatives have come out of the grower group network (i.e. Esperance Farm Office Management (EFOM) through SEPWA popped up as a result). What growers are doing is varied and farmers taking control of what is relevant for their area or region is an important part of it. Whilst we talk negatively about the withdrawal of DAFWA services, this is a better way of getting engaged and with community / farmer support.
- The value of grower groups for us as a sponsor is in branding and business growth, involvement of our staff which is very important and their awareness of the latest R&D which allows them to use it in discussion with clients and potential new clients. We have a number of staff involved in committees through grower groups and they are actively encouraged to do so.
- We sponsor 15 grower groups which vary in size and commitment and we spend around \$125,000 in cash and with in-kind support it would be closer to a total of \$200,000 a year. This would include participation of staff in committees, availability of guest speakers etc..
- We have tipped over \$1m commitment to grower groups in WA in the last 15 years. In the scheme of things it sounds like a lot but relatively speaking it is minor compared to grants. It is a significant amount of funds, in terms of return it is hard to gauge new clients and retaining existing clients – but we would say we have achieved a significant return on investment. But that is through active participation and hard work on behalf of the sponsor and the grower group. Our grower group support and sponsorship has been very helpful to assist with our growth.
- Sponsorship is also about the actual involvement of our team in grower group activities and providing specialist services back to grower groups – it is not just about providing funds, it's about getting involved and in most cases you have grower groups who are very passionate and enthusiastic about working with our staff in their groups.
- We have an annual budget to support grower groups and we assess our sponsorship based on if it is where we can get business growth (what is our market share), are there leading farmers involved, have we an office there to support it. These are all active considerations for supporting a grower group. We also look at the functionality of the group, the breadth of support within the community itself, are the movers and shakers actively part of it - this is a key thing and generally they are. Staffing is also important - do they have the right personnel on board as the staff are there to actively pursue the interests of the sponsors.
- We do an annual review of all our sponsorships internally and the cumulative return we earn from our grower group sponsorship.
- Given we put a significant amount of funding on the table, we do ask groups for exclusivity (over 90% of groups we sponsor) as there is consistency to our funding and we generally supply it over a longer term – mostly 3 year agreements. It works well from a grower group point of view in terms of stability of funding which is very important to them.
- Where we have had issues in the last 15 years is based around the passion and enthusiasm of members and burnout by committee members which has seen grower groups wax and wane over the years. One of the major issues for the future is the energy within the groups which is important for their ongoing success and relevance. One thing they actively need to manage is their succession (from a management and committee point of view), an example of a group who does that well is the Liebe Group who has a continual focus and SEPWA also does it very well.

- Successful groups appear to cover 1-2 major communities, have key people involved, their succession is sorted, they have attracted the right management and staff, they know who their next chairman is, they actively involve up and coming farmers and they know where their next EO is coming from. And they are also conscious of relationship building with sponsors.
- There are opportunities to work in with groups and offer up innovative ideas – with one group recently we tested video conferencing and patched the group up with experts in Brazil and Japan in a combined video presentation to members which worked well. There are a lot of ways we can add value back to the groups but what is holding them back is their access to technology and fast and reliable broadband or internet connection to enable them to get information.
- There could be opportunity for some groups to have a commercial R&D arm like MIG is doing – grower groups need to keep an eye on opportunities.
- The core of a grower group is to be relevant for its members and to be relevant it has to be aware of and look into adopting the latest in technology. It has to have its succession sorted and have passion and enthusiasm. Without all this the group will only have a limited life. Some grower groups are struggling to find their relevancy and get community involvement.
- Some groups cover lots of communities and that is a challenge as they may not be so relevant or inclusive, whereas most other grower groups normally cover 1-2 major communities.
- We have never used grower groups to launch new products and services, our approach is to be actively involved and provide our knowledge and networking and use the groups as a pathway to demonstrate our knowledge and expertise. We are always looking for ways to work in with our grower groups in terms of the programs that we offer (farm experience program) and mentoring roles where we match younger farmers up with older farmers. Sponsorship is a two way street and it allows us to look beyond just providing the funding and doing something different.
- If grower groups have their succession sorted and are relevant they will survive and continue to be an active pathway for R&D. They may merge as farm consolidation continues. We might find that grower groups work over a region. Whatever the model is it has to be independent and it can't be controlled by anyone else i.e. input suppliers, banks etc.. What we are seeing now is not a quasi-independent model – we know they have to rely on the services of companies to assist with R&D but it has to be in an environment that everyone understands the outcome for the research. It is not about things being shoved down their throats, there will still be alignment there but groups still need to retain enough independence to not be driven by the agenda of their sponsors and providers.
- Going forward shared services could work - where smaller groups who don't have the capacity to employ their own admin utilise a shared services model that is run by anyone who has capability or capacity to provide – this could be the GGA or another grower group who could leverage against their existing capacity.

Key messages

1. Grower groups are filling a void in local and regional R&D taking into account local conditions and are a pathway for supply chain participants to undertake R&D with farmer involvement.
2. Grower groups bring the community together and other initiatives have emerged as a result.
3. Grower groups are a better way of getting engaged and with community / farmer support.
4. The value of grower groups for a sponsor is in branding and business growth, and involvement of staff which raises their awareness of the latest R&D and allows them to use it in discussion with other existing and potential clients. It is not just about providing funds, it is about getting involved and providing knowledge and networking and using the groups as a

pathway to demonstrate knowledge and expertise. Sponsors can achieve a significant return on their investment through active participation and hard work on behalf of the sponsor and the grower group.

5. Sponsorship is assessed on where a sponsor can get business growth, if there are leading farmers involved, and if they have an office there to support it. The functionality of the group, the breadth of support within the community and whether they have the right staff are considerations.
6. An issue for sponsors is maintaining the passion and enthusiasm of members; the burnout of committee members has seen grower groups wax and wane over the years.
7. Successful groups cover 1-2 major communities, have key people involved, their succession is sorted, they have the right management and staff, they actively involve up and coming farmers, they know where their next EO and chairman are coming from, and they are conscious of relationship building with sponsors.
8. Grower groups that have their succession sorted and are relevant will survive and continue to be an active pathway for R&D. Some may merge as farm consolidation continues.
9. The future model has to remain independent, there will need to be alignment but not be driven by the agenda of sponsors and providers.
10. Shared services could work in the future where smaller groups without capacity utilise a shared services model run by GGA or another grower group.

Participant 11

- I see a lot of great things come out of grower groups both from an ag sector point of view (share ideas and gain information and knowledge to run a business better) and from a social sense which allows farmers to get together to share ideas about farming.
- Groups like Corrigin are valuable after a bad year as they allow farmers to share different practices after a frost event and they know that there are people who did all they could and they were still affected, it is good for farmers to know they are not alone (as they are quite isolated) and grower groups are a good outlet.
- We sponsor four groups to the value of \$10,000 and some are run well and others not so well. We have not estimated the in-kind sponsorship through our involvement with the group and providing guest speakers. We still support smaller groups but not to the same amount.
- As a sponsor we get an invitation to speak at events, we get brand coverage, our logo on all publications, a couple of free memberships and opportunities to write articles in newsletters. Sponsorship allows you to support the group and share your knowledge on what you specialise in and build relationships.
- We have sat down with groups to review sponsorship to determine how to get better value. We talk about what we think is working well and what isn't. Some groups expect more money on top of their sponsorship and keep coming back to us to cover events where there is no speaking opportunity. We like to keep it a flat fee and get regular opportunities to share our knowledge – that's all we ask for.
- We have become frustrated with some sponsorships - we are happy to give them money for sponsorship even though Rabobank is a sponsor (they have exclusivity in the banking sector). We provide sponsorship because our perception (brand) is not out there and it is about supporting local communities and sometimes when we want to sponsor groups we are not allowed. We

often go to the event but we can't sponsor it, it is fine and for those groups we are involved as a paying member.

- Attending events is good for our staff as they pick up industry information. It is good for staff to listen to agronomists about the key techniques and varieties and gain general industry knowledge. It is important to spend time with these groups in a relaxed environment, which gives you the opportunity to build relationships with farmers at events. These events are much more valuable than Crop Updates which is a conference full of industry people. We would prefer to walk around the paddock with farmers and understand what is happening out there.
- As a sponsor we get to keep our finger on the pulse, brand recognition and awareness and if people are not happy with their current bank they understand there is an alternative. We are not putting the hard sell on everyone at events, just ensuring they understand we are involved in the ag industry.
- Some groups are very well run whereas others are still smaller groups of farmers with eskys in the paddock looking at each other's crops. There is quite a gap in the structure and governance. They have a president and no staff. They apologise and recognise that they need to sort themselves out. Whereas other groups have a president who is hands on, a large committee and dedicated support staff which makes a big difference and makes it more functional.
- For sponsorship to be effective, a group needs to have dedicated support staff to build relationships with sponsors, they need a website, social media coverage and time to engage with industry leaders to provide their members with the appropriate value. The group also depends on the farmers who are driving it and local leadership.
- I try and measure return on sponsorship for a three year period and I like to think it is neutral and that's all I expect. If we get a client out of our sponsorship every two years from each group, it helps pay for it and it would be neutral, it isn't a large outlay compared to a site at Dowerin.
- Specific examples of groups that have demonstrated value; some of the early work with WIFE was really good as it gave us the chance to connect with female managers through our financial education/analysis presentation. We had some good feedback and exposure with that.
- Benchmarking groups are also popping up and work well (not Planfarm/Farmanco) where they are neighbours collaborating and sitting around sharing information (financial statements, cash flow) with consultants and discussing what drives their productivity and success. There is some good stuff coming out of these that is in line with grower groups. There is an opportunity for groups to oversee these smaller groups but it would be specific with farmers themselves and those who are comfortable to share. Farmers are getting better at sharing.
- We are looking to continue to sponsor in the future, we would like to do more with WIFE as we see a real opportunity as it is upskilling female participants in the industry as they are doing more in the farm business and are involved in making decisions.
- If grower groups keep doing what they are doing, they will struggle; they need to look at more successful groups – what do they want to get out of it?
- We go through a rigid process and develop sponsorship agreements with our sponsorship team which ensures we get exposure for our brand and it outlines the benefits. One of the key things is what benefit will it provide the regional community (this is one reason why these sponsorship arrangements get through the screening process as from a social point of view groups do put back into their community). One of the biggest risks to our business is the health of our farmers, especially mental health, so anything that helps address that gets a big tick. We were a major sponsor of the Kimberley Pilbara Cattlemen's Association's recent event and that was a great

way of giving back to that industry and the community. We got great exposure through the website, social media and general media.

- I sense that grower groups will continue to be part of the landscape because their ideas are owned by their own people and it's a social thing more than anything.
- I don't know about a future structure because each group has its own benefit – I like the bigger ones because they are well run, you get more exposure and they are big enough to allow a diverse range of sponsors. If you only have 15-20 farmers in a group or at an event, you only have room for a couple of sponsors to be involved.
- Grower groups are undervalued and some government funding would be well directed towards groups who are out there addressing the needs of farmers in the region and positively impacting on community health.

Key messages

1. The value in grower groups is in sharing ideas, information and knowledge to run a business better and providing a social opportunity for farmers to get together.
2. Groups are valuable after an adverse event like frost as they allow farmers to support others.
3. If we get a new client from our sponsorship every two years from each group, it is cost neutral.
4. Sponsorship allows you to support a group, share knowledge on what you specialise in and build relationships.
5. We provide sponsorship because our brand is not out there, it is frustrating when we want to sponsor groups and we are not allowed due to their exclusivity arrangements.
6. Attending grower group events is good for our staff as they pick up industry information which enables them to better understand the industry and build relationships.
7. For grower groups to be effective they need to have dedicated support staff to build relations with sponsors, have local farmer driving it, they need a website, social media coverage and to engage with industry leaders to provide their members with value.
8. Benchmarking groups work well and there is an opportunity for groups to oversee these smaller groups, but it has to be with farmers who are comfortable to share data.
9. The larger groups are generally well run, you get more exposure as a sponsor and they are big enough to allow a diverse range of sponsors.
10. Grower groups are undervalued and some government funding would be well directed towards groups addressing the needs of farmers in their region and community health.

Participant 12

- Our sponsorship model is slightly different on the basis of our marketing (trading) model. We run a streamlined trading house compared to our competitors so it reflects how we spend. We don't invest in grower groups across the board, we are targeted: we only have a direct relationship with one grower group and the WIFE group.
- A lot of grower groups have sponsorship levels that aren't within our range, we just can't compete on the dollars. We don't have the resources to cover all the field days as that is not realistic with the number of staff we have.
- We are more likely to sponsor events rather than be a full sponsor. If a group has a day on grain marketing we will speak and sponsor it. We find blanket sponsoring is very diluted and the return

is hard to measure. We are a bottom tier level sponsor for SEPWA and would rather have access to opportunities like events or sponsor a sundowner with food or provide extra money.

- We have a great relationship with SEPWA and the EO who is flexible and it works two ways. We found WIFE was great too. It gets interesting where grower groups want money and we have to think how will it benefit us? They are getting better but they believe having our logo up is a privilege. Otherwise we haven't been approached by any other grower groups.
- The Esperance region was a target area and we needed better brand recognition in the area. It is tightly held by our competitor and we needed to have a point of difference. SEPWA is funded by CBH, we needed a point of difference by sponsoring them as a key sponsor. We were not sure what it was going to do, we came in at a different level – we are realistic where we sit, we need to make sure where we spend money is where we get traction, we just can't match the money out there. We only have 20 people in our office, it is hard to service Esperance, and we only have 4-5 people who have a grower relationship that we can send to address a group.
- From our sponsorship we hope brand recognition turns into tonnes, but it's hard to measure. It is more about tonnage through the door, we have found that the communication line with growers opens up and there is relationship building. People are willing to give us business.
- We get lots of emails to sponsor events but we need to determine if we have a team available to attend. We don't donate, we sponsor. We get requests from Crop Updates but what true benefit are we getting? SEPWA is the only grower group who has approached us and going forward we are looking to sponsor events with a point of difference from CBH.
- An issue with grower groups is that their staff are very young, so we don't always have that rapport with them and they resort to email communication to request sponsorship; there is nothing better than having a phone conversation or meeting people to build rapport. They will attract dollars if they become personable, but they have moved away from that and that is probably because they are under resourced.
- We do also have a community support element. We found that we have better traction going through local CRC's and sporting clubs – the nature is different and they get more traction. We don't allocate dollars to grower groups, we look at the map to determine where we have traction, where we can add better community support. Indirect sponsorship – we are not attracted to grower group days where we get up with competitors, we are actually targeting community events where we get an opportunity to have face to face contact with customers. We are looking to do something different and like to support activities that encourage exercise and promote men's health. Events like the Gravel Grinders in Watheroo and tennis tournaments / bike rides etc. allow our people to interact with the community and not always be talking grain. It is about building rapport.
- We get good traction from our sponsorship with SEPWA, we have a very good relationship and we know if anything happens there SEPWA will help. We organised a vessel tour and took some growers on board a ship which SEPWA assisted to organise. We had a good relationship with WIFE where we sponsored the crèche for 12 months.
- Relationships with staff are very important as they can be motivated to think outside the box rather than just offering sponsors a banner on display and speaking opportunity as that doesn't give us a lot of value. We could drive for 400 km and get a 10 min slot, but we are not interested in that. I want them to provide opportunities to get to know our staff and for it to have a knock on effect to enable us to connect with growers.
- Consultants are taking a big piece of the pie with relationship building and accessing growers. They add lots of value to our business but they are removing us from direct contact with growers.

50-60% of growers have grain consultants and that consultant views themselves as the grower voice for those farmers they represent. Therefore we don't get the feedback we need or to build rapport with growers. It is a price taking market. We want to make sure our brand is recognised. We know we won't get everyone's grain but we want to make sure the relationship is there.

- Consultants take the thunder of grower groups as well. I have heard in the past that some growers don't go to grower group events because their consultant is going. But there is also an important social element to these events as it enables growers to get off the farm.
- Grower groups do need to review their blanket approach to sponsor organisations.

Key messages

1. Groups need to offer a range of sponsorship levels and opportunities for engagement as not all businesses have the staff or budget for blanket sponsorship.
2. Smaller businesses are looking for a point of difference from their competitors when sponsoring grower groups.
3. Sponsors can't afford for staff to drive 400km for a 10 minute slot at an event, they want opportunities to have face to face contact and to connect with growers.
4. Sponsors want to build rapport with grower group staff and build a relationship that adds value to their sponsorship, not just resort to email communication to request sponsorship. Groups will attract dollars if they become personable but they have moved away from that.
5. Sponsors look for community support opportunities to get more traction and build rapport.

Participant 13

- We sponsor two groups to a total of \$15,000 and double that to include our in-kind contribution (demos, time, staff, attending field days etc.). A trial is estimated to cost around \$8000.
- We sponsor these groups to get closer to them and work with them but we are seriously starting to wonder and we struggle with the concept.
- As a sponsor we provide physical support at field days, conduct trials, and provide our expertise – but that is starting to wane. For the money we pay we get given an opportunity to present; they are getting good information which is of value for the grower group and we are seen as the person delivering it. If we are investing \$10,000 we could run 3-4 workshops ourselves and provide free beer and we might get more value.
- There are some farmers who appreciate what you do but unfortunately not the majority. Part of our marketing plan is to support groups and to be involved. People think we sell a drum of chemical for \$100 and make \$100 and so they chase the cheapest price. It is getting harder to justify sponsorship.
- There is no value in supporting grower groups over say a sporting club. It is more about creating a presence in the field and it is community orientated. We would spend over \$50,000 supporting sporting clubs and grower groups.
- I really struggle with sponsorship as it is hard to measure, I don't know how to get more value. The bottom line is no-one subsidises us and we have to make a living. We are a business which works on service and we have well trained staff and also have to invest in staff training. Then we have the pressure of matching other quotes.
- We work in with the grower groups to undertake trial work, attend field days, speak at various events and we get our logos used and banners up at field days. How you value it is very difficult, we recognise it is part of what we should do and part of marketing and our presence. The only

way we are going to survive is if people buy stuff from us and support us as a business. That is part of how we justify our sponsorship.

- Grower groups are how farmers get their information, they have gone from DAFWA supplying the information to consultants given money to hand information which didn't work as they were selling the information and it was counterproductive. Grower groups now control the whole process and their importance is very high. If you take my cynicism out of it we want to support them and be part of the process and continue to play a role, there is no other way to do it.
- The success of grower groups depends on the people at the top running it - the staff and executive. A group like MIG is strongly staffed but they are struggling at the moment as they don't have the right people so it comes back to the board of farmers who manage it. The capacity of the group dictates the value that you get as a sponsor.
- It would be nice to see some innovation from groups when they figure out how to add value for a sponsor. I am trying to promote customer loyalty, but it is hard to evaluate what we get back. We basically put money up for a relationship. For a business our size the amount is not the issue.
- I don't think there is a better model for grower groups in the future. You have got people handing money out, the problem is where the R&D resources are going. It is a loose arrangement - who gets to decide what is important? There are environmental projects that groups have and are more about chasing the pot of money rather than trials that fit their criteria. Trials that they have done in the past, they are doing again now – there is overlap and information is lost and people are doing things for the sake of doing things.
- Grower groups should sit down and have a look at their long term needs to ensure they get a result and are relevant and collaborate on research.
- We have bought two grower groups together to do trials and there could be more collaborative work done between groups and setting up variety trials over different soils and rainfalls.
- Trials done by grower groups don't always have the rigour as they don't have replication. One of the big strengths is that groups collaborate with researchers (who use grower groups as a platform to provide a site and access to growers) to do work and that is where you are more likely to have trial rigour.
- Grower groups are good at getting growers together for field days, disseminating information, they are great for the community as they provide a focal point socially and as a support group for isolated rural communities which helps address mental health issues.

Key messages

1. Sponsors are starting the challenge how they measure the value to justify their sponsorship.
2. Sponsors may provide physical support at field days, conduct trials, provide expertise.
3. There is no value in supporting grower groups over a sporting club, but it is more about creating a presence in the field and it is community orientated.
4. Grower groups are how farmers get their information, grower groups now control the whole process and their importance is very high.
5. The success of grower groups depends on the people running it and the capacity of the group dictates the value delivered to a sponsor.
6. Sponsors are looking for innovation from groups to add value for their sponsorship.
7. Grower groups need more direction and focus, to ensure trials fit their priorities not just the funding guidelines and that they are not repeating previous work. Grower groups need to look at their long term needs to ensure they get relevant results and collaborate on research.

8. A big strength is where groups collaborate with researchers (who use grower groups as a platform to provide a site and access to growers) and that is where you have trial rigour.
9. Grower groups are good at getting growers together for field days, disseminating information, they are great for the community providing a focal point socially and as a support group for isolated rural communities which helps address mental health issues.

Participant 14

- We sponsor groups to support grass roots research, development, extension and capacity building being delivered to WA grain growers. Our sponsorship also supports a strong social network for growers and regional communities and helps build the grain industry leaders of tomorrow. It also gives us alignment with an influential and progressive grower network.
- Our sponsorship rights provide us with advertising, recognition and networking opportunities. We also have a presence at Committee meetings and get feedback on key issues, and it helps us shape/be involved with decision making for the communities in which the group operates.
- CBH currently supports 11 grower groups to a value of over \$80,000 per annum. The amount ranges from \$1000 to \$18,000 per group. In kind support varies between groups for example we provide Liebe with a sponsorship package that includes direct funds, special event sponsorship for Liebe Women's Field Day, plus in-kind support with grain analysis of 230 samples.
- Return on investment is measured by a sponsorship review meeting between both parties and we get the organisation to complete a written evaluation form that outlines their activities with us over the past 12 months – that includes the activity or event, the number of participants and location, the key objectives and opportunities available to enhance the partnership. Our return on investment is based on advertising, exposure and events.
- When deciding if we are going to sponsor a group we consider the membership, size and influence of the group. We also consider if they have a well-established governance and management framework with paid staff members, and the professionalism of their approach and sponsorship pitch and what they offer for the sponsorship investment.
- Negatives from a sponsorship point of view are that at times it can consume significant time relative to the investment and groups have expressed a sense of 'entitlement' regarding the ongoing provision of sponsorship funds. Some groups request increasing funds without being able to specifically differentiate or identify additional benefits.
- Grower groups could provide better value to sponsors through clear communications and notice of events and their information requirements. They should always consider the ad-hoc opportunities that may work for the sponsor but aren't necessarily in the agreement and also they shouldn't expect the sponsor to drive the relationship.
- Opportunities for groups in the future include delivery of more regional capacity building which could be anything to do with operating a farm business from agronomy, staff management, safety, legal requirements, office management through to rural leadership. As long as it is not already well serviced by another provider. There is no need for duplication and sometimes it may work best as a facilitation role.
- There is also the need for ongoing social connection. Grower groups play a great role in engaging rural communities beyond their members but the primary driver should be to benefit those that pay membership.

- It is important there is a feedback mechanism for grower groups to provide feedback to GRDC funding and research models and advocate for funds to be spent on the ground (help prioritise the spending of funds).
- In the future it seems likely that the current number of grower groups may not exist and that the more established groups may continue as long as they are providing membership benefits.
- The GGA assist in facilitating programs and engagement across grower groups, they have a huge database and they are good at disseminating information.

Key messages

1. Sponsors consider they are sponsoring groups to support grass roots research, development, extension and capacity building for WA grain growers, to support a strong social network for growers and regional communities, to help build the grain industry leaders of tomorrow, and to give sponsors alignment with an influential and progressive grower network.
2. Sponsorship provides advertising, recognition and networking opportunities, a presence at Committee meetings to get feedback on key issues, and it also helps sponsors to be involved with decision making for the communities in which they operate.
3. Return on investment is measured by a sponsorship review meeting between both parties and the group completes a written evaluation form that outlines their activities with the sponsor over the past 12 months.
4. Sponsors consider the membership, size and influence of the group, if the group has a well-established governance and management framework with paid staff members, the professionalism of their approach and sponsorship pitch, and what they offer for the sponsorship investment.
5. At times sponsorship can consume significant time relative to the investment and groups have expressed a sense of 'entitlement' regarding ongoing provision of sponsorship funds.
6. Grower groups could provide better value to sponsors through clear communications and notice of events and their information requirements.
7. Opportunities for groups in the future include delivery of more regional capacity building and the need for ongoing social connection (engaging rural communities and members).
8. In future it seems likely the current number of grower groups may not exist and the more established groups may continue as long as they are providing membership benefits.
9. The GGA assists in facilitating programs and engagement across grower groups and they are good at disseminating information.

PARTNERS

Partners view grower groups as a key part of the RD&E network; they believe they are a good platform for extension, they focus on localised research and projects, and draw the agricultural community together. However the role of grower groups is changing with the expanding role of advisors, reducing state government input, and the impact of information availability from the internet resulting in a declining need for grower groups in information dissemination.

An advantage of grower groups is that they are independent, inclusive of everyone and the information they deliver is more accessible as opposed to agronomists/consultants who have their own clients prepared to pay for information.

Partners also recognise that grower groups play a pivotal social role in rural communities. While they are undertaking extension at field days and events they are also providing a reason to bring all levels of the farming community together, including women with farm office groups, and that has helped farming businesses to become more professional.

Partners such as universities, research organisations and consultants are involved with grower groups through trial programs, projects and various other opportunities that enable them to connect students with producers to showcase the industry and educate future agricultural employees.

The value that grower groups provide partners is in providing trial sites for outside research, enabling them to reach more farmers and achieve effective engagement through participative research and to promote practice change. They also enable students to connect with leading edge farmers. As stated by one partner 'we wouldn't keep engaging with grower groups if it wasn't working as it costs money and is time consuming, but all of our projects have benefitted greatly.'

On the downside, one partner said that perhaps they should find their own trial sites as grower groups have an expectation that they speak at events, which takes time out of their schedule for travelling. It was mentioned that the days of an individual or small business holding events are long gone as they are competing with grower groups for the same audience.

Grower groups were also viewed as a competing force for projects by one partner, who believes that groups appear to have the upper hand in the eyes of the collaborators because politically they are a stronger force with greater ability to extend the information.

The research undertaken by grower groups is viewed as variable and dependent on the group's size, ability and capacity of staff. On a positive note farmer input through grower groups can make projects more practical rather than focused on the high tech aspect and keeps it relevant to the average farmer.

The rigour of research conducted by grower group varies and is perceived by partners to be not as robust as work undertaken by DAFWA and other trained researchers. Generally it is viewed as farmer based research which doesn't have scientific rigour but it is relevant and tested locally, but which requires other research to support it prior to making decisions. It was accepted that with a low budget and lack of staff capacity to undertake trials, grower group trials could lack rigour so partners utilise the opportunity to take the lead in projects and contract grower groups.

One partner questioned the ability of grower groups to undertake extension as it requires a person with knowledge of the topic, charisma, confidence to speak and they need to be an expert on the topic. Graduates employed to work in grower groups generally have to develop these skills over time, so the partner believes there is a hole in extension in WA which is being filled by private agronomists. And if a grower group staff member is good at extension, they are poached by another company.

While bigger grower groups may be more functional, it was raised that they sometimes lack the direct contact with farmers, the board can become more distant, and therefore they need to partner

up with smaller local groups to maintain their relevance. Working under a larger overarching group would also ensure smaller groups have the capacity to engage in larger research initiatives.

It was also identified that there are still some geographical gaps for grower group coverage and those areas suffered a lack of productivity and missed out on local research.

It was mentioned that if grower groups disappeared they would be missed and would soon be reforming in a matter of months. The risk at the moment is that they are undervalued and are being taken for granted; the challenge is to demonstrate how valuable they are.

Grower groups seem to lack staff capacity and this can be attributed to the lower wages they offer as they live funding cycle to funding cycle, and they are often located in isolated areas. The staff they attract are typically young female graduates who lack the expertise required and they don't necessarily receive the support to upskill them, as they are not part of a larger network. In a male dominated industry it can be intimidating to lead projects and present at events.

For grower groups to be effective in extension and research they require more experienced staff who are good communicators and who will remain with the group longer term - however that requires a higher wage which needs to be funded, and those people are already in private agronomy in more secure positions.

Partners believe that staff require more training and mentoring in their roles and that grower groups should be outsourcing trials, forming partnerships or collaborating more if they don't have the skills to ensure scientific rigour. As one partner stated, in recent months there have been a lot of staff changes in groups but that is indicative of the serious skills shortage within the agricultural industry.

Effective grower groups are not based on the group size or member numbers but they appear to have a wide range of industry touch points, are driven by a particular focus (issue specific or regional focus – both are important) and have a proactive board and management committee.

There were many opportunities for grower groups outlined by partners which included innovation, forming partnerships with research organisations, utilising their political lobbying power on local agricultural issues, incorporation of social media and greater interaction with university students.

According to partners, the GGA is effective in assisting grower groups, coordinating guest speakers and providing a calendar of events. It also offers more opportunities and connections with other groups which leads to collaboration and enables the GGA to represent a critical mass. Other states are following the lead of the GGA and forming their own version to enable groups to get together and be more effective. Opportunities for the GGA include more training in extension and project management, technology, mentoring and training to ensure more scientific rigour. If they are successful in upskilling grower groups, they could phase out their own role.

Longer term it is envisaged there will still be an overarching role for the GGA however that depends on the relevance and value that grower groups get from GGA, especially the bigger groups. It is up to grower groups to lobby government to continue to fund GGA as it would be easy to cut the funding.

Participant 15

- Grower groups provide a useful service for growers but the social aspect is the key. There is some extension delivered, but the fact they are providing field days, focus sites and reasons to get people together is the key advantage. Their research is only as good as the partners they have.
- We have our own grower group which is made up of a group of farmer clients that pay a fee to be part of a group of 25. The fee varies but is usually a flat rate of \$2000 or we do agronomy which is charged on a per hectare basis. The group comes together 4-5 times a year and we do

some agronomy and specialised programs, they get to choose their trials program and we also organise a yearly bus trip away (which is subsidised) and have a major update day.

- Smaller groups can be more functional and more personalised with less red tape. People are willing to share more information; it is part of the appeal but the capacity to pay is tough. More intimate groups require people to really value it, farmers love getting things for nothing but then there are others who appreciate total independence and are willing to pay for that. They see value in that it gives them an advantage to be ahead of the game.
- We also do a lot of work at grower group sites either on behalf of the groups themselves or for a client say GRDC NVT or Bayer.
- Grower groups are an efficient way to do research in terms of having multiple sites on one location and they can be useful for finding trial sites for us.
- They are good at keeping research locally relevant and they bring farmers together to look at it. They are also more independent and more inclusive of everyone as opposed to agronomy companies/resellers who have their own set of clients.
- Grower groups are not very good at scientific rigour or mentoring. Are they addressing the key issues if they haven't had good mentoring, a lot of the time they are pushed to where funding is which aren't the key areas that farmers want to know about. For example carbon sequestration – most growers don't care about it, they would rather a group focus on something more relevant.
- Groups need mentors to assist with rigour; one of the limitations is that they are run by farmers who are doing their own thing and they don't have skills in research. Trials are done well by a local agronomist or DAFWA researcher as they are highly skilled in those areas. It is about forming partnerships and collaborating.
- Grower group staff are typically young females newly out of university who are green and they don't get the support they need. They are the ones typically managing grower groups. They need more training and more mentoring. It is not easy to attract staff as groups are living funding cycle to funding cycle. They should be outsourcing trials if they haven't got the skills to ensure scientific rigour.
- What could they do better? They could hire more experienced people, it is easy to say but hard to do it. They need to offer a higher wage (that needs to be funded) but the same people they would be drawing on are already in private agronomy in more secure positions. MIG have had good people in the past. Grower groups are providing a free service for farmers but there is no such thing as a free service as someone needs to pay for it.
- With the changing nature of agriculture there is a decreasing population and increasing ability to get information very quickly over the internet, which means that there is a decreasing need for grower groups. They are serving a social function and their role in providing relevant up to date information is decreasing. In the early days WANTFA used to get hundreds of people attending their field days and that has now dropped off.
- Grower groups are not doing extension as much as they used to as that has been taken over by private agronomists. There is a hole in extension in WA as there are not a whole lot of people who can extend the message, it is a massive problem. Once again grower groups have a lack of skills in this area as they have young staff – to extend you need to be sharp on your topic and the people in grower groups are not necessarily experienced. You need to be charismatic, not afraid to talk on the subject and be an expert on your topic – it is hard to be good on a lot of topics but you need to be very knowledgeable across the board. Then if you are you are poached by an agronomy company or someone else. Are growers willing to pay for advice? They are accepting having a private agronomist is like having an accountant now and they pay a yearly fee.

- There is lots of public research with DAFWA and a lot of private research can't be lumped in with grower groups because of confidentiality issues. GRDC works with grower groups and that will continue – from GRDC's point of view it works well and they can guarantee they will get an audience through groups. If they have got DAFWA or someone private, there is no guarantee they will get anyone to view the work – therefore grower groups are a useful extension tool.
- There can be two lots of successful grower groups and it is not based on size and the number of people. The NAG is kicking goals at the moment as they have a lot of passionate farmers involved, then you have MIG which has been successful and in the past married private agronomy with the local DAFWA and have good people, then there is WANTFA which has faded – they were successful in promoting their message but they are a victim of their own success as they haven't had follow-on and kept up with changing trends. The best groups are the ones with a wide range of industry touch points along with what really drives them and who is at the helm (board or EO or local farmers).
- If a group has a very rigid board and doesn't have good support from farmers or an EO then they don't do as well as the others.
- Grower group staff can be hot and cold to work with – it depends on the people running the show at the time.
- Grower groups need to understand research better and what partner's requirements are for a trial site (e.g. weed free or not).
- We usually run the trial ourselves so we don't need much feedback from a grower group. Sometimes we may get them to do some measurements for us. As a partner in research there is an expectation that we speak at events which can be hard for us as that is a day or two out of our schedule. The trade-off would be for us to find our own site and then we wouldn't have to speak at field days. We question the value of being involved with grower group trials but there is an expectation. With the NVT trials (in which we have become the expert) the project is not funded through a grower group but we have built speaking etc. into that fee.
- What value do you place on research undertaken by a grower group? It depends on who does it, sometimes grower groups do the research but it depends on who is at the helm. There has been some really good work and some poor work. Sometimes grower groups have a lack of skills through the capacity of staff which gives it less scientific rigour. A lot of grower groups don't have the capacity at the moment as there have been a lot of staff changes in the bigger groups over the last 6 months. It is not as good as it used to be. Like most agricultural businesses there is a serious skills shortage, we are seeing it as well - people with ag research skills are not out there and often grower groups are located in the areas that are hard to attract people to.
- The GGA works well to coordinate all the groups and they are an easily accessible portal for all of the events that are on. It is handy for grower groups to have an alliance that can extend their message. Future opportunities would include more training in extension, mentoring and training to ensure more scientific rigour.
- I am on the Crop Updates organising committee and we are always looking for the go to guys who extend the message and they pack out the room, whereas there are others who are doing some good work but if they can't extend the message they won't attract an audience.
- Grower groups employ a lot of young females and it is a male dominated industry – therefore it is hard to skill them up quickly especially when they are not part of a larger network (e.g. Elders). They need to turn into good communicators quickly. But that is the trade off with lower wages – grower groups can't afford more experienced people and therefore are limited with the capacity of the staff they can attract. Unfortunately grower groups have to respond to a lot of bosses, for

example a farmer may be sitting on a tractor and have a light bulb moment and ring up their group with an idea that may not be achievable. They really are answerable to a lot of growers.

- Farmers should be paying a membership fee to keep their local groups going – really it is only the equivalent of one tonne of wheat and they should just pay it to have the social outlet.

Key messages

1. Grower groups provide a useful service for growers and the social aspect of providing field days, focus sites and reasons to get people together is the key advantage groups offer.
2. Research is only as good as they partners that grower groups collaborate with.
3. Smaller groups can be more functional, people are willing to share more information, and the group is more personalised with less process/red tape.
4. Grower groups are an efficient way to do research in terms of having multiple sites on one location and they can be useful for finding trial sites for partners.
5. Grower groups are good at keeping research locally relevant, at bringing farmers together to look at it, they remain independent and are inclusive of everyone.
6. Grower groups are pushed to where funding is available, which may not be the research areas that farmers want to know about.
7. Grower groups are not very good at scientific rigour so they need mentoring in that area, and they need to form partnerships and collaborate to fill their gaps.
8. A lot of grower groups don't have the capacity at the moment as there have been a lot of staff changes in the bigger groups over the past 6 months. It is not as good as it used to be. Like most agricultural businesses there is a serious skills shortage impacting groups.
9. Grower group staff need more training and more mentoring – it is not easy to attract experienced people when groups are living from funding cycle to funding cycle.
10. With the changing nature of agriculture there is a decreasing population and increasing ability to get information very quickly over the internet which means there is a decreasing need for grower groups. They are serving more of as a social function and their role in providing relevant up to date information is decreasing.
11. There is a hole in extension in WA as there are not many people who can extend the message, it is a massive problem. Grower groups lack the skills to do extension and are not doing extension as much as they used to as that has been taken over by private agronomists.
12. GRDC works with grower groups and that will continue as grower groups are a useful extension tool for GRDC – they can guarantee they will get an audience through groups.
13. The best grower groups are the ones with a wide range of industry touch points, that have something that really drives them and clear leadership at the helm (board or EO or local farmers). It is not based on group size or member numbers.
14. As a partner in research there is an expectation that we speak at events which can hard for us as that is a day or two out of our schedule. We question the value of being involved with grower group trials but there is an expectation.
15. The GGA works well to coordinate all the groups and they have an easily accessible portal for events. In the future they could provide more training in extension, and mentoring to ensure more scientific rigour.

Participant 16

- Grower groups are a key part of the RD&E network, their role is to enable research to be more in line with the practical realities of farming and key issues. I think their role has changed like all the changes going on around extension with the growing role of advisors and with less state government input.
- As a researcher, groups make it easier and more effective for us to be engaged with farmers and to get grower perspective and conduct participative research. That is why well-organised grower groups are successful and have a role in the research process.
- I am a board member of Mallee Sustainable Farming Systems (MSFS) and a scientific specialist, and I have also had involvement over a lot of projects which collaborate with CSIRO, GRDC, DAFWA so I have worked with a range of grower groups in WA.
- Some groups may be too small and have no staff to engage with researchers, but they may also be highly effective as a local extension agent in the region. Groups have their own objectives with a range of scales. In terms of their ability to engage in larger research initiatives – they need to be well organised and have staff that can engage with large organisations with some size and capacity. The successful groups have not just effective farmers behind them (invaluable input) but also they have their own research and extension staff that can contribute ideas.
- As a partner to determine who to work with the thing that we look at is the location; it is not often that groups are competing in a region so it narrows it down quickly. The other major factor is if it is a new idea (grower groups generate ideas and seek researchers – it happens both ways) and that groups can generate and explain their research ideas as a potential project. Often it is not farmers that have to attend meetings but the staff and they have to have a sound knowledge and know the needs of local farming systems to really get traction.
- From a research perspective the value of grower groups is in creating stronger projects as they have a stronger base to their groups and that can add value to the research objective and outcomes. The other major value is that they provide a strong vehicle for extension impact and by partnering with a grower group there is more opportunity for contact with farmers and promoting practice change. We prefer groups that have the capacity to add value to the research by extending it, adapting it and promoting it to farmers in their region.
- In terms of the value of grower groups compared to resellers, fee for service advisors, DAFWA, etc. we often find consultants and grower groups are entwined so it is hard to separate the two. Our preference - we use consultants a lot but also bring them into the grower group research partnership but we don't just work with private consultants, we prefer to work with grower groups to reach more farmers and get better value. Often agronomists and consultants have the agronomic expertise that adds value and this is what some groups lack.
- There is still plenty of potential for groups to evolve further. Groups have different objectives with some aimed at generating employment for the district and becoming big businesses, which is a different path to groups that service a large area or those that aim to get more research activity in their local region. There is an opportunity for grower groups to become more innovative and try new things – it is a matter of what GRDC will fund but I hope that grower groups can partner to progress innovative ideas.
- Grower groups can only do what they are funded to do. There is still scope for grower groups to grow in their regions; they are doing a good job delivering value at the moment but that is biased by the funding availability. There is opportunity for more groups to form partnerships with research organisations as that is where there has been big powerful changes made.

- Where grower groups have had enormous impact is when they successfully target a specific systems change, such as WANTFA who rapidly increased in size and played a big role in expansion of no till farming, they had great farmer input and collaboration on a red hot topic. There are likely to be other topics in the future like Precision Ag. These non-regional groups need to be able to fold and form to add value to the big systems changes and it is important to distinguish between issues specific groups and regional focused groups. It is important that both exist. WANTFA is still trying hard to remain relevant and is looking at a mixed frontier which can be hard given their focus; they are not finding it easy as they are still seen as a no till group. For these issues specific groups there needs to be a cycle and new groups may arise around managing data (gaining value from that) or other practices. Regional groups stay strong and have stability over time with a legacy of experience and their own research and I hope they may sustain themselves in the longer term, but that may involve some consolidation.
- Small versus large groups – MSFS is a unique group because they are over big and work across states and they can't be the small local group. They can be a strong enduring group with good capacity. As a big group it still relies on smaller locally focused groups to remain relevant and there are opportunities to form partnerships. SEPWA is a good example and needs local rubber on the ground in local regions. Farmers want direct local contact which some of the bigger groups can't offer as they can't be the local group when they cover a big area and the board also becomes more distant. That is why they need to partner up with smaller local groups. GRDC would love it if they had fewer contracts with grower groups and more with larger overarching grower organisations. It is hard in a research initiative for groups without the capacity to engage with the demands in being involved in a big research initiative. If they work under a larger overarching group with smaller local nodes it is a good model and more attractive to GRDC.
- Grower groups attract graduates as they offer a smaller wage but they lack the expertise. Groups need to bring in the expertise. They also need to show what value they can offer partners/researchers to encourage them to work with them.
- As a partner we wouldn't keep engaging with grower groups if it wasn't working, as it costs money and is time consuming. All of our projects have benefited a lot but it depends on the nature of the project. Grower groups may take the lead but if it is more research-orientated then CSIRO will take the lead and contract grower groups. Relationships are important but you need to be flexible. Farmer group input can help make projects more practical rather than focused on the high tech aspect as they tend to think more broadly on the range of needs of farmers compared to a specialist. It is about bringing it back to the level of the average farmer to ensure relevance and adoption.
- Grower groups range from those with no staff and hardly any projects through to big businesses. No one model is perfect, but the output of some groups lacks some rigour – low extension, low budget - they can't expect a lot of scientific rigour and perhaps farmers aren't seeking that.
- If grower groups disappeared they would be missed and would be re-forming in a matter of months. The risk at the moment is that they are becoming undervalued and are being taken for granted, so the challenge is to demonstrate how valuable they are. It is easy to think that consultants do everything now as 70% of farmers use consultants, but grower groups need to show the value they have to offer.
- Where there hasn't been a GGA in other states, they have felt the need to form one to be more effective in information sharing, sharing policies, holding forums which encourages sharing and to be the vehicle that allows grower groups to get involved with national initiatives. There is still an overarching role for the GGA as there will be grower groups around for a long time. It is more a question of if they are responsible to the member groups and how relevant GGA is to bigger

groups. For MSFS the state-based alliance gives them a chance to connect with state-based funding and state-based initiatives and allows them to connect to opportunities. Potentially there are more opportunities and greater connections with other groups and collaboration.

- Every group seems to struggle with staffing policies and running their business, and the GGA run governance courses and try to help with policies. That is an ongoing role for GGA; not so much doing the work but making it easier for groups to set themselves up in a robust way with the right policies and tools rather than every group chasing its own course; the GGA can make it easier. With GGA representing all regions it allows it to get in the door with better critical mass.

Key messages

1. Grower groups are a key part of the RD&E network, but their extension role has changed with the growing role of advisors and reducing state government input.
2. There is opportunity for more groups to form partnerships with research organisations; that is where there have been big powerful changes made. Grower groups make it easier and more effective for researchers to be engaged with farmers to get grower perspective and conduct participative research. A major value is that they provide a strong vehicle for extension impact and by partnering with a grower group there is more opportunity for promoting practice change. Farmer input can make projects more practical as they think more broadly on the range of needs of farmers to ensure adoption by other farmers.
3. Groups can really only engage in larger research initiatives if they are well organised and have staff that can engage with organisations with size and capacity. Successful groups have effective farmers driving them and their own research and extension staff.
4. Agronomists and consultants have agronomic expertise that adds value to a project and that is why we bring them into grower group research partnerships.
5. Grower groups could become more innovative and try new things, and while it is a matter of what GRDC will fund, grower groups can partner to bring up innovative ideas.
6. Grower groups have had enormous impact when they successfully target a specific systems change, such as WANTFA. These non-regional groups need to be able fold and form to add value to the big systems changes, and it is important that issues specific groups and regional focused groups both exist.
7. Farmers want direct local contact, so larger groups need to partner with smaller local groups to remain relevant, and in turn they can assist smaller groups to be part of a research initiative and provide capacity. An overarching group with local nodes it is a good model.
8. Research partners have benefited greatly from engaging with grower groups.
9. The output of some groups lacks some rigour – low budget so they can't expect a lot of scientific rigour - but perhaps farmers aren't seeking that.
10. The risk for grower groups is that they are becoming undervalued and are being taken for granted; the challenge is to demonstrate how valuable they are.
11. The GGA model is being adopted in other states to be more effective in information sharing, sharing policies, holding forums and to be the vehicle that allows grower groups to get involved with national initiatives.
12. The challenge for GGA is to be responsible and relevant to their member groups, to provide critical mass, more opportunities and connections with other groups for collaboration.

Participant 17

- The role of grower groups to get information from researchers to farmers is pivotal given the substantial reduction in extension services by DAFWA and government agencies, and especially with the push for more research to be done in Universities. Universities have a large drive in the next 5-10 years for Level 1 staff to write and publish in top journals (they are expensive so farmers don't tend to access them). Grower groups are a pivotal gatekeeper in accessing new information for farmers, they understand how to search for journals and relay information out.
- We take students to grower group field days. At this stage we haven't been doing any project work with a group but we will do more. We have just rolled out our third year of the 3 year degree program and this year we have moved into research work so we are still at the early stages.
- In future we have to get involved in research projects with a range of groups and just this year we have instituted a special topics project subject that will allow students to work on a topic of their choice (e.g. PA technology) and this will require them to partner with agribusinesses.
- Grower groups interact with exemplar farmers and farmers who are evaluating and up taking new technology. We want our students to be in contact with leading edge farm industry and their advisors. Groups can also be a way of giving the industry access to the students.
- There are a range of different ways we like to offer to link with industry organisations because as a training organisation we can provide an opportunity for them to connect with students and for industry to share with them the latest technology and applications. There are lots of ways for industry to link with the university but we are not doing them all at this stage – give us three years. We see there are ten different ways to link with industry:
 - Project work as part of a study, field trips, work placement and analysing how to manage business.
 - Opportunities to provide guest lectures (industry come into classroom).
 - Opportunity to supply teaching resources (not so much grower groups but agribusiness organisations).
 - Opportunity for staff to attend subjects or part of (e.g. PA workshop).
 - Provide advice on courses (to date we haven't had a group but had farmers who are part of a grower group).
 - Opportunity to supply scholarships and cadetships (employment placement).
 - Opportunity to provide prizes for subjects.
 - Opportunity sponsor particular events (Muresk lecture high profile industry person).
 - Opportunity to promote agriculture education and careers and we find that is more industry organisations and associations (through website and exemplar farmers).
 - Opportunity to hold their activities on campus; we have had grower groups come in and run board meetings or field days and use our facilities and work with us and students (i.e. lamb evaluation day on site and make students part of the day).
- We don't use grower groups for extension at the moment but will be moving into projects in the future. They are a good platform as not everyone accesses agronomists/consultants because they have a price tag attached – it is easier to get information through to grower group coordinators than all the different consultants as there are lots of them. Grower groups are more organised to receive and disseminate information.

- The rigour of research undertaken by grower groups varies but that is also what we say to the students. How robust it is? It is the same with any information source, there are lots of sources but you have to be careful of the credentials. If information comes through a journal article it is sound. As a farmer you have to work it out for yourself, that is part of the rigour of university.
- If I had to categorise information I would go firstly with referee journal articles which are rigorous but have narrow scope, then R&D corporation research which is more applicable to the Australian industry but it is limited in scope. Grower group and farmer based research tends to be more extensive but particular to that location; instead of a plot it is a strip or two. It is on a different scale but very specific. The issue is that farmers don't do it rigorously and don't always document it and don't have the control. You really need to look for other research to support it.
- Social media – people are increasingly using Facebook for profile, socialising and events and Twitter for information on topical issues and Instagram for images and social basis. It is a young person's social tool. There are lot of opportunities for grower groups there.
- Thank goodness that growers have got themselves organised, otherwise they would be way behind in keeping up with technology, maximising output and accessing information. Grower groups play a pivotal social role and we can't underestimate the importance of that as there are less people and their occupation is very isolating. Notwithstanding their commercial role there is a strong social role (for the rest of the family to be part of the fabric of the community) and with a reduction in voluntary activities grower groups help drive people's emotional wellbeing.
- I can't see the nature of RD&E changing in a hurry so I believe grower groups will stick around. The nature of grower groups has changed a lot; when they started they were similar in their approach and had a similar model. Now it has become more specialised and focused on specific issues and that depends on member's interests and what services are available locally.
- The model for the future depends on the objectives, skills and capabilities of the group because volunteers can only do so much, and also how far they need to travel to attend an event. If they are only going to a field day (1 day) you can expect people to travel whereas if it is only for a couple of hours then your reach will be less. The nature of the model depends on the catchment, the activities run, how they are organised and it depends on the density of the properties. How things are administered depends on the skills of the group (capacity). Whether it is a small or big group it depends on the members and their skills i.e. if the technology available is functional, are the volunteers the group relies on tech savvy: if not they need a support structure and need to pay for admin support.
- Grower groups have to get value out of the GGA and lobby government to fund it; if they are short on funding it will be an easy one to cut unless grower groups are active in lobbying.
- If the GGA was successful in training the grower group members to manage and administer their own groups using technology, it could phase out its role to a large degree. But there is always a base role in assisting groups to coordinate speakers, major events and activities. The nature of their role could be wound back if the groups were upskilled.

Key messages

1. Grower groups have a pivotal role to get information from researchers to farmers, given the substantial reduction in extension services by DAFWA and government agencies and the push for more research to be done in Universities.
2. Universities will do more research project work with a range of grower groups in the future.
3. Universities want their students to be in contact with leading edge farmers and their advisors and see groups as the means to link industry with students. Universities have identified a range of different ways to link more closely with industry and grower groups in future.

4. Researchers find grower groups are a good platform for extension as it is easier to get information through to group coordinators than individually to all the different consultants.
5. The rigour of research undertaken by grower groups varies as farmer based research tends to be particular to that location; it is on a smaller scale and very specific. The issue is that farmers don't do it rigorously, don't always document it and don't have the controls so as a researcher you need to look for other research to support their findings.
6. Grower groups play a pivotal social role and the importance of that can't be underestimated as there are fewer people and their occupation is isolating; groups support people's emotional wellbeing.
7. The nature of grower groups has changed a lot; they have become more specialised and focused on specific issues based on member's interests and the services available locally.
8. The future model for grower groups depends on their objectives, skills and capabilities because volunteers can only do so much. The size of the catchment, the activities run, the capacity of the group, how they are organised, the density of the properties and changing local circumstances all impact on the type of group model appropriate for an area.
9. Grower groups have to drive value out of GGA and lobby government to fund it; it will be easy to cut unless grower groups are active in lobbying.
10. If GGA was successful in training the grower group members to manage and administer their own groups using technology, it could phase out its role to a large degree, although there is always a role in assisting groups to coordinate speakers, major events and activities.

Participant 18

- Grower groups are good at extending agricultural information and doing localised projects especially with the demise of DAFWA on the extension side, and depending on where they are they are good at keeping the agricultural community together by providing a focal point. They are not completely inclusive with their sponsorship model; in some ways they exclude people from being more involved as sponsorship controls their agenda.
- Groups have some political lobbying power and can bring some local agricultural issues to the attention of political parties or grain marketers and they have a valuable role to play there. They also bring all levels of the farming community together (e.g. with women and SEPWA's farm office management group) and that has helped farming businesses to become more professional.
- I am a member of a grower group and as a business I am involved in GRDC funding projects (PA and soil moisture) which includes grower groups to extend the information. I work with SEPWA, Stirlings to Coast, Fitzgerald Biosphere Group (FBG) and MIG. The extension ability of these groups varies; SEPWA is good at extending information as they have staff with the capacity to do it, whereas some of the others don't have the same skills so the message is not as well extended.
- Grower groups are farmer focused so sometimes they forget about the broader agricultural industry as a group (machinery dealers, consultants, fertiliser companies etc.) who all have businesses they need to run and they need the industry support. Groups don't have agendas to help local ag related businesses which is fair enough but there are other players out there apart from their sponsors and that's why some feel excluded. If you aren't a sponsor you still have an opportunity to be involved as a member and have the ability to attend events and gain information. But I don't have an opportunity to present if I have something interesting or relevant, it is excluded from the program. I would like the opportunity to present as I think as a grower group it is all about extending the best possible message that will benefit farmers and

increase their efficiency and productivity, regardless if someone is a sponsor or not. There is some good information that is excluded.

- They need to address beyond their sponsors as they are too much aligned with sponsors. They do need funding to retain staff, but they should get external funding through other grants that don't tie the group to a commercial business. It must be difficult.
- It is about not getting the opportunity to participate as a local business operating in the PA space; we may have the most innovative information and yet the group will bring in external speakers instead of using local resources. At times, they don't look in their own backyard. We need assistance to extend the information as well and it would be nice to be included.
- Some of the trials that groups do are good and some of it is broader case study information. It doesn't have the scientific rigour that DAFWA or other researchers would put in but generally it is good solid farmer based, farmer scale information that has been tested locally which has a fair bit of relevance. Sometimes grower groups don't have resources or people to do some of their work with the amount of rigour to make it truly statistically relevant. A lot of farmers are happy with farmer scale information. Sometimes farmers make the mistake of making it their only source of information (i.e. wheat and barley trials, yes they are good but they need to compare them to NVT trials). It is up to us to ensure that farmers cross reference that data.
- Being more inclusive is an area for groups to improve on. I do get a lot out of grower groups but at times they are exclusive and they can have a reputation for being an exclusive club. They are a competing force for projects with consultants and other researchers, and I don't know how to address that; at times there is collaboration but at varying levels where grower groups have the upper hand in the eyes of other collaborators. It is mainly because they are a politically stronger force and are seen as the ones that have the greater ability to extend the information.
- The project results that I am involved in are made available to everyone. I don't have client groups, I have done in the past but it is difficult to get groups of farmers together when they are doing different things. Most farmers prefer one on one contact. The days of an individual (or small business like myself) having smaller groups, field days and updates are long gone as we are competing with grower groups for the same audience so they are a waste of time, money and resources.
- Grower groups are filling a big role in extending information and there are some big and dynamic groups but also some smaller groups that are serving a role in a smaller geographic area. There are still some gaps where opportunities lie. There are some good groups at Esperance, Albany, MIG, Liebe and Facey but there are still some gaping holes like out in the eastern wheat belt which is a massive area geographically and they are suffering from a lack of productivity and progress because no grower group wants to drive local initiatives. They miss out a lot as researchers don't go out there and yet they still pay their levies.

Key messages

1. Grower groups are good at extending agricultural information and doing localised projects and they provide a focal point for the agricultural community.
2. Groups are not completely inclusive with their sponsorship model, they exclude people with expertise from being more involved because sponsorship controls their agenda. Events should be about extending the best possible information that will benefit farmers and increase their efficiency and productivity, regardless if someone is a sponsor.
3. Groups have a valuable role to use their lobbying power to bring local agricultural issues to the attention of politicians, grain marketers etc..

4. Bringing all the farming community together (e.g. women and SEPWA with the farm office management group) has helped farming businesses to become more professional.
5. The extension effectiveness of groups varies with staff capacity, skills and experience.
6. Grower groups are so farmer focused they often forget about the broader agricultural industry (machinery dealers, consultants, fertiliser companies etc.) who all have businesses to run and they need the industry support.
7. While grower group trials may lack the scientific rigour that researchers would deliver, generally the work is good solid farmer based, farmer scale information that has been tested locally, which has a fair bit of relevance for farmers. While they lack the resources to make trials truly statistically relevant, many farmers are happy with farmer scale information.
8. Grower groups are competing for projects with consultants and other researchers, at times there is collaboration but at varying levels.
9. The days of an individual or small business having smaller groups, field days and updates are gone as we are competing with grower groups for the same audience so events are a waste of time, money and resources.
10. Grower groups are filling a big role in extending information but there are still some gaps where opportunities lie. Areas like the eastern wheat belt, a massive area geographically, are suffering a lack of productivity and progress because no grower group wants to drive initiatives there and researchers don't go out there, and yet the farmers still pay their levies.

Participant 19

- Grower groups don't exist in the horticulture industry. It is unclear what could be achieved above and beyond what we are already doing as we already run a range of activities across the state.
- Broadacre industries have a much deeper culture of collaboration than horticulture because as a wheat grower your competitor is overseas as the industry is export focused. In horticulture we are domestic market focused and your competitor is your neighbour, so there it is unlikely there will be the same level of collaboration.
- There will be some collaboration through workshops and best practice but culturally it is not common. There is competitive tension amongst neighbours so you are unlikely to get people working together in a geographical area. Some growers have relationships with growers in other areas and exchange ideas.
- We run a range of workshop around the state, as well as having staff assist growers one on one. We have some good practice demo sites where growers demonstrate good things and open their properties to others to visit, but the growers willing to do that are few and far between. Helping your neighbour is not helping yourself in the horticultural industry.

Key messages

1. Grower groups don't exist in the horticulture industry as there is no culture of collaboration or sharing grower information due to the competitive nature of the domestic fresh produce market.

DAFWA

The Department of Agriculture and Food WA is both a funder and a partner of grower groups in Western Australia and it regards grower groups as playing a valuable networking role by being regionally based to harness the energy and address topics or research of interest within their local area. Grower groups are seen as a vital part of the rural infrastructure, they are independently run and are valued for their role in disseminating information, organising events and facilitating practice change that contributes to increases in productivity and profitability.

DAFWA representatives see grower groups as filling the void that their organisation has left following budget cuts in the extension area, and groups provide a useful conduit for DAFWA staff to liaise directly with farmers to address their needs and to determine DAFWA's priorities. They also fill the gaps in regions where the department doesn't have a presence.

Grower groups provide a strong network of growers which in turn allows DAFWA to interact and focus on group issues, rather than reacting to individual issues. They also provide an opportunity for department staff to highlight their research through trials and presenting at events.

DAFWA staff have a great working relationship with grower groups in the regions and they are involved in sub-committees, attend meetings, provide briefings on projects or the government's position. According to DAFWA representatives it is a deliberate strategy for the department to remain engaged with grower groups as they are recognised as a key stakeholder group.

DAFWA works closely with a number of grower groups by providing in-kind equipment and support and in some cases they offer groups office space through co-locating.

Concern was expressed that DAFWA is not recognised for their support and investment as a lot of their work is behind the scenes, and given they are not an official sponsor they do not receive the same recognition. This is a challenge for grower groups moving forward to address how they promote other partners like government organisations that provide support.

As a government organisation, DAFWA works with various stakeholders (agronomists, consultants, grower groups etc.) as everyone has different values to bring to the table that can help them achieve their aim which is to double the value of agriculture. It was also identified that extension is one of the services of grower groups which industry can't monetize as it has a wider community benefit and if funders go to the private sector they risk the information going out preferentially to clients. As put by one representative "we would prefer to work with a grower group, as farmers are the levy payers".

Grower groups are certainly viewed as advantageous for DAFWA as it is getting harder for them to run trials and some groups fill that niche; without them the department would have to sort out their own networks. However the expectation of what grower groups can do is higher than what they can deliver in reality and that exposes them to some issues.

SEPWA is an example of a grower group working closely with DAFWA; the group is co-located in the Esperance District office, they pay discounted rent for phone, office and internet and utilise DAFWA resources and the expertise of staff. The department has a MOU in place for renting office space.

Both parties have combined to co-host the region's main field day at the DAFWA research station which has ensured its relevance to connect back to growers. Occasionally SEPWA does a trial at the research station, but that is contracted out to DAFWA as the group doesn't want to go down the same path as DAFWA with research.

In return for the DAFWA support, SEPWA is a vehicle for them to disseminate information to farmers through publications and presentations at events. As stated by one representative, "the ability for our staff to get their information out locally is very valuable and talking at field days helps with their

profiles and the DAFWA state-wide profile". It is believed that SEPWA would survive without DAFWA as the reality is that the group is mature and well-resourced.

While DAFWA works closely with grower groups, they are not trying to protect their turf as they recognise that growers pay levies and funders like GRDC will take that into consideration, and grower groups will have more pull than DAFWA at a local level.

DAFWA has also played a pivotal role in actively supporting the development and establishment of the West Midlands Group which sub leases the Badgingarra Research Station for trials and they sub lease it to a grower to generate income which provides a massive benefit for the profitability and viability of that grower group.

ASHEEP is a great livestock focused group that DAFWA works closely with; they help identify farmers' needs, they have driven some pasture research and provided places for trials to be conducted and provided valued feedback. The group also developed a lambing planner in conjunction with DAFWA which has become one of the department's most successful handheld tools.

While there are lots of positives about grower groups, DAFWA representatives also outlined some challenges for groups in that they need to ensure they have a good strategic plan to maintain their capacity. As quoted by one DAFWA representative "if they don't plan, they will fall on their own swords because of lack of planning". The lack of long term strategic planning can be a reflection of the board's ability which can be addressed with further training to ensure they have the necessary skills. Grower groups also require a good sponsorship policy to ensure they remain independent.

Other feedback for grower groups was the need to communicate and regularly update partners on projects as this needs to be a two-way street. It was also mentioned that groups should avoid overlapping with DAFWA and not get involved in trials, policy and detailed R&D; they should stick with broad scale strip trials and not replicate what DAFWA does unless they are collaborating with researchers.

For grower groups who do undertake trials, DAFWA questions the trial rigour and they do critique it. Grower groups either need to outsource these types of activities or they need to support the growth and development of skills in that area. Staff are crucial for the operations of a grower group and can set a group apart from others; good staff can attract funding as funders look at the capacity of the people behind the proposal.

Unfortunately there is no career progression or pathways for grower group staff and salaries are based around graduate levels, it is rare to find an experienced person working in a group. It appears to be a double edged sword in that groups attract young staff that are trained up and then move on (career progression) and you lose the corporate knowledge that was put into them and staff cycle through quickly. Grower groups need to de-risk their investment and mentor their staff.

Within the livestock sector, it is hard for grower groups to undertake research as they require animal ethics approval and DAFWA's capacity is now limited in this area as well. Grower groups focused on livestock are more important for projects like market opportunities and value adding, it is not about research. The groups are valuable in maintaining networks and a link between the supply chain.

In regards to attribution, DAFWA tends to work on the premise of contribution rather than attribution however it is said that grower groups are good at attributing research as they know that it is important from DAFWA's perspective and they also want to keep them happy.

The GRDC initiative of Regional Cropping Solutions Network groups are viewed as complementary to grower groups as they help determine priorities in the region and provide funds to the groups. They are not viewed as being in competition with grower groups as GRDC doesn't deliver projects.

Future opportunities for grower groups, as suggested by DAFWA representatives, include looking beyond the farm gate at value and supply chains and building relationships and partnerships to

create links with markets. It is viewed as an area that will develop and deliver more value back to growers. Another opportunity mentioned was to link grower groups and have collaboration on specific issues (i.e. adoption of technology) which could be driven and formalised by the GGA and could utilise social media.

While grower groups are focused on production issues and they refrain from getting involved in political farm lobby groups, an opportunity was identified for groups to realise their value in representation as they can be one voice speaking on behalf of many (e.g. SEPWA was pro GM and based their argument on GM advantages from a production perspective). Grower groups have clout and current data on agricultural issues which they could use to inform policy for farm lobby groups.

The reality is that grower groups are a key part of the landscape and they are here to stay, according to DAFWA representatives. It was recognised that external efforts to drive a specific model for grower groups would be pushed back as it would need to be driven by farmers to be accepted.

In the future, it was thought there would be fewer groups as there is only limited funding available, unless groups can become more innovative. A super group model was proposed as a combination of groups, which could help overcome replication of resources and help older groups who have become stagnant to look at growth. The super group could provide the strategic direction and oversee the growth of the group, however it would require farmer and grower group ownership to be successful. It was also recognised that there are still some areas of that state that are not serviced by a grower group and these areas are missing out on funding for locally relevant research.

According to DAFWA representatives the GGA has a big role in supporting the capacity of grower groups. However it was mentioned that the top groups did not receive a lot of value from being a member of the GGA; for them GGA was more a point of coordination. The GGA is funded to work across all industries and it was expressed that there is an opportunity to learn from other industries.

Other opportunities for the GGA include assisting groups to look at post farm gate opportunities, overseeing training for grower group boards and management committees, providing more support and supervision for inexperienced staff (professional development) and determining how grower groups can retain and train staff members. The GGA could also drive better partnerships and collaboration between groups as they appear to keep to themselves and focus on their own survival rather than the bigger picture.

On the downside, it was mentioned by a DAFWA representative that the GGA had a top down approach versus a bottom up approach, and grower groups weren't all on board in driving towards making the GGA something. The GGA has evolved and is still evolving and there are opportunities to drive more support from the bottom; it is a token membership of the alliance rather than feet in.

Participant 20

- Grower groups are a vital part of the rural infrastructure sitting between their local members and other organisations as a point of contact, they also provide a service to farmers given the change in state government budgets; they have filled the niche for local linkages in the extension area. If you look back 20 years in extension, there were a lot of government service providers but that has been wound back with changes in priorities and with a rise in R&D corporations, state government saw an opportunity to decrease funding. Where we had offices a grower group presence has filled the void. They now have newsletters, we used to have newsletters.
- Grower groups facilitate practice change to contribute to an increase in productivity and profitability. The groups enable DAFWA to work through group networks to contact growers, they now partner with us in projects (fee for service contractor) and are part of the rural landscape.

- I am a principal point of contact between DAFWA and grower groups (SEPWA, RAIN, ASHEEP). I am a guest at meetings, briefings on projects, update them on what government is doing and the impact on them/members. They are recognised as a key stakeholder group.
- The support we provide depends on the grower group. SEPWA would survive without us as this group is mature and well-resourced and is one of top 6 grower groups in the state.
- SEPWA uses DAFWA resources from the Grains Program which has people with knowledge to use as a resource for staff and expertise around R&D. They in return provide DAFWA with the opportunity to talk to farmers (which is part of their milestones which aren't funded) as we don't have any extension resources left in DAFWA. The model will evolve and projects may go through grower groups to help with facilitating and meeting extension targets. The state component doesn't have a budget to do extension but GRDC allows extension in their project budgets.
- SEPWA has projects through Royalties for Regions (RfR) which are administered through DAFWA as we are the grants administrator and SEPWA is the recipient. Part of the government model is for us to do more steering, less rowing. Grower groups are closer to clients so we are happy for them to do more. We are happy to provide an office for SEPWA as it helps us drive contact and incorporation between groups. It is handy to have them co-located. SEPWA pays discounted rent for the phone, office and internet. It is a good deal and given the location of the Esperance office out of town it works well as we don't have others interested in using the offices. Our network can be set up as a virtual wide area network for internet connection so they can't access DAFWA information. We have done this with other grower groups before but sometimes groups like to separate from us for their own identity, as the Avon Catchment Council did.
- A good relationship with grower groups makes my life easier, where it gets strained you need to be honest. We have a number of contracts in place and internally we document what support we are providing from DAFWA. We have provided in-kind secretarial support for some groups but it can get to the point where it costs more than it is worth. We have MOU's in place for renting office space.
- In return DAFWA has access to the grower groups who help pass on our information, they provide a vehicle for DAFWA to provide information (newsletters) and are an avenue for getting content out from DAFWA to a grower audience. Our Agmemo is now state wide and doesn't have local content and is much broader (used to be locally based). Grower group newsletters provide a mechanism to get our local research to the Esperance Port Zone through their members. Our partnership is quite informal and there is a lot of conversation/discussion. The ability for our staff to get their material out locally is very valuable and also talking at field days helps with their profiles and the DAFWA state-wide profile.
- Occasionally SEPWA has done trials on the Esperance District Research Station (EDRS) and that has been contracted out to DAFWA staff to do; SEPWA don't want to replicate DAFWA and would rather DAFWA provides that service funded through a SEPWA project.
- DAFWA and SEPWA combine to jointly host field days which works well for us and we have an MOU drawn up. Our field day nearly died and co-hosting it gave it relevance to connect back to growers. SEPWA promotes the day.
- DAFWA Katanning still does it solo, Merredin may work in with MADFIG but it is early days. It is pretty unique where you are co-hosting and it encourages a better relationship between a grower group and DAFWA locally. We are not trying to protect our turf. SEPWA will have more pull than we will at a local level and will be seen to be higher up than DAFWA.
- GRDC is yet to figure it out that grower groups are GRDC levy payers as at the moment there is disconnect in their lack of understanding of that. GRDC has an issue with branding; they haven't

moved down the pathway to co-brand with grower groups. They need to figure it out as they have tried to treat everyone as a tenderer and put their logo first. There is logic in working in partnership. RCSN is perfect for determining grower priorities and by definition they shouldn't be in competition with groups as the GRDC doesn't deliver projects; the relationship is between GRDC and grower groups.

- The SEPWA model is good and industry specific which works in the Esperance region, but in other areas groups work across industries and are not so focused on just one. You want a group with critical mass and the groups need to think about what capacity will serve their purposes (the skill set they need). They are all money hungry to maintain capacity – they have to have a good strategic plan so they know what they want to compete for. Groups can have a tendency to pursue projects for the sake of maintaining staff whereas it may not fit their strategic plan, it is a churn project. They risk resources going where they are not supported by their members and the group may lose relevance. No-one wants to fund the EO position; SEPWA has sponsorship for that but some other groups are reluctant to go down the sponsorship path. RAIN sits in SEPWA's footprint so they won't charge a membership fee. They are funded by projects and informal local sponsorship to fund staff. SEPWA will help them out with resources.
- The SEPWA model works well as one group for a port zone, but in a big port zone like Kwinana there are multiple grower groups. If anyone from the outside tries to drive a specific model for grower groups in the future, they will get pushed back as farmers must have ownership. Government doesn't fund groups so they can't dictate what they want.
- In the past we had the Zone Advisory Committees (ZAC) which fell by the wayside and we now have the Recognised Biosecurity Group (RBG) model to control pests but the reality is that farmers are not interested in the coordinated control of declared species and it is up to the community to make a decision if they want to do it; they shouldn't have to. Grower groups don't operate under any legislation in WA so there is no mandated process. There are some regional groups like South Coast NRM and NACC that get some admin fees from federal government, a core allocation, but that is decreasing.
- Project funding will only cover up to 10 per cent on admin but it depends on the funding scheme. It will not pay for the running of the group, only the project.
- Grower groups need a good sponsorship policy to remain independent. Members haven't valued groups enough to fund it to run the group to ensure it remains independent. I don't think industry is ready to accept it. Private grower groups tend to operate closest to that model. The Holt Rock group use their membership fee to fund a private consultant and some grower groups retain an agronomist. Would that work universally I am not sure, it depends on the value that members put on their grower group.
- Groups are valued by a percentage of their members. SEPWA's trials program has a point of difference and members get early access to trial results. SEPWA is unique in having its own trial program which is wide spread and at a farm scale which is paid for through sponsorship. SEPWA holds an election to be on the committee.
- We have done project work with agronomists but we would prefer to work with a grower group. In one project we have had a private researcher, public and grower group all involved. A lot of the private sector find that the requirement for in-kind contribution knocks them out of the race whereas with a tender for GRDC they are more competitive.
- We are happy to continue to work with grower groups and if we don't have the capacity we are happy to push projects out to grower groups. For example the vertebrate pest CRC came to us

for the mouse model and we referred them to RAIN as they had mice issues. It was a nice line up and a natural fit for them to do the project as we don't have the capacity to do small projects.

- Grower groups need to value themselves; what is the value of their publications and brand? They have instant access to 200 plus members. It is about identifying their brand value but that is not specific to all grower groups. I do get a sense that they talk about competing with DAFWA for funding but we are so far out of that space. It amazes me how they keep talking about DAFWA hogging funding, it would be nice to have an appreciation of the reality of the environment that DAFWA is working in (some groups fought against RfR funding which didn't fund trials work that is funded through RCSN). In reality they need to see the changes coming. Say with liming trials we have been doing them for a long time and they need to be switched on to the next funding opportunity. The game has moved on and there is no use reinventing the wheel and there is no appetite to fund it at the moment.
- RAIN is becoming more interesting as a group as they are moving into NRM and biosecurity. RAIN has moved to sponsor the RBG as they needed a legal entity to oversee it in the region.
- The reality is that grower groups are a key part of the landscape, but some groups will stay informal. They are here to stay. Extension is one of the grower group services and government or DAFWA won't get back in there. Industry can't monetize it as it is a community wide benefit. If funders go to the private sector they risk the information going out preferentially to clients.
- There is an opportunity for grower groups in representation as there can be one voice speaking on behalf of many. Grower groups are focused on production issues in an apolitical way and they are not stepping on the toes of farm lobby groups. SEPWA was pro GM and based their argument from a production perspective as they could see an advantage.
- There is an opportunity for grower groups to be flexible and pick up new opportunities that their members will strategically identify and move forward. They need to be flexible and adaptable and a group needs a good strategic plan so they don't chase everything because if they do, they won't be focused on the key issues for their members.
- The GGA is really good for new people in grower groups and for groups as they are stepping through from small to medium and medium to big, they can provide the resources. For the top five groups there is not a whole lot of value and GGA is just as a point of coordination so that they know what everyone is doing. Those groups have bigger budgets, a good EO, a couple of project staff and effective boards, they have the capacity and capability. Maybe you could send them to a Company Directors course.
- There is need for a restructure because they have had to change business models to meet funding requirements. The issue is the level of support for new groups and new entrants and medium sized groups as they get most out of it. The big groups don't but it doesn't mean they haven't benefited in the past. It is also about capacity building for new staff.
- The GGA is funded to work across all industries and there is an opportunity to learn from other industries e.g. the West Midlands group have a horticulture sub-committee. GGA provides a wider network and perhaps it could look at post farm gate opportunities as the focus has been on on-farm R&D. New Zealand has doubled the value of their production through productivity gain and looking post farm gate. The GGA could support grower groups through a study tour to focus on how the industry operates in NZ and the role of grower groups.
- The environment changes very quickly and I can't see any funding that will last for 10 years; they are more short term and policies will change more quickly. Grower groups have to be nimble.
- A lot of grower group staff lack capacity and the GGA has a big role in developing that capacity. There are a lot of graduates that come in and you can't expect them to operate on that level as

they are an entry level employee and haven't the capacity; until they have a few runs on the board the group needs to de-risk the investment and they need mentoring. The GGA could hold management and professional development workshops for grower groups; how to retain staff and provide more support and supervision for inexperienced people.

Key messages

1. Grower groups are a vital part of the rural infrastructure sitting between their local members and other organisations as a point of contact, they provide a service to members and have filled a niche for local linkages in extension. Groups facilitate practice change that contributes to an increase in productivity and profitability.
2. DAFWA recognises grower groups as a key stakeholder and the department works through groups to connect with growers and partner on projects. The government model now is for the department to do more steering, less rowing.
3. DAFWA staff in the regions have good relationships with grower groups. DAFWA and SEPWA are an example of collaboration: SEPWA is co-located, they combine to jointly host field days, SEPWA uses DAFWA people with expertise around R&D to use as a resource for staff, and DAFWA has access to the grower groups to pass on information and profile staff at events.
4. External efforts to drive a specific model for grower groups in the future will be resisted as groups have to be farmer driven and locally relevant. Government doesn't fund groups so they can't dictate what model they want.
5. RCSN is perfect for determining grower priorities and isn't in competition as the GRDC doesn't deliver projects; the relationship is between GRDC and grower groups.
6. Grower groups need a sound sponsorship policy to remain independent.
7. Groups can be driven by funding to maintain capacity but they need a good strategic plan to guide their priorities so they don't lose relevance for their members.
8. Grower groups need to value themselves; what is the value of their publications and brand? They need to demonstrate a point of difference and provide tangible benefits to members.
9. There is an opportunity for grower groups in industry representation as they have information and data they could contribute to broader debate and policy.
10. The GGA is funded to work across all industries and there is an opportunity to learn from other industries, provide a wider network and perhaps look at post farm gate opportunities. GGA has a big role in supporting capacity development through training and mentoring, and providing support and supervision for inexperienced people.

Participant 21

- Grower groups get together to address their member's needs in areas where they haven't been addressed by other providers.
- I am the DAFWA representative on a couple of committees and I extend the information that I think is of value or interest to grower groups (West Midlands, Liebe, Miling groups). DAFWA used to have relationship managers with grower groups (project finished 2 years ago) and I kept in contact with these groups on my new project work. That's fine with DAFWA, it is a deliberate strategy to remain engaged as we are interested in where they are going.
- I have personal relationships with the grower group staff, they are a great sounding board to talk through issues that arise, they will also call me about issues and I will advise what DAFWA knows. Other staff in the office (biosecurity, livestock and regulation) have opportunities and avenues to

speaking at field days and there are other staff members on grower group committees. We don't do any trial work from our office and we don't have any grains research staff.

- We provide in-kind equipment and support and we are going through a discussion at the moment about temporary office space. We don't have a grower group co-locating.
- We have actively supported the development and establishment of the West Midlands Group including the use of the Badgingarra Research Station (BRC). The Dandaragan Shire lease the BRC off DAFWA who sub-lease it to WMG and they sub lease it to a grower to generate income off that lease. That is a massive benefit for the profitability and viability of that grower group. It is a long term trial site for the group. DAFWA did a lot of work with the community and grower group to set that up and make it happen. In terms of its success, DAFWA has played a pivotal role in that group. In other locations there are opportunities given to grower groups.
- We have a good relationship, but there is not as much recognition as we deserve because we are not actually a sponsor and it is difficult for grower groups to fit that in their model to provide recognition, which is a concern for DAFWA. A lot of work we do is supporting behind the scenes and people don't see it and recognise the investment. I have good relationships and the group does value our support, but grower groups can move on quickly and forget their basis for operation (reflective of staff who don't retain corporate knowledge as they flow through). With the Liebe group we helped set up their offices and provided a lot of support as a spring board.
- The strength with DAFWA is that we have a lot of corporate knowledge whereas that is lost with grower groups.
- Grower groups have sponsors and supporters who provide money but it is a challenge how they promote others like government organisations who provide in-kind support. There is a large proportion of DAFWA speakers at group events and it is often not recognised that they are from DAFWA – the attention to detail is missing because we are not giving cash.
- We like to develop relationships and partnerships to achieve the best outcome and support grower groups.
- A lot of salaries that grower groups offer are for graduates, it is very rare that you will find an experienced person working in a group. Farmers are not realistic in terms of what is an attractive salary unless they have someone in the area with the skills. Groups attract young staff who will inevitably move on to further their career. Once they get to the EO position there is nowhere to go; no career progression or pathway for grower group staff.
- The value for DAFWA in working with grower groups is in valued partnerships. Grower groups provide DAFWA with a place to connect to growers, showcase research and extension on R&D technology.
- We work with different stakeholders (agronomists, consultants, grower groups etc.) in different ways as each has different values to bring to the table. If we can double the value of agriculture, we will work with people who can deliver that.
- Grower group trials will be questioned on trial rigour by DAFWA as that is how a trained scientist will critique it other research. Groups need to support the growth and development of skills in that area. The staff cycle through quickly and you can put knowledge into them but it goes with them when they move on. We have trained groups on statistical analysis programs before but when the staff leave you are back where you started. Groups need to outsource those types of activities and we are open to helping them. WMG have a new PhD person to help with trial work so that group is starting to bring those skills in and that will give them more credibility.

- Grower groups need to move beyond the farm gate to look at value and supply chains and create relationships and partnerships to build links with markets. We see that area will develop and deliver more value back to the grower and support growers and other players in that chain to generate more profitability overall, it is all about local provenance.
- All groups are relevant regardless of their size. In terms of functionality those groups with paid staff can support growers to focus on what their business is about. Big groups have a board (growers are investing a lot of time into running a board) and theoretically bigger groups have time to look strategically whereas the smaller groups run day to day, year to year.
- Grower groups aren't good at long term strategic planning which is a reflection of farmer's abilities to look beyond their operations; this impacts on the board of the grower group and the group's direction. Professional boards get training on how to think strategically.
- In the future DAFWA will not be going back into extension, grower groups are around for the long haul. Groups do need to address their sustainability issues which comes back to long term strategic planning. If they don't plan, they will fail because of a lack of planning.
- The size of grower groups has been stagnant for quite a few years since they established. There are more partnerships between grower groups but I am not sure if they are super effective yet, it is still in its infancy and groups are still developing how to manage good partnerships. You would think there would be less groups going forward because there is only so much money around unless be they can be inventive and look at other sources of income; be innovative.
- There is a lot of replication of resources in grower groups so maybe moving forward there could be a super group which combines a number of smaller groups, but not at the moment as there is not the pressure for change. You could have a central group that could run a number of groups and be overarching; they could provide the strategic direction and oversee the growth of the group. It still needs to be driven by growers and the committee. Local ownership as opposed to grower ownership is a key driver and will see things remain as they are. Communities are getting smaller and they don't want town sizes to decrease so they are holding onto things.
- The GGA is a good idea and the first step in developing better collaboration and partnerships between groups. It still has a long way to go to get to a super productive position. From what they are to what they could be they have a way to go yet. They could drive better partnerships and collaborations between grower groups as the groups still keep a lot to themselves and focus on their own survival rather than the bigger picture. There is an opportunity to focus on the bigger picture if grower groups let go and have the confidence to do so.
- I get the feeling that the GGA has a top down versus bottom up approach and grower groups aren't all on board in driving towards making the GGA something. The GGA has evolved and is still evolving. There are opportunities to drive more support from the bottom, it is a token membership of the alliance.
- Some groups can overvalue themselves. Liebe is a classic example of rotating staff and they still ride a lot on their initial reputation rather than doing anything ground breakingly new lately. WMG are a younger group and have set themselves up with ambassadors to move forward and to keep moving forward. They have a different approach in place as they have more facets to the group which includes horticulture and looking at the supply and value chain for future profitability growth, which has opened up more opportunities for them. Liebe not getting value from GGA is old thinking – there is more for them to learn to keep moving forward and it is a challenge with the rotation of staff. GGA can help older groups who have hit a stagnant spot to look at future growth. WANTFA is challenged by the lifecycle of groups; the only way is a new and different model rather than reinventing the current model.

- GGA were initially set up and then changed into something else; sometimes it is better to start something new rather than transforming and recreating the group. The GGA will still continue with the role of working with all industry and grower groups (not just grains focus) and there is opportunity for the more immediate term in getting a network of highly functioning groups of grower groups across industry and getting learnings shared which could transfer to different industries. I am not sure about the longer term role for the GGA.

Key messages

1. The value for DAFWA in working with grower groups is in developing relationships and partnerships to achieve the best outcomes by connecting with growers, showcasing research and extension of R&D technology.
2. Grower groups are a valuable sounding board to talk through issues and DAFWA staff have opportunities to speak at field days, and provide in-kind equipment and support.
3. DAFWA support groups behind the scenes; people don't see it or recognise the investment. It is a challenge for groups to acknowledge other supporters like government organisations who provide in-kind rather than financial support.
4. There is no career progression and pathways for grower group staff. Groups attract young staff who move on as once they get to the EO position there is nowhere to progress further.
5. DAFWA challenges the rigour of grower group trials, groups need to support development of skills in this area. Groups need to outsource these activities and DAFWA is open to helping.
6. Grower groups need to look at value and supply chains and creating relationships and partnerships to build links with markets to grow profitability for their members.
7. Grower groups aren't good at long term strategic planning.
8. Groups will need to be inventive and look at other sources of income as funding reduces.
9. There is a lot of replication of resources in grower groups so greater efficiencies will need to be considered, including how smaller groups may be serviced by larger groups.
10. GGA is a good idea and the first step in developing better collaboration and partnerships between the groups, but it still has a long way to go as the groups still keep a lot to themselves and focus on their own survival rather than the bigger picture. Grower groups aren't all on board in driving towards making the GGA something.
11. Some groups overvalue themselves and ride on their reputation. GGA could help older groups who have hit a stagnant spot to look at growth.

Participant 22

- Grower groups play a valuable network role as they are regionally based and can harness energy and topics of interest that suit their local area and they focus on the key things that matter to their members. Groups have a way of developing topics of interest and value to their members. They also provide an opportunity (events are getting harder for R&D organisations and DAFWA to run in regions) for DAFWA to liaise with grower groups to see if information is useful and can be tailored and to access networks – it is a win for everyone.
- They are in a difficult position like many other groups in that to access funding is a hard ask and has to be managed carefully. They struggle to get grants/funds that will support experienced staff to ensure their research is done well. It gets harder as requirements for process and monitoring and governance gets higher – it is hard to maintain staff to meet those requirements.

- It is getting tough for groups but they play a very big role and allow growers to be in more control to apply for funding to run on-farm R&D trials which they can do independently rather than them being run by a private business which has a vested interest. It is harder for the department to run trials and grower groups fill that niche. The expectation of what grower groups can do is higher than what they can do in reality and that exposes them to some issues.
- I work closely with ASHEEP and have a strong relationship with them as they are the only sheep focused groups.
- Grower groups have driven some exciting pasture research and made it possible for research to happen because they provide places where trials can be done and provide valuable feedback. We worked with them closely to develop a lambing planner, one of DAFWA's most successful handheld tools and that came out of ASHEEP identifying the need and working with us providing the technical knowledge and they tested it in the field. From a DAFWA perspective, grower groups provide a strong network of growers we can link with, in past we had local advisers that visited farmers. We can interact with producers as a network but also on a higher level on group issues, rather than reacting to individual issues.
- Grower groups are the conduit for research for farmers, most grower groups have a DAFWA person in a client relationship role. We have specific programs (e.g. lamb survival) where we have utilised groups as a conduit to have growers get together to look at the issue. There is an opportunity to build on the expertise and knowledge of grower groups more and it's a bonus if they pull together a number of Lifetime Ewe Management groups, they get a spotters fee. There is more support for using groups rather than private enterprises.
- The quality of the work done by grower groups depends on the work they are doing and what the outcome is. We have a strong relationship and support the Sheep Alliance which takes a whole of industry approach and is an integral part of the fabric.
- Grower groups within the livestock industry are more important for projects, it is not about research. We look at market opportunities and the value in providing the connections and the network. There are a lot of competing groups (producer advisory panel, processor and exporter group and a whole range of groups) but grower groups are valuable in maintaining networks and are the link for the beginning of the chain.
- We will partner with groups if there is new information and work with them on events as grower groups play a valuable role in extension.
- Attribution is always a hard one, we tend to work on the premise of contribution rather than attribution; it is about holding hands. DAFWA struggles with it as a lot of information is done through private consultancies who need to badge it with their stuff. Grower groups want to maintain value and integrity so it is hard for them to co-badge. It is a struggle with whoever works with them. Usually we share logos if we talk at an event – it is more about the timeslot attribution rather than the overall attribution. The Lambing Planner was co-badged with ASHEEP and we have an IP agreement (shared IP) and co-badged with MLA and AWI so it had 4 logos.
- Within the livestock sector we don't do many trials as we need animal ethics approval, if involved in research we have to manage the trial which makes it hard for grower groups to participate. DAFWA doesn't tend to do trials, we used to do a lot of ewe and productivity trials but there are not as many trials done now.
- In future it will get harder for grower groups to access funding because of the governance requirements. There are opportunities for groups to explore further down the supply chain and apply for market research and develop business propositions that might work in their area. It is hard for individuals to do it on their own whereas if DAFWA does it, it tends to be more general.

- Grower groups will continue to play a role as it is an important one, and also important for eastern states R&D corporations. AWI and MLA need to make better use of grower groups as they are resourced by them but in general they don't interact well with them.
- It would be a lot harder to work without grower groups as we would have to sort out our own networks and would have to use consultancy networks; we find grower groups most useful.
- Grower groups are good at identifying issues in their region, and many of those issues are the same across other grower groups. There may be opportunities for linking grower groups and having collaboration on specific issues. We have a new technology pilot group and all of them belong to different grower groups but they are all interested in the adoption of technology.
- A big grower group may have enough people to link groups across issues or perhaps there is an opportunity for the GGA to do that (i.e. Morawa link with Facey as groups with similar issues). Whether it is formalised I haven't thought it through, but you tend to get those sorts of groups forming on social media to talk about an issue.

Key messages

1. Grower groups play a valuable network role as they are regionally based and can harness energy and topics of interest that suit their local area.
2. Groups provide an opportunity for DAFWA to liaise with growers to see if information is useful.
3. Accessing funding is increasingly difficult and has to be managed carefully.
4. Grower groups allow growers to be more in control to apply for funding and run on-farm R&D trials which they can do independently.
5. It is harder for DAFWA to run trials and grower groups fill that niche. The expectation of what grower groups can do is higher than what they can do in reality and that exposes them.
6. Groups have driven exciting pasture research and made it possible for research to happen because they provided places where trials could be done and provided valuable feedback.
7. Grower groups are the conduit between researchers and farmers, and most grower groups have a DAFWA person in a client relationship role.
8. Attribution is a challenge; DAFWA works on contribution rather than attribution.
9. It is hard for grower groups to do livestock research as they need animal ethics approval.
10. There are opportunities for groups to work along the supply chain and apply for market research and develop business propositions that might work in their area.
11. Groups will continue to play a role as they are important for R&D corporations.
12. It would be a lot harder for DAFWA to work without grower groups as we would have to sort out our own networks.
13. There may be opportunities for linking grower groups to collaborate on specific issues and there is an opportunity for GGA to do that.

Participant 23

- Grower groups are great at filling the void that perhaps our organisation doesn't fill. They are driven by growers and provide a good conduit for what growers care about and what we need to be doing, and they have industry knowledge which we don't get within DAFWA. I mostly value grower groups for their dissemination of information as they have a good handle on growers' priority topics and are able to do work in areas where DAFWA doesn't have a presence (i.e. Liebe group) and they do a fantastic job organising events. We find that growers are time poor and

they tend to stick to key events and if we start working individually within projects and create more events it doesn't work as there is too much on. We would much prefer to work in with grower group programs and slot in where we can.

- I am involved in projects that are funded by GRDC and some of that work is done through grower groups like Liebe and FBG and I have been involved with SEPWA. The Liebe Group is running trials as part of their project and the FBG is doing the communications - organising field days and helping disseminate the information. SEPWA and RAIN were working in that area too. From my point of view I don't have to organise field days specific to the project, and I let industry run with their extension program which is driven by the grower group. I tend to find a workshop is more successful if it is driven by grower groups and a bottom up approach. I attend various grower group events and speak at them and provide information like articles for grower groups to disseminate. I also work with groups to develop projects.
- It is hard to say how much time I contribute but it is grower group driven when I am invited to participate in events. There is certainly a lot of grower group activity in spring and March.
- SEPWA does a lot of broad scale strip trials which is a good fit for grower groups in terms of being rigorous enough to get some statistical value out of the trial. Small plot scale trials don't have enough vigour. The Liebe Group are at the top end of being capable of doing trials whereas most other grower groups are not in that space as they don't have dedicated people who can apply the rigour. Groups like SEPWA don't want to get into that area as DAFWA works in that area whereas for Liebe there is no department presence in their area so they have to meet the needs by developing more rigorous ways of looking at trials. I am happy with the results from their work as I have collaborators in projects that are working on those trials (i.e. CSIRO) and they do the additional measurements whereas Liebe do the seeding and harvesting. I am wary of working with groups as I have had a few disasters where crops have not been sown or harvested in time.
- Grower groups do a reasonable job with their resources and the publications - most of them are pretty topical and timely and cover a range of issues. Both SEPWA and Liebe are pretty functional. Obviously some are doing a better job than others. What sets them apart is the people within the group and their abilities i.e. SEPWA people have diverse skills which are high level which makes them very functional and then there are groups who struggle a bit like the Lake Grace group who haven't got people on the ground promoting what they do.
- Staff are crucial for the operations of the group; if you have good staff then money pours in. With project funding (i.e. GRDC) my gut feeling is that they look at the people putting up the proposal and if they tick the box, then they will look at the proposal. They want people they are confident with. You can lose information with staff, and until the group gets a continuity of people the funders reserve the right to watch before they start funding and wanting to partner with the group. If they invest in people, they want to make sure they have the capacity to deliver.
- Grower groups are better positioned to do post farm gate value chain work (i.e. look at containerising legumes, high moisture stacks etc.), they are topical timely grower orientated issues and something that grower groups could do a better job than DAFWA can.
- Areas grower groups could improve on include:
 - Grower groups do have a fair bit of political clout when it comes to issues around agriculture that are relevant to grower groups, and that hasn't been used as well as it could be. Perhaps these groups could be feeding in to WAFF and PGA more on those issues as grower groups represent a huge proportion of the farming community.
 - Grower groups do a good job but they need the resources to do it. It needs to be a two way street as I am not getting much back from grower groups about the projects I am involved in

unless I ask for it. It would be nice to get regular updates but it also requires me to ask for it. It certainly makes it easier when I work in the same office as SEPWA as I am kept up to date.

- Attribution – we certainly ask that if a grower group is disseminating information that the project gets attributed which is quite often through the use of a simple logo. They know it is important from our perspective and they want to keep us happy because we are funding projects through GRDC funds. We haven't had too many problems with grower groups, it is mainly other federal organisations. I know there have been some issues with some grower groups and the GRDC where a grower group has organised an event which has been badged by GRDC which has resulted in a little bit of distrust from the groups. GRDC has been strict but they are changing their tune. People on the ground are doing the hard work and get little attribution.
- RCSNs – I see both groups working hand in hand. RCSNs prioritise local R&D. They are not in competition with grower groups, they are providing funds to the groups. Their role is to define issues in a port zone and work out what the funds go towards. It helps if there is only one grower group in a port zone, e.g. like SEPWA which works in with other grower groups.
- The grower group model is not equitable at the moment. If you look at LIFT (Lake Grace) they are a group of farmers that haven't been able to form a functional group, it's a big area from Lake Grace to Lake King and is virtually serviced by a grower group but it isn't a strong one and you tend to find that GRDC funding doesn't flow into the area, yet some individual farmers are putting enormous dollars into the GRDC pool. Until recently Merredin didn't have one and they have MADFIG now. There are still some holes around the place and the model has to be reasonably equitable. Grower groups are formed by like-minded people. You have SEPWA who focuses on grain quality which is different to RAIN. The model needs to be a bottom up approach to have ownership. In the future I still see a role for grower groups as DAFWA has got rid of its extension arm and grower groups have filled that void. What the groups do is in the grower's interest but I don't want to see overlap with what DAFWA is doing either (i.e. running their own small plot trials) or getting involved in policy or detailed R&D. We need to look for synergies. Perhaps you could have one main grower group operating in each port zone like SEPWA but I don't know how it works in other port zones. It works well here and could be a model for other areas which could improve things.

Key messages

1. Grower groups fill the void that DAFWA has left in extension and provide a good conduit for what growers want from DAFWA. They fill gaps where DAFWA doesn't have a presence.
2. Groups are valued for their role in disseminating information and organising events.
3. Grower groups need to communicate and regularly update partners on projects.
4. Grower groups should stick with broad scale strip trials and not try to replicate what DAFWA does unless they are collaborating with researchers.
5. Staff are crucial for the operations of a grower group - some groups are very functional in terms of the capacity of their staff which sets them apart from others. If you have good staff the money pours in; funders look at the people behind the proposal and their capabilities.
6. Groups are good at attributing research as they know it is important from DAFWA's perspective and they want to keep us happy.
7. Grower groups work with RCSNs; they are not competing with each other, they are providing funds to the groups and they define the R&D priorities in the region.
8. The current grower group model is not equitable as there are still some areas of the state that are not serviced by a grower group and they miss out on funding for relevant research.

Grower Group Alliance



Assessing the Value of Grower Groups

Appendix 3

Farmer Interviews Report

June 2017

Agknowledge®

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ABBREVIATIONS

AGM	Annual General Meeting
AHRI	Australian Herbicide Resistance Initiative
ASHEEP	Association for Sheep Husbandry, Excellence, Evaluation and Production
AWI	Australian Wool Innovation
CAA	Compass Agricultural Alliance
COGGO	Council of Grain Grower Organisations Limited
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
CRC	Cooperative Research Centre
CTF	Controlled traffic farming
DAFWA	Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia
EO	Executive Officer
GGA	Grower Group Alliance
GIWA	Grain Industry Association of Western Australia
GM	Genetic modification
GRDC	Grains Research and Development Corporation
MADFIG	Merredin and District Farm Improvement Group
MIG	Mingenew Irwin Group
MLA	Meat and Livestock Australia
NAG	Northern Agri Group
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NVT	National Variety Trials
OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
OJD	Ovine Johne’s Disease
PASE	Pulse Association of the South East
PGA	Pastoralists and Graziers Association
R&D	Research and Development
RAIN	Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network
RBG	Recognised Biosecurity Group
RCSN	Regional Cropping Solutions Network GRDC
RD&E	Research, Development and Extension
RDC	Research and Development Corporation
RfR	Royalties for Regions
SEPWA	South East Premium Wheat Growers Association
VRT	Variable Rate Technology
WAFF	WA Farmers Federation
WALRC	Western Australian Livestock Research Council MLA
WANTFA	WA No-Till Farmers Association
WIFE	Women in Farming Enterprises
WMG	West Midlands Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During May and June 2017 *Agknowledge*[®] was contracted by the Grower Group Alliance (GGA) to interview 35 farmers to assess the economic and social capital value they believe grower groups provide to farmers, the agricultural industry and regional communities in Western Australia.

Based on the extensive conversations with this diverse group of farmers from across the state, grower groups are viewed as being highly relevant and an integral part of Western Australian farming. The farmers interviewed concluded that groups provide a critical link in extension and research for growers; they address local issues and undertake local research; they are driven by farmers; they support development of human capacity; they provide social opportunities and support; and groups generally play an important role in their rural communities.

The respondents included 31 members of grower groups (both males and females) and 4 non-members, from across various regions, industries and age groups. More than 42% of the farmers interviewed were involved in the grains industry and 57% were in mixed farming (grains and livestock). The location of the farmers ranged from Northampton to Esperance. Across the respondents interviewed 25 different grower groups were represented including grower groups that are employing staff; groups engaging the services of farm consultants; groups relying solely on volunteers, and a Recognised Biosecurity Group (RBG) in the pastoral region. Membership fees ranged from \$0 to \$6,000 per annum.

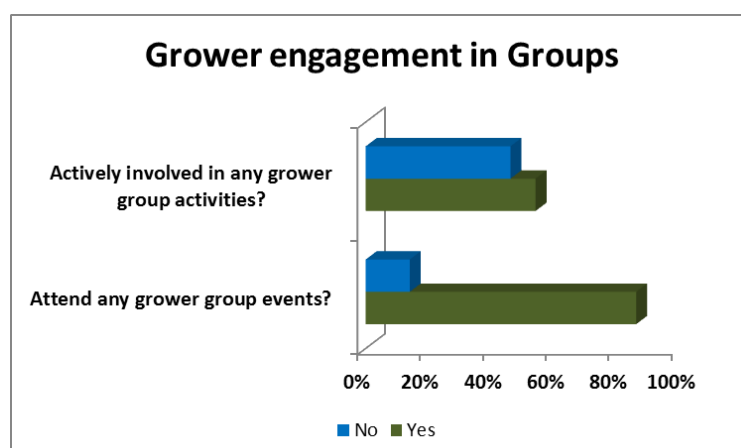
Valuing local research

The main motivating factor for farmers maintaining membership of their local grower group is their need to access locally relevant research. Across the state farmers are faced with a wide range of challenges influenced by soil type and rainfall, so research done locally can help address issues specific to an area. Locally based grower groups enable farmers to have more direction and control over the research agenda and attract researchers to their region to undertake trials or to share their knowledge with farmers at field days/workshops. Grower group members get the chance to view local trials established under conditions that are similar to their own farm, and learn from other farmers addressing these issues through peer-to-peer learning.

“We got our group up and going because the research was not hitting the mark. It was not answering my questions, it was not done on my farm, in my area or in my patch.”⁽¹⁾

Farmers indicated they are members of grower groups for the many networking and fellowship opportunities groups provide and that the general connectivity between growers that groups encourage helps to promote a sense of community.

“Our grower group also has a big focus on maintaining the community. As communities and towns get a lot smaller, grower groups become more important as they help add value to the community and they hold social events that bring everyone together.”⁽¹⁾



Driving industry development

Respondents were unanimous that grower groups add significant value to the WA agricultural industry as they provide a conduit for growers to access information that helps increase productivity to drive farm profitability. Grower groups make an enormous contribution to delivering locally relevant research, development and extension (RD&E) which expanded as the Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA) reduced its presence in the regions.

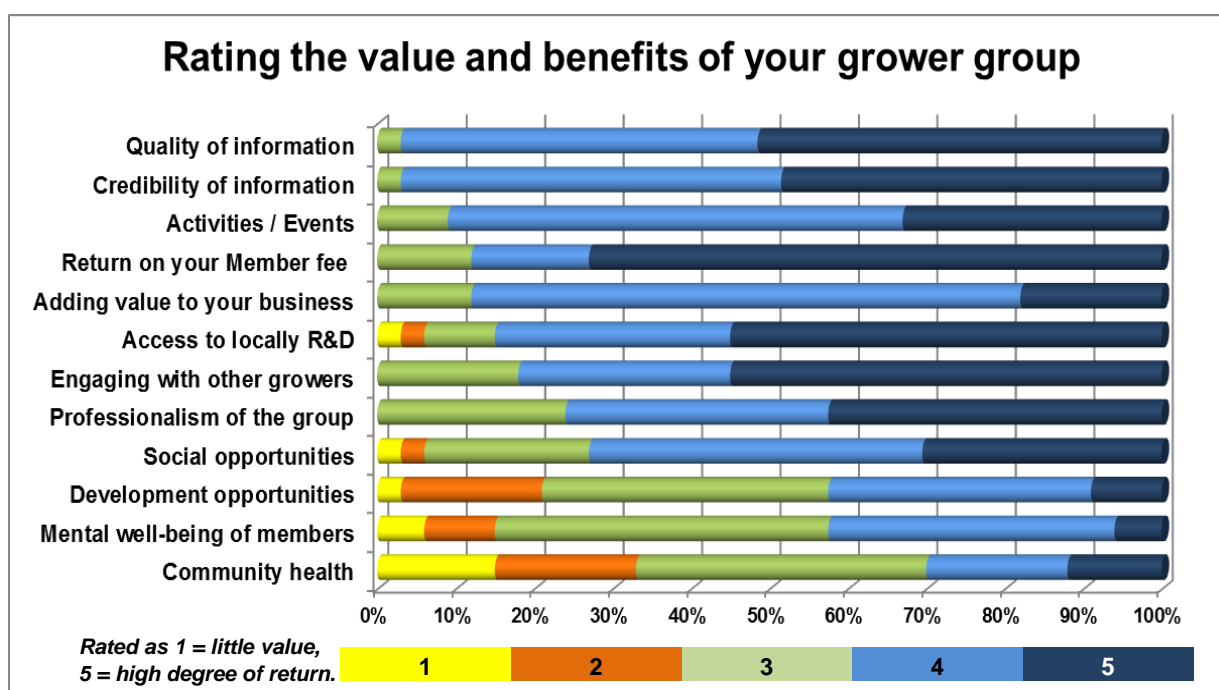
“The biggest benefit to the agricultural industry is the fact that groups drive farm profitability and attract research dollars, and associated industries around the farm benefit. If a farm is profitable there are a lot who will gain from the farm profitability e.g. machinery dealers, consultants. There is a good history of farm groups driving farm profitability and it is also a good community based thing.”⁽¹⁾

Grower groups are valuable to the agricultural industry as they provide a premier network and a great platform for industry and researchers to access farmers. As stated by one respondent, there are other networks but they don’t have the same footprint or impact as grower groups. Groups also enable farmers to access industry experts at group events who wouldn’t normally be as readily accessible if they were operating as an individual.

“Grower groups are the best extension tool of the whole lot of industry. You learn twice as much from growers and researchers coming together and discussing information. That is the number one value of groups and number two is that it puts researchers in touch with the right people to make sure research is relevant in the area.”⁽¹¹⁾

One of the biggest values of grower groups to the industry, according to some respondents, is that they tailor the information disseminated and the research is relevant to their local area and member’s needs. Groups are viewed as independent and trustworthy, they enable farmers to have ownership of the RD&E, they upskill farmers and retain the interest of young farmers in the industry.

“Grower groups keep agriculture alive out there and represent the grass roots level. It gives farmers a ‘go to’ place, it gives them ‘go to’ people. They offer incredible value for the industry and make farmers sharper, and they are getting the younger ones involved who are keen to challenge and question and look at how they can make changes and adjust which leads to effective adoption and stronger farm businesses.”⁽³³⁾



Respondents believed grower groups keep the RD&E organisations honest and ensure that farmer's levy funds hit the ground and they get a return on their investment. Another advantage to industry is that grower groups are very affordable to the average farmer as a means of accessing local and relevant information and research, compared to the private sector. Advocacy is another role that grower groups undertake in which they represent their farmer members and the region and influence local councils, policy makers and importantly, push for specific issues to be addressed.

“Grower groups are huge and they are underutilised. My view is that they should be viewed as the go to people as they attract younger more innovative farmers as a general rule and they are the people industry should be talking to. They are superseding the agri-political groups who attract conservative older people and are the polar opposite. Grower groups should be branching out, not to act politically, but as the go to people who have great ideas and know what is happening on the ground.”⁽⁷⁾

Grower group members highly value the return on investment from their membership fees, members value access to locally relevant research and trial results and the group's ability to engage with growers. There was significant value also placed on the credibility and quality of information groups provide along with the activities and events they host and the professionalism of the group.

Building social capital

The majority (86%) of respondents regularly attended grower group events and 54% were actively involved in a volunteer capacity in their local grower group. Respondents volunteering in grower groups contributed a range of 2 to 60 hours a month each to their group, which equated to an average of 11.7 hours per member per month.

Grower group volunteer contribution

	Executive	Sub-committee	Events	Trials	Other*	Total
Total hours/month	155	15	10	13.5	28	223
	# farmers actively volunteering					19
	Ave hr/mth/volunteer member					11.7

*includes mentoring, grant applications, organising field trips

Of the 74% of respondents who indicated they are involved in other community and industry groups, their average time contributed was 12.9 hours a month. The majority of hours were attributed to broader industry groups (127 hours), followed by sporting clubs (66 hours), community groups (58 hours) and school committees (26 hours) in total for the 25 farmers interviewed.

Farmers' broader volunteer contribution

	Sporting club	Community group	School committee	Industry*	Total
Total hours/month	83	58	13	169	323
	# farmers actively volunteering				25
	Ave hr/mth/volunteer member				12.9

*includes GRDC RCSN and Western Panel, GGA Strategic Advisory Committee, GIWA Wheat Council, Nuffield Association, Stud Merino Breeders Association, AHRI and NVT.

As a result of their involvement with grower groups over time farmers identified a range of skills, professional development and capacity building they had acquired which included public speaking and presentation skills; meeting procedures; project management; corporate governance; event organisation; and development of industry connections and networks. Others skills included people management skills; group processes; leadership; agronomic and trial layout procedures and financial analysis and management.

“There is a lot of professional development from being involved in a group, you are constantly learning from each other (peer-to-peer).”⁽³⁾

Many of the respondents interviewed have progressed to leadership roles in their community or industry as a result of their involvement in groups, and this progression had led to roles including on the Grains Research and Development (GRDC) Regional Cropping Solutions Network Committee; the GRDC Western Panel and the GGA Advisory Committee. Other roles included a CSIRO steering committee; the Sheep’s Back discussion group; Nuffield Scholarship Committee; Sheep Industry Leadership Council; the Rural Woman’s Award and the WA Livestock Research Council (WARLC).

“Being involved in a grower group is one of the stepping stones to developing leadership skills and community development.”⁽⁷⁾

Grower groups are actively involved in their local community and according to respondents they have a positive impact in increasing social capacity through networking opportunities and addressing mental health issues, which in turn contributes to overall community health. Through developing farmer’s knowledge and showcasing the latest research, grower groups also contribute to the profitability of farmers which has a flow-on effect to other businesses in the community.

“Everyone in the town does well as a result of the viability of the farming community: if farmers do well and they advance and innovate, then other businesses in the community prosper from that as well and it keeps them viable, vibrant and profitable.”⁽⁷⁾

When times are tough and farmers are faced with fire, drought, floods or frost grower groups play an invaluable role in supporting their members and providing relevant information to deal with the situation and they also support farmers to overcome mental health issues.

“Following the fires SEPWA funded someone to help redesign and rebuild the garden at the Scaddan School and the group also provided a lot of support to farmers post the fire. They combined with the Men’s Health Initiative and ran some men’s health evenings, and funded Kevin Sheedy to speak to the Gibson footy club and the local high school. SEPWA was the go to group following the fires. They also produced a booklet which contained case studies of farmer’s experiences to help others in the future.”⁽¹⁰⁾

Grower groups often share their resources with their local community: some groups own tree planters, pizza ovens or mobile cool rooms which are readily available for the community to use, and other groups share and subsidise the cost of visiting guest speakers with local schools or community groups. Other examples of the role grower groups’ play in the community include employing staff which boosts the local economy; educating students about agriculture and upskilling them; supporting community events like local shows and annual fox shoots; encouraging the involvement of women in the farming business and providing a community network.

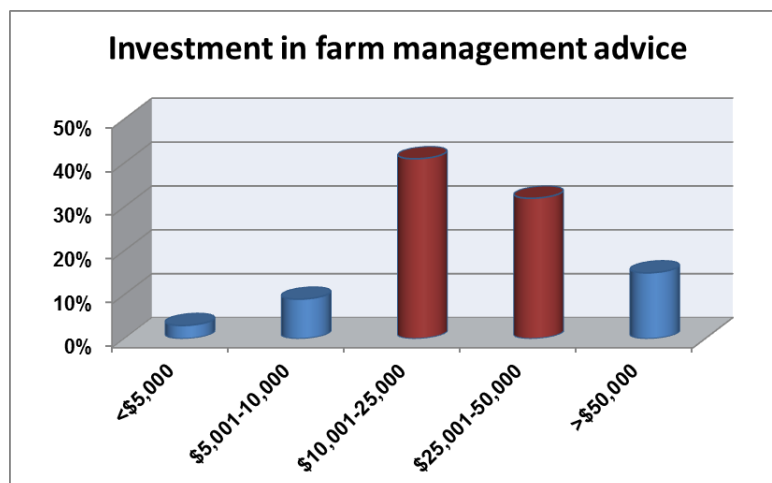
Grower groups also provide fundraising opportunities for local community groups through catering or running a bar at events, and in some regions they manage a community crop with the proceeds enabling them to provide funds back to local community groups and schools.

“The group holds lots of events and for each event they call for volunteers from community groups to help with catering or the bar, and these groups can use it as a fundraising opportunity and may raise from \$500-1,000 on average per event.”⁽⁶⁾

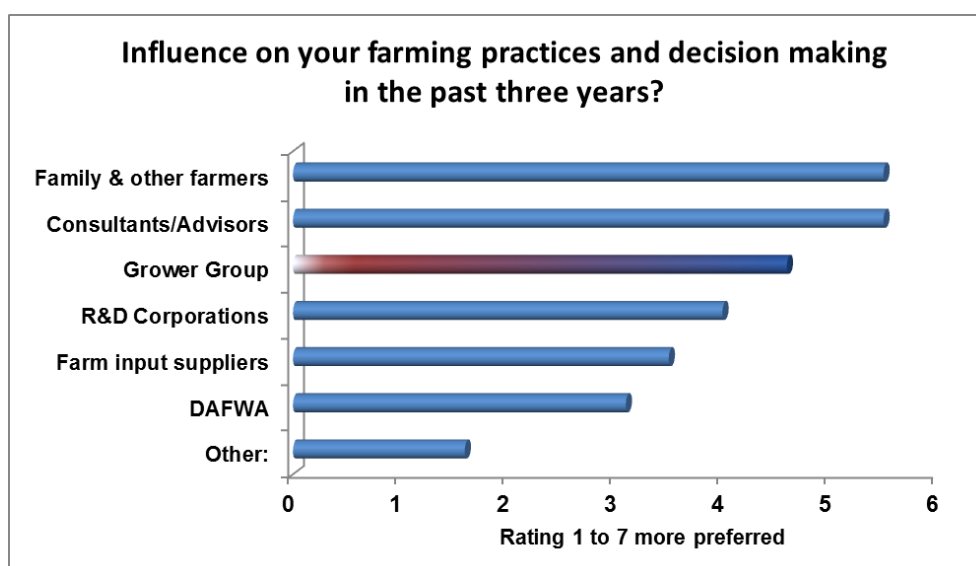
“Our group is self-funded, we don’t have employed staff, we grow a community crop and our money stays within the community. From our community crop funds we purchased 30 iPads for the kids at the local primary school and we also pay the annual insurance (\$7,000) for the swimming pool for the school.”⁽¹²⁾

Investing in information and advice

Of the farm businesses interviewed, the majority of invest more than \$10,000 in farm management advice each year whereas only 12% of respondents spend below that: 41% spend between \$10,000-25,000, 32% spend between \$25,001-50,000 and a further 15% spend more than \$50,000. Farm businesses engaged an average of 3.41 advisors, which ranges between 1-6 farm consultants, agronomists, accountants, marketing advisors etc..



Further evidence of the influence of private advisors was that they, together with other farmers and family, were found to be the most influential source of information on the respondent's farming practices and decision making; both averaged 5.5 in a rating out of 7. Grower groups were rated third with an average of 4.6 (out of 7) and they were followed by R&D corporations, farm input suppliers, then DAFWA.

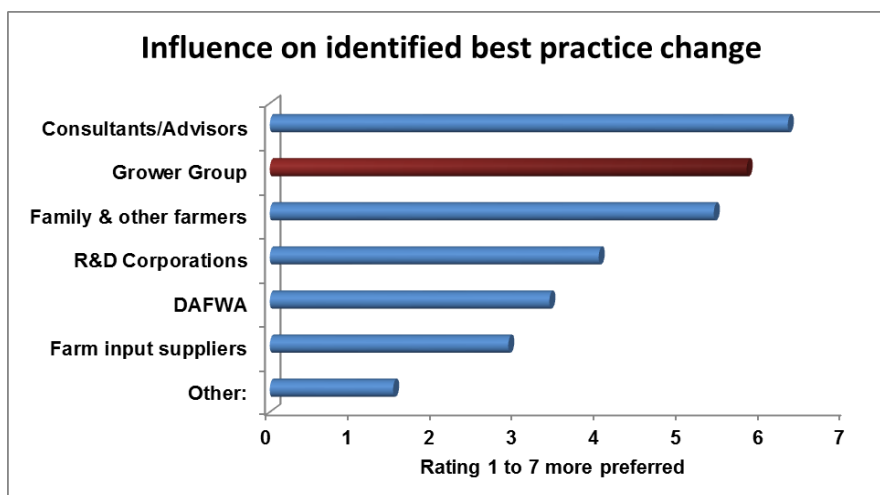


"Fee for service advisors are proliferating to the detriment of grower groups; we are getting people who are using grower group results to feed back to their clients and they are getting paid thousands whereas a grower group membership is in the hundreds. How do we integrate that? It has a big impact on the profit margin of farm businesses. How do we come up with better synergy there, it plagues me. Groups are rapidly competing with people charging a fortune. Grower groups need to be valued more and there needs to be better integration with private consultancy firms, we need to work on that."⁽³⁾

Influencing practice change

Over the past three years grower groups were identified by respondents as having provided a range of information that has influenced farmers to make changes to their farm business or enterprise. The most popular practice change was variety selection of which respondents attributed 74% of the information that influenced their decision was provided by their grower group.

Other practice changes included agronomic investment with a 63% attribution; controlled traffic farming (CTF) at 49%; soil management practices had a 41% attribution; farm business changes were at 45%, and 40% of changes to livestock management was as a result of information provided by grower groups. The most significant influence on practice change decisions was 'fee for service advisors' and 'grower groups' were rated second with 'family and other farmers' rated third.



“The practice change theory is that you need changes with benefits that are immediate with the shortest distance between cost and benefit. You also need credible agents of extension like people on the ground, which grower groups typically are. You also need to make sure the change is relevant to their business. If there is no relevance, credibility or there’s a long pathway between benefit and cost, then typically you will get a low level of adoption. If grower groups can show that something will deliver more profit to farmers they need to be able to say how they can do that and the value of making the change.”⁽⁵⁾

Respondents believe grower groups could be more influential on farmers’ decision making and practice change by using farmers to champion the practice change and promote the message; providing paddock demonstrations; showing the cost benefit analysis; ensuring research is relevant; utilising social media and ensuring grower group staff have the expertise and knowledge required to sell the message. Respondents said it is the grower groups’ responsibility to provide reliable and relevant information and analysis, and it is the farmer’s decision to interpret that to adopt changes.

“The big mover is actually getting growers, peer-to-peer, to transfer learning and using some good examples in organising relevant demonstrations and using champion farmers. Growers are very hesitant unless they see it in practice (touch, see, feel) then they become comfortable with it and adopt changes. One of the biggest practice changes ever is knifepoints and in that farmers liked to see the costs vs profit - demonstrate the feasibility and economics of it. You need to have a value proposition and you need to plan how to sell it, implement it and do a cost analysis of what will happen.”⁽²⁹⁾

Profit margins are powerful and appealing indicators to farmers along with the ability to visualise something in the paddock and on a broader scale. The use of leading farmers who are using successful practices to speak at events or in the field and through the publication of testimonials and case studies is also effective. As one respondent stated, peer-to-peer transfer of learning is

invaluable as change and innovation regularly comes from other growers and grower groups provide the platform for interaction between farmers.

“I don’t see it is their role to make farmers be more innovative but to provide information, you can’t make farmers innovate as they make decisions based on their own wants and needs. It doesn’t mean that they will be a better farmer if they have the information, it is about their desire to want to be or their need to be a better farmer. I am critical of funders wanting to see real numbers in practice change. It is incredibly difficult and expensive to measure and it shouldn’t be used to judge grower groups.”⁽⁷⁾

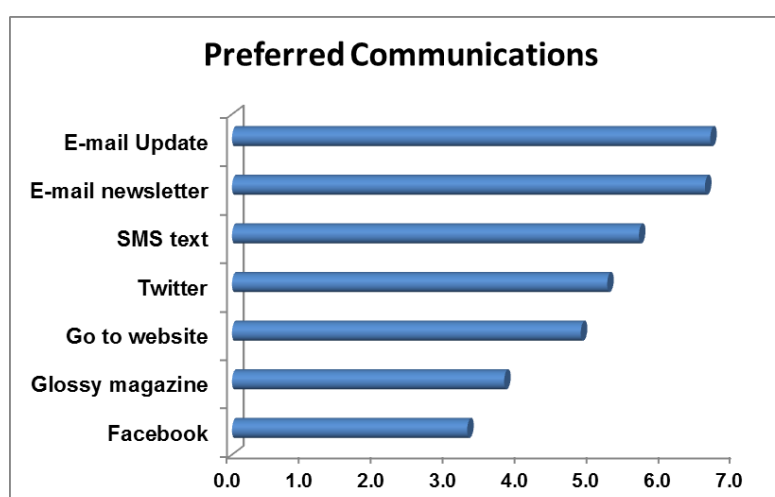
Grower groups are viewed as credible agents of extension as they are on the ground and independent, they filter information that is relevant to their local region and disseminate it through publications and events and through the use of expert speakers. Experts can also help promote the message and entice farmers to attend field days, learn from others at the event, see it in the paddock and return home motivated to make the change. The use of social media platforms was also raised as a medium to broadcast information to influence decision making through the promotion of trials, this could be done via twitter with a link to more information to allow farmers to explore the concept further if they want.

Communicating to influence change

The most preferred method for grower groups to communicate with their members, as indicated by respondents, is a fortnightly email update followed by the quarterly email newsletter and followed by an SMS text and then Twitter.

The least preferred options were the glossy mailed magazine and Facebook. Farmers find email is convenient as they can regularly access their computer/smart phone, it is cost effective, and enables them to readily communicate, triggers thought processes and the information can be easily filed to refer back to later. Texts are also a good reminder to alert farmers about an issue or event. Twitter has been embraced by the younger generation of farmers as it is short and concise (140 characters) and allows the user to select news feeds to follow and provides links to websites for further information. For farmers it is about access, accessibility and finding time to be able to keep up to date with information, so short and concise is best.

“I do like text alerts (bushfires, marketing etc.) but it has to be real time information that is useful. Magazines go in a pile and are shoved to one side. I am not on Twitter and quarterly newsletters are old news by the time I get to them. Websites are particularly useful, you can access them from the paddock. They need to be updated, some aren’t and it taints your decision to go back there next time.”⁽¹⁸⁾



The major R&D corporations have introduced their own 'network groups' to identify local research priorities. Respondents are more familiar with GRDC's Regional Cropping Solutions Network (RCSN) with 66% having had some form of engagement compared to 34% engagement with MLA's WA Livestock Research Council (WALRC) however their understanding of each was poor.

"It complements our grower group although some groups may not feel they are getting the same amount of funding. I am on the committee; the process has been streamlined so from an idea through to a grower group and being in the face of growers as something they could adopt, it has potentially wiped about 2 years compared to what it was previously."⁽¹¹⁾

The RCSN interacts with local grower groups through funding research projects; sponsoring issue specific workshops; holding open meetings with groups, and several grower group representatives (farmers) are also on the RCSN committee. Respondent's views on the role of the RCSN are mixed. Some view it as being complementary to grower groups as it provides an avenue to set priorities and determine where levy funds should be targeted and it also provides a closer link to grower groups than the GRDC Western Panel. Representatives from grower groups on the RCSN committee works in their favour, as it allows for two-way communication and ensures groups are kept up to date.

"When I first started on the RCSN no-one on the R&D Committee knew who they were and I regularly updated them with what is happening, if there are any relevant projects and also get feedback from our group committee to take back to the RCSN to prioritise. It was a negative approach before as it sounded like the RCSN was going to take funding opportunities away. The RCSN is not viewed as competing now but rather they are complementing each other."⁽⁶⁾

Respondents believe there could be more interaction with grower groups, the research is too focused on the short term and the RCSN needs to listen to farmers more. There were significant levels of criticism regarding the RCSN that they are still a work-in-progress and are trying to find their niche and whilst the idea is good, the execution is poor and therefore the model requires further development to interlink with grower groups.

"There are clear issues at GRDC that have prevented interactions with grower groups. Julianne Hill as local coordinator is excellent at trying to maintain relations and utilises the grower group network well but the GRDC hierarchy has made it difficult to build relations with groups. The RCSN is trying to be a grower group and utilise the network they created themselves which stops them from interacting as much with grower groups who have a broad range of farming personalities."⁽³⁾

"GRDC has a funding model where they have preferred groups/tenders; they need to restructure to allow other groups to access funding as our group of volunteers can't access funding. Our local group has reverted to joining with a bigger group to access funds which is fine for broader issues but for the local ones it is up to farmers if they want to do any research e.g. non wetting gravels which is our biggest challenge."⁽³⁴⁾

Concern was also raised that private consultants were able to access farmer levy funds and financially gain from the results, when grower groups could not access these funds. There are some grower groups who haven't been successful in getting funding through the RCSN as their ideas didn't correlate with investment priorities without moving away from their strategic plan and groups run by volunteers are also unable to access funds due to their lack of capacity. There is also the feeling from some respondents that the RCSN is in competition with grower groups and that the GRDC feels threatened by their ongoing success, and some respondents views were quite scathing.

"I haven't had much engagement with RCSN, they do talk with our EO, but I see them as a waste of growers' time and resources and it is a role that could easily and eagerly be done by grower groups."⁽¹⁰⁾

WALRC appears to have had very little impact on grower groups; they have interacted with grower groups through presentations to generate R&D priorities and funding group projects/trials. Some groups have developed more of a relationship with WALRC actively attending events and utilising the group network whereas others hadn't come across WALRC at any livestock events. One respondent was critical of WALRC as a waste of time and that they followed in the footsteps of GRDC (with RCSN) and is in direct conflict with the Sheep Industry Alliance.

“I really hope grower groups will continue. I have more faith in grower groups than GRDC and would rather see groups keep doing the research within the local regions and less done by bigger organisations that do more generalised research (which is not so relevant for our local region).”⁽¹³⁾

Challenges for grower groups

While there is always room for grower groups to improve, some suggestions raised by respondents included extending boundaries to cover some of the outlying regions that don't have an active grower group; reviewing the membership fee structure, and ensuring the baton is passed on to the younger generation through group succession planning.

The main reason the four non-members interviewed are not members of a grower group is because there are no groups in their local area or within their industry, so they use a private advisor to provide them with relevant information. As sole operators many farmers don't have time to go to local field days so they engage other professionals to provide them with research information to maximise their time efficiency. They recognise they also miss out on the social benefits of groups.

“There isn't a group in our area so I am a member of a consultancy group and we get information through their private group. No groups have been active in our area; we fall in a gap being mixed farming in a high rainfall area where most groups are grain focused.”⁽²³⁾

A criticism raised was that some grower groups are too focused on the business and pursuing funding and have detoured from their strategic plans and lost some focus and relevance to members. On the flip side some of the funding criteria and investment priorities outlined by R&D corporations (RDCs) and state government, don't align with that of the grower groups and they feel they are being forced into areas they don't have the capacity to work in, such as focusing on the supply chain. There are also reports of groups being pushed into other areas like biosecurity as DAFWA looks to divest itself of activities and responsibilities.

“Some groups like ASHEEP are getting pushed against their will to go into the biosecurity area (RBGs). As DAFWA divests itself of activities these are taken up by grower groups moving into that role. We are also looking at Ovine Johne's Disease (OJD) with ASHEEP setting up our independent biosecurity control group. Unfortunately as government bodies are removed from those areas groups have to take them up against their will; they are not keen and it is a government function. Biosecurity is quite boring and no one is really interested until something happens like an outbreak which will then motivate people. Grower groups want good powerful messages otherwise people get bored; you won't get people to a field day to talk about starlings and OJD.”⁽¹⁷⁾

Other concerns respondents raised are the quality of research (i.e. rigour and the amount of work they do), the reliance on volunteers, the impact of private advisors and also that grower groups are not inclusive of all farming systems.

“I do think our group was initially too focused on a total cropping system and they did neglect some members who are mixed farmers. They need to be inclusive of all the systems in the area, they struggle with that a bit and that is the reason why I formed a pasture group because we were not well represented. We now have a well-attended field day and

people want to conduct trials, the group now wants to bring us back into the fold as they can see the work we have done and there are some funding opportunities in the sheep industry. If they can attract research dollars they can support staff.⁽⁹⁾

Respondents believe the challenges for grower groups in the future include their survival as farmers become more willing to spend money on private consultants; finding young enthusiastic board members to ensure the succession of groups; attracting new growers onto committees; finding the right person to lead a group who is passionate, and staff with skills and expertise.

Future role for grower groups

Farmers are adamant they want to see grower groups continue in the future but they believe in a changing landscape their future role may be influenced by government and RDC's attitudes, as funding organisations directly impact grower groups by setting the criteria they must meet to access funding. The objectives of staff and management driving the group can also shape a group's direction. The most important approach according to some respondents is that grower groups continue to be driven by growers and have a bottom-up approach to ensure they remain focused on the needs and wants of their local area and members; if they drift away from this they will fail.

"It is very difficult to keep groups going, they are under-funded and under-resourced and volunteers spend way too much time running groups, they need to be reimbursed for their time. Grower groups are still very important and it is about ensuring the relevance of the research; it is through necessity that they have a role, rather than preference. We all have our businesses to run and the only way to get research out here is to do it ourselves.⁽²⁾

Respondents believe there may be consolidation of grower groups in the future as they are competing against each other for scarce resources. One suggestion was for an amalgamation of groups where smaller groups work in and under the bigger groups to disseminate information, feed up local issues and share resources.

There were a number of opportunities outlined by respondents for grower groups including for groups to be more inclusive of livestock and mixed farming systems; increase the use of social media; upskill board members to understand governance and develop greater links between researchers and farmers to further develop and inspire their imagination and scientific intrigue. It was also raised that groups should review their membership fees, articulate their true value and get involved in lobbying around production based issues.

Value adding along the supply chain was identified as another opportunity for grower groups, for farmers to better understand where their grain is going and what the world market wants. It was mentioned that while many groups have forged a relationship with CBH Group, groups could look beyond this and also partner with other grain companies. Some groups feel they are being forced to head down the supply chain path as that is where funding is available.

"The source of funding will change, it is already moving into a supply chain focus which is seeing grower groups forced into projects that aren't necessarily their core business. They hate it but to survive they can't rely on traditional levy funding, in the future they need to think outside the box and find funding from alternative funding sources, groups need to be investment ready.⁽³⁾

With an abundance of trial results available to farmers it was noted that there is huge potential for an online platform/library where all information can be stored centrally, is easily accessible and doesn't get misplaced. This system could also help identify any research gaps and help reduce the duplication of trials. It was thought the process could be facilitated by the GGA who could also play more of an advocacy role and negotiate better strategic partnerships with RDCs for all grower

groups. Respondents believe that GGA should also continue to encourage more collaboration between groups across the industry to drive change.

“I would like to see grower groups work as a whole and negotiate a better position with MLA, GRDC and really figure out what would be of value to their members and deliver an exciting program across the state instead of me being a member of a number of groups to get information, they would be giving that information across the whole of the state and negotiating strategic partnerships as a whole group, renegotiating sponsorship and relationships with industry and claiming their space otherwise they will stay as ‘nice to have’. Grower groups are still their own organisations and are still driving the research agenda but the GGA needs to pull those groups together and supply them on a needs basis and deliver funding outcomes and divide the money up.”⁽⁵⁾

For grower groups to be effective and work on behalf of their farmer members, they require appropriate funding which is becoming increasingly difficult for groups to access. In the future, according to respondents, grower groups should be funded by both the state government and the RDCs through grower levies as they believe there is no greater value for money than a grower group. Funding is seen as a state government responsibility because DAFWA is withdrawing from many areas and grower groups are replacing some of those roles. Grower groups are viewed as a critical part of extension for RDCs: for growers to adopt practice change they require the grower groups (as the conduit) to carry out research and extend the message. Growers would like to get a return on their levy investment through funding to grower groups for on ground local research.

“There needs to be R&D funding for projects and there needs to be credibility given to what farmers can see is on the horizon. Our group is frustrated that the GRDC is 5 years behind us so they have to constantly self-fund what they do. Then the GRDC wakes up and sees farmers doing it off their own back and they then want to put in the research funds. There needs to be funds for innovative thinking, we need to protect the innovators – we need them in industry and don’t want them to move away. State government should be valuing agriculture too, funding should also be through membership and sponsorship – they should be taking responsibility as there is great value in grower groups and that should be valued by growers, partners and sponsors.”⁽³³⁾

It was identified that grower groups could increase membership fees especially given feedback that membership fees are viewed as reasonably cheap compared to the services of a private advisor. Sponsorship is another source but can come with a risk the group is not seen as independent.

“Grower groups need to be careful they don’t paint themselves into a corner and rely on one income source; there are lots of funding streams. Maybe there also needs to be an increase in membership fees if funding is harder to source.”⁽¹⁰⁾

“There is a corporate responsibility for the grain accumulators to sponsor groups because as production increases their profit increases so they have a role to support that.”⁽¹⁸⁾

Overall grower groups are highly valued by their farmer members and they are adamant they want to see them continue as they believe they play a vital role in local research and extension, but it is essential that they are valued and funded by government and the broader industry so they are able to be effective on the ground. Their role is also particularly important in rural communities as grower groups serve an important social role and provide many intangible benefits to rural communities.

GROWING THE VALUE OF GROUPS – A FARMER PERSPECTIVE

The value of grower groups in Western Australia was widely acknowledged by farmers interviewed for this project and they also raised a range of ideas to continuously improve groups into the future.

Extension

- Show cost benefit analysis of farming practices and changes.
- Incorporate peer to peer learning opportunities. Use leading farmers to promote messages.
- Provide visual displays and demonstrations of particular farming practices in the paddock.
- Look for opportunities to package a farming practice; include a case study, how to do it, costs involved, cost savings and profit.
- Use technology and a range of communication strategies that target the older and younger generations and that people can also access remotely.
- Continue to use regular emails to communicate with members and ensure they are short and concise with a link for further information.
- Embrace social media to extend trial results and provide a link for further information.
- Ensure web page is up-to-date and relevant.
- Contribute all trial research data to an online trials platform to ensure information is retained and easily managed and accessed, to reduce duplication and to help identify research gaps.

Grower group operations

- Establish and/or review the strategic plan to determine the grower group's core business.
- Align the group and be driven by the strategic plan to ensure it remains relevant and important to their farmer members and focused on local needs.
- Use the strategic plan to determine what projects or funding grants to pursue.
- Be more inclusive of livestock and mixed farming system operations.
- Negotiate new sponsorship arrangements and relationships with industry.
- Investigate opportunities to provide / hire out resources to farmer members (i.e. own assets like sheep handling gear, drones etc. and casual labour hire).
- Get involved in lobbying agricultural policy around production and local issues.
- Look for opportunities for grower groups to extend their boundaries to include some of the geographical gaps and hold local field days and undertake local research.
- Develop relationships with other grower groups to capitalise on shared opportunities as well as opening up communication lines to share information that is relevant to members.
- Continue to provide social and networking events and support local towns and communities.
- Promote awareness of mental health issues, support farmers through face to face interaction and ensure the appropriate support systems are in place.
- Develop greater links between researchers and farmers to encourage them to work together and experience more at a grass roots level to fire up their imagination and scientific intrigue.

Staff / Management

- Ensure staff have the skills, expertise, knowledge and credibility to extend information.
- Investigate opportunities to utilise retired farmers to be involved in grower group activities, to mentor and upskill staff.
- Develop a succession plan for the management committee and staff.
- Maintain the passion and motivation of the board and ensure they remain focused on core business.
- Investigate making staff salary packages more competitive to attract people with the skills, knowledge and expertise.

Funding

- Review membership fees and reinforce the group's value to members.
- Determine better ways to utilise levy spending and collaborate with other grower groups to maximise outputs.
- Investigate opportunities to reimburse volunteers who are involved in grower groups.
- Lobby state government to fund grower groups. Determine opportunities for DAFWA / state government to provide staffing support and resources to grower groups to provide activities that were originally the role of DAFWA.
- Maintain and improve relations with RDCs and reinforce the value of grower groups and importance of grower levies being used to fund local research.
- Push for longer funding cycles for long term research.
- Pursue corporate sponsorship from a range of grain accumulators.
- Ensure sponsorship does not impact on the independence of the group.
- Look for opportunities for private investors to be involved in grower group activities.
- Think outside the square and seek alternative funding.

Wider industry

- Look for opportunities for better integration and synergies with the private sector (farm advisors, consultants, agronomists).
- Address relationship with GRDC / RCSN and emphasise the value of grower groups.
- Push for more recognition of the research undertaken by grower groups.

Future

- Ensure that grower groups continue to be driven from the bottom up, by farmers.
- Look for opportunities to be more involved in the supply chain and value adding.
- Investigate options for consolidation / amalgamation of grower groups to increase effectiveness and capacity. Larger grower groups could embrace smaller groups and empower them to be involved in their group to ensure they have the capacity to continue to operate and feed up local issues. Smaller grower groups could look to develop relationships with larger grower groups who can provide the resources and support for smaller groups, and be inclusive of them in applying for funding to support local research.

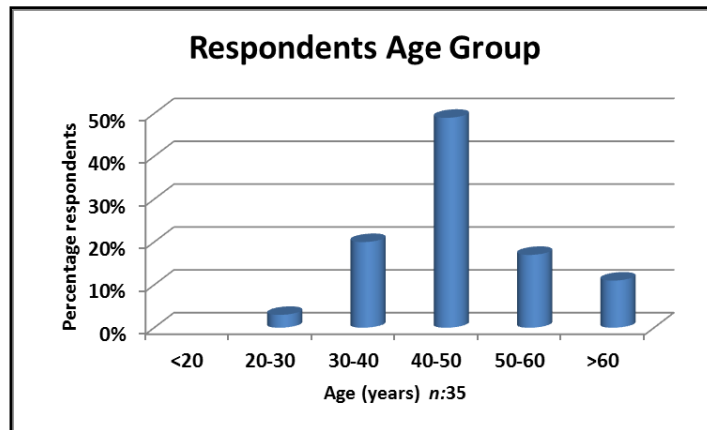
GGA

- Provide leadership / advocacy on industry issues and communicate with industry (including government and funders) on behalf of grower groups.
- Negotiate a better position for grower groups and build strategic partnerships with RDCs.
- Encourage more collaboration and networking amongst grower groups so there is an openness and willingness to be inclusive and share information.
- Continue to provide professional development opportunities for staff and committees.
- Provide governance training for board members to understand due diligence and planning.
- Facilitate an online trial results library to store grower group trial results.
- Investigate production of a grower group publication to include trial results and case studies.
- Investigate ways to support grower groups who are being pressured into other areas (e.g. biosecurity) outside of their core business.
- Investigate communication tools for communicating with members (WhatsApp, WeChat etc.)

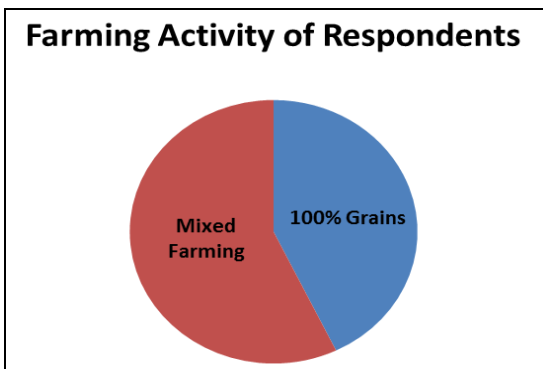
Assessing the Value of Grower Groups - Farmer Interviews Report

Context

During May and June 2017 Agknowledge® was contracted by the Grower Group Alliance (GGA) to interview 35 farmers to assess the economic and social capital value they believe grower groups provide to farmers, the agricultural industry and regional communities in Western Australia. The respondents included grower group members (male and female) and non-members from across a range of industries and age groups. Of these 88% are members of a grower group and the majority are in the 40-50 year age bracket and a quarter are female.



More than 42% of the farmers interviewed are involved in the grains industry and 57% are in mixed farming (grains and livestock).



NOTE: Each respondent is identified by their own number in this report so you can read the responses from the group as a whole, or you can follow the conversation with one particular farmer across the report.

Interviews averaged 40 minutes each and this report captures 24 hours of conversation.

The location of the farmers ranged from Northampton to Esperance.



The respondents included 31 who were grower group members, representing 25 groups located across Western Australia. These groups included grower groups that are employing staff; groups engaging the services of farm consultants or advisors; groups relying solely on volunteers, and a Recognised Biosecurity Group (RBG) in the pastoral region.

Membership fees ranged from \$6000 per annum down to free membership. Those groups run by volunteers were at the lower end of the membership fee scale, whereas grower groups with staff employed set their membership fees in a range from \$80-500, and at the higher end were the groups that utilised a private agronomist; they ranged from \$240-6000. Of the farmers interviewed 14% were members of a state-wide group in addition to their local grower group.

Group Membership identified	Membership fee
North Mallee Farm Improvement Group	\$50
Moora Miling Pasture Improvement Group	\$50
WIFE	\$50
MADFIG	\$100
The Gillamii Centre	\$100
Corrigin Farm Improvement Group	\$110
Northern Agri Group	\$110
ASHEEP	\$110
Yuna Farm Improvement Group	\$150
SEPWA	\$192.50
Southern Dirt	\$200
Broomehill Cropping Group	\$240
Calingiri Local Improvement Group	\$280
WANTFA	\$299
West Midlands	\$300
Stirlings to Coast	\$300
Liebe Group	\$350
Facey Group	\$400
Kellerberrin Demonstration Group	\$500
Holt Rock Group	\$500
MIG	\$550
RBG	\$2,000
Living Farm	\$2,000
Compass Ag Alliance	\$6,000
Lakes Information & Farming Technology	Free
PASE	Not known

What motivates farmers to be a member of a grower group?

The main motivating factor for farmers joining as a member of their local grower group is their need to access locally relevant research. Across the state farmers are faced with a wide range of challenges influenced by soil type and rainfall, so research done locally can help address issues specific to their area. Research trials can be located within close proximity to their farms and an advantage of being a grower group member is that it enables farmers to have trials located on their property. Farmers are able to view the trials at field days where farmers have an opportunity to meet on local farms to view local research, discuss local and relevant issues and learn from each

other through peer to peer learning. The opportunity to see something demonstrated in the field is invaluable for farmers as it allows them to identify the risk and sound the idea out before adopting it.

Locally based grower groups enable farmers to have more direction and control over the research agenda and they attract researchers to the region to undertake trials or to share their knowledge with farmers at field days and workshops. Grower groups also extend the research and help increase farmer's knowledge and keep them up to date with the latest technology and developments.

Farmers also indicated they are members of grower groups for the many networking opportunities groups provide, along with the fellowship. The various events held by grower groups throughout the year usually conclude with social opportunities that enable farmers to catch up over a beer with other farmers to discuss local issues. The general connectivity between growers promotes a sense of community.

Grower groups are also recognised for supporting local communities and encouraging the involvement of women through specific events. Other reasons cited for being a member of a local grower group included for grain marketing purposes to market field peas, for farm business support in the office and, out of necessity, in order to control vermin.

Local research

- We got our group up and going because the research was not hitting the mark. It was not answering my questions, it was not done on my farm, in my area or in my patch. Often you see a lot of good work done in high rainfall zones because grower groups have attracted the researchers to do it. We are facing quite a few challenges out here; we need to do the research so we can adapt our systems and change. Good research is done locally to meet specific challenges and helps us to run our farm businesses.⁽¹⁾
- Access to up to date research results and the trials booklet. There is also a sense of community and they have numerous social events. There is also the potential to be involved in on farm trials that are relevant to our business⁽³⁾
- Grower groups offer a fantastic networking opportunity, they are close to the ground and apply research. As a grain grower you channel your money into GRDC and get some back through grower groups; they have far more direction and control over the research agenda.⁽⁵⁾
- They do local research that is relevant to us, to our rainfall and to our soil. Everything is locally relevant rather than research which is done in other areas with different conditions so we can't correlate the findings as they are not suited to our farm.⁽⁶⁾
- The sharing of information is the most important reason we belong to a group, and also they are able to initiate local research which is locally relevant. We got sick of looking at research from out of the area and wanted our own locally relevant research.⁽⁷⁾
- The information and the network are valuable. I like our local group because it allows local farmers to meet on local farms and it is very hands on and we take along samples for everyone to look at and talk about local issues. I am still involved in WANTFA because I was on the board but I do like the newsletter and attending the conference.⁽⁸⁾
- I like having trials in our local environment; that is the key for me to get localised trials that are specific to what we are looking at with pastures in particular. Grower groups are also good at supporting our local community and drawing funds into the region along with bringing industry experts in as well. The information becomes more accessible first hand and if we didn't have a grower group, we wouldn't have access to that.⁽⁹⁾
- I maintain my group membership to access local and relevant agronomy which is applicable to my farm and to ensure representation within industry.⁽¹⁰⁾

- I need localised research pushing innovation in our local area: we are right at the top end of the WA wheatbelt and it is easy for researchers to forget about us.⁽¹¹⁾
- Localised information helps increase our knowledge and the group keeps us with up to date with the latest technology and developments.⁽¹²⁾
- Location specific R&D.⁽¹³⁾
- I am a member to access their localised and relevant information.⁽¹⁴⁾
- I like to see the research they do and the information distributed. Their information is quite broad as they have a state wide focus. Because it is not in our local area, it doesn't mean the information is not relevant; the more heads that look at it, the better the outcomes.⁽¹⁵⁾
- For the knowledge and they also provide a social outlet. It is about cooperation, the pooling of experience and knowledge in our local area. They do trials of wheat varieties in our local area so the information is localised to us and the trials are in close proximity to our farm.⁽¹⁷⁾
- They were struggling financially, so we support them with a membership and they supply us with information. They are a local and close knit group, we are involved on a volunteer basis. We get value from the group because they provide localised information and research.⁽¹⁹⁾
- Relevant localised trial results along with the different ideas and fellowship. Farmers get the chance to talk about what we do in a more structured environment and talk over a beer, it is a group of people brainstorming and undertaking peer to peer learning.⁽²⁰⁾
- Our local farming conditions are different in this area so a grower group makes the information more relevant to our local farming conditions and it also helps to get researchers into this area to do trials.⁽²²⁾
- For information collected locally and disseminated, and the ability to network regularly.⁽²⁴⁾
- It is a community service; DAFWA is now defunct and hopeless so there are multiple needs met by a grower group for social interaction, research and connectivity between growers.⁽²⁷⁾
- I belong to a group because we are trying to improve our farming practices and we're trying new varieties that grow better. The group provides local and relevant information and is focused on our environment which includes a different soil type, high rainfall, frost resistant, boron tolerant farming conditions.⁽²⁸⁾
- It is about locally driven research and local and relevant results which hit the ground. We need to contribute back to industry and support locally as we are only a small community.⁽²⁹⁾
- Our group does local research that is relevant to us and it enables us to mix with fellow farmers and provides an opportunity to look at things from a different angle. We get to visit the different farming businesses involved.⁽³⁰⁾
- Our group is a much better operation as it is localised and we come up with the trials that we want done in our area. The trials have good rigour and our group is more personalised which allows for more peer to peer learning.⁽³¹⁾
- Our group undertakes local and relevant high priority R&D. We need to keep up with new farming practices and technology and having the opportunity to see it demonstrated in the field is invaluable as it allows us to identify the risk before adoption (making decisions).⁽³³⁾
- It brings farmers together in a region to focus on similar issues and learn from each other. They have field days and allow for interaction which is pretty important as farmers are all there for the same reason.⁽³⁴⁾
- They undertake some good independent trials in our region. The group also does some good extension of the research and I like to support grower initiated trials in our region.⁽³⁵⁾

Networking opportunities / fellowship / community health

- From a woman's perspective I love the field days and get to a couple of different group's women's days, and I have spoken at a lot of events and have built a sensational network; it is a premier network within farming, it is my go to network for broadacre farming.⁽⁵⁾
- You have people who think along the same lines involved in the group and it is interactive and social with the sharing of ideas with others.⁽¹²⁾
- I like to interact with local farmers and get as much knowledge as I can from the local grower group which is focussed on improving farming returns in the local area. I have only been in the area a short time but have a massive contact base within our local grower group and the local knowledge and relevant information is invaluable, you can't get it anywhere else.⁽¹⁶⁾
- Sharing information, fellowship and it gives you access to a wider pool of information.⁽²¹⁾
- Our grower group has a big focus on maintaining the community. As communities and towns get a lot smaller, grower groups become more important as they help add value to the community and hold social events that bring everyone together.⁽¹¹⁾

Grain marketing

- I am a member because my group helps market my field peas, and we also get local information.⁽¹⁴⁾

Control vermin

- I am involved out of necessity to achieve a job that used to be covered by other government groups. You need a strong group to be dealing with pests (wild dogs, pigs) and it is a necessity to control vermin. All the groups are covering what government used to do.⁽²⁾

Farm business support

- I just recently joined WIFE as I wanted business and farming support for myself and other people in the region. It is about being able to share knowledge within our local region as I am keen on fostering the knowledge and sense of community of women and helping them learn about farming. There are a lot of younger women who are coming to the area with no experience of farming and living in rural communities. WIFE is about trying to bring them together and upskill them to the level where they can have the knowledge in conversation. It's like secret farming business; if you come in from outside there is no learning process to pick up the knowledge and we are trying to break that down.⁽²³⁾

Other comments

- We haven't been invited to be part of our local group (it is an invitation only group).⁽¹⁵⁾
- I am a member of WANTFA as I was on the committee and still support the group, otherwise we don't have an active grower group in our shire.⁽³⁰⁾
- I would go to other grower group events if they were active in our area as we are in a bit of a gap so we work in with a group run by the private sector.⁽³¹⁾
- To ensure we stay up to date with farming practices we pay a membership fee to be part of our group and have other people put in trials that are relevant to our area.⁽³²⁾
- To see the industry, community and businesses thrive. It is holistic economic development and about sustainability.⁽³³⁾

Why don't farmers join a grower group?

Four farmers who are not currently members of grower groups were interviewed and the main reason they are not members is that there were no groups in their local region. To access relevant information they use the services of private consultants and agronomists. Their responses reflect that there are geographical gaps in the distribution of grower groups, and in the dairy industry.

Farmers stressed they are time poor (as sole operators) and as they don't have time to go to local field days they engage other professionals to provide them with the information to ensure they are being time effective. They recognised that they miss out on the social aspect of group events. One observation was that grower groups suit the majority rather than minority, so it is essential for groups to have strong facilitators to ensure that everyone has their say.

- There aren't any grower groups in our area. We used to be a part of a CROPS group which was part of Living Farms. We got out of it as it was replicating GRDC work and we didn't see any point in continuing with it. To be a member you need to be seeing some bang for your buck. I am not really fazed about becoming a member if a group is set up. There is a lot of information available from GRDC and I also get it through my private agronomist I employ. I can't see any great benefit for me personally as to why I would join unless there was a massive improvement on what we are already getting. As a levy payer I have insight on how it works and some farmers will say they are not getting value but I know there is a lot of work that is done on a national level that benefits all farmers, not just WA. There is a lot of money and research done that benefits all; not all farmers recognise that and therefore they don't believe they are getting great value from their levies.⁽⁴⁾
- We engage other professionals in the business and use a farm agronomist and adviser to collect information that is relevant locally and present it to us as it becomes available; it comes back to being time effective. We don't have time to go to field days and we do miss out on the social element of it. We are about paying other people to bring the information to us. If we were farming half the area or moving into semi-retirement mode then I would be in the position to have more time and be able to contribute, but I would need to halve my workload. There is an underlying need for me to start putting back into the community and that is one area I would like to look at in future.⁽¹⁸⁾
- There isn't a group in our area. I am a member of a Farmanco consultancy group and we get information through that private group. No groups have been active in our area so the motivation is not there. We fall in a gap as we are mixed farming in a high rainfall area, whereas most groups are more grain focused. We don't really get a full return on the investment of our levies. Our consultancy group filters information that is relevant to us.⁽²³⁾
- We don't have time; we are very time poor in the dairy industry and there are no grower groups in the industry, there are some discussion groups but there aren't any groups active in our area. We are involved in a little private business group. For us to be involved in a group the dairy industry would have to be travelling a lot better.⁽²⁵⁾
- Grower groups suit the majority rather than minority and you tend to get the big personalities and typical group dynamics. Groups need to have good strong facilitators that are not swayed by the big voices. There is a skill gap where facilitators don't have strategies to get everyone's ideas; they need to be able to shut down the aggressive types and bring out the shy ones. Facilitators need to be upskilled or groups need to use more experienced facilitators. They aren't necessarily healthy groups, as some farmers drive the agenda. We are out of farming now but did put our energy into getting involved in an industry group. We did use an agronomist as the local group was more focused on the cropping side.⁽²⁶⁾

What do farmers contribute to their grower group?

The farmers interviewed were asked to identify their level of involvement in their grower group, with an estimate of the hours per month and in what capacity they contribute voluntarily to their group.

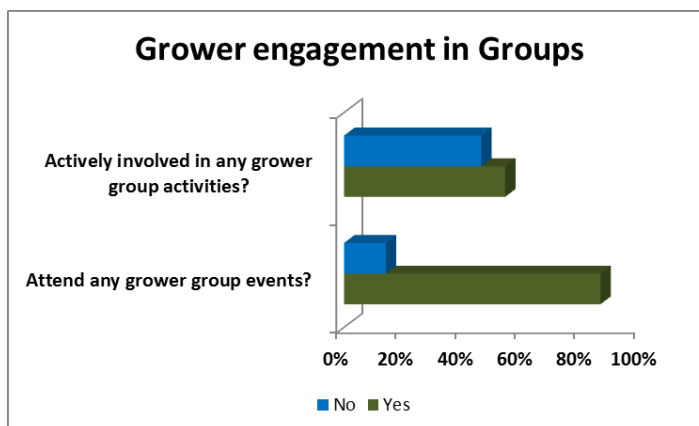
Of the farmers interviewed 86% said they attended grower group events and 61% were actively involved in a volunteer capacity with their group.

Their roles ranged from chair, sub-committee, event organising committee, trials committee, assisting with grant applications, mentoring, coordinating study tours, and state committees.

The 19 farmers who indicated they are directly involved in a volunteer capacity

with their grower groups estimated they collectively contribute an overall total of 223 hours per month of their time to their groups, which averages to 11.7 hours per month per active member.

The voluntary hours per month per active member ranged from 2 hours to 60 hours, which included three farmers in leadership roles who were contributing many more hours compared to the others.



Grower group volunteer contribution

	Executive	Sub-committee	Events	Trials	Other*	Total
Total hours/month	155	15	10	13.5	28	223
# farmers actively volunteering						19
Ave hr/mth/volunteer member						11.7

*includes mentoring, grant applications, organising field trips

What do farmers contribute voluntarily to their community?

To build an understanding of how a farmer's contribution to their grower group fits in with other commitments they have outside of running their business, the farmers interviewed were asked to estimate the volunteer hours they contribute to their community and industry.

The 25 farmers who indicated they volunteer to other community or industry bodies estimated they contribute an overall total of 323 hours per month of their collective time to other groups, which averages to 12.9 hours per month per volunteer.

The majority of hours for the total group of 25 farmers were attributed to industry groups (127 hours), followed by sporting clubs (66 hours), community groups (58 hours) and school committees (26 hours). The industry groups included GRDC RCSN and Western Panel, GGA Strategic Advisory Committee, GIWA Wheat Council, Nuffield Association, Stud Merino Breeders Association, AHRI and NVT. The community groups ranged across local fire brigades, ambulance volunteers, agricultural show societies, community recreation associations, development groups and community care. Sporting clubs included tennis, football, golf and the turf club.

Farmers' broader volunteer contribution

	Sporting club	Community group	School committee	Industry*	Total
Total hours/month	83	58	13	169	323
# farmers actively volunteering					25
Ave hr/mth/volunteer member					12.9

*includes GRDC RCSN and Western Panel, GGA Strategic Advisory Committee, GIWA Wheat Council, Nuffield Association, Stud Merino Breeders Association, AHRI and NVT.

What skills or capacity building do farmers benefit from involvement in grower groups?

The farmers interviewed identified that being involved in a grower group can build an individual's skills, knowledge and confidence which they may then transfer into other industry and community groups. The benefits of learning and interacting with other farmers and agriculturalists helped farmers develop new skills and challenge their farming systems to continuously improve.

The range of professional development opportunities members identified from their grower group involvement included public speaking and presentation skills; meeting procedures; project management; corporate governance; event organisation skills and developing industry connections and networks. Others skills developed included people management; group processes; leadership; agronomic and trial layout procedures; financial analysis and management; using technology; negotiating; mentorship; community development; negotiating; strategy; capacity to pitch to sponsors; strategic planning, and understanding government departments and industry bodies.

- There is a lot of professional development you get from being involved in a group, you are constantly learning from each other (peer to peer).⁽³⁾
- Being involved in a grower group is one of the stepping stones to developing leadership skills and community development.⁽⁷⁾
- I now have an ability to communicate better and have developed a sense of forward thinking and thinking outside the square.⁽¹⁶⁾
- You are always learning something from participating in a grower group.⁽³⁵⁾
- Use of technology.^{(1) (3)}
 - I have become more aware of technology i.e. use of Dropbox.⁽¹⁾
- Project management.^{(1) (9) (16)}
 - It has helped me understand how to apply for and acquit funding grants, write reports, manage projects and analyse the financials.⁽¹⁾
- Negotiating skills.⁽²⁾
- Public speaking and presentation skills.^{(2) (6) (8) (16) (19) (28) (33)}
- Communication skills.⁽⁹⁾
- Meeting procedures.^{(2) (8) (11) (12) (19) (27) (28)}
- Industry connections and networks.^{(1) (2) (3) (6) (8) (9) (12) (23) (32)}
 - It helps put you in constant conversations with adaptive innovative people which is invaluable. Establishing a network allows for a good source of information. It is a very good peer group and is very motivating.⁽¹⁾
 - Broaden agricultural network.⁽²³⁾
- Committee skills in management, organisation.⁽³⁾
 - I have learnt how to be a part of a grower group committee.⁽³⁾
- Group process.⁽²⁴⁾
- Corporate Governance.^{(3) (8) (11) (12) (16)}
 - I did a corporate governance course last year which was run by the GGA, it was the best course I have been to in the last 15 years.⁽¹¹⁾
- Financial management and analysis.^{(1) (3) (28) (33)}
- Teamwork.^{(5) (8) (9) (28) (33)}

- You need soft leadership skills as you have to manage and communicate with different people.⁽⁵⁾
- Managing staff.⁽⁸⁾
- Relationship building and management.⁽⁹⁾
- Capacity to pitch to sponsors.⁽⁵⁾
 - What you always need is the capacity to be able to successfully pitch to sponsors and to package up the value you can deliver to them.⁽⁵⁾
- Leadership skills.^{(7) (10) (33)}
- Mentorship skills.⁽³³⁾
- Event organisation.^{(7) (16) (19) (28) (33)}
- Community development skills.⁽⁷⁾
- Farm office management procedures and skills.⁽²³⁾
- Negotiating skills.⁽⁵⁾
- Agronomic skills.^{(8) (24) (29)}
- Understanding intricacies of government departments, industry and development bodies.⁽¹⁰⁾
- Trials procedures and layout.^{(16) (30)}
- Strategy and planning skills.^{(24) (8)}

The 29% of grower group members who couldn't identify skills or capacity building that they could attribute to their involvement with groups felt their previous education and work in the agricultural industry had already provided their professional development.

- None.^{(13) (14) (15) (17) (18) (21) (22) (31) (34)}
 - None really, though if I hadn't gone to university and been exposed to a lot of professional development opportunities then it may have been different.⁽¹³⁾
 - No, not really as I had already been professionally involved in the industry.^{(21) (34)}
 - Not so much for me as I was already skilled before I got involved in grower groups.⁽²⁷⁾
 - Grower groups have given me more confidence. I already had a lot of skills before from my agribusiness careers and have shared a lot of my skills with others in the group. Grower groups have helped solidify my capacity and skill set. I have certainly learnt a lot of agronomic skills that have played an integral role in my farm career.⁽²⁹⁾
- None as not a member.^{(4) (14)}
 - From my involvement with WA Farmers I have developed skills in the area of grains logistics, supply network understanding, overall governance, government policy in agriculture (state and federally), transport and regulations etc..⁽⁴⁾

What leadership roles do farmers progress to from their involvement in grower groups?

Many of the respondents have been in leadership roles in their industry or community and nearly half (48%) suggested this was directly as a result of their involvement in grower groups.

Some of the industry leadership roles included the GRDC Regional Cropping Solutions Network Committee; the GRDC Western Panel; the GGA Advisory Committee; a CSIRO steering committee; the Sheep's Back Discussion Group; Nuffield Scholarship Committee; a Cabinet Select Committee; the Sheep Industry Leadership Council; the Rural Women's Award and MLA's WALRC.

A further 16% of respondents had progressed to leadership roles that they said were not directly related to their involvement with grower groups, although it had helped them, while 29% said they had not taken on any leadership roles that could be attributed to an association with grower groups and 6% said that they were still heavily involved in grower group roles.

- I wouldn't have put my hand up to be involved in the community if it wasn't for my grower group involvement; it has given me the confidence to step up and keep moving forward.⁽¹⁶⁾
- My involvement in industry groups has led me back to the grower group; I developed skills through other means but have been able to use these when I came back to a grower group.⁽⁹⁾
- I did a Nuffield Scholarship and realised on my return I had no group to share it with; I had spoken to other groups, so we set about creating a local group and getting people together. Essentially it came from the skills and experience I got from being involved with other groups and leadership roles.⁽⁷⁾
- I have had numerous board positions and my grower group involvement has had some bearing on my leadership roles. I certainly use my involvement to develop rapport with people as it is more relatable and credible and farmers trust you more as a result. My involvement has helped build my leadership skills undoubtedly and I have gone on to use them in lots of different roles.⁽⁵⁾
- CSIRO steering committee on agronomy in a low rainfall environment.⁽¹⁾
- GGA Committee.^{(1) (3)}
- Sheep's Back Discussion Group funded through DAFWA, enabled farmers to get together to discuss benchmarking etc..⁽¹⁾
- Nuffield State Chair. Cabinet select committees. Sheep Industry Leadership Council (Sheep Alliance).⁽²⁾
- Sheep CRC Board.⁽⁷⁾
- WALRC engages with grower groups; members must come from a grower group network.⁽³⁾
- WA Regional Development Trust, National Landcare Advisory Committee, Landcorp, Agricultural Produce Commission. Rural Women's Award – WA and National level.⁽⁵⁾
- RCSN committee.^{(6) (11) (22)}
- GRDC Soils Constraints West Committee.⁽²²⁾
- GRDC Western Panel.^{(29) (30) (33)}
- Ambulance Sub Centre.⁽⁸⁾
- School Board.^{(8) (21)}
- Chair of local recreation centre.⁽¹⁶⁾
- Regional Repopulation Committee.^{(24) (33)}
- Northern Ag Catchment Council Board. Sustainable Grazing of Saline Land Board. Liebe Group mentoring role.⁽³³⁾

Other comments

- None.^{(12) (13) (14) (15) (19) (23) (27) (28) (34)}
 - I am still very focused on grower groups at the moment.⁽²⁷⁾
- No, not directly related to my involvement with grower groups.^{(6) (17) (20) (31) (35)}
 - My roles are not directly related to my involvement in grower groups, but it has certainly helped.⁽⁶⁾

What contribution and impact do grower groups have on their community?

Grower groups are actively involved and have a positive impact on their local communities according to respondents through providing networking opportunities which increase the social capacity of the community and helps support good mental health, which in turn contributes to overall community health. With grower groups providing local and relevant research for their members it was also raised that groups help attract investment to increase the profitability of farmers which has a flow on effect in the community with farmers supporting local businesses.

With their role in research and extension grower groups facilitate events at a local level that enable peer to peer learning; provide professional development and capacity building opportunities, and attract professional people to the region to advance local knowledge. These events also help address the social aspect through networking opportunities. A lot of grower groups also hold specific social events like dinners, Christmas parties and family events in their local area to bring the community together. They are also actively encouraging women in farming businesses to be involved and upskilling them through specific ladies day events and through farm office groups.

Respondents provided a number of practical examples of grower groups helping farmers following tough periods of flood, drought, frost or fire. Groups assist their members through social events, mental health workshops and provide support through workshops where they provide information on how to rehabilitate the land and/or deal with the issue and the avenues for assistance. The respondents believe this support is invaluable for affected farmers as it ensures they don't feel isolated in dealing with such an issue and it brings them together to support each other.

Other examples of the roles grower groups play in the community include supporting community events like the local show and annual fox shoots; in some cases they are an employer of staff which brings extra people and families to local towns and they support local businesses; and they provide a community network. A great example in progress is the Liebe Group which is currently developing a new building which will create a hub to bring the community together. This resource will have a workshop area and commercial kitchen for the community to use and will provide a base for visiting professionals and businesses to the region.

Grower groups also provide fundraising opportunities for local community groups through catering or running the bar at their events; one respondent said this can raise between \$500-1000 for a group. Some grower groups have their own community crop with the proceeds enabling them to provide funds back to local community groups and schools. The Yuna Farm Improvement Group is an example, raising \$120,000 towards a new community centre and purchasing iPads for the school.

Grower groups also share their resources with their local community; some groups have tree planters, pizza ovens or mobile cool rooms which are readily available for the community to use while other groups may share and subsidise the cost of visiting guest speakers with local schools or community groups.

Educating students about agriculture is another role that some groups are actively involved in through intern projects with Morawa Ag College; sponsoring high school students to attend the Dowerin Field Days to take part in an agricultural focused quiz; and holding science days for primary and high school students that focus on sheep and soil, as examples.

Some respondents are not located near the town their group is based in and the group doesn't have an impact in their outer lying communities. There are also some smaller groups that are focused on in-paddock discussions and peer to peer learning and they aren't involved in their local communities.

Networking opportunities / social element / mental health

- Our group provides networking opportunities amongst farmers and industry people. We hold updates, field days, study tours etc.. All our events have a huge social element with barbeques, breakfasts and networking time which supports mental and community health.⁽¹⁾
- We have baiting days and committee meetings which bring landholders together and families are also involved sometimes. We don't necessarily hold community events.⁽²⁾
- The group organises a lot of events and the women's field day is huge so there is lots of social support.⁽⁵⁾
- Our group holds events post seeding and pre-harvest to allow the majority of people to attend and get together.⁽⁶⁾
- They give people somewhere to discuss farming issues outside of their local sporting groups etc. and offer a more formal event and bring relevant research to the area.⁽⁷⁾
- The group is a good social outlet for farmers when things are not going so well; we meet on a farm and discuss very local issues and we always finish with a beer and snag so it helps everyone mentally in tough times.⁽⁸⁾
- We run a lot of community events, we host spray days and run trials on farms in the region.⁽⁹⁾
- Everything our group does is based around family involvement. We put on one big social function every year – a ball or dinner - and we put on a fishing competition in a drought year and turned it into a great social outlet.⁽¹¹⁾
- We run some great events like the 'canola seeding Olympics' which is funded by COGGO where we run 4 bars at 3 depths seeding canola. We also have a big Christmas party each year where we put on dinner and drinks, plus we have two field days a year where we end up at the community centre for a social gathering afterwards.⁽¹²⁾
- Our group is based around our small community and it provides another social outlet which is different to other community groups. Once a year we put on a black tie 'Winter Woolshed Party' where we get a speaker and the event brings the farming community together.⁽²⁰⁾
- Our group fosters friendships and provides opportunities for farmers to swap information.⁽²¹⁾
- Our group events are very community orientated and it is about looking after community health and keeping the community together.⁽²⁷⁾

Support community events

- Our group holds a fair in town to promote local produce and support the Cranbrook Show.⁽¹⁹⁾
- We sponsor our local annual fox shoot and sponsor prizes at the local Ag Show.⁽²⁰⁾

Support in tough times

- Last year our region was hit by frost and our group coordinated a number of mental health community functions. They also looked at how to deal with a frost event and turn it around as an advantage on-farm through cutting hay and doing research. Frost is an area that our group specialises in and they play a large role in the community at these times. If other natural disasters were to happen our group would be able to respond.⁽³⁾
- The group provides a community network and provides social support. In the drought years it was responsible for organising and sponsoring mental health days.⁽⁹⁾
- Following the fires, SEPWA funded someone to help rebuild and redesign the garden at the Scaddan School and the group also provided a lot of support to farmers post the fire. They also combined with the Men's Health Initiative to run men's health evenings and funded Kevin Sheedy to speak to the Gibson footy club and the local high school. SEPWA was the go

to group following the fires. They also produced a booklet which contained case studies of farmer's experiences to help others in the future.⁽¹⁰⁾

- Following the fires our group was very involved in the aftermath; they organised meetings and got information out to farmers to help with the rehabilitation, organised social events so the communities didn't feel isolated and they organised mental health workshops.⁽¹⁶⁾
- Following the floods our group worked with RAIN to lend a hand with the flooding issues.⁽¹⁶⁾
- In the drought years the group held functions to bring everyone together to socialise.⁽²⁹⁾

Community network

- The WMG offers a major community network in the area; the group is part of the furniture. When we put in the proposal for the Community Resource Centre in Dandaragan the WMG was the cornerstone that enabled us to demonstrate community need; without it the proposal wouldn't have worked and now they are in the back office of the CRC. The group has created community infrastructure at a time that a lot of other businesses and organisations have moved to other towns.⁽⁵⁾

An employer

- We employ 6 doggers and a CEO for our group.⁽²⁾
- We provide casual jobs (i.e. seeding counts etc.) to young people in the community and also employ other grower group staff.⁽⁶⁾
- We employ 5 people in the community and we have brought the expertise that we didn't have to town.⁽⁷⁾
- Our group is also an employer in our community.^{(9) (16) (24)}
- They employ two staff members.⁽¹⁹⁾
- Our group has only just started again and we have just employed a part time person to get it up and running.⁽²²⁾
- We employ 7 staff in the area.⁽²⁷⁾
- They employ local people which has brought an extra 5 families to town who support the local businesses.⁽³¹⁾
- While we are a closed group, we do employ a part time person.⁽³²⁾
- The group employs 4 full time and 2 part time people.⁽³³⁾
- The group supports local businesses and employs farm consultants.⁽³⁴⁾

Involvement of women

- The involvement of women in the agricultural community is important; each year we have a luncheon which is very professional and engaging with thought provoking speakers. It is an important event on the calendar for our group.⁽³⁾
- In the past the group has run 'women in ag' days; they are supportive of getting women more involved locally.⁽⁹⁾
- The group was a male dominated farming group but we have got the women involved now and they have their own sub-committee social group which meets three times a year.⁽¹¹⁾
- They are not just aimed at the male side of farming, it has ladies days as well to get females involved which is very important.⁽¹⁶⁾
- Upskilling women and getting them involved; it is about providing support for women in the agricultural community, supporting succession development and increasing knowledge.⁽²³⁾

Increasing profitability through local research

- Our group is the leading grower group working in frost research in WA and is providing a significant contribution to that research, not just in the community but nationally. It is having an enormous impact in the community and helping farmers' bottom line.⁽³⁾
- We have lots of research going on in the region now that wasn't here 7 years ago and the research keeps accelerating. There are lots more farm trials because we have a process in place locally to organise it and gain from it, which is the biggest value of our group.⁽⁷⁾

Fundraising opportunities for community groups

- The group holds lots of events and for each event they call for volunteers from community groups to help with catering and manning the bar and they can use it as a fundraising opportunity; they may raise from \$500-1000 on average per event.⁽⁶⁾
- Our group also allows local community groups to benefit (through fundraising) from catering at field days, Ladies Day or other events.⁽¹⁰⁾
- They allow local P&Cs to cater at events and use it as a fundraising opportunity.⁽¹⁷⁾
- We get local groups to cater at our events (AGM and social events) which provides fundraising opportunities for community groups.⁽²⁰⁾
- We provide fundraising opportunities for sports clubs and the P&C to cater at events.⁽²⁴⁾
- The group provides fundraising opportunities for groups through catering at events.⁽²⁹⁾
- We provide fundraising opportunities at any of our events and allow the school etc. to do the catering and run the bar or get involved in setting up. We support locals first.⁽³³⁾

Provider of funds to local community groups

- We put in a community crop every year and feed money back through the P&F of the three schools in the region and also the local sporting clubs.⁽¹¹⁾
- Our group is self-funded, we grow a community crop and have no employed staff and our money stays within the community. From our community crop funds we purchased 30 iPads for the kids at Yuna Primary School and we also pay the annual insurance (\$7000) for the swimming pool for the school.⁽¹²⁾

Share resources with community

- Our group has a tree planter which is available for people to use in the community.⁽⁹⁾
- When organising speakers, our group shares them around with the outlying schools and also funds them to speak. The kids at these schools are children of our farmer members.⁽¹⁰⁾
- From our community crop funds we have purchased a number of assets which have grown and these are available for community members to use (pizza oven, cool room etc.).⁽¹²⁾
- We have just built a new community centre in Yuna which cost \$1m. Our group was responsible for getting that off the ground and put up \$120,000 which was matched by the Shire. It has now given us a building in town with the latest technology, a crèche, kitchen, meeting rooms etc. which has become the main hub of the community.⁽¹²⁾

Attracting local investment

- The WMG has developed a horticulture project (there is major potential for horticulture in the region) and they are supporting businesses to grow and develop in the area. That is important as when we developed our enterprise it was lonely, difficult and challenging to get off the ground. They are helping businesses and attracting investment into the community.⁽⁵⁾

Educating students

- We do an intern project with Morawa Agricultural College where students come and help with seed counts. It is skilling students in the industry and exposing them to farmers.⁽⁶⁾
- We sponsor the local high school when they go to Dowerin Field Days where they do a quiz which takes them around the day and they answer questions and get a prize (which we sponsor). It is all about teaching them about agriculture.⁽²⁰⁾
- Our group is involved in two science days at the high school which focus on soils and also hold a sheep day to help educate kids (primary and high school) and promote agriculture.⁽²⁴⁾

Contribute to community health

- Everyone in the town does well as a result of the viability of the farming community; if farmers do well and they advance and innovate, other businesses in the community prosper as well and it keeps them viable, vibrant and profitable. Even our Shire has recognised that and has put money and a lot of effort into groups as they recognise the value they bring.⁽⁷⁾
- We will soon have an office which will be shared with other businesses in the community.⁽²⁴⁾
- The group facilitates events at a local level and provides office workshops, business management and provides opportunities for professional people to come into the area.⁽²⁴⁾
- While we are a small group, we try to support the local community as much as we can through hiring the venue and supporting local businesses.⁽²⁸⁾
- Our group focuses on the industry and economic growth for the region.⁽³³⁾
- The group provides capacity building opportunities and advancement of people's knowledge through presentations and bringing expert speakers and presenters into the community.⁽³³⁾
- One of the value drivers for our new building is to create a hub to bring the community together for creative thinking. We will have a big workshop area that will cater for 50 people and a commercial kitchen. We are also co-locating Rabobank and we will have a board room that will be hired out for other agribusinesses who want to come and use the premises. It is about bringing experts to town more regularly and providing services to the community rather than them having to go to Perth.⁽³⁴⁾

Other

- Our group plays a very important social role and RD&E role. It plays a proactive role in the community promoting diversity and upskilling the community.⁽³⁾
- It's hard to quantify, but people would miss grower groups if they weren't there.⁽⁷⁾
- Our group is totally made up of volunteers and it is one of the group's good features that we don't employ staff therefore we don't do any non-relevant stuff. Groups can go out and chase money but there is no point if they put themselves under pressure. We take a different approach to other groups and that adds a new dynamic to what we are doing. We spend 75% of our time focussed on local research and 25% on the community.⁽¹¹⁾
- We are very much the glue that pulls everyone together in the community and we are the go to place for funding in the community (proceeds from community crop). It does ensure that everyone stays involved in the group because we are more a community group than just a grower group and we make sure that the money is well spent. We probably spend about 40% of our time on research and 60% on the community.⁽¹²⁾
- The group tries to have one event a year which involves the family of the volunteers who help run the group.⁽¹⁶⁾
- We sponsor any members who do a Nuffield or Rabobank course as well.⁽²⁰⁾

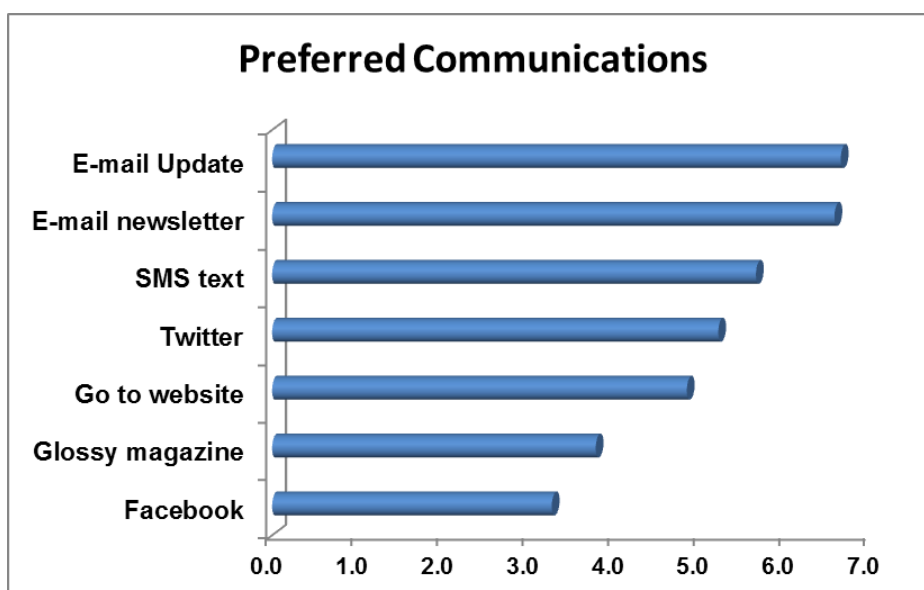
- Our group was very proactive when GM canola came, we had 7 out of the 17 original trial growers and we worked hard to get it.⁽²⁷⁾
- Our group has set up a commercial arm and got involved in Irwin Valley Flour.⁽²⁹⁾
- We are not located near the town that our group is based (100km away) and therefore we are not strong members as we don't get to go to a lot of meetings. Our group is strong in that town, but outside of that is doesn't do a lot.⁽³⁵⁾

Not sure / None

- WA Farmers does get involved in their zones and supports the community following bushfires and also do fundraising for those things. They also give out a lot of scholarships to universities (Muresk and Murdoch) which are targeted at students from the country. They are not directly involved with the community as much.⁽⁴⁾
- WANTFA doesn't have any impact on our community.^{(8) (15)}
- My group doesn't do a lot in my community as we are in an area where there is a bit of a gap. Otherwise in the direct area they have brought the farming community together, support the local economy and employ staff.⁽¹³⁾
- Not really sure.⁽¹⁴⁾
- Our group is based more around in-paddock discussions and doesn't get involved directly in the community.⁽²¹⁾
- Our group is small and specific to farming, they don't do anything for the community.⁽³⁰⁾
- Our group is more focused on farming/business than the community.^{(32) (34)}

How do members value communication received from their grower group?

The most valued method of communication from grower groups as determined by members was a fortnightly email update, which was followed by a quarterly email newsletter and then SMS text and Twitter. The least preferred options were a glossy mailed magazine and Facebook.



(Note the higher the number the more valued the information source.)

Farmers find that email is convenient as they are regularly accessing their computer, or using their smart phone in the paddock. They appreciate that emails are cost effective, enable groups to readily communicate, they trigger member's thoughts and information can be filed to refer back to later.

It was mentioned that emails need to be informative, up to date and relevant, and be short and sharp with links to further information should they require it.

Texts are considered to be a good reminder tool to alert farmers about a particular issue, grain prices, or an event, but it was mentioned that farmers wouldn't like to see them become regular like emails and one respondent said they found that texts are too invasive.

When it comes to social media there is a distinct difference between the older and younger generation of farmers. The younger farmers have embraced Twitter in particular as it is short and concise, allows the user to select news feeds to follow and provides links to websites for information.

While a lot of people use Facebook it was found to serve more of a personal purpose and is not used much for business. Websites can be useful to source information, but some sites have limited relevance as they are not regularly updated. It was also raised by one respondent that unreliable internet access restricts the availability of electronic information for farmers. Farmers are concerned about access, accessibility and the time to be able to keep up to date with information.

Other communication methods used by the respondents included podcasts which are good for delivering content, WhatsApp is used by a couple of grower groups to communicate and share photos, along with WeChat.

Email

- I like to get email updates as I like instant access to information as it comes in. I don't want to go and look for it; an email triggers my thoughts. I also use Facebook.⁽³⁾
- Email is convenient as I spend a lot of time on the computer in my office, on the tractor and sprayer and it is the easiest way to communicate.⁽⁴⁾
- It's all about access and accessibility and timewise what you can do on the go. Fortnightly email is good and easy and you can refer back to for reference.⁽²⁹⁾
- I don't like regular emails, I prefer quarterly updates that are short and sharp with links to information to get content and knowledge. I like a link to what I need to get to in an article, podcast etc. Getting knowledge to farmers is hard as they are busy.⁽⁵⁾
- I have a much better chance of reading email. It is quick and immediate, to the point and I can follow up with more info if I like. I like to read emails and I don't have time to get on the web, I'm starting to follow Twitter which helps. I am not a Facebook fan.⁽¹⁶⁾
- It is expensive to do glossy mail outs, emails are more cost effective as are Facebook and Twitter. I like information as long as it is informative. I don't require redundant updates, frequent emails are good.⁽¹⁷⁾
- I don't do social media or glossy magazines. You get lots of information every week and I never read them. I do open my email every day and we all look at our phones too much.⁽²⁷⁾
- Magazines are a waste of resources, DAFWA send out email and texts which are very specific with warning alerts, email is best and easy to get back to – you can file it to check later.⁽²⁶⁾

Mail / magazines

- The only magazines/ papers I am likely to read are the Elders and the GRDC magazine. If all grower groups were to contribute to one magazine then it would be as relevant as the GRDC. They should all work together on one and the GGA could pull it together, it could be a quarterly email with links to a magazine publication. Farmers love the trials booklets as they are relevant and offer real value.⁽⁵⁾
- I like to sit down and read as I get more out of it, you can go back to it and read it again like a glossy magazine.⁽²⁸⁾

- I like glossy stuff however emails do accumulate at this time of year.⁽³¹⁾
- I prefer to receive information in the mail every 1-3 months, I don't use social media.⁽¹⁴⁾
- Personally I like hard copy and have it in the car for when I am sitting and waiting, I will read it. I don't bother with social media as I am a compulsive personality and if I got on it I would be wasting time.⁽³³⁾

Twitter

- You can follow Twitter and if that provides a link to a home page on a website that is good.⁽⁴⁾
- I like the briefness of Twitter and it is easy to get more information if you want to go further. You get the gist of it in 140 characters and when you have time you can go deeper with the link. I do still like a magazine and leave it out for everyone to read in the lunch room so they can keep abreast of what is going on, so I believe there is still a spot for it.⁽⁸⁾
- It depends on what form of social media you use; I use Twitter as I like the information with a link and if it is of interest you can have a look and access it later. I like the immediacy and you can follow through for more information if you wish.⁽⁹⁾
- I don't look at Facebook and it is not used for business these days as it is more a personal tool. We get inundated with information too regularly and it gets easy to dismiss. Twitter is good and can encourage more interaction with growers and businesses.⁽¹²⁾
- I like Twitter but it depends on the information you want, if you want more depth or if you want a quick read and take just the main points.⁽¹³⁾
- I like Twitter as there is so much information out there that comes at us. If you are engaged in everything you would spend all day looking at it.⁽¹⁵⁾
- I like Twitter as it is short and sharp with a link to a website, you can access it on the go and quickly. Website is my least preferred, not the least important but the least used.⁽²⁰⁾
- I do like Twitter as it is like a newspaper and you can choose the news feeds you want.⁽³¹⁾
- Twitter is short and to the point and it is easy to get more information if you want, rather than dealing with the extra stuff; it is the best way of communicating. Texts are too invading; I want to look at it when it suits me and that's the case with Twitter I can sit down when I have time and look at it.⁽³⁵⁾

Text

- A text is good to remind you about an event or alert people about a weed but I don't want texts to become like email as I delete a lot of them without looking at them.⁽⁵⁾
- Text is the easiest way and if they let you know about an email then you can go and read it after. Glossy magazines drive me mad and I won't read it.⁽¹¹⁾
- I do like text alerts for bushfires, marketing etc. but it has to be real time information that is useful. Magazines go in a pile and they take time to read and are shoved to one side. I am not on Twitter. Quarterly newsletters are old news by time you get it. Websites are particularly useful; you can access them from the paddock as long as they are updated and current it is very relevant. They need to be updated, some aren't and it is of limited relevance and it taints your decision to go back there next time.⁽¹⁸⁾
- Texts are good to alert you for a disease or pest; they are a good prompter.⁽²⁸⁾

Phone

- Lack of time is an issue so something that is easy to access on the phone is great so you can do it on the go instead of sitting down and finding you only get half way through it and then you never get back to it.⁽⁶⁾

- I like communication to be short, sweet and regular. I don't look at websites as I find them user unfriendly. I do like text reminders and Twitter is also good for updates.⁽⁷⁾
- Fortnightly is too often and we get bombarded with information. With magazines you need it to be a good size (i.e. Liebe size) to make it worthwhile. Twitter or text I do look at them and read them, they are quick and easy. Otherwise I have a stack of magazines I never read.⁽²²⁾

Other communication methods

- Podcasts are good for delivering content.⁽⁵⁾
- We use WhatsApp as well, as of this year and everyone loves it. We use it a lot for our group and we post pictures. Otherwise I like Twitter for farming because of the immediacy and the option to read more deeply (links to websites), I like the short and sharp headlines. I don't like to mix farming with my personal life where I use Facebook.⁽²¹⁾
- We use What's App if there are any issues we chatter through that, we do that with the agronomist as well and it works well. I do still like to read a magazine.⁽³²⁾
- The committee guide us on what forms of communication to use, field days are very good for extending information. We are also using an App called WeChat where we all talk about all sorts of issues, trials, left over seed etc..⁽³⁴⁾
- I don't do social media, glossy magazines I will flick through in the house while sitting around and if I am paying bills, I will check emails. I don't read fluffy stuff.⁽²⁵⁾
- I am comfortable with emails and text is good, I am not across social media.⁽³⁰⁾

Other comments

- You get a lot of information from conversations with other farmers at events – networking.⁽¹⁾
- Unreliable internet restricts electronic information.⁽¹⁰⁾
- I like to get a monthly update on what's coming up so we get plenty of warning.⁽¹⁹⁾
- I like face to face meetings, but it depends on the information you are getting. I don't use social media. Magazines unless they are relevant are little value. You can easily sift through information on email. It is good to have links to websites for more information.⁽²³⁾
- I really rate them all fairly evenly as they all have their place.⁽²⁴⁾

What value or contribution do grower groups provide to the WA agricultural industry?

The farmers interviewed were unanimous that grower groups deliver value to the Western Australian agricultural industry by providing a conduit for growers to access information that helps increase productivity and drive farm profitability. Grower groups make an important contribution to delivering locally relevant RD&E and are increasingly at the coal face of delivering levy spending as DAFWA reduces regional services.

Farmers believe that grower groups add significant value to their industry by streamlining and sharing resources and they create efficiencies by bringing farmers together to share information that can support and improve decision making. Better productivity is a flow-on effect through an increase in production, although one respondent believes there is a blurred line between profitability and productivity because of the capital that is put at risk to achieve production outcomes.

Grower groups are perceived to make a huge contribution to a farmer's bottom line and farmers get a good return on their time and levy funds investment when they attend group events. Grower groups are very affordable to the average farmer as a means of getting local and relevant information and research when compared to paying for the services of a consultant or advisor. They

are viewed as a cheap means of getting high quality information and they are easily accessible for the majority of farmers.

Grower groups are also valuable to the agricultural industry as they provide a premier network and they are the best way for industry and researchers to access farmers. As stated by one respondent, there are other networks but they don't have the same footprint or impact as grower groups. Group events enable farmers to access industry experts they couldn't normally access as an individual.

One respondent believes grower groups are under-utilised and should be viewed as the go to people, given they attract younger innovative farmers. They believe industry should talk more with grower groups as they supersede traditional agri-political groups which attract conservative views. Grower groups provide value as a conduit for advocacy in dealing with local councils, policy makers, politicians, and R&D corporations. They are driven from the grass roots level and can influence policy makers for specific issues to be addressed for local areas with a focus on agriculture.

Grower groups are also valued for bringing communities together and keeping them alive and vibrant through providing numerous networking opportunities which help address mental health issues along with other local benefits including employment opportunities.

Grower groups keep research relevant to farmers and provide trustworthy and independent information which is specific to their local area. Groups facilitate peer to peer learning and allow farmers to have ownership of the R&D and the direction of the groups and they also help to upskill and retain the interest of young farmers in the industry.

One of the biggest values of grower groups to the industry, according to a couple of respondents, is that they tailor the information they disseminate and the research they conduct to be relevant to their local area and their member's needs, which is the reason for their existence. They are seen to be more successful than DAFWA, with its declining budget, given their regional focus.

It was also raised that the grower group network (number of groups and scale geographically) within WA is an asset that the industry should be capitalising on given that it is unique to the state. Another valuable role that grower groups play is in keeping the levy organisations honest as they ensure that farmers' levy money does hit the ground and that they are getting a return on their levies.

- Each grower group is different but the biggest benefit to the agricultural industry is the fact that they drive farm profitability and it is from that the research dollars flow, and associated industries around the farm benefit. If a farm is profitable then there are a lot who will gain from the farm profitability i.e. machinery dealers, consultants, GRDC levies etc. There is a good history of farm groups driving farm profitability and they are also a good community based asset.⁽¹⁾
- Without the control of pests we would lose our industry and at the moment there is a lot on the verge of being lost; our industry would become unviable. We are maintaining the viability of the agricultural industry as our key value, while other grower groups add value to the industry through research so they are slightly different to us.⁽²⁾
- Groups make an enormous contribution to delivering locally relevant RD&E and in the absence of DAFWA we have proliferated in a space well suited to groups. The value is growing and groups have different levels of capacity (a continuing issue) which is where the GGA is important. With that we need to ensure that groups continue their personal development journey. They are at the coal face of delivering levy spending with good means to deliver collaborative research with research organisations. Groups make a huge contribution to farmer's bottom lines and farmers do get out what they put into the groups i.e. if they attend events they get a return on their investment. It is a cheap means of getting high quality information.⁽³⁾

- Grower groups make a positive contribution, but their role going forward is going to have to change. They do provide value and act as a good conduit for a lot of growers to get information. There are a lot of growers who have their head in the sand (don't use consultants or advisers) and grower groups help them keep up to date with industry changes and prioritise research issues for them.⁽⁴⁾
- They are the premier network and the best way to access farmers; there are other networks but they don't have the same footprint or impact as grower groups. While some groups say they increase the profitability of farmers I don't think they can say that as they can't demonstrate it, which they need to, but they have kept people farming and helped keep farmers ahead of the game and kept them innovating. There are no parallels in other states; they don't have the same network we do which is geographically spread with the scale and number of groups and that is special and an asset that we should be capitalising on.⁽⁵⁾
- Grower groups undertake a lot of research through trials and they do a trials book that everyone looks at for local trials. They also do a lot to bring a community together and in general it is good to have little groups all over the state as they provide local benefits and they have the local knowledge, rather than 2-3 big organisations doing trials. Grower groups also allow local farmers to access industry experts that they wouldn't normally have access to, when operating as individuals, unless they were part of a group. A lot of events are half industry and half farmers and it provides an opportunity to network and mingle and use the expert knowledge to their advantage.⁽⁶⁾
- Grower groups are huge and they are underutilised; my view is that they should be viewed as the go to people as they attract younger more innovative farmers as a general rule and they are the people industry should be talking to. They are superseding what are traditionally the agri-political groups (WA Farmers and PGA) who attract conservative older people and are the polar opposite. Grower groups should be branching out, not to act politically, but as the go to people who have great ideas and know what is happening on the ground. One of the most valuable roles of grower groups is keeping the levy organisations honest and keeping the research relevant and the ideas and innovation relevant. GRDC created the GGA for that very reason and pulled the pin as they didn't like the idea and from an outsider's point of view it is fascinating that an idea was dumped because it was too successful.⁽⁷⁾
- Grower groups add significant value to our farm in regards to agronomic issues and new technology. They help increase productivity and profitability of farmers and help in the battle against herbicide resistance. We have localised trials with our local Farm Improvement Group which benefit us, it is backyard research which is relevant and it is very beneficial for visual learners who like to see a crop growing to demonstrate the benefits.⁽⁸⁾
- They are very important in allowing local issues to be addressed, they give a platform to go to if the Minister or DAFWA need to deal with growers to get issues looked at and resolved. I think grower groups are more relevant than say DAFWA, they are the most important structure because they run in their own local areas and target specific issues. Localised information is so much more important than a general outlook, like DAFWA provides. From the pasture side, the grower group has had significant impact on how I changed my farming system by being able to see and talk to experts on my farm and trial new varieties and new methods of establishing pastures; I have changed systems and have had huge benefits both financially and production wise and have reduced the risk (inputs to my business).⁽⁹⁾
- They are quick, nimble and general and provide trustworthy information; generally there is no commercial interest behind them and they are viewed as independent. They provide localised research and contribute to the productivity and profitability of the industry.⁽¹⁰⁾

- The main thing grower groups do in the WA agricultural industry is to allow contact between researchers and growers in those areas and they provide that real network where researchers can go to a group to find the right person they need to work with. Before grower groups a lot of researchers were stuck with a certain grower (still happens a bit) but they are able to extend local information and extend that through a group of people and use groups as an extension tool. Grower groups are the best extension tool of the lot. You learn twice as much from growers and researchers coming together and discussing information. That is the number one value of groups and number two is that it puts researchers in touch with the right people to make sure research is relevant in the area.⁽¹¹⁾
- The value of groups is that they are a conduit for information, the money hits the ground with grower groups and farmers are getting something back from their levies. There is an element of increased profitability associated with grower groups. Grower groups are very important, there are groups that are not doing it right and are not listening to members and they are trying to get as much funding and replace DAFWA, they are falling over and are poorly supported at field days. The bigger groups are not doing it so well and smaller groups are more focused on members, rather than how much money they source.⁽¹²⁾
- They contribute to an increase in productivity and the little things that lead to that happening; they provide better information, timely information, are location specific and they provide networking opportunities to get information from people who hold it. Grower groups lead to better decision making and better productivity. They provide a decent conduit between farmers and industry (politics) as they can't contact every farmer, it is easier to go through a grower group.⁽¹³⁾
- They are the point of collation of all the information; DAFWA don't do that stuff, anything that any farmer has done goes through a grower group. They provide a core value with relevant information and in the longer term they contribute to profitability and productivity. They also provide a system of networking for farmers.⁽¹⁴⁾
- They are highly valued as growers generally pick up more information from peer to peer learning. Unfortunately there is not enough critical analysis done by individual growers. They all like to kick tyres which is why grower groups are so strong. I like to analyse critically. Grower groups do contribute to productivity but that is more so an increase in production and not from an efficiency point of view. There is a blurred line between profitability and productivity because of the capital that is put at risk to achieve those production outcomes which loops back to the lack of critical analysis. Farmers are quick to read more tonnes per hectare and how to achieve that but they don't analyse it to see how it was achieved. It may not fit their business model.⁽¹⁵⁾
- They contribute massive value to the WA agricultural industry. It is easy to get to get farmers' opinions and new ideas to other farmers through local groups as they are groups of like-minded individuals who are sharing the same goal (to get information relevant to their locality) and can learn from each other. Farmers are very busy people and they don't get the opportunity to get to a lot of events but they have a better chance to get to a local grower group field day and chat to neighbours and pick up a few things rather than go to an industry sponsored day. They offer great value in networking, addressing mental health, profitability of farming businesses and keeping the community alive.⁽¹⁶⁾
- They make a significant contribution, it all hinges around local application of varieties and technique. There is value in terms of profitability which is a major driver, productivity and networking opportunities (social function). I am a fan of grower groups as it keeps it local rather than a regional or state wide focus. There are important functions that can be done at

that level but on the practical side local groups are the way to go especially with extension of information. They also extend information from other research and GRDC uses grower groups as do MLA and AWI; that's the way it should be as the groups are on the ground and in direct contact with farmers.⁽¹⁷⁾

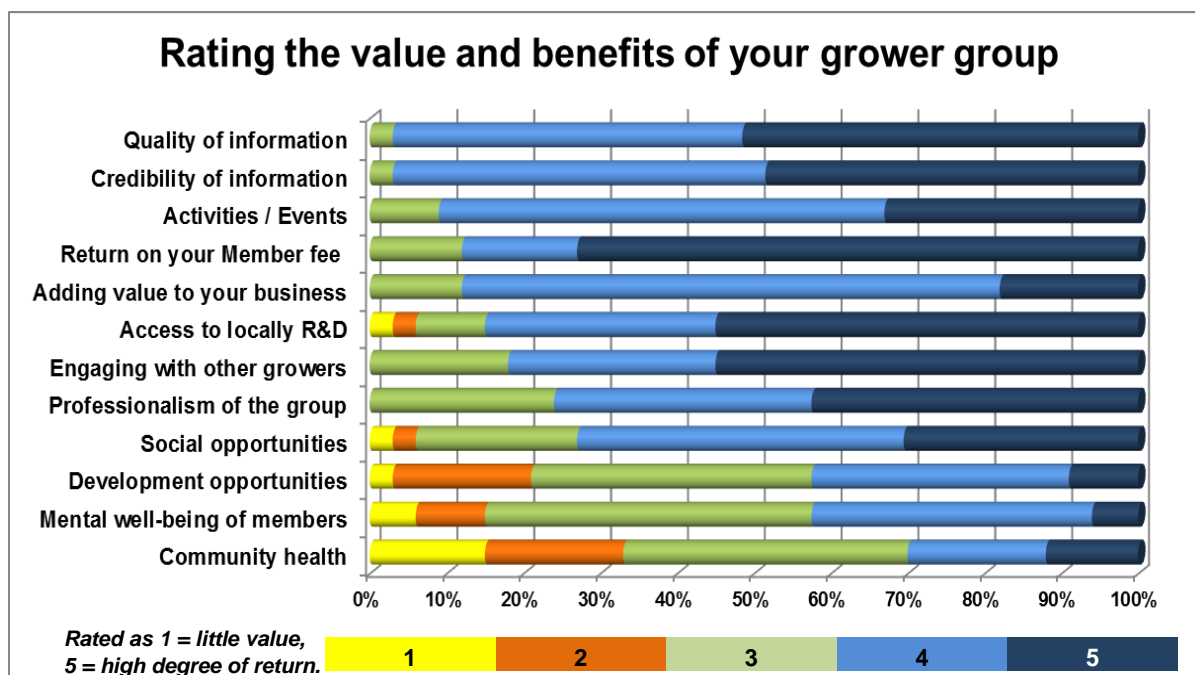
- The biggest benefit is the information they research and disseminate that is relevant to their area, which is the reasoning behind their existence. To expect DAFWA to provide information that is relevant to so many specific little areas on a declining budget is not realistic, therefore groups offer great value and benefit the industry indirectly as the information goes to my grower group and is then extended to me. There are huge financial and production benefits which are hard to quantify.⁽¹⁸⁾
- They are a vital source of information and provide opportunities to learn more and attend workshops. Farmers need to make an effort to go but you learn lots from the speakers who provide valuable information and you glean information from the experts socially afterwards which is more relevant to your business. There is a huge amount of support for information from local farmers including sheep groups and it helps to add value to farming businesses.⁽¹⁹⁾
- Grower groups contribute a fair bit at the moment because DAFWA has lost so much funding; lots of trials are now done through grower groups and industry is going directly to groups and their farmer members therefore they have access to researchers. Groups contribute to an increase in production and profit for farmers otherwise they wouldn't exist. We can get relevant research which more tailored to what we want because they do have a closer link to researchers and trials and they disseminate the information. It is not just DAFWA putting on seminars which are loosely tailored and not location specific, compared to events put on by groups who tailor the information for their local members and area.⁽²⁰⁾
- Grower groups build strength and communication between farmers. Their sole purpose is really that and the dissemination of information (new techniques, chemicals etc.). They sometimes add to productivity and profitability of farming businesses. I don't think grower groups should be all things to all people and I don't necessarily want a one stop shop. I think grower groups are great for agronomy and the farm business.⁽²¹⁾
- They are huge. They attract researchers and experts; researchers want access to farmers. Groups also help with morale; farmers can have a chat and go away knowing they are on the same page as others, mateship is really important with fewer farmers around these days.⁽²²⁾
- They contribute a high value in research and through networking and sharing knowledge.⁽²³⁾
- They add significant value to the agricultural industry by streamlining and sharing a lot of resources. They add value and create efficiencies to bring farmers together at one event; it is more efficient than everyone running their own agenda.⁽²⁴⁾
- It probably brings capacity to a more average level, they help improve the bottom end of farmers and give them the opportunity to understand how things are done better. As far as the cutting edge farmers, grower groups are behind the eight ball.⁽²⁵⁾
- I think they provide good value if they are run correctly; profitability of farmers will go up.⁽²⁶⁾
- I think they are becoming more important, they are a conduit through to advocacy as we are meeting with our councils. The image of agriculture hasn't been good and our group is starting to put it back on the map – agriculture is our biggest income earner on the south coast whereas if you believed the media you would think it was tourism. Advocacy to get council to devote resources to the ag industry is important along with adding value to farming businesses. Grower groups do add to the profitability and productivity for some farmers more than others and they play a major role in educating growers and representing

growers (e.g. we fought hard to get a permit to spray glyphosate on barley and we also had big input into CBH to have our own grain stack to get some value adding happening).⁽²⁷⁾

- They keep the community together and retain young farmers in the area and attract them to come back and get into farming. It is good for the younger guys as grower groups bring in speakers on succession planning (which brings up the subject) and lots of different issues. They are about keeping everyone up to date with the latest technology in farming i.e. varieties, climate outlook etc.. Also they are more focused on local issues and research which is more specific to the local area instead of generalised research.⁽²⁸⁾
- It is solid given the shrinking government departments and that is where they sprang from, there was a need for grower driven R&D and they have filled that and made a difference. They also add value where DAFWA interacts with groups and also the interaction between grower groups is coordinated through the GGA. Grower groups have made R&D local, relevant and up to date, and allowed farmers to have ownership of R&D trials and the direction. The community benefits through employment, keeping communities vibrant.⁽²⁹⁾
- Their value is huge as they undertake relevant research that is required for the WA agricultural industry. They have replaced DAFWA to a large degree by providing on ground research. They have been so successful because work is done in relevant areas and driven by farmers. They have had a positive impact financially and there is no doubt with our group. The groups get people together which is a good thing for companionship, communication and support in local communities. They provide a good medium to transfer information; peer to peer learning is invaluable and it is about both the successes and failures too.⁽³⁰⁾
- They add a lot value and are very important. There are always kids coming back to the farm with a big void of information and they need to learn; grower groups are good at getting new, young farmers up to speed with industry, demonstrating best practices, new varieties, encouraging them in professional development and getting them involved in committees. They do make a difference to a farming business; farmers get information from everywhere and it just reinforces what they have read somewhere else. It has helped back up my arguments for changing farming practices as I had hard data behind it so they do add efficiency gains to farming businesses with adopting new technology, varieties etc.. GRDC Ground Cover collates a lot of information on projects undertaken by grower groups.⁽³¹⁾
- They are great for general information and information sharing and result in financial gains. They aren't insular and don't assume you have everything right. Our group is made up of progressive farmers; it is important to keep farmers open to different and new ideas.⁽³²⁾
- They give agriculture a focus which is driven from the grass roots level and they influence policy makers, how much I don't know. It is quite profound when we get politicians or GRDC and they are very impressed with the farmers around the table. If we have issues our group will go and meet people who can influence that. Grower groups keep agriculture alive out there and represent the grass roots level. It gives farmers a go to place, it gives them go to people. They offer incredible value for industry and make farmers sharper and they are getting the younger ones involved who are keen to challenge and question and look at how they can make changes which leads to effective adoption and stronger farm businesses.⁽³³⁾
- Grower groups enable farmers to talk with like-minded individuals at events and discuss issues they are interested in and that make a difference to them. They contribute to some financial and productivity gains. I wouldn't like to see them disappear.⁽³⁴⁾
- They keep R&D independent which is the main thing; with the demise of DAFWA we don't have that anymore and rely on companies to do trials and it is hard to trust them. Grower groups keep things local; employ people, do local grower driven research.⁽³⁵⁾

How farmers rate the value and benefits of their grower group

Respondents placed a high value on the majority of benefits and services provided by their grower groups. The return on membership fees delivered the highest degree of return for farmers, followed by access to locally relevant research and trial results and engaging with other growers, which are the core activities of most grower groups. There was significant value also placed on the quality and credibility of information that grower groups provide, along with the professionalism of the group. At the lower end of the value scale were the mental well-being of members and community health.



How can grower groups improve?

Specific areas where grower groups need to improve according to the farmers interviewed include attracting funding, reducing the reliance on volunteers and employing staff, field walks and running on time, and offering more professional development opportunities to members. Other areas raised include getting women involved, employing the right person for the job and ensuring the stability of staff, and being inclusive of all farming systems i.e. mixed farming and livestock.

Suggestions for grower groups include extending their boundaries to cover some of the outlying regions that don't have an active grower group; reviewing the membership fee levels, and ensuring the baton is passed on to the younger generation through good group succession planning. Criticisms raised were that a lot of research is soft as no-one (not even GRDC) wants to take the risk on difficult research and some groups are doing irrelevant work to chase funds to maintain staff.

Grower group operations

- Some groups are better driven as the farmers behind them are more driven and passionate, some also have farmer's wives who are very active and good at what they do; women are involved and it reflects in the way the groups work.⁽¹⁶⁾
- We did a few trials before we fell apart; we only started in 2010 and went for two years. We have just employed a person part time to get the group up again as we have the money and sponsors. We have some younger ones who are keen and I hope they will drive it. It is such a fledgling group and we are revamping and reforming. We don't have any trials in the area and we need to get some researchers coming here to understand the issues. We want to get everyone back together and keen so we have a soils day planned.⁽²²⁾

- We need to be more successful in attracting funding so grant writing needs to improve.⁽²⁴⁾
- We need to improve communication, stability of staff, and employing the right person for the right job. This is a hard one but it is influenced by who is available, and the culture of the group is driven by the CEO so if they aren't a good leader the group falls away quickly. You also need a strong, innovative, active board otherwise the group will drop away. You don't realise what it was doing until it is gone and the group is not as vibrant as it used to be. When something is new and innovative, everyone is keen and motivated. It is also important that the baton is passed on to the younger generation.⁽²⁹⁾
- Better information flow is an area for improvement for our group.⁽³²⁾
- While attracting funding we need to remain strategic with our R&D, our governance is really good, but maybe we need more training of sub-committees on governance.⁽³³⁾
- We're working on getting women involved more and engaging all members of the farm business rather than just the primary decision maker, including staff and next generation.⁽³⁴⁾
- It would be great for the group to expand its boundaries into outlying regions to cover Wongan Hills/Goomalling and hold events in our area as they are focused on Dalwallinu.⁽³⁵⁾

Staff/ Volunteers

- We need to employ staff to go to the next step; at the moment we are bumbling along on volunteer time and it is hard for the whole committee when we also have our own farms to run. Our governance, structure and strategic plan also need to be reviewed.⁽¹⁾
- Our greatest challenge is we need to make sure we don't take on more than we can handle as we will need more resources; we are all volunteers so we don't want to burn out.⁽¹²⁾

Events

- We probably need to look at scrubbing up on our field days as we don't always run on time, we need to become a more professional and focus on time management and field day etiquette. We do survey our members regularly to make sure we are on the right track.⁽¹¹⁾
- We do need to have more field walk events specifically to look at a trial for in the paddock learning. Our group does concentrate on fellowship (mental health) and provides an outlet for people. It brings the older and younger generations together and the social part is huge. There is so much money spent by other groups on big trials; we do small localised trials.⁽²⁰⁾

Professional development opportunities

- One of the main things would be to offer business and professional development opportunities; our group doesn't really focus on the farm business, they do more agronomic and project work. I know other groups do look at the farm business. Also we need to improve staff retention and selecting staff who want to stay in the region.⁽⁶⁾
- Improve professional development opportunities for our members.⁽⁸⁾

Be inclusive of all farming systems

- I do think our group was initially too focused on a total cropping system and they did neglect members who are mixed farmers. They need to be inclusive of all the systems in the area, they struggle with that a bit and that is the reason why I formed a pasture group because we were not well represented. We now have a well-attended field day and people want to conduct trials; the group now wants to bring us back into the fold as they can see the work we have done and there are some funding opportunities in the sheep industry. If they can attract research dollars they can support staff. It is hard with volunteers, there could be more events run but it does take up time and we all volunteer in other ways in the community as well.⁽⁹⁾

Membership fees

- Our group is financially constrained because the membership is so cheap.⁽¹⁵⁾
- Membership is pretty cheap.⁽²³⁾

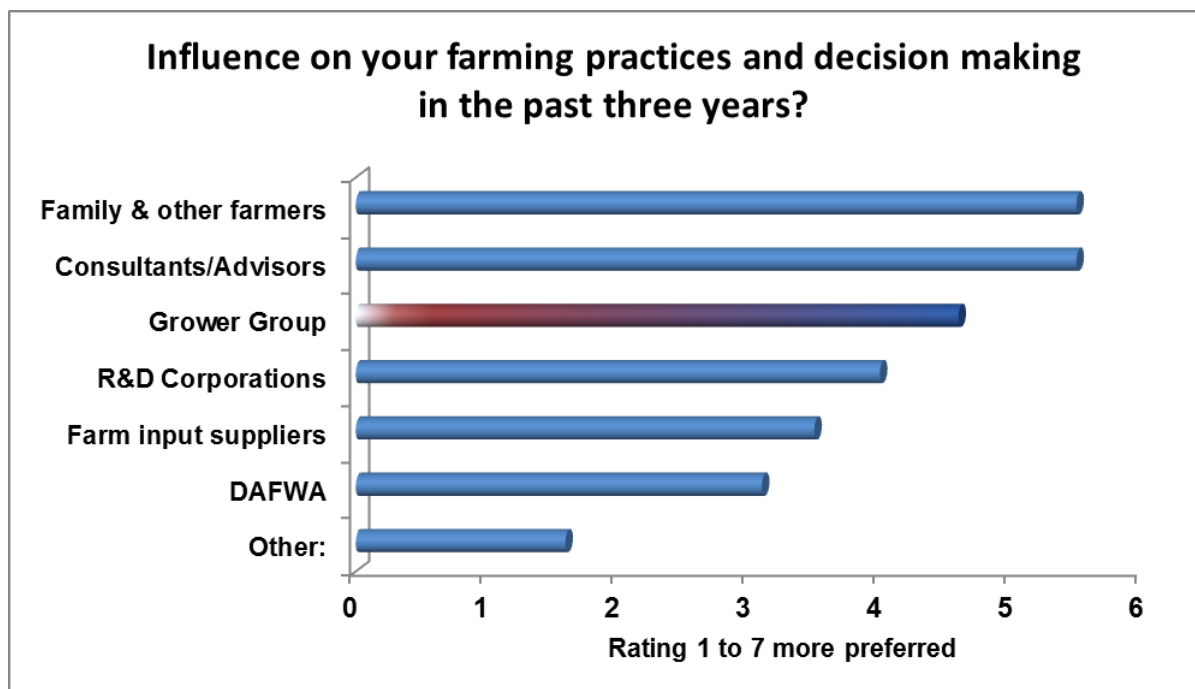
Other comments

- A general criticism is that no-one wants to do the difficult research and GRDC don't want to fund it. A lot of trials are a bit ho hum and research is a bit soft as no-one will take the risk.⁽⁷⁾
- Our group is well run and supported but when I look at other groups that are run by staff, I question their relevance to their growers as they seem to be chasing money to keep staff employed and they are doing lots of irrelevant stuff.⁽¹¹⁾
- We have a low rainfall and high alkaline soil type so there are not too many groups like ours that are dealing with the same soil constraints, so that's why we look at South Australia more. Our group is full of volunteers and it totally driven by farmers. SEPWA has been helping us out (stepping in because DAFWA stepped back) and getting speakers for the group. Working in under the bigger group works well as SEPWA works in with trials, helps provide a barbeque and sponsors part of our field days; it works well for both groups.⁽²⁸⁾

No improvements

- We have a paid CEO so there is not much more we can do.⁽²⁾
- We are ticking the boxes. We do need to find a niche as a grower group and look to the future as we are not going to survive off research funds and where we go is a challenge.⁽³⁾
- I haven't got a current understanding of the group but my observations are that grower groups go up and down and the WMG is in a reasonable place at the moment. All groups are struggling financially and need assistance to figure out how to create financial stability.⁽⁵⁾
- There is always room for improvement and if they don't think there is then they are setting up for a fall. They need to always be on the look-out. Perhaps they could work on engagement with non-grower members.⁽¹⁰⁾
- I wouldn't know as I haven't seen enough other group groups and we aren't as involved in our local group.⁽¹³⁾
- I don't think our group should cross over to cover other grains as it is focused on pulses and no-one else covers that area.⁽¹⁴⁾
- Ours is one of the better groups that has a good structure and knowledge.⁽¹⁶⁾
- Our group is all good, we are very lucky.⁽¹⁷⁾
- Some groups are bigger than ours and have more pulling power but we still get a lot out of a smaller group, it is more personal and the interaction allows for good peer to peer learning.⁽¹⁹⁾
- I think everyone is pretty happy with our group.⁽²¹⁾
- We have only been going for 7 years so we are still developing the group – it all takes time.⁽²⁷⁾
- We are different model to other groups and not about getting bigger.⁽³⁰⁾
- Nothing springs to mind, we are a different model.⁽³¹⁾

Who is most influential on farming practices and decisions?



'Family and other famers' along with 'fee for service advisors' have been the most influential on the respondent's farming practices and decision making over the past three years. Grower groups were the third most influential and they were followed by R&D corporations and farm input suppliers.

What changes are influenced by information from a grower group?

The farmers interviewed listed key changes they had made to their farm business in the past three years which were influenced by information provided by their grower group. The most popular practice changes included variety selection; agronomic investment; controlled traffic farming and soil management practices. Respondents felt three years was a short timeframe to identify the impact.

Varietal changes appear to be a lot lower cost change compared to other changes; it is the cost to purchase initial seed which is then bulked up to grow on a broader scale. A change in variety offers advancements in yield that increases the return on the crop harvested. The attribution to grower group information on varieties averaged 74% (range 40% - 100%, see table on following page).

Respondents attributed 63% of their decisions on agronomic investment such as fertiliser, seeding and chemical decisions as being influenced by grower groups. Grower groups influenced 49% of farmer's decisions to move to controlled traffic farming, with the cost to change over ranging from \$50,000 to \$234,000, and this was implemented across a broad scale with about a \$50/ha profit.

Expenditure on new soil management practices including deep ripping, tillage, mouldboard ploughing, soil amelioration, liming and drainage ranged from \$15,000 up to one respondent who spent \$3 million across 12,800ha for a 7% return on investment. The costs were considerably higher with the purchase of additional machinery and respondents attributed 41% of these changes to grower groups.

Other changes attributed to grower groups include farm business changes rated at 45% and addressed employee management, changes in business structure, streamlined office procedures and implementation of OH&S measures. These changes were lower cost to implement and harder to measure the impact of the changes. Livestock management issues were also mentioned of which 40% were attributed to grower groups and they include changes to lambing time and grazing crops.

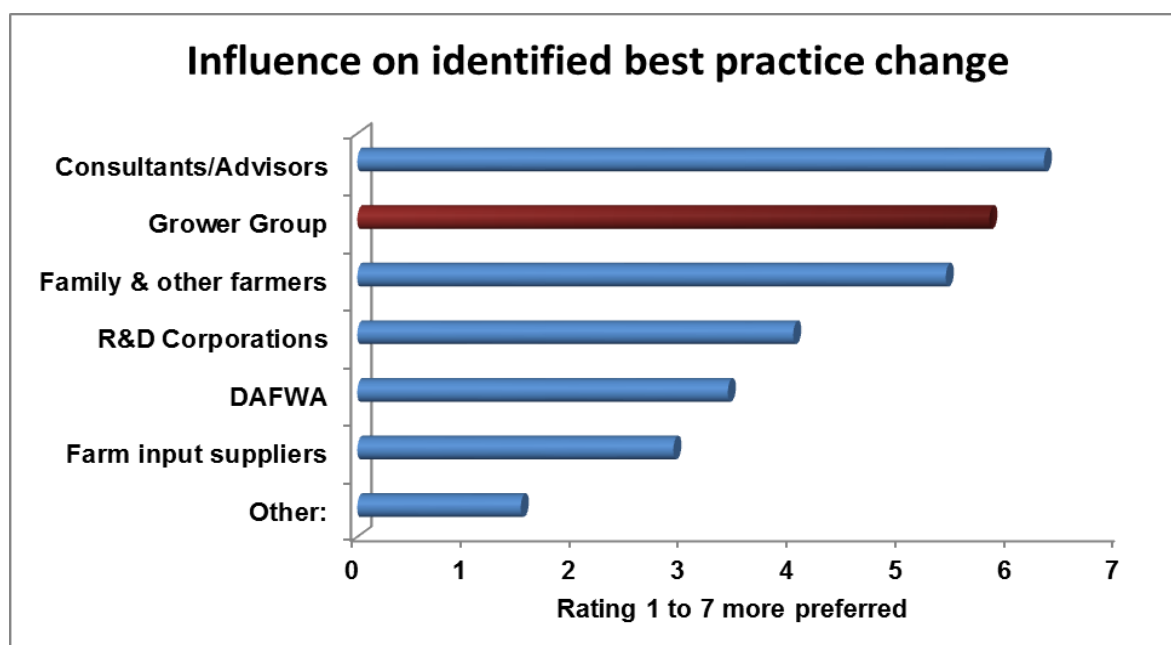
Estimated impact of practice changes influenced by grower groups

Farmers were asked to identify key practice changes they have implemented in the past three years and to estimate the cost to implement, the area on which the change was made, the impact on profitability, and percentage of information influencing their decision attributed to a grower group.

Changed practice - grower estimate	Cost to implement	Area (ha)	Profitability (\$/ha)	% attribution to your GG
Variety selection				Av 74%
Wheat variety	Seed purchase	4,000	Inc yield	80%
Fast variety adoption	\$5,000	4,800	\$100/ha	100%
Varietal changes	\$50/ha	2,000	\$15/ha	50%
Varietal changes	\$700,000	12,800	\$200/ha	100%
Varietal changes		15,000	\$50/ha	50%
Varietal changes	\$1,000	20	\$10-15/ha	60%
Variety selection	\$2,000	1,500	\$45/ha	40%
Pasture variety and increase in area	\$10,000	300	\$100/ha	50%
Agronomic investment				Av 63%
High water rates on knock down spray	\$4/ha	5,200	\$25/ha	100%
VRT fertiliser	\$4,000	5,000	\$8000 /annum	40%
Wide row canola		1,650	\$40-50/ha	50%
Soil constraints/ Crop agronomy (varieties etc)		5,500	\$50,000	15%
Using treflan trialate pre-emergent		1,500	\$20/ha	100%
Reliance on soil moisture probes	\$6,000	4,300		100%
Seeding date – (costs 1t/ha)		300	\$250/ha	100%
Delayed seeding (no dry)		400		75%
No stubble/ windrow burning	\$190,000	400		10%
Controlled Traffic				Av 49%
CTF	\$100,000	4,800	\$50/ha	75%
CTF	\$26/ha	9,000		30%
CTF	\$20,000	2,200	\$50/ha	70%
CTF	\$50,000	4,000	5% ROI	50%
Soil Management				Av 41%
Deep ripping	\$15,000	200	\$100/ha	100%
Deep ripping	\$60/ha	300	\$130/ha	40%
Deep ripping	\$30/ha	7,000	\$150/ha	20%
Deep ripping	\$80,000	1,000	\$100/ha	50%
Deep ripping	\$100,000	2,000	\$20/ha	30%
Deep ripping techniques	\$30,000	100		30%
Tillage – inversion of non-wetting sands	\$45/ha	250	\$110/ha	40%
Mouldboard ploughing	\$100,000	600	\$280/ha	50%
Mouldboard ploughing / amelioration	\$150,000	2,500	\$200/ha	15%
Soil amelioration (deep ripping, liming)	\$3,000,000	12,800	Min 7% ROI	50%
Incorporation of lime	\$50,000	9,000	\$50/ha	40%
Liming	\$60/ha	1,000		40%
Drainage	\$700,000	12,800	7% ROI	50%
Farm Business				Av 45%
Employee management				80%
Streamlined office procedures				80%
OH&S – farm compliance				70%
Whole business structure		5,500	\$10/ha	15%
No changes – fine tuning best practice		4,000	\$15/ha	40%
Livestock management				Av 40%
Changed lambing time			\$10/ha	30%
Grazing crops		8,000	\$150/ha	20%
Increase crop grazing		200	\$10/ha	50%

How does information from different sources influence practice change?

The most influential information source for practice change identified by respondents was fee for service advisors, followed closely by grower groups. Other farmers and family members also strongly influenced changes on farm, followed by the information sourced from R&D Corporations.



How could grower groups have greater influence on decision making?

Grower groups could have a greater influence on farm decision making, according to the respondents, by using farmers to drive the message home; by demonstrating change in the paddock; showing the cost benefit analysis; ensuring the research is relevant; using social media, and ensuring grower group staff have expertise and experience in extension.

Farmers interviewed said with farmers driven by profit, a cost benefit analysis of making the change would assist their decision making, though the benefits needed to be fairly immediate as a time lag on benefits deters practice change. The change needs to be relevant to a farmer's business and they need to understand the economics behind it, otherwise there will be a low level of adoption. Grower groups could package a practice change in terms of costs involved or cost savings, how to do it, and the per hectare profit that may be achievable.

Demonstrations in the paddock appeal to farmers as they get to see a new practice on a broader scale and visualise it in their system, along with seeing proof that it works and the results. Farmers are hesitant to change unless they see it in practice (touch, see, feel) then they become comfortable with it and adopt changes.

The use of leading farmers through speaking at events or in the field, and through publication of testimonials and case studies is also effective. As one respondent stated, peer to peer transfer of learning is invaluable as a lot of change and innovation comes from growers, and grower groups provide a platform for interaction of farmers. Farmers are quite open and transparent about their successes and failures as there are learnings in both. One respondent said 'champion' farmers are not usually looking for recognition but they are willing to help others.

The relevance of local research helps to influence decision making, but currently there is concern that some grower groups focused on pursuing funding have detoured from their priorities and lost relevance to their members. Groups need to continually revisit the strategic plan to keep on track with what their members want.

Grower groups are viewed as credible agents of extension as they are on the ground and independent, and they filter information that is relevant to their local region. They can influence decision making through trial results with good economic analysis behind them, the dissemination of information through publications and events and through the use of expert speakers. Experts can help drive home a message and fire farmers up to attend field days to learn from others, see it in the paddock and return home motivated to make the change. It was also raised that grower groups need appropriate funding to be able to be effective and work on behalf of their farmer members.

There is an abundance of research results generated by groups which can be hard to track down and manage over time, so respondents suggested there could be a web based platform or online library to store and manage all the information in one spot. A central hub would also help identify any research gaps and help reduce duplication of trials. As stated by one respondent 'lots of trials have been done in the past and people forget they have been done, and you can waste a lot of time searching for the information'. It was identified there is an opportunity for the Grower Group Alliance to facilitate the research program and work in collaboration with all grower groups to ensure that results are made available.

Social media platforms were raised as a medium to extend information to influence decision making through promotion of trials via twitter with a link to more information to allow farmers to explore the concept further. Grower group staff also have a significant impact on farmers' decision making but they require the skills, expertise, knowledge and credibility to be able to extend the information. It was suggested to utilise mature/retiring farmers who have the rapport with other farmers to extend the information and to mentor and upskill graduate staff.

In discussing how grower groups could influence decision making more, many respondents said they believe that it is up to the farmers to make the change and for grower groups to provide the information. It was pointed out that 'you can't make farmers innovate as they make decisions based on their own wants and needs' and also 'a lot of farmers are not open to change – it is a case of getting them out and seeing things'. Farmers need a reason to change and there are different forces impacting on their decision on their farm. Farmers learn in different ways and styles – some farmers like to get out and feel, look and do it; some like to do the research and some will adopt overnight. It is about continual provision of learning and information opportunities by grower groups.

A further issue raised was that the fee for service advisors are proliferating and they are profiting from feeding grower group results back to their clients. Grower groups who charge a membership fee in the hundreds are competing with advisors who are paid thousands. As stated by one respondent, the information supplied by grower groups needs to be valued more and there needs to be better integration with private consultancy firms in the future.

Using farmers to drive the message home

- They could be more successful in getting information across from demonstrations on farm in their area through farmer testimonials. Farmers are smothered with publications and emails but if they see a trial a local farmer is doing they find there is more value to them and the information is more relevant.⁽¹⁾
- Groups are driven by growers that are at the forefront of most of the changes, they have been fairly successful with the leading growers in the state sitting on grower groups and they are able to influence change. Champion farmers making the changes, as most of the change and innovation comes from growers, it doesn't come from outside sources very often. Keep using those farmers to influence decision making - a lot of them are open and allow people to look at their systems and how it works – there is nothing better than seeing something on farm and sharing their experiences and how changes improve productivity and profitability.⁽⁹⁾

- The big mover is actually getting peer to peer transfer of learning and using some good examples in organising relevant demonstrations and using champion farmers. Growers are very hesitant unless they see it in practice (touch, see, feel) then they become comfortable with it and adopt changes. One of the biggest practice changes ever is knifepoints (one pass farming) and farmers liked to see the costs and impact on profit; demonstrate the feasibility and economics of it. You need to have a value proposition and you need to plan how to sell change, implement it and do a cost analysis of what will happen.⁽²⁹⁾
- It depends on how it is packaged and the information provided, the main thing is getting the word across by a decent speaker which is half the battle along with hearing it from other farmers and the profit impact.⁽²⁸⁾

In the paddock

- It's about showing farmers in the field e.g. a deep ripping day with topics of interest and doing demonstrations around those topics. That is the way to pull a crowd, if you have the right topic and right demo – farmers love seeing big tractors but it is also important to hear from other farmers, although some don't like to be put out there. I would rather be out of the spotlight, you have to be careful how champion farmers are used as they are not usually looking for that kind of recognition but are willing to help others, but they can get set back from people who want all the information. It seems to be the same few people who are innovative and others jump on board.⁽¹²⁾
- Through leading by example and keeping farmers up to date with information and changes. Grower groups should be a filter for information and disseminate new information. Farmers like to see proof and to see things in action in the paddock and the results.⁽²³⁾
- There has to be a way of bridging the gap of knowledge and getting it adopted – a lot of farmers are not very open to change and it is a case of them getting out and seeing things. There are more opportunities for farmers to go to a local field day to get them thinking about something and seeing what is happening on other farms. If you see it with your own eyes you can start thinking about it; to see it in the paddock brings the message home more.⁽¹⁶⁾

Demonstrate financial impacts

- It could be through projects that are well designed to show the benefits quickly, the practice change thinking theory around it is you need to get to a benefit cost after a cost, the further away the benefit is it is too far. Therefore you need changes with benefits that are immediate with the shortest distance between cost and benefit. You also need credible agents of extension with people on the ground, which grower groups typically are. You also need to make sure the change is relevant to their business. If there is no relevance, credibility or a long pathway between benefit and cost then typically you will get a low level of adoption. If grower groups can show that something will deliver more profit to farmers they need to be able to say how they can do that and the value which is really important. It all needs to be packaged into a value proposition for their membership fee.⁽⁵⁾
- Groups hold trials, events and ask for input at events for future trials. It is probably through results and showing the value/worth of the change, 'this will save you money', this is why and this is how you do it. With published variety trial results they need to use data over several years rather than relying on farmers to remember the past.⁽⁶⁾
- One thing I think they miss is business development and understanding the economics behind your business. That is something the GGA could facilitate and drive in offering training courses. A lot of research will continue, the next big step is people understanding their business and the economics of it. The only way to do that is through training and

creating a network within the group who can openly communicate with each other. The best thing about our group is farmers are open and transparent about their failures as well as the good things; if changes don't work the learnings are just as important.⁽¹¹⁾

- It is simple – hard profit analysis, nothing gets people's attention more than profit. There is an underlying motivation for seeking information which gets a better outcome. If groups put forward a strong per ha profit case that is going to get people involved in groups and they will be sitting up and implementing what the groups are promoting. Grower groups working in a specific area can extend the profit analysis and make it more meaningful and relevant to the local area and rainfall zone.⁽¹⁸⁾
- The quality of the trial makes a massive difference, if you have a good trial with solid results and an economic analysis behind it that is what farmers want to know as they want to achieve more profit. It is about access to experts which gets everyone fired up to attend a field day and they come home motivated through peer to peer learning and seeing what other farmers are doing. The economics of it also makes a big difference.⁽²²⁾
- Showing the cost benefit analysis. I don't know how accurate some of it is – everyone likes to see it in the paddock but it depends on what it is. A case study of someone who has implemented a change, it can be someone who did a trial on a farm or from a proper trials based company. Farmers don't do a proper cost analysis (it is not accurate quantified data) like a grower group or a trials based company should do.⁽³¹⁾
- It comes from positive trial results, showing the economic advantage in making changes and the long term outcome has to be positive as well, as there may be a good result in the short term but it has to continue into the long term.⁽³⁰⁾
- Other farmers encourage change; one of the things we want to do is have a field day on a farm that is proven to be profitable over a long time and see and hear what they do, but we need to find that person who is willing to share the information. Profit is a powerful driver for change along with seeing it and knowing what is possible.⁽³⁴⁾
- It is about seeing the results, seeing the benefits and the dollar benefits and seeing it in the field (best on a broad scale). A good thing about being involved in grower groups is that you get to look at what other people are doing and get ideas from them. It opens your mind.⁽³⁵⁾

Improve information management

- If they can get all their information in one spot and then deliver it to growers. It needs to be packaged up and extended and be more easily accessible, perhaps online rather than flicking through numerous trial books. Lots of trials have been done in the past and people forget they have been done and waste a lot of time searching for information.⁽⁶⁾
- The more information you have at your fingertips the better decision you can make, they need to keep layering on the information. More products make decisions harder and if these are backed up by good information that is good for decision making. They should be seeking more information out from around the world and develop an information hub or a farming library where they keep accumulating information and finding gaps and looking for new and better ideas around the globe. The power of the GGA is to connect all the groups together so they can do that, they shouldn't be working in isolation but they do because of the competitive nature in getting funds, which is an impediment to information sharing. The GGA should be strong in this area and work in collaboration and make sure information is being shared amongst grower groups.⁽⁷⁾
- I think you need to have all the information on a platform where growers can seek what they want. You can have field days and peer to peer learning where farmers interact with each

other. A web based platform where they can go on and include trial results and case studies (comprehensive talk about costs, payback periods, outcomes) so they can see if it will fit into their business. The trial results should have an underlying profitability number. The GGA could facilitate the program and include the data from all grower groups and it would become a one stop shop for information.⁽¹⁵⁾

Research relevance

- Ensure that research is relevant to the region and is addressing local issues. Some problems are arising because groups are not funded well, they chase grants or anything that is available whether they need it or not, I have seen groups do it.⁽²⁾
- The biggest issue is remaining relevant and not chasing the pot of money. Groups should focus on their strategic plan and what their members want.⁽⁴⁾
- They need to keep relevant, be a little forward thinking and keep their finger on the pulse of what is happening and relate it back to their local area. It is not up to grower groups to influence decision making but to get as much information out there as possible and to get people with the relevant expertise to meet with farmers to assist them or run workshops.⁽¹⁶⁾
- Through trial results and providing information and putting on workshops with expert speakers who do the research, as long as farmers are able to access presenters socially after the event to run through their own situation and ask more specific questions.⁽¹⁹⁾
- It's a whole basket approach; some farmers are only involved through a lower level of group field days, whereas others are more switched on by the upper level of business. It's partly an education process as sometimes these things need to be run a number of times, a lot of it is borne out of financial imperatives and it is up to the grower to change.⁽²⁷⁾
- Grower groups could influence decision making more if there were a greater number of rotational sites that were not only monitoring yield but soil health as well. This would help growers understand that improvement in soil health doesn't always have an immediate correlation to yield. It can take time for the improvement to relate back to yield and there will always be seasonal variance. They need appropriate funding to be able to work on behalf of local members to be effective.⁽²⁴⁾

Use social media

- Grower groups need to use social media platforms and make their information readily available. A trial book is great but it is not read by all.⁽³⁾
- Twitter or texting could also be used to help growers with decision making; a text or tweet which says 'have a look at x trial' then encourage farmers to explore more through a link.⁽¹⁵⁾
- Through the promotion of quick case studies on social media with a link to more information. It's not just about making it look pretty and easy, it has to be short and sharp and concise with a dollar value to it as well. A farmer can see things and it may look good but then they may think it's too hard to implement, but if someone says it made me \$10/ha over 2000ha that's a lot of money and well worth the time and effort.⁽²⁰⁾

Grower attitudes to change

- I don't see it is their role to make farmers be more innovative but to provide information, you can't make farmers innovate as they make decisions based on their own wants and needs. It doesn't mean that they will be a better farmer if they have the information, it is about their desire to want to be or their need to be a better farmer. I am critical of funders wanting to see real numbers in practice change. It is incredibly difficult and expensive to measure and it shouldn't be used to judge grower groups.⁽⁷⁾

- I am not sure they can do better, all you can do is point a grower in the right direction and it is up to them to make the change. Grower groups provide information and not all farmers are willing to make change.⁽¹⁰⁾
- Groups need to get information out more. All the early adopters are doing it, you need to figure out why others are not doing it; they may face technical difficulties, so perhaps there is a need for a step by step road map to assist those.⁽¹³⁾
- I don't think they can do much more, it depends on what sort of grower group you are talking about. The local ones do their job and they can't do much more. Grower groups provide the information and it is up to farmers to make change.⁽¹⁴⁾
- You can only lead a horse to water, you can't make them drink – farmers are stubborn buggers. I have no idea what more they can do – apart from more field days but there is not a spare day to fit them in. Grower groups are doing a good job, it comes down to the farmer and if they are interested in change or in seeing a change. If a group has a good reputation of putting on good days and providing good information, they will get more people along.⁽¹⁷⁾
- I am not sure they need to. Grower groups provide information and it comes back to the individual business to make change, not the collective. Everyone is different because of the family structure/ownership etc. so there are many different forces impacting on a decision and it comes down to farmer's need and wants.⁽²¹⁾
- If something is proven to be an effective measure, then people have to take it up but some don't want to change and they need a reason to change. We are open to change if we see something is right, we will adopt it – if it is backed up with figures everyone will do it, we don't go right into it we only do trials. As individual farmers if we go to someone's place we will ask what the gain is and the figures based around it.⁽³²⁾
- It's seeing it and having the demonstration and the explanation. All personalities learn in different ways and styles – some people need to get out and feel the soil and look and do it. It is about talking with other people and having supporters around for a long period of time. Some will adopt overnight whereas others will take 5 years of looking and seeing and they will drop off if they are not continuously fed information or supported. Our group still feeds out information on liming even though we have had 100% adoption; it is about a continual provision of learning. It can also be about succession planning and business planning changes which aren't taken into account.⁽³³⁾

Grower group staff

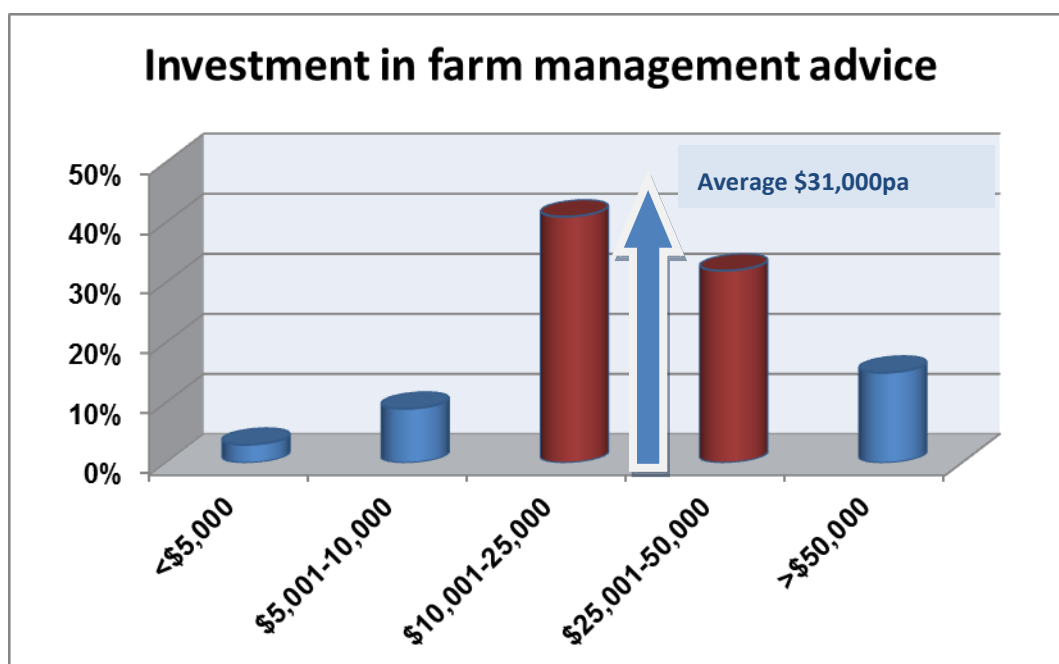
- Have an open day with beers and make it social. The grower group staff need to work on their facilitation skills as they need more expertise in this area. Retired farmers are going to be your best and innovative resource as they have the credibility, the knowledge and it is quick and easy to upskill them in facilitation strategies. Graduates have to start somewhere and maybe they could be mentored by retired farmers, as they have to build credibility, knowledge and be upskilled.⁽²⁵⁾
- Everything will only be as good as your CEO as they can make or break your grower group as farmers are time poor and can't be hands on group managers. Staff need credibility, be willing to work, possess relevant knowledge and expertise.⁽²⁷⁾
- It depends on who is the leader of the group and how it is driven, they are heavily dependent on staff or volunteers on the committee, and with bigger groups like SEPWA on GRDC backing it.⁽²⁸⁾

Managing grower group information and value

- Fee for service advisors are proliferating to the detriment of grower groups; we are getting more consultants that are using grower group results and feeding them back to growers. They are getting paid thousands whereas a grower group membership is in the hundreds. How do we integrate that? It has a big impact on the profit margin of farm businesses. How do we come up with better synergy there, it plagues me. Groups are competing with people charging a fortune for their own information. Grower groups are independent (if not paid off by farm input suppliers) and they can't do much more in terms of delivering information to their membership base. Group membership needs to be valued more and there needs to be better integration with private consultancy firms, we need to work on that.⁽³⁾

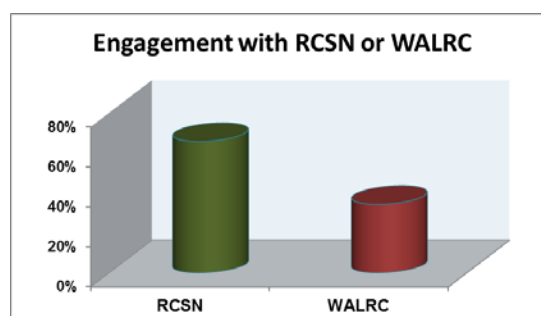
What farm businesses currently invest in farm management advice

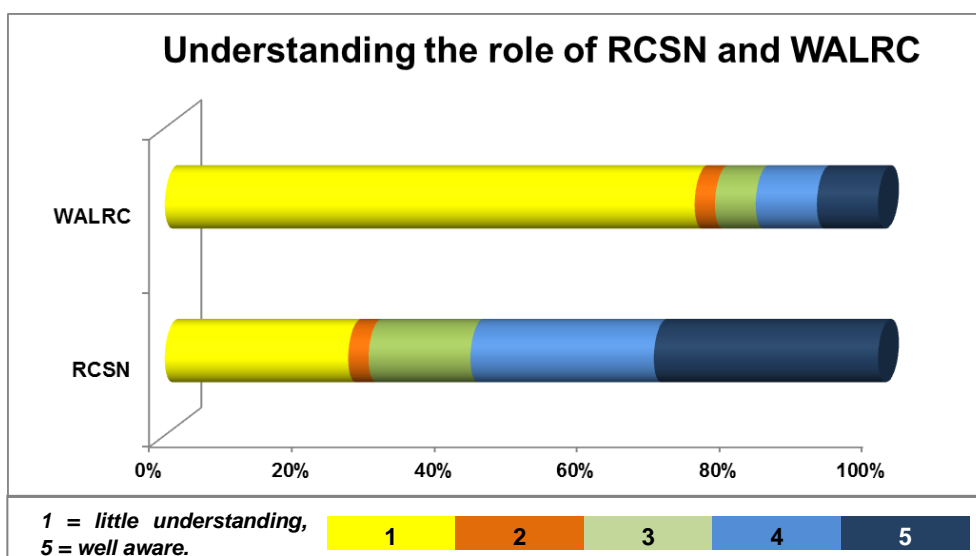
The majority of the 35 farm businesses interviewed for this project invest more than \$10,000 in farm management advice each year. There were 41% of the farmers interviewed who spent between \$10,000-25,000, while 32% spent between \$25,001-50,000 and a further 15% spent more than \$50,000. The farming businesses reviewed engaged an average of 3.41 advisors per business, which includes a range of between 1-6 advisors including farm consultants, agronomists, accountants, marketing advisors etc..



What engagement do WA farmers have in the RDC network groups?

The farmers interviewed were asked a range of questions to determine what engagement WA farmers have in the RDC network groups that have been established in recent years to identify local research priorities. The conversations revealed that farmers are more familiar with the GRDC Regional Cropping Solutions Network (RCSN) with 66% having had some form of engagement, compared to 34% of farmers having had some engagement with the MLA's WA Livestock Research Council (WALRC).





When farmers were asked about their understanding of the RDC group's respective roles, more respondents (31%) were well aware of the RCSN, but 26% said they had little understanding of what the network did. Of the same group only 8.5% said they were well aware of WALRC and 74% said they had little understanding of their role.

Farmers' observations about RCSN in terms of how they interact or impact on local grower groups were mainly through funding research projects; sponsoring issue specific workshops; RCSN open meetings with groups; and several grower group representatives (farmers) are also on the RCSN committee. Aside from grower groups, respondents report that they have had some interaction on an individual basis to have input into setting the RCSN priorities.

The RCSN is viewed by some respondents as being complementary to grower groups (not competing) and an avenue to set priorities, otherwise it was thought there would be a disconnect. Other feedback is that the concept is good, they do a good job of prioritising and it provides a closer link to grower groups than the GRDC Western Panel. As stated by one farmer 'they are not out there to come up with proposals but they are looking at priorities and where levy money should be targeted and spent, they help grower groups to undertake some of the work'.

Grower group representatives on the RCSN committee work well as this allows for two way communication and ensures groups are kept up to date. One respondent said when they first started on the RCSN committee no-one in their group was aware of the network's role and it was viewed quite negatively as it sounded like RCSN may take funding opportunities away, but now the group has a better understanding it is not viewed as competitive but rather it complements grower groups.

There was quite a lot of criticism about the RCSN being a work in progress and still trying to determine its role. Respondents believe there could be more interaction with grower groups and that they need to listen to farmers as the research is too focused on the short term and therefore they don't tackle the really big issues. It was mentioned there are knee jerk issues and flag waving to please everyone which appears to be part of a bureaucratic process. Further criticism targeted the GRDC hierarchy which a couple of respondents believed were looking after their own agenda.

Concern was raised that private consultants were able to access farmer levy money which then allows them to financially gain from the results. There are some grower groups who haven't been successful in getting funding through the RCSN as their ideas don't match up with the investment priorities, so it is difficult for the group to attract valid funding without steering away from their strategic plan and therefore losing relevance to their farmer members.

There is also a feeling from some respondents that the RCSN is in competition with grower groups and that the GRDC feels threatened by the success of grower groups. One respondent was quite scathing in that they viewed the RCSN as a waste of growers' time and resources and that it is a role that could easily and eagerly be done by grower groups. Moving forward the industry can't afford to be seen to be divided; they need to have a more united front and work together.

WALRC's interaction with grower groups includes presentations to groups to generate R&D priorities and funding grower group projects and trials. Some groups have developed a closer relationship with WALRC actively attending events and utilising the group's network, whereas others hadn't come across WALRC at any livestock events before. Overall it appears that WALRC has had very little impact or interaction with a lot of grower groups but this could be attributed to grower groups being more focused on the grains industry. Criticism from one respondent was that it was hard to get money out of MLA, while another felt WALRC was a waste of time and that they followed in the footsteps of GRDC with RCSN and it is in direct conflict with the Sheep Industry Leadership Council.

RCSN

- Not sure about interaction and impact on grower groups.^{(2) (5) (8) (9) (10) (13) (14) (17) (18) (21) (25) (26) (34)}

Funding

- Our group has had funding through the RCSN and we do interact with them. They have an impact on grower groups as they have funding available for groups.⁽¹⁾
- Our group has been involved in a couple of projects. I am on the RCSN committee and it makes the RCSN acceptable to growers in our groups.⁽⁶⁾
- Our grower group had a visit from the RCSN group last year (open meeting). It has supported and funded the group on 3 projects in 6 years and has funded a lot of research that we have been able to tap into and extend to growers.⁽¹¹⁾
- Not enough interaction, we have had funding through them.⁽¹⁶⁾
- They do sponsor grower groups through workshops e.g. non-wetting soils, but I am unaware of their role.⁽¹⁹⁾
- They are getting better, I understand their role and our group has funding through RCSN.⁽²⁴⁾
- We actually had a win with getting funding through the RCSN for snails research, which is a major time bomb on the south coast and no-one was aware of the impact.⁽²⁷⁾
- We don't interact with them often but we did get some funding assistance to help with soil moisture probes in the area. They are helping to address local research.⁽²⁸⁾
- They have impacted directly on our group, there have been a few events put on deliberately in our area and an open meeting, and we have had a trial funded.⁽³²⁾

Other interaction

- I have interacted with the RCSN through WA Farmers and as a farmer but not through a grower group. We have suggested priorities which have ended up at the Western Panel.⁽⁴⁾
- I have had some interaction myself as I have spoken at one of their meetings about farming systems. Our grower group has a representative who sits on the RCSN. It hasn't had any impact on our group as we haven't had any funding.⁽¹²⁾
- I have had dealings with them myself as I was invited to one of their information evenings and I came away underwhelmed. I just think they are trying to dumb it down too much for farmers; while they are trying to get growers to interact or engage they aren't pushing them to think harder as some of the issues they were discussing were quite trivial, not fundamental issues. GRDC has been so production focused and not market focused that we

are now seeing the result with Australian grain losing market share because we are not market focused and are trying to compete with others who have more capacity.⁽¹⁵⁾

- Our president is a RCSN member so we have a direct link with them; if we have any queries or ideas we can get them to them easily. We haven't had any funding at this stage so it hasn't had a lot of impact on our group, but it is a good idea.⁽²⁰⁾
- Their interaction has been minimal in our area but I have had some personal interaction with them as they are going to run a workshop in our area in August.⁽²³⁾
- Yes with our group via feedback on what research priorities are in our area, we have exposed what we are doing when they visited us. Whether that has had an impact is the question? One of our members is on RCSN so there is two way communication; it is a great concept.⁽³⁰⁾
- Not that I am aware of. I have mates involved in the RCSN so I understand a bit about it. My take is that they are trying to do research on areas that are specific to the regions/local areas and that growers come up with the priorities.⁽³¹⁾
- We have local farmers as representatives on RCSN but it doesn't really interact with our group; we requested to learn more about it because we didn't know anything about it as there were no local meetings. We got Peter Roberts up to learn about how they operate. We weren't getting any funding; we were applying for projects and weren't hitting the mark.⁽³³⁾
- I had no prior knowledge of the RCSN before being on the committee. Now I help get the information from grower groups to GRDC, which GRDC needs.⁽³⁵⁾

Positive impact on grower groups

- In terms of how they impact on grower groups – they do, there are a lot of RCSN members who are heavily involved in groups and they are viewed as working well side by side. I don't see them as being in competition. They are not out there to come up with proposals or funding but they are looking at priorities and where levy money should be targeted and spent, they help grower groups and they then undertake some work.⁽⁴⁾
- When I first started on the RCSN no-one on the R&D Committee knew who they were and I regularly updated them with what is happening, if there are any relevant projects and also I get feedback from our group committee to take back to the RCSN to prioritise. There was a negative approach initially as it sounded like the RCSN was going to take funding opportunities away. They do get independent consultants to do the projects which was a concern at the start, but they soon realised that these projects were too advanced for groups to do themselves. The RCSN is not viewed as competing now but is complementing groups.⁽⁶⁾
- I don't understand how they interact with our group. I understand how they work because I have been to meetings and met with them. I do have some criticisms but they are complementing grower groups and they do a good job of prioritising.⁽⁷⁾
- It complements our grower group although some groups may not feel they are getting the same amount of funding. I am on the committee; the process has been streamlined and it has reduced the amount of bureaucratic crap that everyone went through on the ground. From an initial idea through to delivery by a grower group and presentation to growers as something they could adopt, it has potentially wiped about 2 years off the delivery time compared to what it was previously.⁽¹¹⁾
- I have looked at some of the publications to come out (on VRT). The RCSN provides a closer link to grower groups than the Western Panel so the concept is good.⁽¹²⁾

- They are a conduit; I am trying to push our local issues on the RCSN committee as our issues are very different to the rest of the port zone. I believe the RCSN is complementary to grower groups and I hope it will have more interaction with our group.⁽²²⁾
- The RCSN fits with grower groups, the idea is to complement groups. They are working on communication and trying to line up events to work in with groups. The RCSN seems to be a work in progress, it will take a while for people to know it. There could be more interaction with groups.⁽³²⁾
- The RCSN complements grower groups and provides an avenue to get priorities through, otherwise there would be a disconnect.⁽³⁵⁾

Criticisms

- There are clear issues at GRDC that have prevented interaction with grower groups. Julianne Hill as local coordinator is excellent at trying to maintain relations and utilises the grower group network well, but the GRDC hierarchy has made it difficult to build relations with groups. The RCSN is trying to be a grower group and utilise the network they created themselves, which stops them from interacting as much with grower groups who have a broader range of farming personalities.⁽³⁾
- I haven't had much engagement with RCSN as they talk with our EO, but I see them as a waste of growers' time and resources and it is a role that could easily and eagerly be done by grower groups.⁽¹⁰⁾
- My criticism is that they are focused on short term stuff (3 years) which doesn't have a big impact on my business. They don't tackle the really big issues and don't develop a larger, long term picture, it is all knee jerk issues and flag waving to please everyone. It is a bureaucratic process. GRDC felt threatened by grower groups and the success of them; there is nowhere else in Australia that has such a successful model so they saw the opportunity. If it was in every region, they would cut it off.⁽⁷⁾
- They are still finding where they fit. It is hard trying to extract ideas out of people when so much research has been done and the same issues keep coming up. It is about trying to bridge the gap between GRDC and growers but it is taking time to find its niche.⁽¹²⁾
- I believe they need to be more involved with local grower groups to find out what is making things tick and what questions need to be answered. It was a good idea what GRDC were doing previously in relying on one representative in each port zone; that was a much better approach. There is a feeling the RCSN is in competition with grower groups, for such a small group of people they can't afford to be divided or seen to be divided; they need to have a more united front.⁽¹⁶⁾
- Some people within GRDC are looking after their own agenda it appears and they need to listen to farmers more; some projects that were lined up have since fallen over.⁽²²⁾
- They have had some interaction with our grower group. I think the RCSN model needs development in terms of approachability from the groups and RCSN – they need to interlink. The plan needs more work and development; it doesn't work at the moment, the idea is good but the execution is poor.⁽²⁹⁾
- The projects are all short term fixes, there is not a lot we can do in the short term. We can't access funding. The RCSN is working in with grower groups but we haven't managed to work out how they best function and what we apply for is not their investment priority. It is difficult for us as a group to attract valid funding without going away from our strategic plan where we also risk losing credibility with our farmer members.⁽³³⁾

- GRDC are giving money to private consultants rather than grower groups so a lot of farmer levy money is going to the private sector – is that fair? The consultants make money out of it; while they publish the information they gain financially from it.⁽³⁵⁾

Other comments

- We need to make sure we are not doing the same work and need to work with them.⁽¹⁾
- I know they provide the link to the GRDC as far as research priorities but I don't know how they operate.⁽¹⁷⁾
- I'd like to investigate it more as cropping is 75% of our business, but I haven't got to it yet.⁽²¹⁾

WALRC

- Not sure about interaction and impact on grower groups.^{(1) (2) (4) (6) (8) (10) (12) (13) (14) (15) (16) (17) (18) (21) (22) (28) (29) (30) (31) (32) (35)}
- WALRC come to us and utilise grower group networks to generate R&D priorities, workshops etc.. They utilise the network for free and attend field days, meetings etc. and they use these as an opportunity to have a lot of interaction with farmers/groups and they are utilised very significantly to generate priorities.⁽³⁾
- I only recently became aware of them through our grower group when a MLA director came to chat. I have never seen them at any livestock events before. I suppose they wanted feedback on what we wanted to see funds directed towards. I am not sure of any impact on our group at this stage, but we will be applying for funding when the funding rounds come.⁽⁹⁾
- We had a presentation for the first time ever this year, they have touched base and they are trying to build rapport. Our group wasn't livestock orientated until two years ago. I am not sure of any impact that WALRC has had on our group.⁽¹¹⁾
- There are programs through the Gillamii Group that have used WALRC.⁽¹⁹⁾
- We have been involved with trials through MLA.⁽²⁶⁾
- They are a complete waste of time. MLA has tried to do what GRDC did with the RCSN groups. I understand what they were meant to do, but I'm not sure how they interact with our grower group. It is in direct conflict with the Sheep Industry Leadership Council and has had no impact on our grower group as yet.⁽⁷⁾
- It is hard to get money out of MLA and they are slow to pay.⁽²⁷⁾

Other comments

- Only through Erin, I didn't know they existed before that but from my knowledge they have had zero impact on our local grower group.⁽⁵⁾
- I have had a couple of discussions with them otherwise they haven't had much to do with our group.⁽²⁰⁾
- No interaction, but I would like to investigate more later on.⁽²¹⁾
- I have had emails from them. They have a presence on the fringe of our area, we are trying to get more information on their research priorities.⁽²³⁾
- We have just gone back into sheep ourselves but our group has had limited contact with WALRC as there has been a continual move away from livestock.⁽²⁴⁾
- No interaction, I have heard about them around the traps.⁽²⁵⁾
- We only have 25% of livestock in the system, there's a group at Miling that some have joined with but otherwise WALRC have not had any interaction with us as the focus is not here.⁽³³⁾
- No, I have been to brainstorming meetings.⁽³⁴⁾

What is the future for grower groups in Western Australia, their funding and role?

Grower groups are viewed by farmers as an integral part of Western Australian agriculture now; they are a critical link in extension and research, they build local knowledge and capacity, and draw farmers together to focus on addressing local production issues. Grower groups are on the ground providing relevant and timely information, conducting research and offering peer to peer learning opportunities. In recent years as government withdrew regional resources, grower groups employed staff and collaborated to access expertise, attracted levy funding and sponsorship, expanded their trials programs and filled a gap in regional research and extension.

The growers interviewed for this project are adamant they want to see grower groups continue and thrive into the future. They recognise grower groups have a particularly important role in rural communities and towns; with the decline in the number of farmers, grower groups serve an important social role and provide a range of intangible benefits to their communities.

The future role of grower groups, according to respondents, will be significant but it will be impacted by both government and funding bodies as they remain dependent on external funds, resources and expertise to deliver regional research initiatives. In a changing policy landscape, grower groups will have to continue to adapt and change. Their future is dependent on who drives them (staff and board) and respondents stated it is critical that grower groups should continue to be driven by growers and have a bottom up approach. Grower groups need to ensure that their research is relevant, that people keep attending events and that groups remain focused on the needs of their members to be successful; farmers warn that if groups drift away from that focus, they will fail.

There was concern expressed that some groups have lost relevance as their focus shifted away from their core business to chase funding to keep staff employed and the doors open. It was mentioned that in applying for funding from RDCs and government, some groups had been forced into areas that don't align with their strategic plans and areas they don't have capacity to work in, like focusing on the supply chain. Some groups feel they have been forced into taking on roles that government is vacating, like biosecurity, as DAFWA divests itself of activities. These groups struggle with lack of staff, capacity and resources, and the expectation to realign their priorities away from their core reason for forming their group and attracting members.

Future resourcing for grower groups is a recurring concern for farmers. The reliance on volunteers is a vulnerability of groups in the future, as is the risk of complacency from a generation that has always been served by a grower group and expect it to continue without their contribution. Capacity to employ experienced staff has a direct impact on a group's ability to deliver on projects, and there is some concern about the rigour and volume of research trials groups are able to manage with limited resources.

It was mentioned unhealthy competition exists between groups vying for limited levy funding which prevents them from collaborating; with shifting funding priorities their survival relies on better collaboration in the future. Respondents believe there may be consolidation of some grower groups in the future as they are competing against each other; some amalgamation could result in smaller groups working with bigger groups to feed up local issues and share resources. Larger groups can maintain their regional relevance by supporting smaller groups to retain a presence in outlying areas and deliver on ground.

There is concern about the impact of private advisors on groups as time-poor farmers increase their spend on private consultants, with some consultants charging their clients to access the results from grower group research, to the detriment of grower group memberships.

Grower groups are driven by the needs of their members, and the board and staff establish the strategic direction and determine what capacities need to be built up to serve the specific needs of their group. Respondents believe future challenges for grower group survival include finding young,

enthusiastic board members and managing the succession in groups by attracting new committee participants; and finding the right people to lead a group with the skills and expertise.

A range of opportunities for grower groups were outlined by respondents including for groups to be more inclusive of livestock and mixed farming systems: adopt technology (social media) and communication (webinars, video conferencing) strategies to attract the next generation and to allow for remote access to resources, events and meetings; renegotiate sponsorship and relationships with industry; and hire out resources to farmer members (e.g. sheep handling gear, drones).

Opportunities to sustain groups included developing group capacity through training board members in governance and offering professional development opportunities for staff, and addressing financial sustainability by reviewing membership fee levels and better articulating the return/value members get for their investment and involvement.

Opportunities to extend the role of grower groups included encouraging greater links between researchers and farmers to fire up their imagination and scientific intrigue, to present current and relevant input to debate on agricultural policy around production based issues, and to help support mental health by encouraging farming families to participate in group activities.

Another area of potential identified by growers was for an online library to better manage trial results and improve accessibility, which the Grower Group Alliance could facilitate. This would also address farmers' concern that money is wasted on replication of trials as groups chase funding to keep their group going and repeat work done by other groups, which is a waste of growers' levies. Other opportunities for the GGA were to be an advocate for groups to negotiate better strategic partnerships with RDCs, and to encourage more interaction between groups to drive change and deliver funding outcomes.

In terms of farmer levies grower groups are viewed as a critical part of extension for RDCs, and for growers to adopt practice change RDCs require the conduit (grower groups) to carry out research and extend the message. As growers contributing the levies, the grower group members expect to see a return on their investment through delivery of funds to groups for on-ground local research. In the future the respondents believe funding for grower groups should be shared by RDCs and government as groups are delivering great value for the investment and are replacing key functions as government withdraws from regional service delivery.

Concern was raised at the RDC's current funding model based on preferred groups (which excludes smaller volunteer run groups), and the short funding cycles driven by results to justify trials which eliminates longer term sites. It was pointed out that groups are an important conduit between RDCs and levy payers, and they need to give more credit to farmers who drive the research in setting research priorities and policies which can greatly impact the operations of grower groups.

Acknowledgement was made of the importance of corporate sponsorship to the grower group model, and the equally important requirement to carefully manage expectations to ensure groups remain independent. Growers believe there is a corporate responsibility for grain accumulators and other produce marketers along the supply chain to support groups through sponsorship because as production increases they benefit as their profit increases. Respondents can see that grower groups can't rely on traditional funding or one income source and they need to broaden the thinking on who to approach, including putting their hands in their own pocket if they want their groups to survive.

Future role of grower groups

- Grower groups are very relevant and they will continue. They are the pointy end of the spear and everyone has a role to play as grower groups are reactive with a finger on the pulse.⁽¹⁾
- It is very difficult to keep groups going; they are under-funded and under-resourced and volunteers spend way too much time running groups, they need to be reimbursed for their

time. The role of grower groups depends on government attitudes at the time; there may be less reliance on grower groups in the future, who knows? Grower groups are still very important and it is about ensuring the relevance of their research; it is through necessity that they have a role, rather than a preference. We all have our businesses to run and the only way to get research out here is to do it ourselves.⁽²⁾

- The challenge is the survival of groups going forward as people are more willing to spend money on private consultants. There are a number of research projects going to consultants who are delivering on levy spending; it is a changing landscape and how information will be delivered in the future, I am not sure. Grower groups need to keep doing what they do well and prove their worth. I think there is a lot of unhealthy competition that exists between groups which stops them from collaborating and best utilising levy spending, so the funds are spread thinly. Their survival relies on better collaboration in the future. Have we reached saturation point for broadacre cropping groups? I think to achieve support and buy-in from funding groups we need to develop our culture, systems and processes to encourage good collaboration between the groups. There needs to be some consolidation and better collaboration; there is not enough funding for 45 broadacre groups.⁽³⁾
- There are too many groups and they have grown to a size now there has to be rationalisation as they are competing against each other and are doing more damage than good (in some places). They need to reassess their priorities and goals going forward and decide if they should exist. I think they have to evolve and change as I don't think what they are doing is going to be relevant in several years' time as I see a lot of money is wasted with replication and re-hashing stuff that has already been done. The mentality with some grower groups is that they have to find funding (keep putting in proposals and submissions) to keep going and that is not necessarily the right thing to do; there are a few like that at the moment and some are wasting growers' money and Royalties for Regions money. I can't comprehend why the money is given out. This is not indicative of all of the groups. There could be some amalgamation and they could still do some good things in the future.⁽⁴⁾
- They are falling well short of charging for the value they provide; they are clearly providing great value but it is not well articulated, they don't document the difference their work makes at farm scale and the idea that they are increasing profitability is not provable. If it was they should be charging more and they should be figuring out where they fit in the system; currently they position themselves as 'nice to have' but not as 'have to have'.⁽⁵⁾
- Groups really need to have a few dominant people to drive them forward. They will continue as long as the research remains relevant and people keep attending events. While we do get a lot of people along to events, our group is serving more of a social function. Some groups at the moment are chasing funding for the sake of it and they need to revisit their strategic plan. Other challenges are finding young enthusiastic board members, succession for staff, they need to find the right person to lead a group and to pay staff more to get quality.⁽⁶⁾
- I think as long as there are not too many groups, if they are specific and focused on the needs and wants of their local area, they will be successful but if they start drifting and getting airy fairy they will fail. They have to be specific with information flows and assisting to get results to local farmers. Grower group leadership is not specific to an area but more so state based, so the GGA can take that on and tackle the big industry stuff that is relevant to all grower groups and leave the local stuff to grower groups. The GGA could be an advocate to tell GRDC what grower groups need and want. GGA shouldn't control groups but make sure information is shared. The power of groups is that they are independent.⁽⁷⁾

- There needs to be some rationalisation, there are a lot of groups and a lot of overlap. I see a role for the state-wide and regional ones and I would like to be a member of more of them. I like our local group which is 20 farmers and is focused on a small area with localised issues.⁽⁸⁾
- I can't see grower groups having a bigger role to play. With reduced funding to DAFWA, I am not sure if that is a good or bad thing, I think there is more benefit to have a grower group as they utilise local knowledge and farmers to build localised information. Grower groups will continue to grow and adapt and change to what industry requires, who knows where they will be in 10 years' time. They will have a significant role going forward and they seem to have an ability to adapt to where growers head, they work well and they are reasonably simplistic in their design. They will continue to be driven by growers and that is the most important part; it is a bottom up approach. However I wouldn't like to see them get too big, once a group is too big it loses grower influence and relevance.⁽⁹⁾
- I think grower groups are really important as communities get smaller. Grower groups have huge potential; they don't have to be a massive group driven by executive staff, they can be simple and still be effective. It is important the community is kept involved, while bringing in as much local research as required. Extension is the key, local research and community.⁽¹¹⁾
- I don't think they are going to replace DAFWA, like some may think they are. I am concerned about the quality of research done amongst grower groups (rigour and the amount of trial work they do). As long as they can justify the work on trials, rather than keeping someone in a job and duplicating previous trials. Grower groups will change and funding is becoming less and groups will struggle to continue with the cost and relevance to their growers if they look after sponsors and chase funding. Grower groups should do more networking and become affiliated with more groups and share information – there should be an openness and willingness to include everyone, rather than be exclusive.⁽¹²⁾
- They will see funding cut, which will be a bad move as they do a good job of on the ground research that no one else does. Even if a private agronomist gets the credit for giving information out, the original data usually comes from a grower group and gets kneaded out by the agronomist. Their information filters out into the wider industry and goes a lot further than people realise. Each agronomist may talk to 50 farmers, but grower groups are talking to a lot more farmers than you realise and it has a multiplying effect. I really hope they will continue. I have more faith in grower groups than GRDC and would rather see groups keep doing the research within the local regions and less done by bigger organisations that do more generalised research (which is not so relevant for our local region).⁽¹³⁾
- The local groups will continue to be relevant. WANTFA is struggling, but everywhere is slightly different. I would hope groups continue to play a similar role to now and that they are not going to employ lots of staff; they have to do what they can afford and what is within their capacity. Grower groups have to be on the ground providing information and it's important they keep doing research so it is there to access. They do a good job in unofficial peer to peer to learning.⁽¹⁴⁾
- I hope they grow, for the sake of employment in the region. The more growers that put their heads together, the more ideas will be floated and it will be a continuous improvement model. The future of groups depends on who drives them and their role depends on the GGA and GRDC, more so than the individual members. There are some really good groups out there that others can learn from, but it needs to be facilitated from above to enable them to learn from each other and strengthen growers' knowledge base.⁽¹⁵⁾
- Grower groups are an integral part of WA farming and necessary to get the information out there, they are a very important tool for information sharing. I would like to see them take

on more and be a larger part of the extension of information. A lot of relevant information doesn't get to where it should. They need to be funded; we can't afford to have them close down due to lack of funding.⁽¹⁶⁾

- I hope they don't change, they are doing a good job and they are a critical link in extension and research for growers. Some groups, like ASHEEP specifically, are getting pushed against their will to go into the biosecurity area (RBGs); as DAFWA divests itself of activities they expect them to be taken up by grower groups moving into that role. We are also looking at OJD with ASHEEP setting up our independent biosecurity control group, unfortunately as government bodies are removed from those areas groups have to take them up against their will, they are not keen and it is a government function. So was research before too and grower groups have formed around that to make positive changes. Biosecurity is quite boring and no-one is really interested until something happens like an outbreak which will then motivate people. Grower groups want good powerful messages otherwise people get bored; you won't get people to a field day to talk about things like starlings and OJD.⁽¹⁷⁾
- Their relevance is unquestioned. Grower groups role in the future; who knows what will be out there in the future? It is hard to envisage what will be required, certainly the information they dish out has to be done in real time to be relevant to members, they need to be snappy or it's gone. Research and extension is their role but I can't see they can venture into other areas that aren't covered by other services that are available. It is not their role necessarily to influence decisions beyond production. I would be concerned about their core direction being diluted; you have to think back to why they set up in the first place. The state is very grain centric and that is reflected in the amount of information available and these groups are indicative of where the information is required in this state. There are so many groups around for grain, whereas with sheep you get more from talking with neighbours, AWI and other advice sources. The information is not nearly as well disseminated and the livestock industry is not getting the recognition that it deserves in terms of research.⁽¹⁸⁾
- I think more and more people are slowly becoming members, it was a free service before and to make it more viable they now ask for membership fees. I believe they will continue to remain relevant to farmers, some groups are very strong and right into their own research.⁽¹⁹⁾
- In the medium term with fewer farmers and less time it is going to be more difficult to get volunteers to do these things, so they will need someone keen to do the work. There will have to be some rationalisation, we have seen local land care groups fold and we have got their money – it will have the same impact as groups rationalise they disappear. There will always be a place for smaller groups as big groups can't be everything to everyone; whether or not we may go under the wing of a bigger group but still retain our own entity and work closer together, even bigger groups might work closer together.⁽²⁰⁾
- They will remain and they are a good thing for the younger generation. It is a great way for GRDC to come to grower groups to get them to implement their ideas and find out what they think and grower groups can help GRDC too. They should stick to research and extension as that is why they started in the first place as they were looking to address issues; I don't think they should move away from that. It is hard for grower groups to get people involved to take on a role; it is always the same people and that gets tiring and they end up suffering volunteer burnout or we get too old and the young ones don't get involved because the group management is behind the times. It is a real challenge to keep succession of the group flowing, like a family farming business.⁽²⁸⁾
- There needs to be more cross pollination and interaction between groups where new groups can learn from older groups (this happens through the GGA to some degree). Groups are

definitely relevant as far as their place in the local community and they provide a lot of intangible benefits that growers don't realise. It is vitally important that you have the right people in the right roles and you have a vibrant board and a progressive CEO to run it; if not the group will become unstuck and stall. Groups will go through cycles – this is life. There are opportunities for younger growers to step up to a leadership role and provide future direction. Group roles are a stepping stone to larger involvement in the industry (GRDC board etc.). The role of grower groups comes back to who is driving them. I see good opportunities on the commercial side; seed development, value adding, paddock to plate – but again you need the right person to drive it and be responsible for it and maintain it. You can have a strong community, strong characters in a community but if the leader is not the right person (biggest driver) it can go off the rails. You need to find that person and sometimes circumstances are beyond a group's control. Your culture is led by your leaders. Groups need support from local shires as they are part of the fabric of the community.⁽²⁹⁾

- There has to be the passion with the front runners of those groups and I know within ours the passion has dropped off; that can happen in a big group and all of a sudden there is no leadership. The role of grower groups may change, it is an evolving thing. I am concerned about some research which is done for the sake of research (groups have built a business and have to keep rolling and need funding dollars but it is not necessarily relevant, so they invent something). I have witnessed that with some big groups and they have moved out of their core business and they lose their relevance.⁽³⁰⁾
- They will continue to be relevant, they still hold an important place in agriculture in terms of collating the information and presenting it and keeping across what is happening. They serve different purposes for different stages of your farming careers, but they still rate very highly. GRDC has made them change to get their funds, if you want GRDC money you have to deliver and they are forced into those areas. Extension is still important and DAFWA is doing less; grower groups are filling their shoes and branching out in professional development as well. They need to be careful and stick to what farmers want because if they go outside that scope they will lose their relevance and importance to farmers.⁽³¹⁾
- Grower groups will always be there but they need to maintain interest and make sure farmers don't lose interest and stop coming to events. At the moment they are focused on local and relevant issues and they are driven by farmers. They have become more important with the demise of DAFWA as someone has to fill that hole. Grower groups need to make sure the research is right and that there is economics behind it.⁽³²⁾
- Grower groups could be very vulnerable in the future; these organisations require a level of sophistication with good governance, processes and principles and a good structure. There needs to be systematic planning and understanding how to adhere to planning and adjust it, as plans always needs adjusting as life moves on and changes occur. They need to have good strategic thinking and have it nailed down to strategies. Training of board members is critical to understand governance and due diligence processes, value drivers and planning. Support and professional development of staff are also imperative in a sustainable grower group. The Liebe Group will stay but there are lots that are vulnerable at the moment; it is a bit like farming - there will always be tail enders as agriculture moves on. Some groups don't have employees and are run by volunteers (as they move to different stages in life, their capacity to be involved waxes and wanes); it is inevitable that grower groups will come and go. I would like to think there will be a core of groups that will be vibrant and doing a good job.⁽³³⁾
- With DAFWA's reduced budget, grower groups are taking on more research. They are good at it and at extending the information to their group members. There is lots of research going

on but the information generated needs to be in one spot and easily accessible through something like an online trials library, which the GGA could oversee.⁽³⁴⁾

- Their role is important but concerning, given their reliance on volunteers who don't have much time. They need more funding to pay people to do these roles. It's going to be hard to keep them relevant, but hopefully they can remain that way and continue on with extension and research. It is about circulating information within the group and connecting growers. On research grower groups have to compete with big companies (breeding and technology) so they should stay with research and extension primarily. They have to be driven by farmers otherwise they won't be relevant.⁽³⁵⁾
- One of the risks we have is that a generation has come through with the Liebe Group always being there and they could become complacent and they won't take it so seriously; therein lies a vulnerability for the group. The reason I was involved for so long with the group is that there is incredible complexity with the movement of staff and Executive and instilling an understanding of the value drivers and to have the strategic plan so well entrenched in their thinking so they make good decisions. The value driver of grass roots driven, how does it add value to the members' businesses, how do we identify the high priority relevant R&D for the members? We have put some level of vulnerability there because we wouldn't chase the environmental dollars and are keeping the focus on what is important to members. GRDC hasn't seen Liebe and their priorities match up so we have missed out on funding. You always need to put some money aside to have up your sleeve if you can't get funding, it is a support mechanism that allows the group to keep growing while they shift their priorities.⁽³³⁾

Future / Opportunities

- Grower groups are being forced into projects focusing on the supply chain; they don't have the capacity to work in supply chains but that is a role of the GGA to upskill them. Otherwise they will continue to deliver regional R&D but their role won't be specific to farm trials. Their role could go beyond that focus to be supply chain enabled and business development, and they could become more integrated in the community.⁽³⁾
- I would like to see grower groups work as a whole to negotiate a better position with MLA, GRDC and HAL. They need to figure out what would be of value to their members and deliver an exciting program across the state, instead of me being a member of a number of groups to get information, they could be sharing that information across the whole of the state. They could be negotiating strategic partnerships as a whole group, renegotiating sponsorship and relationships with industry and claiming their space, otherwise they will stay as 'nice to have'. They need to get involved in the value chain as that is where the real value is in broadacre, they can capture more value between the farm gate and the person who eats the product. Groups have a partnership with CBH, but have they thought about what they could do if they built a relationship with Graincorp or Bunge – they are not dealing with them because they are living off a relationship with CBH who are sponsors. We are already in a world where they are surviving by doing lots of little projects; it is hard to run a business that way, they should collectively add up their average turnover and value to the industry in terms of the people who are extending the information. I would go in and pull the whole value and supply chain apart and look where the money flows, do a value chain analysis and look at where we go from here. Without that we still don't know who the major players are and where your deal could be. In reality change needs to come from the areas where there isn't a sense of deep conservatism. Maybe the grower group is held hostage by the culture in farming at the moment, are we at crisis point or not? There is a lot holding us back from opportunities. We don't have the quality of leadership in the right roles and in the right places. Grower groups are the network that can drive the change and the most important

network. It can't be done alone, it is about doing it together and becoming a real alliance. Grower groups are still their own organisations and still driving the research agenda but the GGA needs to pull those groups together and supply them on a needs basis and deliver funding outcomes and divide the money up. The potential is bigger, the staff get it but not the board – it is about protecting their own patch. I didn't see the value of GGA until I saw it from a bigger perspective.⁽⁵⁾

- I think it depends on where they are and the community they are in, to keep them going and alive they need people in the community to support and drive them. One issue our group is facing is getting the next generation involved; there is a generation gap with the guys who started it still hanging around and next generation has missed out on leadership roles, and in trying to find replacements they are now too busy and won't commit time and resources to grower groups as their priority is sport and kids. With the GRDC becoming more accessible with research online (text and twitter) there are lots of other ways to get information now; whereas before we relied on our group to pass on information we can now look anywhere to get it. It is up to grower groups to move with the times as things are changing and they need to make sure all their information is easily accessible and at people's finger tips through Facebook, Twitter and they need to communicate with the next generation.⁽⁶⁾
- There is a future for both big and small groups; there will be some big ones that remain and some smaller satellite ones that will also continue to disseminate information. Grower groups will continue with what they are doing now and feeding up local issues to other organisations.⁽⁷⁾
- When we had the GM debate I would have liked to see grower groups take up more importance on getting the issue across, they kept claiming it was a political issue but it was clearly an agronomic issue. Bigger groups should have more of a role in lobbying for agricultural policy especially around production issues. There is still a need for the PGA and WA Farmers, but grower groups should be involved in shaping our industry.⁽⁸⁾
- They have a bright future, grower groups need to stay relevant and vibrant to retain and attract funding. Probably the biggest issue is attracting new growers onto the committees. They need to stay focused and relevant and ensure their income stream is diversified. Their role will increase and it depends on the politics with GRDC in the next 5 years.⁽¹⁰⁾
- Trial results need to be pulled together in one place. There is 'Online Farm Trials'. I sit on the board for North East Farming Futures and we are in the process of wrapping it up and all its trial information is now online. The GGA could oversee this and pull together on behalf of grower groups.⁽¹²⁾
- WA as a state is so remote and all our produce is exported so we need to be able to communicate what is expected in the world market and what needs to be done to get the product there; getting that information through grower groups is the best way. They need to be involved in the supply chain, farmers need to understand where their grain is going – there is no point producing something if there is no market for it. As grower group members we need to be able to see what the world wants and what we can grow on our farms.⁽¹⁶⁾
- There is lots of information out there, it needs to be easier to access and put into a central filing system of grower group trial results. A lot of trial results are interesting when done in other places and they are not easy to find or track down.⁽¹⁶⁾
- To a degree they need to increase the local research that is done, grower groups have had to evolve because DAFWA was leaving the space. I don't want them to get too big and lose their local touch. They will lose their relevance if they become a state-wide group.⁽¹⁷⁾

- There are opportunities for more diversification in our area as the farms are not as big and to perhaps also include wine, chickens, pork and look at different ways of operating.⁽¹⁹⁾
- There may be opportunities for groups to collaborate and also own their own assets like sheep handling gear, drones etc.; they could hire them out or become a labour hire group.⁽²⁰⁾
- I would like to see them establishing themselves in the high rainfall mixed farming areas because they don't have a lot of relevance where we are. We are on the fringe of Southern Dirt and we are trying to get some relevance in our area. Grower groups will continue where they have a proven track record, but I am not sure about new groups starting up. If Southern Dirt moved into our area and started doing local research, we would join. Rylington Park is a local research site owned by the shire; we are trying to seek trials applicable for high rainfall areas. We have the venue, we just need trials. I think we will need to find it ourselves, we are paying levies so why can't we get the use of them? But I don't want it to be at the expense of DAFWA as they should still be doing biosecurity and research, I want to see DAFWA maintain their role. There is a place for both grower groups and DAFWA.⁽²³⁾
- There is never one silver bullet but where I see a real gap is between researchers and farmers and then you have the people in the middle; researchers are stumbling along doing work and farmers are progressive and innovative anyway, there should be a greater link between innovate farmers and researchers to work together. Researchers need to talk with farmers and experience more at a grass roots level to fire up their imagination and scientific intrigue. If they do that as part of a process, not necessarily one on one but a group process, it will get farmers and researchers asking questions of each other. The reason it doesn't happen is that time costs money. Civilisation is based on extracting as much profit as we can per hectare but that is not our nature, we are extracting as much of the resource and leaving nothing to go back to the soil.⁽²⁴⁾
- Grower groups do need reinventing; there is a lot of trial work that has been done for the sake of it and they need to be careful not to repeat it (it is not just grower groups). I also think there is a lack of innovation and that some research is not complex enough (the more complexity the harder it is to get a result) but that is the environment we operate in as there are a lot of factors that influence what happens. It might fail in a lab but not out in the field. We are wasting a lot of resources on doing trials, they are doomed to not be statistically significant before they start. We learn more from the original replicated trials and we focus too much on yield as a measurement of success when we should be measuring lots of things along the way i.e. changes to soil, root structure etc.. We quite often lose data because we don't test again and the trial is flattened. We have never measured the side effects to what we do as we haven't been brave enough to acknowledge them i.e. acidity.⁽²⁴⁾
- Grower groups are the key to the success of farming in regional areas. They spread the work load and concentrate efficiencies at a local level. Researchers and farmers need to learn and work together. I feel consultants are hijacking a lot of the research that we pay for and then charging us for this again. They should be part of the collaborative approach but not the pathway to adoption. A lot of it is about extension and training, I know there is lots of research we have never seen; there shouldn't be any research that farmers don't have the right to see. There is a misconception that you have to get adoption which is used as a measure of success, but reasons for lack of adoption are just as relevant and you never hear that. If you don't see adoption is it because it didn't show anything? I have spent a lot of money on my own research because I can't find relevant independent research.⁽²⁴⁾
- Stress management is a key factor in farming. Groups should have that component of boosting morale and addressing mental health and having like-minded people go through

together with those experiencing difficulty. It is a huge issue in our industry and we do need to create face to face interaction. It gets to a point where farmers stop playing sport as they don't have time. We need to have support systems in place for mental health as agriculture is not well placed compared to other industries. Grower groups could address all components of farming; financial, productivity, good management and mental health.⁽²⁶⁾

- I really think they need to look more at mental health, as this needs to be addressed more. There are mental health workers with no farming background (qualified counsellors) who don't have a core understanding and farmers get their backs up because they can't relate. We need to use grower groups to find people who can look after farmers and counsel each other. They can run workshops; how to support your wife, mate, husband.⁽²⁶⁾
- They should look to play more of a role in the supply chain and conduct a feasibility study. It depends if the group can stay afloat and how good the EO is and if they can keep people actively engaged.⁽²⁷⁾
- In a recent strategic planning session I was waiting with baited breath to see what exciting things growers wanted to do in the future but they want what they are getting now at a local level. There weren't any mind-blowing ideas to diversify. It is a waste of time for farming groups to look at supply chains particularly for low rainfall regions and broadacre agriculture. Value adding is in the business, it is not about being able to box up barley and wheat.⁽³³⁾
- We have to adopt the sort of technology and communication strategies that work for the generations coming through and adopt things that people can access remotely – webinars, video conferencing etc..⁽³³⁾

Funding

- I'd like to think they'll be state government and GRDC funded. Funding is always an issue.⁽¹⁾
- We will lose groups unless government assists; they need to be funded by industry or government and those people involved in the groups should be reimbursed for their time, they can't keep relying on volunteers.⁽²⁾
- The source of funding will change; it is already changing from a reliance on levy spend and moving into a supply chain focus which is seeing grower groups forced into projects that aren't necessarily their core business and science. They hate it but to survive they can't rely on traditional funding schemes in the future, they need to think outside the box and find funding from alternative funding schemes. Groups need to be investment ready, they can't rely on traditional levy funding.⁽³⁾
- Some groups have become quite weighty in the number of staff they employ and they have grown thinking they can keep growing; now is the time to think hard about where they are going. There will always be funding from the levy side and on a state side with DAFWA but that depends on the new minister. There are some other funding streams for groups but you question why they got the money. Funding will also be from membership fees. Groups need to think outside the square and evolve a little left field - that might be a good strategy.⁽⁴⁾
- GRDC are funding a lot of grower group projects at the moment. It is a numbers game and the more people involved in a group, the more beneficial it is for GRDC and DAFWA to work with them. I am unsure about funding, but groups need to work better rather than repeating research and they shouldn't chase funding just for the sake of it. If a project is relevant perhaps private investors could be a way in the future if government funding is not available, but they need to make sure it is relevant to industry and their members.⁽⁶⁾
- They should be funded by industry as there's no greater value for money than a grower group. The Sheep CRC looked at ways to get information out to farmers and WA grower

groups are far ahead of other areas and their value for money for industry is huge. The RDCs can't control grower groups, and that is what the CEOs are obsessed about (controlling groups) and when they give information to a group they completely lose control because they are independent in the research they do and the information they are given. AWI went to the point where they made people sign confidentiality agreements to say they couldn't release information until the board signed off in case there wasn't a favourable outcome. Grower groups have to be free to talk about what they want, it is important they stay independent. They need to emphasise their strength and ensure they are not controlled by GRDC; that's their strength. National organisations should fund groups more generously.⁽⁷⁾

- They should be funded by GRDC. It is a good way to get their information on the ground through local groups. A lot of people wouldn't engage with GRDC without going through their local group, it would be silly for them to cut groups off.⁽⁸⁾
- In the future funding is going to be a problem for grower groups; they want to run more projects and they need to employ more staff. The way the system works around funding it is a problem area as there is no certainty in jobs or in reliance on obtaining funding from RDCs. If groups can't secure funding they can't continue with trials or staff if they don't have funds attached to them. As growers we contribute levies and there should be more that trickle down through funds from these organisations to grower groups. I do know that AWI are certainly looking at going to grower groups for their projects.⁽⁹⁾
- Every group is different, there are those relying on GRDC funding who are in trouble. Grower groups need to be careful they don't paint themselves into a corner and rely on one income source. There are lots of funding streams; COGGO, DAFWA, RfR, federal money, sponsorship etc.. Maybe there needs to be an increase in membership if funding is hard to source.⁽¹⁰⁾
- Our group is super economic, I would like to see our group work with DAFWA (we work closely with them and have got some great work out there) and for groups to work with local service providers and those who can give out the relevant trials and information you are looking for. Whether it be DAFWA or private enterprise as long they work closely together. It is not hard to get funding but they need to make sure what they are doing is relevant and done properly. Most important is local relevance to members; there's no point doing projects for the sake of it, it's a waste of time, money and effort and turns growers away.⁽¹¹⁾
- Funding should stay the same but it also depends on government and GRDC models of funding. I can't see it coming from industry, unless they are holding the group accountable for the money they are giving them and getting results and making them available.⁽¹²⁾
- I hope they keep getting the same and continue on as they are.⁽¹³⁾
- Grower groups operate on a lot of volunteer work. Farmers pay a levy through grain deliveries and marketing and a lot of those GRDC levy funds get sucked up by the bigger groups (which I don't get). I would like to see some money flow to the little ones.⁽¹⁴⁾
- Grower groups have to be funded through industry based funding, levies paid should come back through groups. They should ring-fence a percentage of levy money and distribute it back through groups. Some of the R&D can be taken off the GRDC and they could push that down through the grower groups and that would provide them with the necessary funding. They can also use membership funds.⁽¹⁵⁾
- DAFWA could actually fund the grower groups to have a person with the skills and expertise based with each group and be the face of that group and it could all fall into a larger overseeing body. Even the smaller groups could have a staff member (or share them), it would be nice to have more people employed out here.⁽¹⁵⁾

- Levies are there for a reason and they are an important part of funding grower groups.⁽¹⁶⁾
- They should be funded generally on a membership basis but also paid to carry out extension or research which should continue to be funded through levies. It is a critical part of extension for RDCs; for growers to adopt practice change they need a conduit which is grower groups carrying out the research.⁽¹⁷⁾
- Their funding has to have a membership component; their membership will keep information relevant and the group going in the local area, but they can't rely just on membership fees to keep them running. There is a corporate responsibility from the grain accumulators for corporate sponsorship because as production increases their profit increases so they have a role to shoulder that to a degree through sponsorship, not only CBH but Bunge etc..⁽¹⁸⁾
- Groups will continue to be funded through membership and sponsorship. They need to be neutral and not pushed by a commercial company or they lose their independence.⁽¹⁹⁾
- The funding model is part of the problem; groups are so competitive to get money and the people running the groups need to source funds to pay themselves. Something has to change; what the answer is I don't know, it may go back to DAFWA.⁽²⁰⁾
- I think groups have a future and hope that funding for trials is increased to 'not the top end of town' groups like ours. Different groups will do different things as they are driven by member's wants which are different depending on the group's location and members. One of the benefits is that they can be relatively pliable to what the community wants them to do and that is why they were created in the first place, along with a need for research and dissemination of information. Our group wants take on more but we are made up of volunteers and I can't see any change in the future.⁽²¹⁾
- I would like to see DAFWA involved more again and take a bit off groups' hands in terms of research; could that be funded by government? It is not the fault of DAFWA that it is not higher on farmers' list but the fault of the government. I think the private sector is a great training ground for the agricultural industry, it provides solid training and background, as did a role in DAFWA previously. It is now up to the private sector to take on graduates and they are not as keen as they are in business to make money. This role has been missed and it has been undervalued and needs to be addressed. If they can claw back some R&D they need the personnel and what better way to start furnishing the industry with upskilled personnel?⁽²¹⁾
- In the future they will be the dominant research body and that will be where research will head towards. Grower groups have a major role to play and I hope they maintain their current role. If they bite off too much they will only do half the job.⁽²²⁾
- The GRDC levy needs to fund grower group research, I have no problem paying the levy as long as we are getting funding back on the ground in local research. Grower groups put the proposal up and GRDC should fund the appropriate ones. I am also happy to pay membership of the group to keep it operating.⁽²²⁾
- It worries me most about the lack of numbers of people in the country and volunteers doing too much. Maybe in future the Executive will be staff or paid to reduce the demand on volunteers, everyone is too busy to get jobs done. In the future I also believe there will be rationalisation of groups and we will see more bigger groups - if a smaller group is closer to a bigger group they would become part of that one but it would mean we would have to drive further to see things.⁽²²⁾
- It is not a one size fits all solution. Where there are organised grower groups I would like to see a proportion of the levies come back to be spent in the area. Funding cycles are too

short, we can't get funding for long term trials or systems because everyone wants to see results to justify trials.⁽²⁴⁾

- Groups need to remain as people do get value from them. Maybe there is an opportunity for them to integrate more and include livestock and look at the whole farming system. I would also like to see the dairy industry included.⁽²⁵⁾
- Groups should be funded by levies and by those who benefit from them (members).⁽²⁵⁾
- It depends on which political party is in leadership. Grower groups are needed and if they are run correctly they will have an incredible impact for the better. If they do not exist at all farmers will not be given the opportunity to upskill, address mental health etc.. They are essential to give farmers the opportunity to reduce isolation and upskill them. There are still quite a lot of farmers in the 40-50 year range with poor literacy and a lot of farmers can't read or comprehend (they get lots of literature) - how can they upskill? They need a grower group to give them the information verbally because they don't have the literacy to access information. There is a significant number of blokes that struggle.⁽²⁶⁾
- They are ripping that much out of us for our wool for overseas advertising, transit insurance and levies for livestock and grain sales; stop the glossy publications (waste of time) and put that money into upskilling facilitators and addressing mental health.⁽²⁶⁾
- We are trying to win a research grant to explore a co-operative which we are trying to go to the next level in the sheep supply chain. We are hanging with the change in government. Part of our problem is funding, we keep applying for grants to do research but sometimes it is not a total fit with what we want to do and we are using up resources. There has to be a better funding model.⁽²⁷⁾
- The EO needs to be funded, grower groups need to have some basic underpinning of expenses; we did target RfR at one stage. Farmers are levied out of existence for what they get. Perhaps there is a government role given DAFWA is not there and grower groups are replacing their roles and becoming DAFWA without doing the research.⁽²⁷⁾
- They should be funded by farmers through levies mainly and the RDCs need to make sure we get local relevant research on the ground from our levy money. Our group is pretty financial through memberships and that keeps us going.⁽²⁸⁾
- Groups have to be able to get grants funding and membership fees.⁽²⁹⁾
- They have to be funded by the research levy that is fine, but we need to have faith that is fair and equitable. The success of the group depends on the farmers driving it. All groups serve a purpose both small and big. They have a great future especially with DAFWA withdrawing.⁽³⁰⁾
- It comes down to what farmers in the group want out of them. If a group has industry sponsorship then they are not as independent. GRDC is very cut and dried and provide good information with a high degree of independence. It may well be that growers will have to put their hands in their own pockets to survive if they still want funding.⁽³¹⁾
- I am not sure there is an obligation to fund them but there are certainly opportunities if a group applies for funding, there can't be handouts. There also needs to be membership funding to help with trials etc..⁽³²⁾
- There needs to be R&D funding for projects and there needs to be credibility given to what farmers can see is on the horizon. Liebe is frustrated that the GRDC is 5 years behind so they have to constantly self-fund what they do. Then the GRDC wakes up and sees farmers doing it off their own back and they then want to put in the research funds. There needs to be funds for innovative thinking. We need to protect the innovators, we need them in industry and don't want them to move away. State government should be valuing agriculture too,

that will fall upon deaf ears with the government now. Barnett put the focus on mining and forgot about agriculture and really there should always be a focus on agriculture. Funding should also be through membership and sponsorship – they should be taking responsibility as there is great value in grower groups and that should be valued by growers, partners and sponsors. As long as a group performs, the membership fee should provide value for money. We weigh that up constantly and have discussions within management and also survey our members to determine where they place their value.⁽³³⁾

- Funding is getting tighter and tighter; our local group finds it hard to get funding for anything local, they have reverted to joining with a bigger group to access funds which is fine for broader issues but for the local ones it is up to farmers if they want to do any research e.g. non-wetting gravels are our biggest challenge. GRDC has a funding model where they have preferred groups/tenders; they need to restructure to allow other groups to access funding as our group which has volunteers can't access funding.⁽³⁴⁾
- A lot of GRDC money is directed towards grower groups; it is grower money so it should continue that way along with annual membership fees which is really a token contribution otherwise people wouldn't join. Groups are better off with numbers.⁽³⁵⁾

Other comments

- Grower groups need to have a couple of trained company directors on their management committee as well as some outside expertise, not just farmers but those with research or finance skills.⁽⁵⁾
- Event attendance or bums on seats is not a true reflection of the impact a grower group has, it is more about the information filtering through to farmers.⁽⁷⁾
- Some of the MIG projects are not relevant and they are too busy chasing the pot of money. They are involved in livestock projects but not many people in the area are livestock dominant and people aren't going to change their farming practices because of a major project. It is an issue finding relevant projects.⁽⁶⁾
- Something that bugs me a lot is that there is so much money put into research and funding trials every year and we put our hand up for a trial and there is nowhere to turn to see if the work has already been done. Private groups want to keep the information to themselves, it is frustrating that there is no open forum to access trial data from previous projects. Ideas are hard to come by now because research has been done for so long. The GGA would be a good spot for that information to be housed and they could point people in the right direction; in the meantime there appears to be a waste time, money and resources.⁽¹²⁾

Different group models

- The Sheep's Back was open to anyone to do a course, it was a small local course and the issues raised were really relevant to your quarter of the shire. It was a very intimate group of 4-6 growers with a facilitator and the course was run over 3 years. As a structured course it introduced new skills, but follow up was peer to peer. AWI funded the initiative for a finite time. Icon Ag was coordinating that. I still get regular updates on email and texts, like warnings to look out for this, it's hugely relevant.⁽¹⁸⁾
- We have 7 active farming businesses involved where we visit each other's farms and it is based on peer to peer learning. Our membership fee pays for Geoff Fosberry who plans the trials and compiles the results. Our group has 4 field walks (half day), a planning half day and also a results half day. We also get a trial results booklet and a plan of the trials. Geoff plans

the trials and we (farmers) do all the work in seeding and harvesting the trials and getting an analysis done at the bin. We also own a weigh trailer.⁽³⁰⁾

- We pay \$2000 for our membership which covers a whole lot of independent trials that we get done. We have two field trips a year and get a season summary and report book on the trial outcomes. They do all the trials and provide independent advice. We get the opportunity to ask one on one questions and get honest answers which aren't biased (i.e. someone selling a product that is too good to be true, we can ask about). It is quantified and backed up data. Living Farm is a private business (they also run trials for GRDC and NVT) and our group is very localised where we have 20 farming businesses. We come up with the trials we want done and they have good rigour and provide good data. Our group is more personalised and allows for peer to peer learning. We pay a higher membership fee and we don't need to rely on volunteers to run the group.⁽³¹⁾
- Our group is the oldest grower group in WA and we are all volunteers, we have 40 farming businesses as members. We have our own assets, a house in town and block (sold recently) so we are quite a financial group that has continued through the generations. The Liebe and West Midlands groups are also close by and a lot of members are double up members. We are not trying to compete, we are filling a hole and work in with them where we can.⁽²⁰⁾
- Our group does Clayton's research and we compare on a field scale basis. It is not often carried through to harvest but is more visual comparisons. We have lots of in paddock discussions. Our group is volunteers and 100% of fees go to the group agronomist who does 3 full days a year plus the writing up of notes on what was looked at. Our group has never developed to more than that, we have 22 farming business.⁽²¹⁾
- While we are a closed group, we employ a part time person. The group is invite only (if anyone wants to be involved they can, we haven't knocked anyone back but kept it closed). The onus is on members to attend events and they expect to attend. We have 20 farming entities plus sponsors. We have looked at other models but we have decided it is best to keep it as is rather than have more committees and meetings, otherwise the membership fee would increase. The group provides an outlet to discuss local farming issues openly.⁽³²⁾
- What makes our group work is that we are specific to a small group's needs, we get very good interaction with other members, they are not intimidated by a large group, no one has to travel too far and they can have a beer and be social. It is expensive and it took a bit to get over but you do learn. Instead of a glossy magazine you can save quite a bit of money as it is a very trial results orientated group. We are also a member of the GGA so we get emails from them.⁽³¹⁾
- Compass Agricultural Alliance has a \$6000 membership fee with 60 farming businesses as members, they are also a member of GGA. Members have access to a farm adviser; they get 20 hours' consulting which includes a budget review, spring review (follow up review to see where cash flow is at), benchmarking (all one group, they complete a sheep survey and farm survey, and budget; we collect the information and put it into a program where we have ten years' of data for each person). There are two reports every year, one on sheep and one on cropping, to see where they are at compared to other years and their peers. They also receive ten newsletters, text messages (alerts, reminders about events etc.), emails (as required) and we have six field days a year. We do a little bit of research. Compass Ag Alliance contracts Icon for farm management advice, the group has its own committee made up of ten farmer volunteers. One of those is a trial representative and they collect information for farmers' trials and are also on the board of Southern Dirt, it is only a new position. CAA has been going for 50 plus years.⁽³⁴⁾

Grower Groups in Western Australia Review – Interview Template

Agknowledge[®] has been commissioned by the Grower Group Alliance (GGA) to undertake an independent review and analysis of Grower Groups in Western Australia to determine the value (monetary and social capital) they provide to members, funders and partners.

As a third party we collect the information and then present it in a report that identifies 'themes' and 'issues' but not the people who expressed them. Your identity will remain confidential but your comments will enable us to assess the benefits and costs of Grower Groups.

1. In order to identify your region, can you please give me some base details including your town, and which is your main industry. Are you a local Grower Group member?

Post code			Key industry/s	
Group member	Yes	No	Age bracket	<20: 20-30: 30-40: 40-50: 50-60: >60

2. What is your local grower group?
What is your membership fee to each
Are you a member of a State-wide group?

Local group (1)		\$
Local group (2)		\$
State-wide group		\$

- a. What motivates you to be a member of a local grower group?

- b. If you are not a member of a group, can you outline why not, and what it would take to become one?

3. Are you actively involved in any grower group activities?

Yes	No
------------	-----------

- a. In what capacity, & how many hours/month do you contribute voluntarily to your grower group?

	Executive	Sub-committee	Events	Trials	Other - describe
Role					
Hours/month					

- b. What other community groups are you involved in and what time do you contribute voluntarily?

	NRM	Sporting club	Community group	School committee	Other - describe
Hours/month					

- c. Can you identify skills, professional development or capacity building you have acquired from your involvement with grower groups?

- d. What other leadership roles have you progressed to in the community or industry as a result of your involvement in grower groups?

4. What role does your grower group play in the community? Can you please provide an example?

Can you describe what impact the Group has had in the community?

Comments: _____

5. Understanding that you receive a lot of information from a variety of sources, what is the most valuable way your grower group can get information to you? (in descending order with 7 being more preferred).

Fortnightly email Update	Quarterly email Newsletter	Glossy mail magazine	Go to website	Ad Hoc alerts		
				SMS text	Facebook	Twitter

Comments: _____

6. What value or contribution do you perceive Grower Groups on the whole add to the WA ag industry? Why?

Comments: _____

7. How would you rate the value and benefits of your grower group:
Please rate your views in the following areas (Rate 1 = little value, 5 = high degree of return)

Topic	1	2	3	4	5	None
a. Engaging with other growers						
b. Access to locally relevant research and trial results						
c. Business and personal development opportunities						
d. Activities / Events						
e. Credibility of information						
f. Quality of information						
g. Professionalism of the group – staff, systems						
h. Social opportunities						
i. Mental well-being of members						
j. Community health						
k. Adding value to your farm business						
l. The return on your Membership fee						

Are there specific areas your grower group that needs to improve, by comparison with other groups?

8. Who has been the most influential on your farming practices and decision making in the past three years? (please rate in descending order with 7 being more preferred).

Fee for service Advisors	Farm input suppliers	Grower Group	R&D Corporations	DAFWA	Family & Other farmers	Other: describe

9. Can you identify 3 key changes you have made in your farm business / enterprise / activity in the past 3 years influenced by information provided by your Grower Group?

Please indicate cost to implement the changes, the area of your farm on which these changes have been made, and identify the impact on your profitability. Of all the information you gathered that helped you make this decision, what % of this information was provided by your Grower Group.

Changed practice / enterprise / activity	Cost to implement	Area used (ha)	Profitability (\$/ha)	% attribution to your GG
1.				
2.				
3.				

10. For your best change process described above, how did the different information sources influence that particular practice change? (please rate in descending order with 7 being more preferred).

Fee for service Advisors	Farm input suppliers	Grower Group	R&D Corporations	DAFWA	Family & Other farmers	Other: describe

11. How could grower groups influence decision making more?

Comment: _____

12. Can you indicate how much your farm business invests in farm management advice (budgeted)?
E.g. Farm Consultant, Agronomist, Accountant, Marketing Advisor.

<\$5,000	\$5,001-10,000	\$10,001-25,000	\$25,001-50,000	>\$50,000	# of advisors

13. The major industry R&D Corporations have introduced their own 'network' groups such as the Regional Cropping Solutions Network (RCSN) or the WA Livestock Research Council (WALRC) to identify local priorities.

Have you had any engagement with either the RCSN or WALRC, and please indicate if you understand their respective roles. (Rate 1 = little understanding, 5 = well aware).

Can you provide some observations about these regional R&D networks and how they interact or impact on your local grower group?

	Yes/No	Understanding roles (1-5)	Interact and impact
RCSN			
WALRC			

Comment: _____

14. Can you outline your thoughts on the future of grower groups in WA – their funding and role?

Comment: _____

Thank you for your input - do you have any other ideas or feedback about the value of grower groups or their role?

Grower Group Alliance



Assessing the Value of Grower Groups

Appendix 4

Grower Group Survey and Economic Analysis Report

July 2017

Review copy 19/7/17

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ABBREVIATIONS

AGM	Annual General Meeting
AHRI	Australian Herbicide Resistance Initiative
ASHEEP	Association for Sheep Husbandry, Excellence, Evaluation and Production
AWI	Australian Wool Innovation
CAA	Compass Agricultural Alliance
COGGO	Council of Grain Grower Organisations Limited
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
CRC	Cooperative Research Centre
CTF	Controlled traffic farming
DAFWA	Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia
EO	Executive Officer
GG	Grower Group
GGA	Grower Group Alliance
GIWA	Grain Industry Association of Western Australia
GM	Genetic modification
GRDC	Grains Research and Development Corporation
MADFIG	Merredin and District Farm Improvement Group
MIG	Mingenew Irwin Group
MLA	Meat and Livestock Australia
NAG	Northern Agri Group
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NVT	National Variety Trials
OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
OJD	Ovine Johne's Disease
PASE	Pulse Association of the South East
R&D	Research and Development
RAIN	Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network
RBG	Recognised Biosecurity Group
RCSN	Regional Cropping Solutions Network GRDC
RD&E	Research, Development and Extension
RDC	Research and Development Corporation
RfR	Royalties for Regions
SEPWA	South East Premium Wheat Growers Association
VRT	Variable Rate Technology
WALRC	Western Australian Livestock Research Council MLA
WANTFA	WA No-Till Farmers Association
WIFE	Women in Farming Enterprises
WMG	West Midlands Group
WTP	Willingness to Pay

Assessing the Value of Grower Groups - Grower Group Survey Report

As part of a broader project to *Assess the Value of Grower Groups in Western Australia* the Grower Group Alliance (GGA) contracted *Agknowledge*® to undertake an independent assessment of the value in monetary and social capital terms that grower groups provide to members, funders, partners and the community. Reports were completed on farmer and industry reviews initially, then the grower groups were engaged to provide feedback and data to form the basis of this report and the subsequent economic analysis (see Appendix 4A).

In collaboration with the GGA State Advisory Group a detailed questionnaire was developed and distributed during June 2017 to the 41 grower groups within the GGA (page 29). There were 23 completed responses that provided data from 56% of the groups and the significant detail collated has allowed for an analysis of the financial and volunteer contribution of the groups and their members. This information was correlated with the information gathered during the interviews with 35 growers including contribution, decision making and value generated by the grower groups.

Membership information

Of the 23 grower groups responding to the survey, the average number of members was 124 (ranging from 11 to 395), indicating the wide variance in the size of grower groups and their membership.

Membership coverage (the average size of membership as a percentage of the estimated number of farm businesses in each group’s region) was 56% (ranging from 11 to 80%). When weighted by the size of the group, the weighted average coverage was 51%.

The average cost of membership for the groups surveyed was \$163/year (ranging from \$0 to \$600/year). When compared to the cost of membership identified during the earlier farmer interviews, which included members of a wider range of groups including fee for service consultancy groups with fees between \$2,500 and \$6,000, the average moved up to around \$600/year.

Grower group income and expenditure

Average and total grower group income and expenditure over the past three financial years for the 23 grower group responses are shown in Table 1.

Assuming these responses are typical of the GGA’s 41 grower groups, it may be assumed that approximately 56% of income and expenditure is captured for all grower groups in the past three years. If this is the case, then total income and expenditure for all grower groups in Western Australia is estimated to be in the order of \$10m/year, which accounts for the full range of large and small groups.

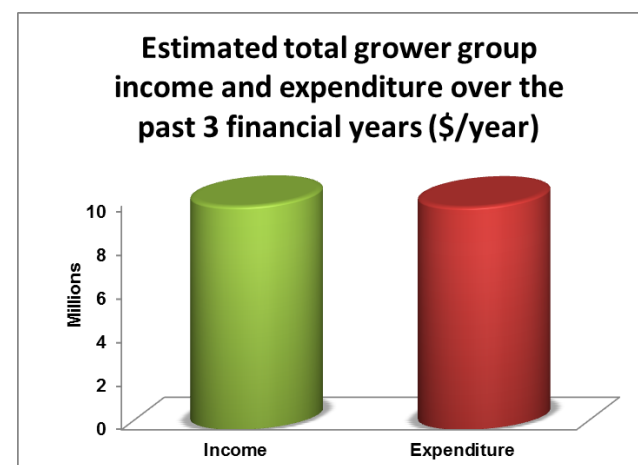
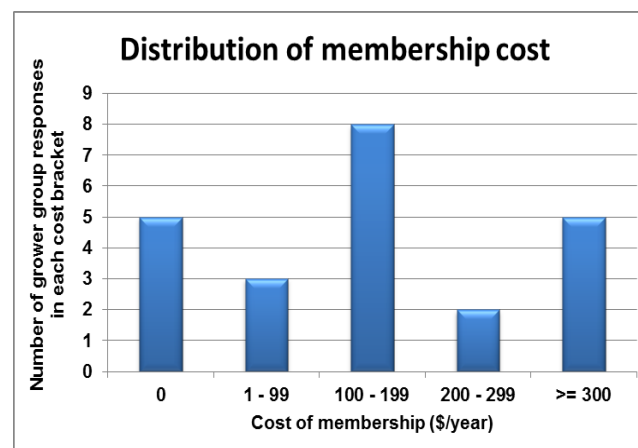
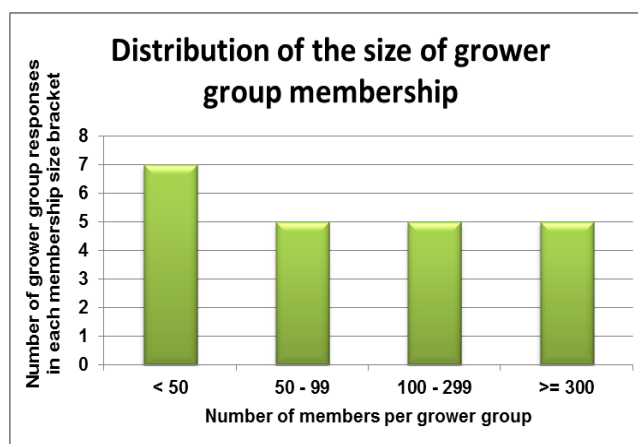


Table 1: Average grower group income and expenditure over the past 3 financial years.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Income (\$/year)			
Membership	15,000	17,000	19,000
Partnerships e.g. DAFWA	30,000	52,000	111,000
Sponsorship	43,000	53,000	38,000
Events income	14,000	13,000	15,000
Project income	325,000	303,000	192,000
Other, including interest	35,000	32,000	26,000
Total	462,000	470,000	401,000
Expenditure			
Permanent staff	130,000	154,000	131,000
Administration/office	27,000	30,000	29,000
Marketing	5,000	21,000	10,000
Events	22,000	20,000	18,000
Project expenses	226,000	216,000	181,000
Total	410,000	441,000	369,000

Number of groups = 23. Total group annual income ranged from \$1,000 to \$1.5m.

While grower group annual turnover varied significantly across the 23 groups that contributed data, the average income and expenditure remained on the right side of the ledger. Turnover is significantly impacted by project funding cycles but **average project income for these groups was 62% of total income**. Project funding is the major driver for a group as the enabler to undertake specific projects and validate research, which assists farm decision making and ensures the group’s relevance to its members.

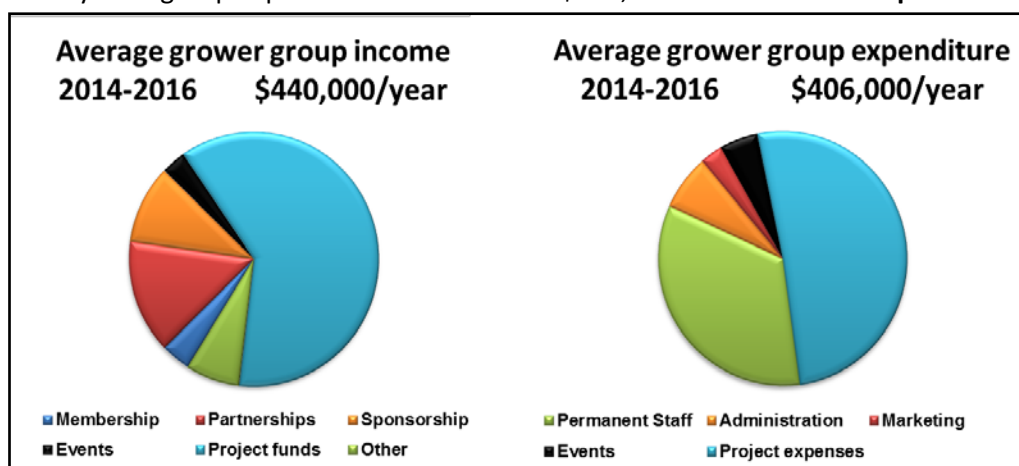
With membership fees averaging \$163 per annum in this study sample, multiplied across an average group membership of 124 members this delivers around \$20,000 annually, which means **membership fee income delivers just 4% of total revenue for a typical group**. The perception of value for money for membership versus the actual cost of membership remains a key dilemma for grower groups: how can groups source sustainable revenue to maintain key operations and support the good work of the organisation?

Significant effort is expended by groups to source, service and retain sponsorship and partnership agreements to underpin group income. The **average income generated from sponsors and partners was 25% of total income** or around \$100,000pa per group. Depending on the cost to service, these funds are not sufficient to manage and engage executive support for a group.

Analysis of group expenditure found around \$180,000 or **44% of total expenditure was required to service**

staff, administration and marketing while a further 51% of expenses are used to service projects.

Funding to maintain executive support for groups remains one of the vexing issues for all groups, large and small.



NOTE: The views of sponsors and partners and their perceptions of grower group value can be found in Appendix 2 *Grower Group Value – Industry Interviews Report July 2017*.

Volunteer and in-kind contribution to grower groups

Average volunteer and in-kind contributions made by grower groups are shown in Table 2 including average days per group per year, total for all responses, and estimated total for all grower groups. **The average amount of time provided in-kind is approximately 111 days per grower group per year.**

Table 2: Estimated volunteer and in-kind contributions made by grower groups.

In-kind time as an average of the past 3 years	Average per group (days/year)	Total of 23 responses (days/year)	Estimated total of all grower groups (days/year)
Chairperson contribution	16	368	657
Meetings (meeting length * # of meetings * # of participants)	36	838	1,496
Event organisation	21	483	863
Trials	32	736	1,314
Other	6	138	246
Total	111	2,563	4,577
Value of other in-kind contributions	Average per group (\$/year)	Total of 23 responses (\$/year)	Estimated total of all grower groups (\$/year)
Use of facilities	8,952	143,230	255,320
Committee members' travel cost to attend meetings	3,494	66,382	118,330
Other travel	5,580	78,118	139,250
Other	5,489	38,425	68,500
Total	23,515	326,155	581,400

Valuing in-kind time at a basic rate of \$320/day (\$40/hour) provides a value for time of \$35,500/year per grower group, or approximately \$1.5m/year for all grower groups (Table 3).

The total of in-kind time and other in-kind contributions is approximately of \$60,000/year per grower group, or approximately \$2m/year for all grower groups. Seventy per cent of this is voluntary time.

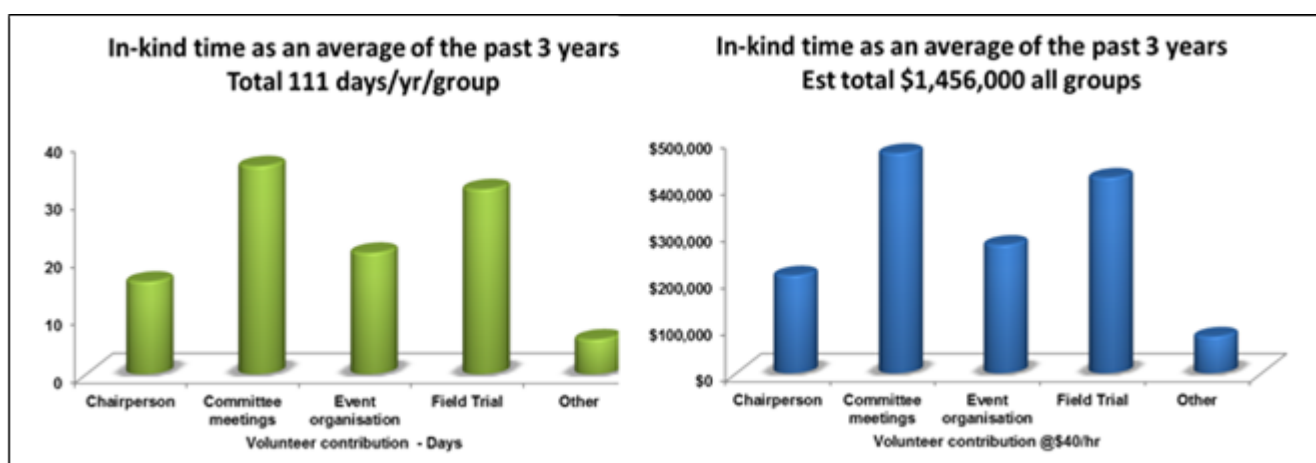
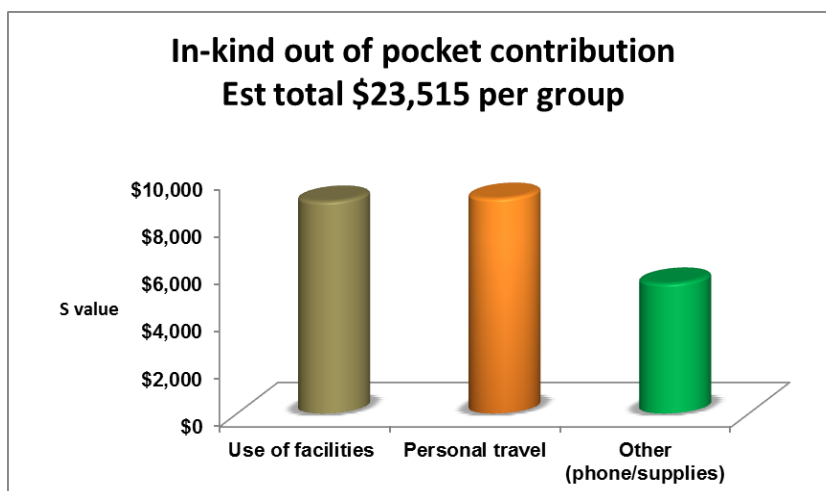


Table 3: Total estimated value of volunteer and in-kind contributions made by grower groups.

In-kind contributions as an average of the past 3 years	Average per group (\$/year)	Total of 23 responses (\$/year)	Estimated total of all grower groups (\$/year)
In-kind time	35,520	816,960	1,456,320
Other in-kind contributions	24,000	326,000	581,000
Total	59,520	1,142,960	2,037,320



Totalling average financial expenses and in-kind contributions, total contributions made by grower groups are estimated to be approximately \$467,000/year per grower group, or \$12m/year for all grower groups (Table 4). Approximately 85% of this is financial and 15% is in-kind contributions.

Table 4: Total estimated value of expenses and in-kind contributions made by grower groups.

In-kind contributions as an average of the past 3 years	Average per group (\$/year)	Total of 23 responses (\$/year)	Estimated total of all grower groups (\$/year)
Financial expenses	407,000	5,745,000	10,241,000
In-kind contributions	59,520	1,142,960	2,037,320
Total	466,520	6,887,960	12,278,320

Comparing the information from both the Farmer Interviews Report and the Grower Group Survey (Table 5) there was a strong consensus that suggests **members of a grower group who provide volunteer time to their group do so for between 11.1 and 11.7 hours/month**. Extrapolating this number further would indicate an in-kind contribution of between \$4-500 per volunteering member per month.

Table 5: Grower Group Volunteer Contribution.

		Executive	Sub-committee	Events	Trials	Other*	Total
Farmer assessment	Hrs/mth	155	15	10	13.5	28	223
		# farmers actively volunteering					19
		Ave hr/mth/volunteer member					11.7
Group assessment	Hrs/mth	16	36	21	32	6	111
		# farmers actively volunteering					10
10 committee @ 8 months/year		Ave hr/mth/volunteer member					11.1

Influence on practice change

The gold standard for integrated research and extension across many parts of agricultural production used to be the Department of Agriculture, however over the past 20 years the research landscape has been changing: where innovation is sourced from (more comes from global sources with local adaptation); who does the R&D (RDCs dominant, private and tertiary sectors rising, and the public sector in decline); who translates these and services industries (private and commercial sector, RDCs and grower groups with the public sector exiting); and increasing global connectedness and collaborative funding arrangements.

Grower groups have increasingly become self-reliant and independently minded and many, but not all, have evolved to be effective in aligning local needs with local R&D and translating R&D to practice change.

*“The grower groups have evolved into a new animal across the State. They all start for a reason and to sustain themselves they have to have a purpose and remain relevant to their members. **You can easily argue the value of having strong grower engagement in determining better outcomes; the grower groups have demonstrated capacity to drive productivity.**”*

The Grower Group Survey requested groups nominate three farm management or business practices for which they have had the most success in influencing adoption. Groups noted the year the group first started providing information on that practice, the proportion of all expenditure spent on each practice, the proportion of members adopting the practice, and the proportion of total economic benefit to growers provided by their grower group due to each farm practice.

Table 6: Top 3 management practices grower groups believe they had the greatest influence on adoption

Practice Type	# GGs indicated this activity as a top 3 practice for influence on adoption	Average year GG started providing information on the practice	Average % of members adopting the type of practice	Average % of total annual expenditure on the practice	Average % of total economic benefit to growers by GG
Soil health and amelioration	17	2011	69	12	14
- liming	6	2010	75	29	10
- deep ripping	5	2015	64	6	10
- non-wetting soils and soil moisture	2	2015	70	10	30
- general	3	2007	65	7	15
New crop and pasture varieties/species	10	2010	50	27	14
Precision ag, VRT and CTF	7	2011	70	5	
Time of sowing and dry seeding	3	2011	80	31	50
Weed and disease management	3	2011	45	42	15
Farm management	2	2014	30	10	33
Frost management	2	2013	40	9	10
Other	9	2009	41	17	31

Source: *Assessing the Value of Grower Groups – Appendix 4 Grower Group Survey 2017.*

Grower groups indicated they started providing information about these practices from 2007, that between 30 and 80% of members have adopted the practices, that grower groups have spent from 5 to 42% of their expenditure on these individual practices, which have contributed from 10 to 50% of the economic benefit to these groups.

The list of management practices identified by grower groups is similar to those provided in the Farmer Interviews Report as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Top 3 management practices farmers identify grower groups had greatest influence on adoption

Practice Type	# farmers who indicated this as top 3 practices influenced by GGs	Average cost of implementation (\$/ha)	Average area (ha/farm)	Profitability (\$/ha)	% attribution to GGs
Soil management	14	90	3,325	127	43
- deep ripping	6	99	1,767	100	46
- mould board ploughing	3	91	1,117	197	35
- liming	2	n.a.	5,000	50	40
- general	3	116	5,140		46
Agronomic investment	9	n.a.	2,700	85	66
Variety selection	8	32	5,203	75	66
Farm business	5	n.a.	4,750	13	57
Controlled Traffic Farming	4	17	5,000	50	56
Livestock management	3	n.a.	4,100	57	33
Soil management	14	90	3,325	127	43

Source: *Assessing the Value of Grower Groups – Appendix 3 Farmer Interviews Report 2017.*

Estimation of the Economic Value Provided by Grower Groups in Western Australia

This estimation of the economic value of grower groups in Western Australia in the role of influencing practice change utilises the concept of valuing the economic benefits of particular management practices that have been promoted by grower groups. To arrive at a current value underpinned by real experience and outcome, Dr Liz Petersen in conjunction with *Agknowledge* completed an economic analysis on four case study land management practices identified in Tables 6 and 7:

1. controlled traffic farming,
2. deep ripping,
3. adoption of new wheat varieties, and
4. adoption of serradella/biserrula pasture species.

Note: *The full report by Advanced Choice Economics Pty Ltd and Agknowledge can be found as Appendix 4A.*

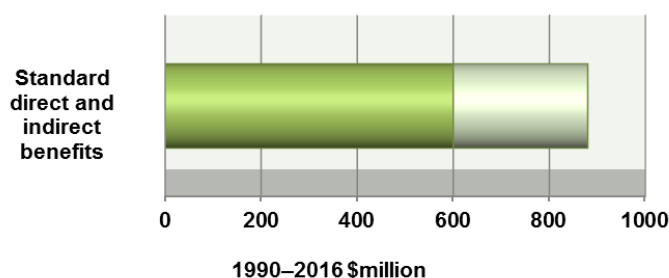
The study estimates that the grower groups spent approximately 35% of their budget on these four case studies of land management practices, and benefits to growers from these practices represent approximately 30% of total benefits of grower group activities.

Direct on-farm economic values are estimated through calculating the difference between current adoption and hypothetical adoption in the absence of grower group activities. The difference in gross margins as a result of adoption of the land management practice is multiplied by the additional adoption attributed to grower group activities.

The total direct on-farm benefits, cumulative from 1990 to 2016 in 2017 dollar terms, are estimated to be approximately \$600 million (and could range from approximately \$450m to \$750m).

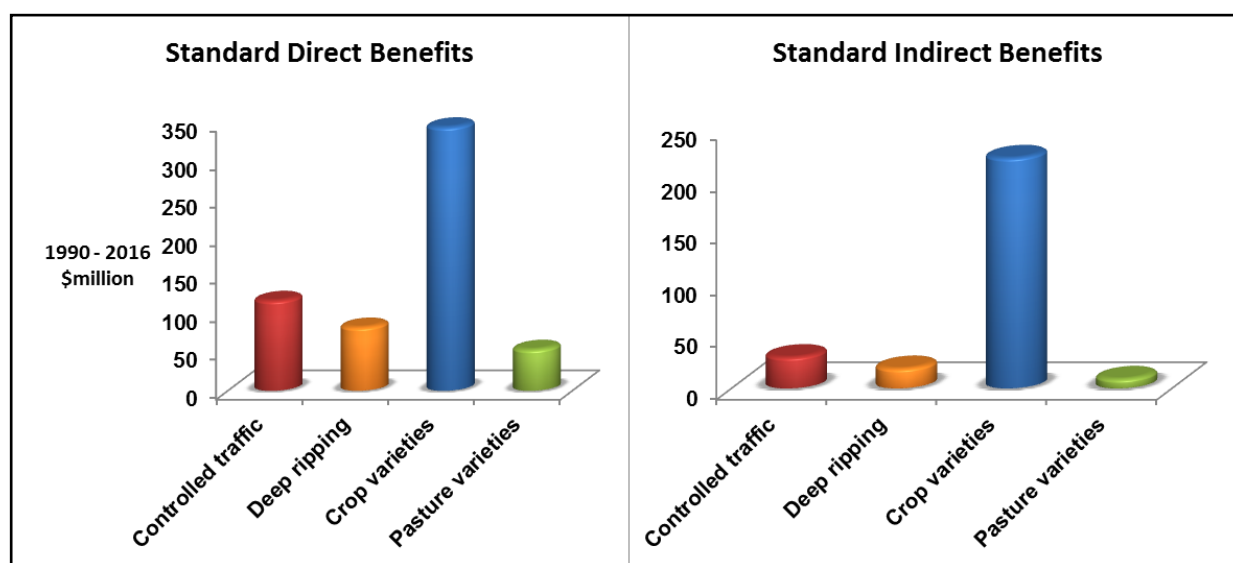
Indirect flow-on effects through the Western Australian economy due to growers' increased adoption of farm practices as a result of grower group activities are estimated using output multipliers. These multipliers estimate the flow-on value of increased demand for goods and services that supply inputs or service production (such as fertiliser, machinery, cartage) as well as increased expenditure of households due to increased incomes.

The total indirect flow-on benefits, cumulative from 1990 to 2016 in 2017 dollar terms, are estimated to be **\$300 million** (and could range from approximately \$200m to \$350m).



The total economic value of the four case study land management practices is approximately **\$900 million**.

Present value of the economic benefits attributed to grower groups from four case studies



Scaling these benefits up to estimate the value of all grower group activities, **the cumulative total economic value is estimated to be \$3 billion over the period 1990 to 2016** (and could range from approximately \$2.3bn to \$3.6bn). Over the 25 year time frame, this is an average of \$120m/yr (ranging from \$90m/yr to \$150m/yr).

The results of the Grower Group Survey reveal that over the past three financial years, expenditure of all grower groups within the GGA is approximately \$10m/yr, and in-kind contributions value approximately \$2m/yr for a total contribution of \$12m/yr.

Table 8: Present value of the cumulative economic benefits and costs of grower groups (\$m/yr)

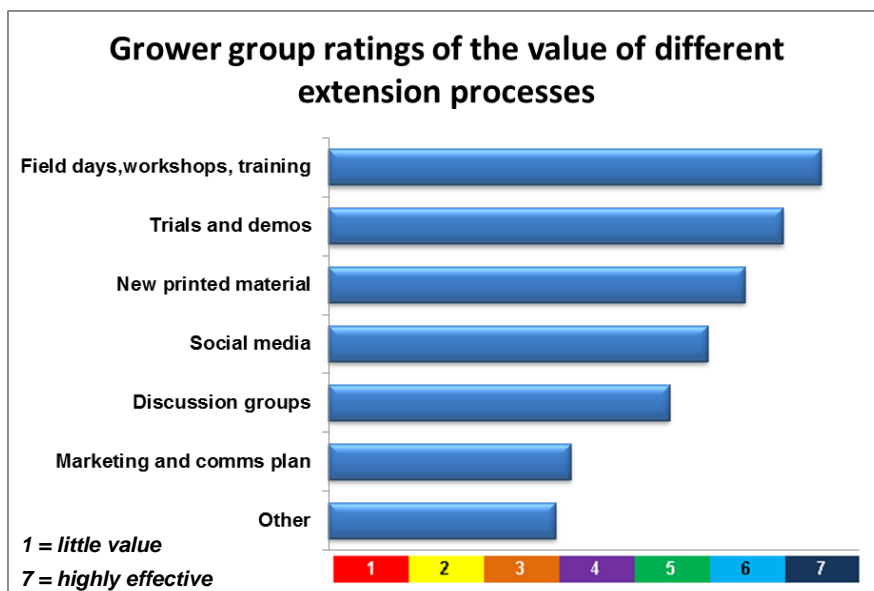
Levels of adoption	Low	Standard	High
Estimated total benefits	92	117	143
Expenditure	10	10	10
In-kind contributions	2	2	2
Estimated total costs	12	12	12
Benefit cost ratio	8	10	12

Dividing the estimated annual average benefit per year (\$120m/yr) by the estimated costs (Table 4 - \$12m/yr) reveals a **benefit cost ratio of approximately 10** (ranging from 8 to 12).

This suggests that every dollar spent by grower groups (including in-kind contributions) generates an economic value to the Western Australian economy of approximately \$10, which is a very good return on investment.

Extension processes of key practices

Grower group respondents rated the various extension processes for providing information to farmers for each of the land management practices. The importance of the hands-on approach to the localised information is demonstrated by the high rating given to field days and trials. Supporting information in printed format and social media also support the practical and visual information.



Economic benefits provided by grower groups beyond practice change

Grower Group Survey responses identified a range of economic benefits other than on-farm practice change that groups provide to their local community. These include employment, support of local businesses and the community; upskilling people; providing funds to the community and representation on local issues. Other benefits include networking opportunities; empowering women and focus on land care.

Many of the grower groups employ staff who live locally or they move into the region and in turn support local businesses and the community. Throughout the year, the groups support local business through event catering; venue hire; accommodation for speakers and advertising in local publications. Grower group events also attract farmers to town who often need accommodation and spend money at local businesses while they are in town. Grower group events generate expenditure in towns and help to sustain local communities.

Community crops, facilitated by some grower groups, help to raise substantial amounts of money which allows those groups to support their local community groups through the provision of funds for local projects, schools or local infrastructure.

Grower groups are also active in representing their members on issues that affect their bottom line and provide a voice for farmers on R&D issues and local community issues and also in the development of further opportunities. Some groups in particular are focused on landcare and they work with the local community and schools to raise awareness.

Other economic benefits that grower groups provide to local communities that were identified include new business ventures; attracting research and funds into the region; promotion of agriculture through sponsoring local shows; retention of young farmers through succession planning and connecting the community through open communication and promotion of local events to reduce event duplication.

Employment

- Employment for local community members (EO, project officer etc.).

- Staff employment locally.
- Provides employment for the Liebe Group staff.
- Through accessing funding for local activities and project employment, business opportunities can be created for people living and working in the region.

Support local businesses / community

- Support of local community organisations for event catering and venue hire. For example the CWA or local community centre buildings.
- The hiring of facilities and catering work for training, workshops, forums and sundowners creates local employment and sustains community facilities.
- MADFIG events bring people to town who may otherwise not visit. For example the research updates had attendance of ~100 people including at least 20 who would have stayed overnight for 1 or 2 nights, had meals etc. Attendees from outlying towns often spend at local businesses while in town including food, groceries and farm supplies. Events generate expenditure in town including catering, accommodation for speakers, venue hire, advertising in local newsletters, bus hire etc..
- Advertising in local papers and newsletters provides a revenue stream for these voluntary-run, low cost important communications avenues for communities.
- Brings external parties to town for events etc. who support local businesses.
- We use a local caterer for events and meetings, this provides economic stimulus.
- Spending in shops, utilising local businesses and venues for events.
- Overnight travel stays in local town for consultants and industry people.
- Local suppliers are used for required inputs and provision of services.
- Shop local; use local caterers; use/hire local facilities; support local businesses.

Networking opportunities

- Significant networking opportunities for women involved in farm businesses and agribusiness in the eastern wheatbelt.
- General networking and creating contacts for people at events.
- Holding events introducing innovation and networking opportunities.
- Social cohesion and inclusivity.
- Unique and niche grower group; only local grower group designed to solely benefit, upskill and empower women.
- On farm machinery demonstrations aid decision making.

Landcare focus

- We've focussed on keeping the landcare name and practises alive in the community and school. We've done much with the local school – talks, walks, projects. Also rehab of public areas with a Shire budget. We are mainly a NRM group and so most of our funding comes from NLP projects - spring and winter crop walks are well attended.
- As we are an NRM group, we raise community appreciation of their surrounding landscape – it's uniqueness and its long-term care.

Upskilling people

- Provides access to business and financial management training and support.
- Understanding new technology.
- Industry development.

- Capacity building and corporate governance.
- Local business upskilling.
- Provide training opportunities e.g. PinG courses, Agrimaster, education forum to support decisions.

Representation

- Representation on issues that fundamentally affect the bottom line of producers e.g. BJD.
- Gives farmers a voice for research and development actually needed on farm plus additional areas that need attention within the community and enables members to develop new and exciting opportunities, and markets and exploring alternative options for managing farm businesses and creation of jobs and training.

Funding provider

- Donates substantial amounts of money to local community groups.
- Provides funding for local infrastructure, i.e. Yuna Community Centre YFIG donated \$150k.
- Funds community projects through community crop funds.

Other

- Starting point for formation of SW growers group.
- New business ventures.
- Attracts GRDC R&D support as main group in our area.
- Promotes agriculture (NR Show rural trophy).
- Retention of young farmers through succession planning has been successful. Family farm businesses have included younger generation in their structures; some have grown their farm to suit the needs of the next generation.
- Our e-news includes local community events. We aim to connect the broader community so we include events from Munglinup, Jerdacuttup, Hopetoun, Ravensthorpe, Lake King. We also include to a lesser degree Jerramungup, Albany and Esperance. They do not just have to be NRM or agricultural updates/events. This 'community connect' strives to promote open communication, maximise event attendance, reduce event duplication, and avoid event clashes (not unusual to intercept 2 or more large events scheduled for the same time/ day with the same target audience).

Social benefits provided by grower groups

Grower group responses regarding the social benefits they provide to their local community are listed in the dot points below. They include networking opportunities; supporting mental health; organising local events; educational opportunities; industry representation; promotion of land care and they provide a community service.

Networking opportunities attributed to grower groups are both formal and informal and allow for social interaction which enables farmers to share their personal stories; catch-up with like-minded people and support each other. A lot of groups also hold social events that are aimed at including both the husband and wife and children (i.e. Christmas party) and some groups specifically target women and upskilling them and allowing them to learn in a safe environment. An indirect benefit of grower group activities is the social benefit – the feeling of belonging to a cause, connecting with other farmers and not feeling so alone can help build resilience and address mental health issues especially in times of hardship.

Grower groups also identified that the various events/workshops/training days they host provide social benefits along with the learning opportunities these events provide through discussions and interaction which encourages farmer to farmer learning. They also help to upskill members and provide benefits from a

social and business point of view. It was also identified that all voluntary groups provide and maintain a community service to bring farmers together to achieve outcomes as a group rather than as individuals.

The promotion of landcare ethics was also raised as a social benefit as the groups focused on these issues and maintained an environmental presence in their districts and help protect and conserve the local environment. Other benefits raised include a drop in centre for information in town; a venue for various meetings within the community and they are also important in retaining younger farmers in the region, especially in a town with no pub as grower groups put on social functions to fill the gap.

Another benefit outlined by grower groups included industry representation on issues relevant to members (i.e. production issues, telecommunications, better roads etc.) and it was also identified that grower groups were the peak advocate body for agriculture in their district.

Networking opportunities

- Informal and formal networking opportunities for local farmers.
- Opportunities for networking and social interaction.
- Networking amongst local growers and agribusiness to share success stories and those not so successful is an important part of improving business profitability and community success.
- Social interaction and education.
- Social functions for families and opportunities to support men and women in ag especially during the growing season.
- Social get together and support. Social networking and entertainment.
- YFIG hosts a community Christmas party for everyone in the community, irrespective of whether they are growers or not. YFIG supplies all food, drinks, decorations and entertainment.
- Both meetings and field days include a social component. We encourage wives and kids. We even subsidise childcare for local events to help encourage the women to attend (better to support the struggling service than do our own crèche).
- Discussion and interaction, both social and from a business point of view.
- AWWE provides a platform for like-minded women to meet, network and support each other in a safe environment.

Supporting mental health

- Mental health.
- Feeling of belonging to a cause.
- Sharing (not only knowledge but experiences and emotions - mental health).
- Connection between farmer to farmer, the feeling of belonging and being part of a group.
- Connecting growers means in times of hardship they have a closer bond to their neighbours.
- Activities and speakers at past events have provided tips and skills for building resilience. Having events helps bring people together when times are tough, get them off the farm and talking to other people. One of the driving reasons for forming MADFIG was that it was a positive, proactive thing to do in a run of tough seasons, It was about acknowledging that we needed to be involved in identifying and driving the changes that we needed to undertake for long term business and production success.
- All successful agricultural groups have socially based membership (they generate social benefits amongst their own membership by supporting and attending the same functions). They formed as a result of friends or neighbours joining forces to work towards a common theme, namely making their farms more profitable.

Events/ Workshops

- Inclusive, all members welcome at all events.
- Events of relevance to industry.
- Leadership Programs.
- Access to training, workshops and events.
- Events to attend and engage with people x 3 per year.
- Brings in outside influences via information sessions, workshops .
- All grower groups work towards activities they can learn from, implement or practice that are profitable and sustainable for their enterprise. They develop partnerships with any organisation, business or learning institute to suit their means and they are very successful in sourcing sponsorship from organisations that provide agricultural products or services. Their continued success lies in the fact that their meetings are a great social event, field days are very well attended by all members to learn in a friendly environment with their mates and then enjoy a few beers at the end of the day (membership fees ensure that Members do attend functions so they can reap benefits from their membership fees). Grower groups can be flexible to organise events, field days and seminars when it is not their busy time. They are in charge of the direction they want to go and what they want to achieve. All decisions are shared by the members or a committee representing the group are elected to make decisions on the member's behalf.

Education

- Farmer to farmer learning.
- Education.
- Discussion and interaction, both social and from a business point of view.
- Facilitate discussion on topics that local farmers may be struggling with (stock management after fire etc.).
- AWWE plays a significant role in the capacity building of women involved in farm businesses and agribusiness in the Eastern Wheatbelt.

Industry representation

- Industry representation.
- Local issues Lobby for better roads, telecommunications, conduit for information dissemination. Peak advocate body for agriculture in the district.

Community service

- All voluntary groups provide and maintain a community service, within the shire where they operate due either to an interest by farmers in general who have at some point approached the local Shire for support to set up a group or a collection of farmers have come together with common interests and know they can achieve outcomes a lot more successfully working as a group, rather than operating as individuals.
- The last event was attended by over 80 people. A collaboration between Historical Society at the oldest farm in the district – Macpherson Homestead 'Bygone Days and Landcare Ways'. Shoe string budget. \$1000 from NACC and \$2000 from YYCMG. Open for 5 hours. Land management appreciation and knowledge abounded.

Landcare ethics promotion

- The few remaining landcare groups struggle to attract membership, it is also voluntary but the focus is mainly on non-profitable aspects, soil and water conservation, protecting the environment, maintaining healthy bush, conserving the few native animals that still exist in the

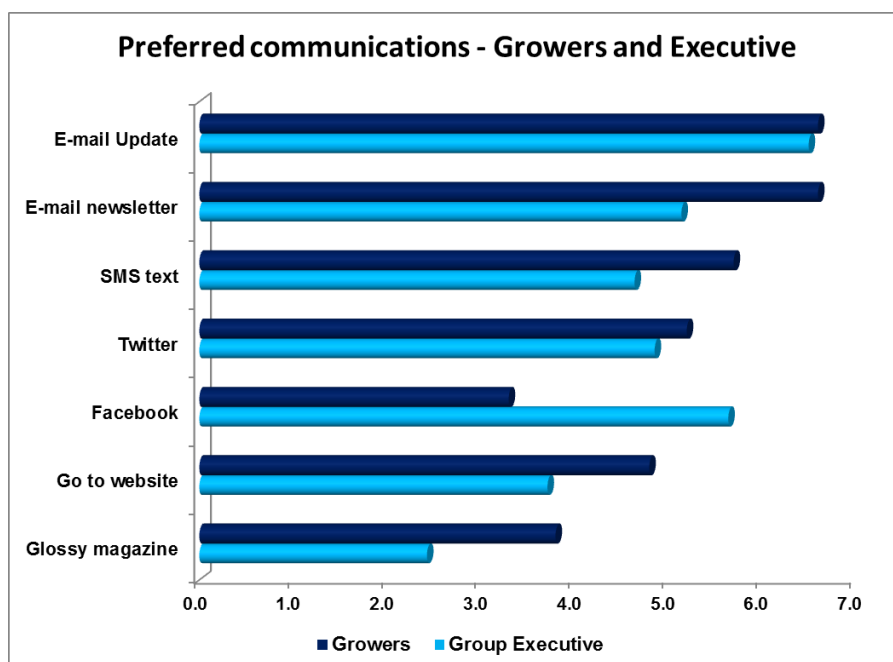
wheatbelt and addressing the weed and feral animal issues within the farming community. Therefore members are less likely to find any social benefits; their role is perceived by the community as promoting landcare ethics. The members that support the landcare groups understand the need for the continuation of a group within the community that maintains an environmental presence in the district they live in. As landcare groups receive minimal sponsorship and rely on government grants and shire support these groups are slowly losing favour in the community. Farm profitability commonly overrides the attitude for protection and conservation of the environment.

Other

- Soon to be research management on station.
- Drop in centre for information.
- We manage Cranbrook Public Library, fencing and revegetation projects are main business. Venue for various meeting such as WIFE, Community Bank, community newsletter compiled in venue, meeting place, industry information, funding opportunities.
- Link for beef group.
- Enables young farmers to come into the community and talk to people as Yuna no longer has a pub and YFIG have several social functions a year to help fill the gap. We have experienced a substantial increase in membership in the last two years by mainly younger farmers.

Grower group preferred communication mediums

Respondents were asked to rank, from a list, their preferred communication mediums (in descending order with 7 being most preferred). The most popular communication mediums grower groups utilise to communicate with their members are a fortnightly email update which was followed by the use of Facebook to promote the group’s activities, events and other applicable information (light blue bars in Figure 6). An email newsletter was rated third and closely followed by Twitter and SMS text. Website was rated 6th and a glossy magazine was used the least.



In a separate questionnaire, farmers were also surveyed to determine the most valuable communication method for grower groups to get information to them and it appears that grower groups are hitting the mark and addressing their needs to some degree (dark blue bars in Figure 6). Their most preferred

method was a fortnightly email update which is most commonly used by grower groups at the moment and this was followed by an email newsletter. Farmers find email is convenient as they can regularly access their computer/smart phone, it is cost effective, and enables one to readily communicate, triggers thought processes and the information can be easily filed to refer back to later.

SMS text also rated highly as farmers find that texts are good reminders to alert farmers to an issue or event and in reflecting on the grower groups' use of text there is potential to increase their use of SMS text but as farmers indicated it has to be brief and not used to the point where it becomes a regular text.

While Facebook was utilised by a lot of grower groups, farmers indicated that it was their least preferred option and that they were more likely to use Twitter to keep up to date with grower group activities. Twitter is increasingly popular with farmers and more so with the younger generation as it is short and concise and allows the user to select news feeds to follow and provides links to websites for information.

With a focus on communication being brief and to the point for farmers in order to save time and allow them to explore an issue further (through a link to a website), they placed more value on a website than grower groups themselves did as a communication medium. A glossy magazine also rated low on the list for farmers as it was for grower groups.

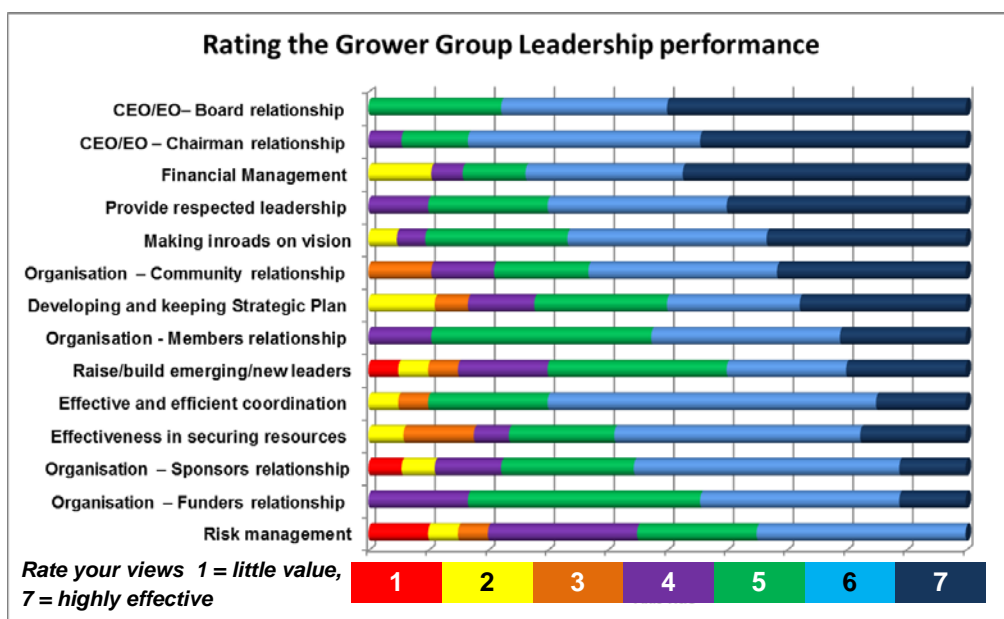
In order to better meet the needs of farmers, grower groups should be looking to maintain their email communication, utilise SMS texts more for alerts / reminders, embrace Twitter more, reduce their focus on Facebook and ensure their webpage is up to date with group events / activities / research results.

Grower group leadership performance

The results of grower group's assessment of their leadership performance is summarised in Figure 7. Groups rated aspects of leadership on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = little value and 7 = highly effective.

In reflecting on the executive leadership, grower groups rated the board relationship, chairman relationship and the financial management of their groups as highly effective. Groups also rated very high in providing respected leadership, effective and efficient co-ordination, making in-roads on their vision and in their community relationship.

While the ability of grower groups to develop and keep to their current strategic plan was above average, it was also rated quite poorly by some groups. In terms of relationships with stakeholders, the relationship with members was identified to be the most effective compared to sponsors, and funders' relationship was rated the lowest and the second lowest overall. Raise/build emerging new leaders and effectiveness in securing resources rated poorly, risk management was rated as the issue least addressed by grower groups.



Grower group influences

Grower groups were asked to rank (in descending order with 7 being most influential) bodies/organisations or people that have been the most influential on their grower group. Results are presented in the green line of the radar chart in Figure 8. These results are compared with influences on farming practices and decision making (blue line) and influence on the top three land management practices for which grower groups have had the greatest perceived impact on adoption (red line).

The most influential body, organisation or person on grower groups in the past three years has been family and other farmers, followed by DAFWA, then R&D corporations, consultants/advisors, farm input suppliers, and the Grower Group Alliance. Whereas for individual farmers, it was identified that private advisors were the most influential source of information on their farming practices and decision making, which was followed closely by family and other farmers and then grower groups were rated the third most influential. In terms of practice change, once again consultants/advisors were rated the biggest influencer ahead of grower groups and then family and other farmers.

In summarising the key influences on decision making, it shows that family and other farmers, consultants/advisors and grower groups are the main influencing sources of information for grower groups, farmers and for farming practices. R&D corporations were rated ahead of DAFWA, and farm input suppliers.

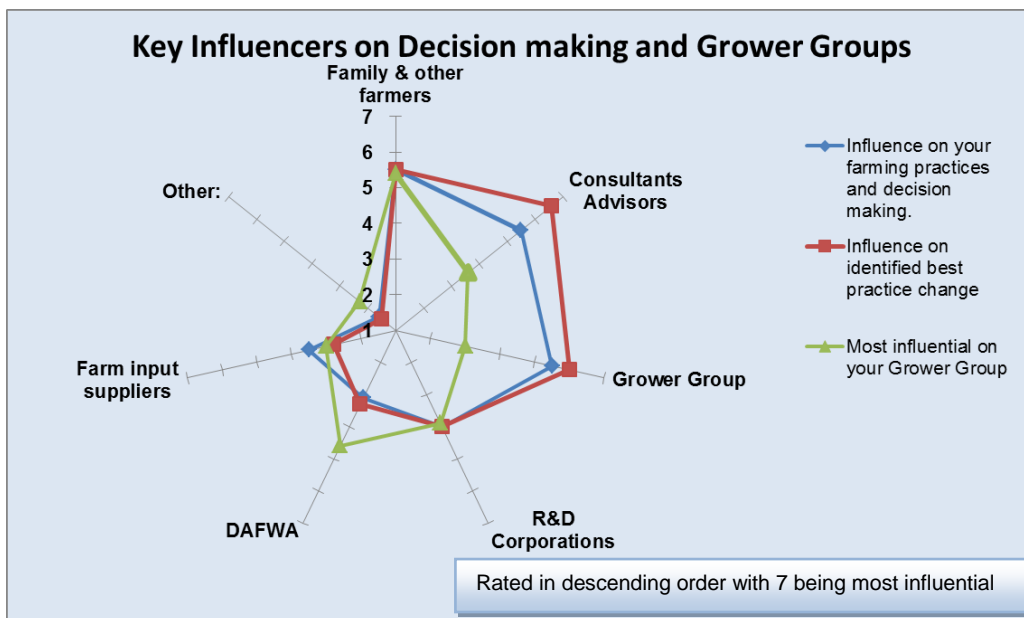
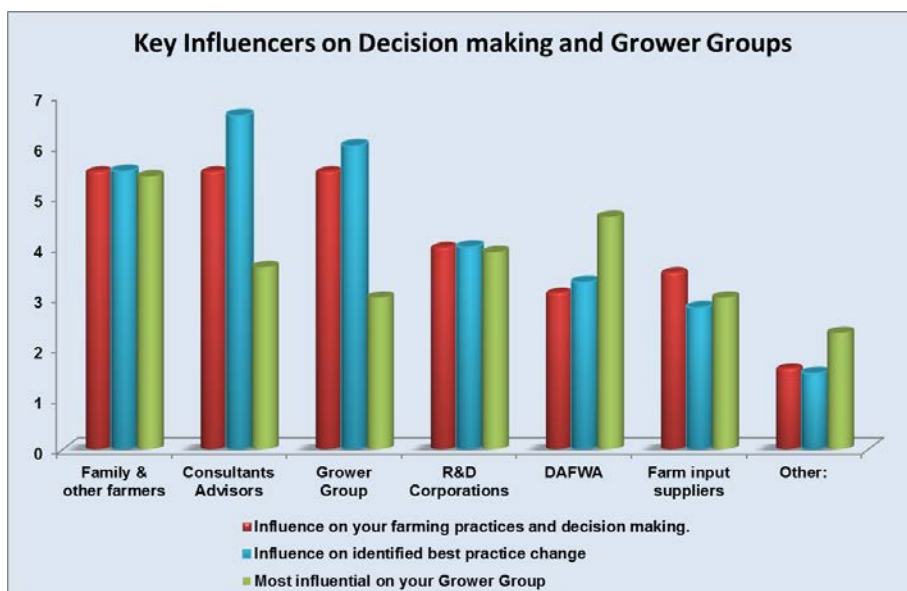


Figure 8: Key influencers on decision making and grower groups



Engagement with other network groups

The major industry R&D corporations have introduced their own ‘network’ groups such as the Regional Cropping Solutions Network (RCSN) or the WA Livestock Research Council (WALRC) to identify local priorities. Grower groups indicated whether they engaged in some way with the RCSN or WALRC in Figure 9 (left-hand bars). These results are compared with a similar question asked of growers (right-hand bars).

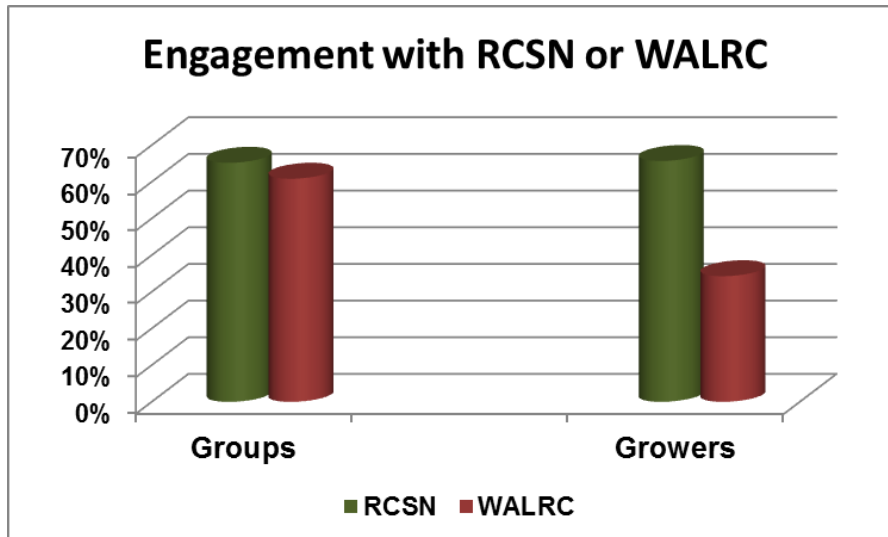
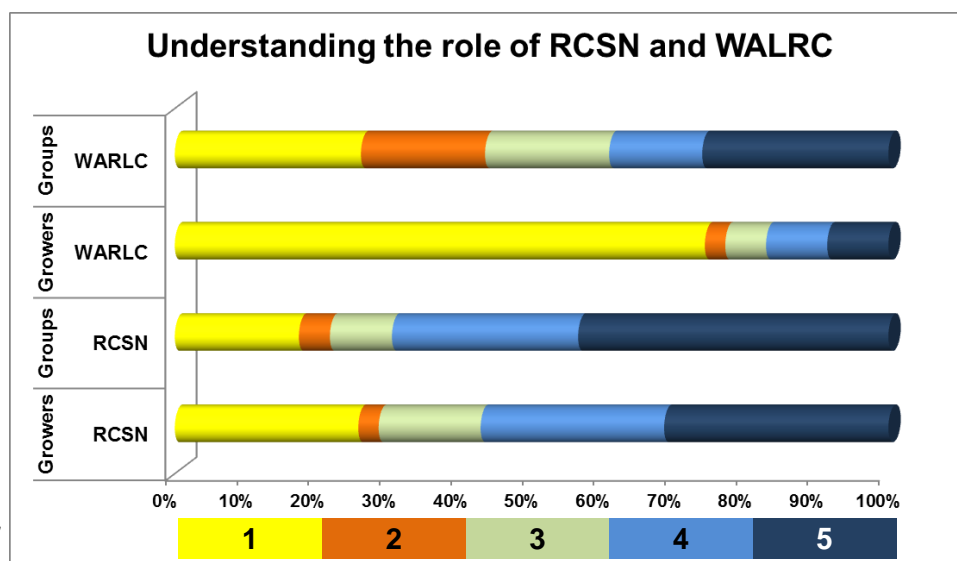


Figure 9: Engagement with the Regional Cropping Solutions Network (RCSN) and the WA Livestock Research Council (WALRC)

More than half of the grower groups surveyed have had some engagement with the GRDC’s Regional Cropping Solution Network (RCSN) and the WA Livestock Research Council (WALRC). The results indicate that grower group management have more interaction with the network groups than individual farmers.

Grower groups were asked to rate their understanding of the roles of RCSN and WALRC on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = little understanding and 5 = well aware. Results are presented in Figure 10 (1st and 3rd bar), in comparison with results of a similar question asked of growers (2nd and 4th bar). Grower groups had a far better understanding of the role of the RCSN compared to WALRC. The individual farmer’s understanding of the roles of RCSN and WALRC was considerably poor and especially for WALRC. However it can be said that there are a lot more grower groups and farmers who are grains focused rather than livestock, which would account for the poorer interaction and understanding of WALRC.



1 = little understanding,
5 = well aware

Figure 10: Understanding of the role of the Regional Cropping Solution Network (RCSN) and the WA Livestock Research Council (WALRC)

Grower group interaction with the RCSN includes grower group representatives who sit on the RCSN committee; funding for local research / trials and through meetings which provide an opportunity to put forward local priorities. There was a number of comments that groups had had little or minimal interaction with the RCSN due the group being too small or that the group wasn't focused on the grains industry or didn't do trials. Some criticisms about the RCSN outlined by grower groups included that there were promises and little action; that the GRDC is too focused on conventional farming to match our strategic plan and therefore groups are unable to obtain funding; and that the RCSN appears to be a one way flow of information with groups advising the committee of their priorities but unsure if they are being addressed. One group encourages its members to be on the RCSN committee to ensure that their research priorities, which are set by local farmers, are presented as they recognise the impact that the RCSN can have on driving core funding priorities in the region and state.

Interaction with WALRC was noted to be through contact with a local board member; requests to provide input to help set research priorities; and a grower group representative on the WALRC committee. A number of groups have had no or limited interaction due to being less livestock focused or because the group is too small.

RCSN

- Minimal interaction and impact on our group as GRDC is grain focused.
- Minimal – our group AWWE does not partake in any agronomy or farm trials.
- We are too small for them to be interested.
- 2 members of the group sit on RCSNs.
- Liebe Group research priorities are set by an R&D committee which has strong grower representation. Although initially unsure on the role of the RCSN, the group now encourages members to be involved in the RCSN groups to ensure the Liebe R&D priorities are presented. There is therefore an increasing interaction between Liebe and RCSN as we recognise the large impact RCSN can have on driving core funding priorities in the region and state.
- Have good contact with RCSN and are aware of their activities and processes. One project directly managed by the group is an RCSN project. The group has been directly involved in several other RCSN projects as host of trial sites.
- 2 committee on RCSN. We had members on a RCSN.
- Attracted local research.
- Have meetings in the area once a year – provides an opportunity for locals to make their priorities known to GRDC.
- Little or no impact. Lots of promises little action.
- One of our members has been a grower representative on the Geraldton RCSN for the last 12 months. Geraldton RCSN has been largely dominated by private consultants and agribusiness in the past and YFIG has not been included in any discussions about regional priorities in that time. We have identified gaps relevant to YFIG in applied research over the last few years and concepts on how to address it and have been advised to take it to the RCSN, however it is a one way flow of information and we have no idea if our concerns are ever addressed.
- Open interaction, feeling GRDC using ideas but not on ground yet.

WALRC

- A lot of interaction through board member, we are often asked to provide input to help set research priorities.
- Again we don't rate much as too small.

- Lesser interaction due to less livestock focus in the area however still see the strong potential impact on local grower driven research and development.
- Limited to date.
- Board member spoke at Autumn update, one committee member on it.
- Unsure, no local direct contact with group. WALRC is starting to play more of a role.
- Have made contact and welcomed an opportunity to interact with our members. We just haven't managed to lock in a date/event yet!
- Negligible. Little or no impact. Negative.
- New relationship but proactive.
- We have a member on WALRC.
- Secretariat of the WALRC; no direct impact, increased interaction with MLA.

Other comments

- Not our province currently. Only livestock matter we are involved in is 1080 baiting.
- GRDC are not interested in our small and basically sustainable ideals – they are too conventional farming orientated to match our strategic plan and so we are not a preferred funded body.
- NABRC - only been to one meeting, but will be very helpful in aligning our agenda across Northern Australia.
- Not a reliable income source at the moment.
- Grower groups are willing to share information but only if they see value coming back on ground – it's their levies being spent.

Value the grower groups add to the Western Australia agricultural industry

Grower group management believe that grower groups provide immense value and play an integral role in the WA agricultural industry as they represent the strongest connection to grass-roots and they undertake grower driven RD&E. They are viewed as a vital link between researchers, industry and farmers and they help to empower and embody producers as they address local issues and facilitate local R&E that is relevant to their members.

With DAFWA withdrawing from some of its activities and within extension in particular, grower groups are seen to be the main vehicle that actively facilitates adoption and extension of new research and technologies. Access to locally relevant information is an important part in ensuring that farmers can continue to improve their productivity and business profitability.

As stated by one group, 'groups provide an important path for getting R&D opportunities on the ground and in linking growers and those involved there is potentially a greater return on the research investment as it is better focused, reaches growers more directly and is linked with other local relevant research'.

Grower groups are also viewed as contributing significant value to the industry as they facilitate the sharing of information and encourage innovation through peer to peer learning, they also provide capacity building opportunities which are specific and highly beneficial to members.

They also play a valuable role in representing farmers to address issues that cannot be achieved single handed, as they are seen to be powerful and provide a less fractured voice on issues that are important to their local members.

Other successful roles that grower groups undertake is through providing networking opportunities which are highly valued for the social aspect, and some groups play a valuable role in conservation within their region.

In summary, grower groups are viewed as an essential player with the WA agricultural industry as they provide a service (which is minimal compared to private advisors or in the case of some groups is free) that aids adoption, facilitates learning, connects industry with farmers and has a strong social benefit.

However in saying that, it was also identified that a properly functioning grower group can add enormous value to research, technology uptake and scientific rigour of farm trials. It was also mentioned that a group is nothing without strong leadership, a strong community spirit, a culture of learning and sharing information and cross-pollination between older and younger members.

- A very valuable method of extension to the farmer and social aspect is almost as important.
- Grower groups provide significant value to the WA agricultural industry by localising research and capacity building opportunities which are specific and highly beneficial to the members. WA grower groups have the opportunity to become localised learning hubs which cannot be replicated by the government or private sector.
- Networking. We are not geared up for trials. No paid staff. I only do what I have knowledge of – i.e. environmental issues and biodiversity. We are conservation farmers and do a lot of tree planting and seed gathering workshops.
- Very valuable as they are a conduit to the research and development of the industry to growers.
- Extension of information, other groups do research etc.
- Connection, group learning, a more powerful, less fractured voice on issues that are important
- Grower groups provide immense value and an integral role in the WA and national agricultural industry as they represent the strongest connection to grass-roots, grower driven research and development. Grower groups have the ability to facilitate and drive true local and relevant R, D & E that is aligned to the needs of the end users.
- Grower groups provide significant value to the WA agricultural industry. Farm profitability is strongly linked to the ability to adapt and change. As growers, having access to local R&D is an important part in ensuring that we can continue to improve our productivity and business profitability. The grower group provides a quorum that assists in attracting relevant R&D and expertise to the local area in a co-ordinated and more accessible way. Through the grower groups we can clearly outline priority issues and identify activities that we can implement in the short term but also longer more strategic R&D that helps us adapt to changing circumstance. The conversations that happen at grower groups through the networking and sharing of information amongst Growers and agribusiness can make a big difference on-farm. The groups provide an important path for getting R&D opportunities on the ground By linking growers and directly involving them with R&D opportunities there is potentially a greater return on the research investment as research can be better focussed, linked to other relevant local research and reach growers more directly.
- sharing information, encouraging innovation
- Impossible to quantify- Keeps research relevant and local, supports innovators and experimenters locally.
- The link for farmers to researchers and discussion points on testing in practice.
- Grass roots! We connect the growers with industry. We know what grower's main issues are and how they want them addressed before researchers and industry. We nurture information sharing whether peer to peer or industry to grower.
- A properly functioning group can add enormous value to research, technology uptake, and scientific rigour for on farm trials.
- High value due to on-the ground interaction and ability to remain up to date with changing issues.

- Significant if strategic, forward thinking and have the funding to do the job. They are the conduit from the farmer to govt, industry and beyond.
- local issues being addressed
- Help empower and embody producers.
- Improved connection between grower, consumer and industry professionals
- Puts producers on a level playing field with whole of agricultural industry.
- Enhanced R&D in mixed farm business situation (i.e. not just focusing on one area of farm business like cropping but integration of livestock to improve on farm production and profit)
- Allows for better use and realisation of funds for R&D, training and marketing opportunities.
- Improves communication right throughout the industry especially farmer to farmer for improving better farming techniques and technologies.
- Allows a body for representing the farmers to address issues that cannot be achieved single handed.
- We are a vital link between, researchers, industry and the grower. We provide a service (unpaid) that aids adoption, communication and has a strong social benefit.
- Growers Groups have taken over the extension from DAFWA for local research, development and particularly extension.
- Grower groups are the main vehicle for actively facilitating adoption and extension of new research and technologies as the network of government extension officers no longer exists. The model is flawed as there is not a strong feedback loop taking research problems back to the core researchers. The private consultant/agribusiness model does tend to be a one way flow of information to clients with little fed back in to researchers due to where the best financial return is for them (no financial reward in feeding ideas back to researchers). Therefore we see YFIG as a great extension vehicle where research can be fed into and adopted by members and at the same time we can highlight gaps in our system.
- Grower groups are essential – they are local and have direct farmers links and are driven by farmers.
- They are great. We have seen where they can be very successful – e.g. Yuna. But they are nothing without strong leadership, a strong community spirit, a culture of learning and sharing information and cross-pollination between older and newer farming members of the community. All they are then is purely a social event on the calendar. It is very important the groups have a leadership succession planning strategy.

Future operation and role of the Grower Group Alliance

Grower groups say that the future of the Grower Group Alliance is dependent on the ongoing success of grower groups in Western Australia. The GGA is viewed as the overarching body that brings grower groups together and supports them in their various roles in remaining relevant, connected and sustainable and acts as a conduit between grower groups and wider industry.

It plays an essential role in supporting groups with administration functions, providing training and facilitation, linking researchers to growers, providing resources for groups and industry information and networking opportunities. The GGA also plays an advocacy role in liaising with funding bodies. The value that grower groups put on the GGA varies across the groups, in the questionnaire it was indicated that new and emerging grower groups and those run by volunteers found the GGA support more valuable as it minimises their time spent chasing up relevant information.

One grower group emphasised the important role of the GGA in that ‘grower groups are unique and isolated and support is vital – there are few people who understand the complexity of a grower group and how they operate, by networking the groups we can work together to improve and share our learnings and the GGA can represent us as a whole giving us a stronger voice to larger organisations’.

In the future, grower groups would like to see the GGA continue in its support role and play a stronger advocacy role on the role and significance of grower groups in WA and be the collective voice for groups on matters of policy at a state and national level and liaise with funding bodies.

The GGA has the potential to further build the capacity of growers, grower groups and staff and to provide further training opportunities. Grower groups indicated they would like training in statistical analysis, social media, company directors’ courses, changes to the incorporation act and impact on the groups’ constitution, setting up websites, texting groups, new technology to save time and other training as necessary to upskill staff. As stated by one group, the ongoing importance of increasing the capacity and leadership of grower groups and their members is paramount in ensuring the future of R, D & E remains connected to the needs of end users.

While the GGA has the established network, grower groups would like to see it facilitate greater cross-learning and collaboration and cohesion between grower groups rather than competition. Other feedback from grower groups was the need for the GGA to be sexier online and develop a massive online presence to promote their and other grower groups activities; and that it should establish closer relations with grower groups by regularly visiting them in their regions to be aware of their needs.

It was also raised that groups that are run by volunteers (no paid staff) find it hard to attend GGA events as they are significantly out of pocket after paying for travel, accommodation and registration fees.

- GGA will be valuable for emerging grower groups, those that are starting out.
- The GGA is essential in supporting the administrative function of grower groups such as AWWE.
- It’s highly professional. DAFWA has traditionally been this districts stronghold. I’ve appreciated seeing how they do things but it’s not where we are at.
- As an association for the groups – training of staff, delivery of industry information – networking
- Coordinate activity between Grower groups to the benefit of all the industry
- Pulling all the groups together more often, forming linkages between, it is difficult for the KPCA as we are a long way from the South where all the groups are, hence farm tours etc. are not of value, but would be down south I imagine. I would like to learn more from other grower groups on how they manage their back office, how they have built from scratch and overcome the hump of limited funds and resources to grow.
- We see the future of the GGA as integral to the ongoing success of grower groups in WA. The growing need to be progressive and up to date can be taxing on grower groups when also trying to maintain their core business and meet the needs of local members. The GGA provides essential support for grower groups across the region in remaining relevant, connected and sustainable and to be continuously developing our staff and members capacity and skills. They have the opportunity to build the capacity of growers and grower groups to become strong advocates and leaders with the ag industry and to represent their issues at a higher level. We would like to see the GGA helping to facilitate greater cross-learning and collaboration between grower groups as we see the future of R & D potentially moving in this direction. The GGA has the opportunity to facilitate collaboration rather than competition between grower groups. The GGA has the potential to provide a stronger advocacy on the role and significance of grower groups in WA and to promote their significance within the future of the agricultural industry. The ongoing importance of increasing the capacity and leadership of grower groups and their members will be paramount in ensuring the future of R, D & E remains connected to the needs of end users.

- As a new grower group, the GGA's support, particularly around governance has been invaluable. As we 'mature' as a group we see GGA as very important in providing additional networking and connection opportunities with other groups across the state. Having GGA helps provide a collective voice for the groups' on matters of policy and additionally assists in advocating the important role of groups in the industry. It is useful to have an organisation that provides the opportunity to bring the groups together and potentially to help identify collaboration and sharing of information from the agricultural area
- keep calendar and newsletter, organise courses e.g. social media, AICD training, perhaps when change Sec. in groups like ours come up and show how to do thing like CANVA, facebook tips etc.
- GGA is highly needed as common thread, overarching body. Governance materials, handbooks for group running, back ground setup, linking researchers to growers. Statistical analysis support.
- GGA has an integral role supporting grower groups and networking them. We are unique and isolated and their support is vital. There are very few people out there that understand the complexity of a grower group and how they operate. By networking the groups we can work together to improve, share our learnings and innovations. I think the GGA can represent us as a whole giving us a stronger voice to larger organisations.
- A conduit for all groups, disseminate info, political lobby group
- Facilitate cohesion of groups and provide a voice on behalf of all groups at state and national level.
- Would be great to keep this as a support mechanism and networking group
- support, a place to form collaboration,
- Providing training, event coordination (annual gathering), advocacy on value of gg's to govt,
- Voice for other issues relevant to community – I.e. roads, sporting, education, health etc.
- I would like to see the GGA be more of a spokesperson for the GGA to the funding bodies and actively seek projects for grower groups through. Training and facilitation also important.
- Advocacy role and coordination role
- GGA has a role providing grower groups continue to flourish. Once groups have overheads by employing staff they are put under pressure to source funding, and sometimes become less relevant to their members as they can end up doing projects where the money is rather than projects addressing issues the members want researched. GGA is a great concept as it is very useful for supplying information on events, funding, deadlines etc. for YFIG but this would not be a full time role. GGA has not been to Yuna(for 2 years at least) and we believe it would be a stronger organisation if GGA came to one meeting a year/2 years and were aware of our needs. Are we the clients of GGA or is the body who funds GGA? I believe the project management workshop to be held in May has a perfect fit with GGA as grower groups can take a lot from hands on workshops. Another area we thought GGA would address is the changes with incorporation and how groups need to change their constitutions, however we have seen little information on this, but we were sent a website. Also a workshop on grower groups and technology, setting up websites, texting groups, new technology to save time. I see GGA as the umbrella body for grower groups, however groups like ours have no funded positions so for members to continually travel to Perth and pay registrations etc. means members are \$800-\$1000 out of pocket every time there is an event .GGA offers great support for YFIG as it minimises the time we have to spend finding out information
- Advocacy; resource base (policies, insurance etc.)
- They need to have a massive online presence, needs to be 'sexier' so people can browse the webpage looking at what other groups are doing. It needs to raise awareness through social media and twitter about events and it needs to be helping us through promoting awareness of workshops

e.g. mental health, succession planning, GRDC field days etc. They also should write wrap ups for what is going on e.g. what is MIG up to for people who aren't able to attend events.

Grower Group Alliance services accesses or utilised by grower groups

The services that are offered by the GGA and most valued by grower groups appear to be the industry calendar of events and the 'Groupwire' newsletter. Other services that groups utilise include the annual forum; templates for staff employment; strategic plan assistance/ reviews; training (some subsidised) - project management, governance and grower group management; research opportunities and linkages; funding opportunities; speaker and study tour ideas and contacts and general networking opportunities. Many groups utilise the HHA not only for support but to ensure that they are well connected with the wider agricultural industry. Overall the GGA provides a great network between all WA grower groups and allows for the facilitation of cross-learning and sharing of information.

- Annual conference, the calendar and Groupwire
- Promotion of AWWE events, introduction to other stakeholders, funding to undertake strategic planning or subsidized speakers for events, training (i.e. media training)
- emailed calendar of events, templates for staff issues, events information, strategic planning help,
- Crop Updates, regional updates, contacts
- None in the past.
- Access and awareness of funding opportunities and subsidised training and workshops for grower groups. GGA provide a great network between all WA grower groups and allow for the facilitation of cross-learning and sharing of information. They provide integral support for groups including strategic planning, governance and operational queries. We utilise the network to ensure we are well connected with the wider ag industry and as support for our activities.
- facilitation of grower group management and governance, training opportunities, event calendar, promotion of events collaborative research opportunities
- correspondence via emails
- Read calendar for ideas for courses, newsletter for ag news/ideas, asked about funding but really need someone to apply for us.
- Constitution to form a group, calendar events, some research linkages.
- We have utilised their support for event attendance, advice for speakers for our own events, picked their brains about study tours, utilised their subsidy for our Strategic Plan review, utilised their templates for employment etc.
- Planning – strategic, help set up group.
- Events, training workshops, emails that provide information. Attend events
- Networking, grower group training, conduit to funding.
- strat plan, workshops, forum, diary dates
- Calendar, training (governance, project management)
- GGA forum and governance training
- All the funding options, some of the forums, meetings in Geraldton are circulated to members. We are not entirely clear on other services that would be useful to our group.
- GGA calendar; links to industry and other contacts; training
- We get the phone numbers of people within other groups and read the newsletters.

Additional demands placed on grower groups

Aside from their core focus, many grower groups have additional demands placed on them which include lobbying; hosting groups/ organisations; writing letters of endorsement for funding proposals; providing feedback on industry issues; responding to local issues; representing the region on boards/ committees/ groups; upskilling staff and applying for funding grants. A lot of these additional activities are not covered by funding and given these extra demands, a lot of groups struggle to have the capacity to operate outside of their core focus.

While grower groups are a conduit for information, they are required to act as a filter of an enormous amount of information that is available to growers therefore they have to find additional time to sieve through it and provide members with relevant and topical information. They have a responsibility to be at the forefront of new technologies and innovations in agriculture and to be able to understand what will be of value to their members.

A lot of grower groups, given they represent local farmers, lobby government on agricultural issues in the region or local government on land use planning and infrastructure requirements. As pointed out by one group, the level of advocacy that is required to represent growers requires significant time and energy and groups are required to be progressive and raise the profile of their groups to ensure members voices are heard at a higher level.

Grower groups respond to issues as they arise or when asked by members/ committee to follow up something, as outlined by grower groups they range from stable fly, wild dogs, fracking etc. and they also respond to emergency situations like fire, floods, drought and frost where groups step in to provide assistance with flow of information, organising community events or whatever is required to support their members.

A good example is RAIN who say they are a one stop shop for all agricultural and land care enquiries and contacts in their region and with the recent flood damage they worked closely with the local shire to raise the profile of the event and rallied to get funding for repair works on farm.

Many grower groups are asked to host various groups/ organisations to show them their local area/ issues which include the GRDC board, RCSN meetings, Barley Industry Council, politicians, students, study tours, visiting delegations etc. As one group stated due to the voluntary nature of grower group committee's it places a considerable burden on the groups in regards to time and organisation.

Groups also find that DAFWA, GRDC and other agencies use them a lot to get information out of them for which they are not remunerated. As stated by one group, 'our group is getting tired of being used up by these agencies with no forthcoming money to fund staff'.

Other additional demands include administration work; compliance; supporting local land care groups; connecting with tourism; local business development; raising the value of the group with funders; organising social events and other ad hoc work. This extra work load can easily take up a large proportion of a grower group's day.

- We are sometimes asked to lobby government on some issues on behalf of farmers although we try not getting involved too much with politics.
- Administration, compliance, event organisation, capacity to apply for funding, lack of funding to employ an executive officer and/or administrator
- We recently held a small forum with speakers on flood mitigation in paddocks. We simply hold it at the local 'Club', and share info. DAFWA, when contacted were very helpful in providing information. The Geraldton office – Russel Speed and Bindy Isbister.
- We are too small for the minister to bother with – Community expectations are huge – we get little to no funding for Agriculture so all we do as a grower group is funded by local government – commitments to meet to retain this funding are huge – DAFWA, GRDC and other agencies like

these just use us to get information out and give us no funds to continue – no funding in small grants for staff and so when our local government money runs out, we will have to close our doors – group is getting tired of being used up by these agencies will no forthcoming money to fund staff.

- Our core focus is representation, R and D and Events. There isn't much outside this scope that people want us to do, it is just that there is one person trying to do all those things well so time and resources are frustratingly short. This will soon change with a new relationship with MLA.
- The level of advocacy that is required to represent our growers on a state and national scale. The responsibility and difficult of this is immense and requires significant energy and time. To be a representing body of a group of growers who each face their own unique issues and concerns can be a difficult task. We are required to act as the filter of the enormous amount of information that is available to growers in order to sieve through this and provide them with relevant and topical information. We have a responsibility to be at the forefront of new technologies and innovations in agriculture and be able to understand what will be of value to our members. We are required to be continually progressive and to be raising the profile of our group to ensure that our member's voices are heard at a higher level.
- MADFIG and its members are frequently approached by different parties to host visiting delegations and groups. Examples include barley industry council, GRDC National board, visiting student groups, politicians. Often the group is contacted and asked if we can either bring a group together to meet with visitors or to provide contact details for different activities. We have been approached to provide letters of endorsement for funding proposals, references for people who have done research with the group, feedback on industry change, representation on industry boards, steering committees. Representatives of the group have attended forums and strategic planning days for industry consultations etc. and are able to provide a perspective of key issues and priorities for our membership base. If response to emergency situations the group would be willing to provide assistance with the flow of information and organisation of community events.
- attending/organising leg of GRDC Spring tour, RCSN R & D meetings,
- The grower group raised support for local land care officer. It fills the role of social connection when winter sport folded the farm improvement group became more important for men to see each other in their otherwise socially isolating businesses.
- We are extremely isolated with our nearest DAFWA office in Esperance (2hour drive) or Albany (3hours). Similarly South Coast NRM Offices are in the larger centres. As such we are the one stop shop for all agricultural and land care enquiries and contacts. In the instance of the recent flood damage we worked closely with our Shire to raise the profile of the event and rallied to get Category C ranking to enable more funds for repair works on farm. Ad hoc work makes up a large portion of our day-to-day. As an NRM office also, RAIN has a huge role to play in our regions landscape – sustainable agriculture, revegetation, fencing, salinity management, coastal management plans, river assessments, weed control etc.
- Meeting local Governments and dealing with local issues such as land use planning and infrastructure requirements. supporting Landcare groups, lobbying for ag in region
- We respond to all issues as they arise when asked to do so by members and the executive committee.
- Connections to tourism, and local business development
- skilled staff
- Increase awareness of capacity of our group to funders. I'd like to see grower groups written into all funding deeds from RDC's as the key extension delivery group.
- Industry issues i.e. stable fly, wild dogs, fracking etc.

- We have hosted GRDC several times, also we are often approached to host other organisations but due to the voluntary nature of our committee these events place a considerable burden on the group as there have been many in the last two years.
- Raising value of group with funders; assisting RDC's in events; conduit for information flow to farmers

Other information

Morawa Farm Improvement Group has been in a state of decline

- Time poor, older generation unenthusiastic
- No new innovations or practices have been adopted through the grower group over the past 3 years
- If someone wants to try a new variety or do something innovative they will fund it out of their own pockets, there is little need for a grower group to do that.
- Very little money has been spent over the past couple of years, other than on administration and the odd catering.
- Young farmers involved are very progressive and most adopt new technology and run good businesses but are time poor.
- Young farmers want more time to spend with children but are growing their businesses.
- Older farmers are not attending events and meetings and so there is no cross-pollination.
- MFIG not huge presence at GRDC days.
- Young farmers in attendance to events and meetings are undecided about what in particular they want to get out of the group but are open minded, they do not want it to fold.
- Leadership and strategic planning has been an issue in the past. Previous chair tried to recuperate but lack of support from the group was evident.
- At the moment, the management catch up every 2-3 months.
- Members catch up ad hoc, slightly more than twice a year for events organised by the group. There has been no bus tour in 2016.
- Idea is to make 2017 farm tour more inclusive to whole family. A bus tour early July 2017 with 25 people. 6-7 couples and 4-5 support staff and a few older kids. Could potentially time it to arrive at footy and netball presentations afterwards. Emphasis will be on wife in attendance to the event. Get 4-5 support staff to attend as well as organise child care crèche.
- There is scope to communicate more but differently to how it was done in the past. We are time poor and need advice and information to come through on smart phones and tablets. So should the grower groups use a different platform, potentially online. E.g. copy NZ young farmers who use facebook to share ideas, photos, videos, farm items for sale, jobs etc.
- There is scope to use WhatsApp between the young farmers of MFIG to get them to share photos, videos, crops coming up, harvest pics etc.
- MFIG provides an additional social value – directed about farming to farmers. But not enough talk about the different social aspects of family farming – discussing older generation, boarding school, issues with primary school and sports clubs, shire council etc.

Economic Analysis of Grower Groups in Western Australia

Agknowledge[®] has been commissioned by the Grower Group Alliance (GGA) to undertake an independent assessment of the value (monetary and social capital) that Grower Groups in WA provide to members, funders, partners and the community. We are conducting this survey as one part of our consultation program to help determine the value of Grower Groups, and we greatly appreciate your time and effort on this work.

The information you provide will be aggregated in our report and individual details will not be made public. Please feel free to expand on the space provided to add more detail or comments. Start by saving a version of this document with your Group Name added to the title, and return to cookes@iinet.net.au by **28/4/17**.

1. Can you please provide some base details including your group and its membership numbers.

Grower Group name			
Number of members		Cost of producer membership	\$/year
Memberships as a percentage of the farm businesses in your region			%

2. Please indicate your Grower Group's income and expenditure over the past 3 financial years (\$/year)

Year	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Income			
Membership			
Partnerships e.g. DAFWA			
Sponsorship			
Events income			
Project income			
Other including Interest			
Total			
Expenditure			
Permanent Staff			
Administration/office			
Marketing			
Events			
Project expenses			
Total			
Total annual expenditure figures to consider for Q4C			

Staff costs include full and part time permanent. Staff employed specifically for a project contract are project expenses.

3. In-kind contribution is an under-rated value in partnerships and management. To allow us to calculate a Benefit Cost Analysis can you please estimate the annual volunteer contributions made to your Group.

In-kind time as an average of the past 3 years	Days/year
Chairperson contribution	
Meetings - meeting length * # of meetings * # of participants	
Event organisation	
Trials (farmer and non-farmer time)	
Other (please specify)	
Value of other in-kind contributions (where appropriate)	\$/year
Use of facilities	
Committee members travel cost to attend meetings	
Other travel	
Other (please specify)	

The value of labour contributed to Group activities will be assessed at \$40/hr or \$320/day.

Farm Management or Business Practices change

- a. Please nominate three (3) farm management or business practices for which your Grower Group has had the **most success in influencing adoption** (Try to be specific e.g. adoption of new wheat varieties, liming, specific precision farming practices, specific practices that improve lambing rates etc.)
- b. In what year did your Grower Group first start providing information about each practice?
- c. Approximately what proportion of the expenditure total from question 2 did you spend for each farm management practice? (Please include staff and administration costs in this estimation.)

	Year commenced	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Farm Practice		% of total annual expenditure figures from Q2		
1)		%	%	%
2)		%	%	%
3)		%	%	%

Note: Columns will not sum to 100% if your Grower Group has encouraged the adoption of other management practices.

- 4. Please consider the economic benefits of the 3 farm practices identified above that your Grower Group has provided by way of encouraging practice change on farm.
 - a. Can you estimate what proportion of your members have adopted these three practices?, and
 - b. Considering the total economic value your Grower Group has provided your membership over the past 3 years, approximately what percentage can be attributed to these three farm practices?

Farm Practice	% of members adopting the practice	% of total economic benefit to growers provided by your Grower Group due to each farm practice
1)	%	%
2)	%	%
3)	%	%

- 5. How did you facilitate this adoption for each nominated farm management or business practice? Please rate your views in the following areas (Rate 0 not used; 1 = little value, 7 = high degree of return)

Topic	Farm Practice		
	1	2	3
New printed information (hard copy or web) i.e. fact sheets, case studies.			
Participation in and observation of on-property trials and demonstrations.			
Field days, workshops, training programs.			
Discussion Groups.			
Social media (Twitter, Facebook, online forums).			
Implemented a marketing and communications plan.			
Other (please specify).			

- 6. Other than benefits from on-farm practice change, please list below the other economic benefits your grower group provides to your local community.
 - a.
 - b.
- 7. What are the main social benefits your grower group provides to your local community?
 - a.
 - b.
- 8. Can you please indicate which of the following communication mediums your Group uses? (please rate in descending order with 7 being most preferred)

Fortnightly email Update	Quarterly email Newsletter	Glossy mail magazine	Go to website	Ad Hoc alerts		
				SMS text	Facebook	Twitter

9. How would you rate the performance of the executive leadership (Managing Committee and the CEO/EO) to your Grower Group:

Please rate your views in the following areas with an X in the grid (Rate 1 = little value, 7 = highly effective)

Topic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Making inroads on your Grower Group Vision							
Developing and keeping current the Strategic Plan							
A sound CEO/EO– Board relationship							
A sound CEO/EO – Chairman relationship							
Organisation - Members relationship							
Organisation – Funders relationship							
Organisation – Sponsors relationship							
Organisation – Community relationship							
Financial Management							
Effectiveness in securing and distributing resources							
Provide respected leadership							
Raise/build emerging/new leaders							
Effective and efficient coordination							
Risk management							

10. Thinking about the overall support provided by each of the following, which body, organisation or person has been the most influential on your Grower Group in the past 3 years? *(please rate in descending order with 7 being most influential).*

Fee for service Advisors	Farm input suppliers	GGA	R&D Corporations	DAFWA	Other farmers	Other Describe

11. The major industry R&D Corporations have introduced their own ‘network’ groups such as the Regional Cropping Solutions Network (RCSN) or the WA Livestock Research Council (WALRC) to identify local priorities.

Have you had any engagement with either the RCSN or WALRC, and please indicate if you understand their respective roles. *(Rate 1 = little understanding, 5 = well aware).*

Can you provide some observations about these regional R&D networks and how they interact or impact on your local Grower Group?

	Engagement Yes/No	Understanding of roles (1-5)	Interaction and impact on your Group
RCSN			
WALRC			

Comments: _____

12. What value do you perceive Grower Groups on the whole add to the WA agricultural industry? Why?

Comments: _____

13. Please outline your thoughts for the Grower Group Alliance (GGA) in the future – its operation and role?

Comments: _____

14. What services do you access or utilise that GGA offers?

Comments: _____

15. Aside from your core focus, what additional demands are placed on your Group? (i.e. value in raising the profile of the Group through meeting the Minister, and assisting with specific issues like fire/flood etc.)

Comments: _____

Thank you for your input

Estimation of the Economic Value Provided by Grower Groups in Western Australia

Report prepared for the



July 2017

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Grower groups have made an important contribution to the development and fostering of economic value in rural Western Australia. Overall, their main objective is to bring agronomic and farming systems research to their local area for the purpose of generating practical and locally adapted solutions.

The estimation of the economic value of grower groups in Western Australia utilises the concept of valuing the economic benefits of particular land management practices that have been promoted by grower groups. Four case study land management practices are considered in this analysis: controlled traffic farming, deep ripping, adoption of new wheat varieties and adoption of serradella/biserrula pastures.

Based on the *Agknowledge*® Grower Group Survey 2017 it is estimated that grower groups spend approximately 35% of their budget on these four case study land management practices, and benefits to growers from these practices represent approximately 30% of total benefits of grower group activities.

Direct on-farm economic values are estimated through calculating the difference between current adoption and hypothetical adoption in the absence of grower group activities. The difference in gross margins as a result of adoption of the land management practice is multiplied by the additional adoption attributed to grower group activities.

The total direct on-farm benefits, cumulative from 1990 to 2016 in 2017 dollar terms, are estimated to be approximately \$600 million (and could range from approximately \$450m-\$750m).

Indirect flow-on effects through the WA economy due to growers’ increased adoption of farm practices as a result of grower group activities are estimated using output multipliers. These multipliers estimate the flow-on value of increased demand for goods and services that supply inputs or service production (such as fertiliser, machinery, cartage) as well as increased expenditure of households due to increased incomes.

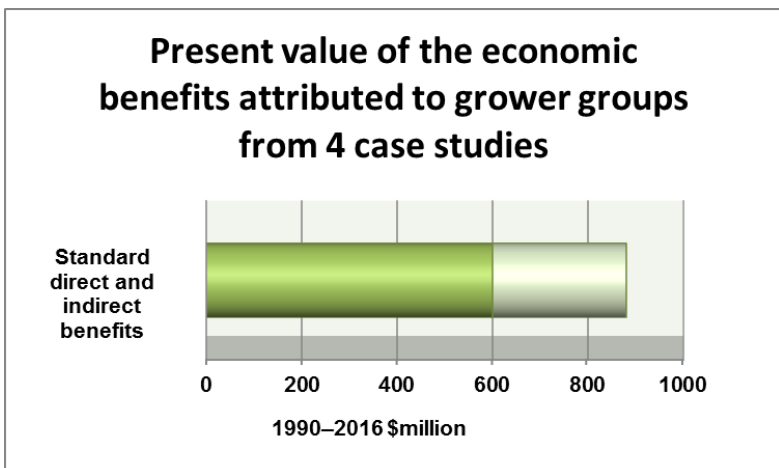
The total indirect flow-on benefits, cumulative from 1990 to 2016 in 2017 dollar terms, are estimated to be \$300 million (and could range from approximately \$200m-\$350m).

The total economic value of the four case study land management practices is approximately \$900m.

Scaling these benefits up to estimate the value of all grower group activities, **the cumulative total economic value is estimated to be \$3 billion over the period 1990 to 2016** (and could range from approximately \$2.3bn-\$3.6bn). Over the 25 year time frame, this is an average of \$120m/yr (ranging from \$90-\$150m/yr).

The results of the Grower Group Survey reveal that over the past three financial years, expenditure of all grower groups within the GGA is approximately \$10m/yr, with an in-kind contributions value of approximately \$2m/yr for a total contribution of \$12m/yr. Dividing the estimated annual average benefit per year (\$120m/yr) by the estimated costs (\$12m/yr) reveals a **benefit cost ratio of approximately 10** (ranging from 8-12).

This suggests that **every dollar spent by grower groups (including in-kind contributions) generates an economic value to the WA economy of approximately \$10, which is a very good return on investment.**



every dollar spent by grower groups (including in-kind contributions) generates an economic value to the WA economy of approximately \$10, which is a very good return on investment.

Note: Many assumptions are made in this process. Due to the hypothetical nature of measuring adoption in the absence of grower groups, accurate information is not always available. Results of this study have significant uncertainty associated with them and should be considered as indicative only. Despite the potential uncertainty of the results, the research is a genuine attempt to measure the value of the role of grower groups to the WA economy.

Background

Grower groups have made an important contribution to the development and fostering of economic value in rural communities (Biswas 2013). Overall, their main objective is to bring agronomic and farming systems research to their local area for the purpose of generating practical and locally adapted solutions (Hassall and Associates 2004, Giannatti and Llewellyn 2003).

For a majority of farmers, the level of engagement with a grower group is usually not through hands-on participation in research trials but as recipients of the information that grower groups generate (Llewellyn 2007). The most recent of the annual GRDC grower surveys suggest that grower groups are the third biggest influence on practice change, behind paid advisers and retail agronomists (GRDC 2015a). The survey results suggest that 22% of Western Australian grain growers directly benefit from grower group activities and 80% of WA grain growers use grower groups as a source of information influencing practice change (of which 38% consider grower groups as a major (rather than minor) influence on behaviour change). With respect to the Grower Group Alliance (GGA), Steady State Consulting (2009) note that the processes of networking and sharing information by the GGA are important for the development of more profitable farming systems, and that the GGA's impact on the profitability of farming systems is not necessarily a direct response to any single action but over time as a result of better informed decisions.

It is difficult to estimate the economic value farmers place on information from grower groups compared with other sources. Walker (2005) conducted a contingent valuation study to estimate farmer willingness to pay (WTP) for a publication containing new agronomic trial information as a proxy for the value of information from grower groups. Walker investigated the difference in WTP based on distance from a source (see Figure 1) and the research organisation who published the research. Walker found that WTP was highest when information from the group was generated locally, with a halving of WTP if the information source was beyond 150km away. The study indicated that the source of the publisher was not important, but the source of the organisation generating the research was (rigour), although local relevance was a greater influence on WTP than perceived rigour. The study showed that growers were not willing to pay for information generated from grower groups if the information was not generated locally.

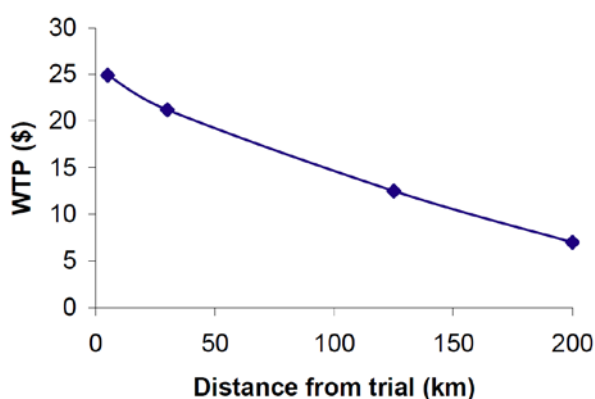


Figure 1: Change in farmer's willingness to pay (WTP) for research information at increasing distances from the location trial. Based on Walker (2005), cited in Llewellyn (2006).

The on-farm economic value of the information provided by grower groups depends on the ability of the information to accelerate the process by which growers move through the various stages of adoption (Llewellyn 2007). Pannell *et al.* (2006) articulates the following stages of adoption: (i) awareness of the innovation, (ii) information collection, (iii) small-scale testing, (iv) scaling up use of the innovation, (v) review and modification, and (vi) scaling down or rejection.

The factors that influence the value of information are specific to the nature of the innovation and the location in which it is being considered for adoption. If it is to be valuable, it must relate to management

options that make a difference to achieving the farmer's objectives. The value increases with greater levels of uncertainty regarding management choices, and the ability of the information to reduce this uncertainty (Pannell 2003). Pannell (2004) argues the value of information depends on the answers to three questions:

1. What would the farmer do without the additional information?
2. What might the farmer do differently with the additional information?
3. What difference does this make to payoffs?

Natural Decisions Pty Ltd (2015) use these questions to develop a framework to value the economic impacts of investment in National Landcare Programme (NLP) activities. They use a number of case studies of on-farm practices for which the NLP has been influential in accelerating the process and/or increasing the level of adoption, multiplying the additional adoption levels by the net returns to growers from adoption. A similar methodology is utilised in this study of the economic value of grower groups in WA.

1. Methodology: Estimating the economic value provided by grower groups in WA

The estimation of the economic value of grower groups in Western Australia utilises the concept of valuing the economic benefits for particular land management practices that have been promoted by grower groups. The estimation has a strong focus on the benefits from adoption of particular practices for which grower groups have been especially successful in increasing the level and/or rate of adoption.

Two types of economic values are estimated:

- Direct on-farm economic values – derived from increased yields, prices and/or reduced costs of farm practices due to grower group activities, and
- Indirect flow-on values – flow-on effects through the economy due to growers' increased adoption of farm practices.

To estimate the direct on-farm economic values, we estimate the hypothetical adoption curve for case study land management practices in the absence of grower group activities¹ and the observed adoption curve in the presence of grower group activities². We then estimate the difference in payoff to farmers in Australia as a result of adoption of the land management practice and multiply this by the additional adoption attributed to grower group activities³. The change in gross margins is used to estimate the financial benefits to growers of this increased adoption of land management practices.

The indirect flow-on values are estimated through multipliers to provide indicative estimates of the economic impacts of increased investment in a given industry on the broader economy (in this case, the Western Australian economy). These flow-on values result from increased demand for goods and services that supply inputs to production (such as feed and machinery suppliers) as well as increased expenditure of households due to increased incomes. Multipliers are calculated from Input-Output Tables, periodically published by state or federal governments. These Input-Output Tables record production and consumption interdependencies across product and industry classifications at a regional, national, and/or global scale. Due to the significant amount of data required to complete these tables, they are often published sporadically. The latest Input-Output Tables supplied by the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia were published in 2010 based on 2005/06 data.

The four land management practices for which grower groups have been especially successful in increasing the level and/or rate of adoption are identified by the farmers and grower groups through this project's Farmer Interviews Report (see Appendix 3) and Grower Group Survey (see Appendix 4). Estimation of the adoption of these case study land management practices, with and without grower group activities, was facilitated through desktop literature review and conversations with relevant experts that have local history

¹ Pannell (2004)'s question 1 above

² Pannell's question 2

³ Pannell's question 3

and context-specific knowledge in industries, practices and perspectives. Specific questions were asked of these people to allow the quantification needed for the assessment. Gross margin estimates were either taken from the literature or developed within the project. The estimated proportion of benefits derived from the four case study land management practices compared with all economic benefits generated from grower group activities is estimated from information generated by the grower group survey.

The total economic value is estimated by adding the direct and indirect benefits of grower group activities for the four case study land management practices, and scaling these benefits up to estimate the value of all grower group activities.

Many assumptions are made in this process. Due to the hypothetical nature of measuring adoption in the absence of grower groups, accurate information is not always available. Hence, results of this study have significant uncertainty associated with them and should be considered as indicative only. Despite the potential uncertainty of the results, the research is a genuine attempt to measure the value of the role of grower groups to the Western Australian economy.

2. Determining the case study land management practices

To determine the land management practices to use as case studies, the top four land management practices for which grower groups have had the greatest perceived influence on adoption, as highlighted by respondents of the Farmer Interviews and Grower Group Survey, were chosen. The Grower Group Survey highlighted soil health and amelioration (and in particular, liming and deep ripping), new crop and pasture varieties, and precision agriculture/variable rate technology/controlled traffic farming (Table 1). Farmer Interviews highlighted similar land management practices; deep ripping, new crop and pasture varieties and controlled traffic farming (Table 2). Based on these findings, four land management practices were selected as case studies as shown in Table 3. It is estimated that expenditure on these four land management practices comprises 35% of total expenditure by grower groups, and benefits to growers from these practices represent approximately 30% of total benefits of grower group activities.

Table 1: Select results of the Grower Group Survey for the top three land management practices grower groups have had the greatest perceived influence on adoption

Practice Type	# GGs indicated this activity as a top 3 practice for influence on adoption	Average year GG started providing information on the practice	Average % of members adopting the practice	Average % of total annual expenditure on the practice	Average % of total economic benefit to growers by GG
Soil health and amelioration	17	2011	69	12	14
- liming	6	2010	75	29	10
- deep ripping	5	2015	64	6	10
- non-wetting and soil moisture	2	2015	70	10	30
- general	3	2007	65	7	15
New crop and pasture varieties/species	10	2010	50	27	14
Precision ag, VRT and controlled traffic farming	7	2011	70	5	
Time of sowing and dry seeding	3	2011	80	31	50
Weed and disease management	3	2011	45	42	15
Farm management	2	2014	30	10	33
Frost management	2	2013	40	9	10
Other	9	2009	41	17	31

Source: Agknowledge Grower Group Survey 2017

Table 2: Select results of the Farmer Interviews for the top three land management practices grower groups have had the greatest perceived influence on adoption

Practice Type	# farmers who indicated this as top 3 practice influenced by GGs	Average cost of implementation (\$/ha)	Average area (ha/farm)	Profitability (\$/ha)	% attribution to GGs
Soil management	14	90	3,325	127	43
- deep ripping	6	99	1,767	100	46
- mould board ploughing	3	91	1,117	197	35
- liming	2	n.a.	5,000	50	40
- general	3	116	5,140		46
Agronomic investment	9	n.a.	2,700	85	66
Variety selection	8	32	5,203	75	66
Farm business	5	n.a.	4,750	13	57
Controlled Traffic Farming	4	17	5,000	50	56
Livestock management	3	n.a.	4,100	57	33
Soil management	14	90	3,325	127	43

Source: Agknowledge Farmer Interviews Report 2017

Table 3: Case study land management practices and their proportion of grower group expenditure and economic benefits

Case study land management practice		Estimated proportion of total expenditure by grower groups (%)	Estimated proportion of direct economic benefit to farmers from grower groups (%)
1	Controlled traffic farming	4	10
2	Deep ripping	3	5
3	New crop varieties (wheat)	29	15
4	New pasture varieties (serradella and biserulla)		
	Total	35	30

Source: Agknowledge Grower Group Survey 2017

3. Estimating the economic value provided by grower groups for each case study

To estimate the economic values provided by grower groups, we first estimate the adoption curves for each case study land management practice in the presence and, hypothetically, the absence of grower group activities (Section 4.1). The benefits of adoption of these land management practices (Section 4.2) and the value of these direct benefits attributable to grower groups (Section 4.3) is estimated. The indicative indirect benefits of adoption of case study land management practices attributable to grower groups is determined (Section 4.4) and added to the direct benefits to estimate the total economic benefits provided by grower groups (Section 4.5).

3.1 Estimating the adoption curves of case study land management practices

The estimated adoption curves in the presence and (hypothetically) absence of grower groups for each case study land management practice in terms of percentage of agricultural area are shown in Figure 2. The source of data used to estimate the curves in the presence of grower groups is outlined below each figure for each practice. The shape of the adoption curve of each practice in the presence of grower groups is somewhat explained by the different projects funded for each project as outlined in Table 4. A description of how the curves in the absence of grower groups are determined is provided in Equation 1.

Appendix 4A – Estimation of the Economic Value Provided by Grower Groups in WA

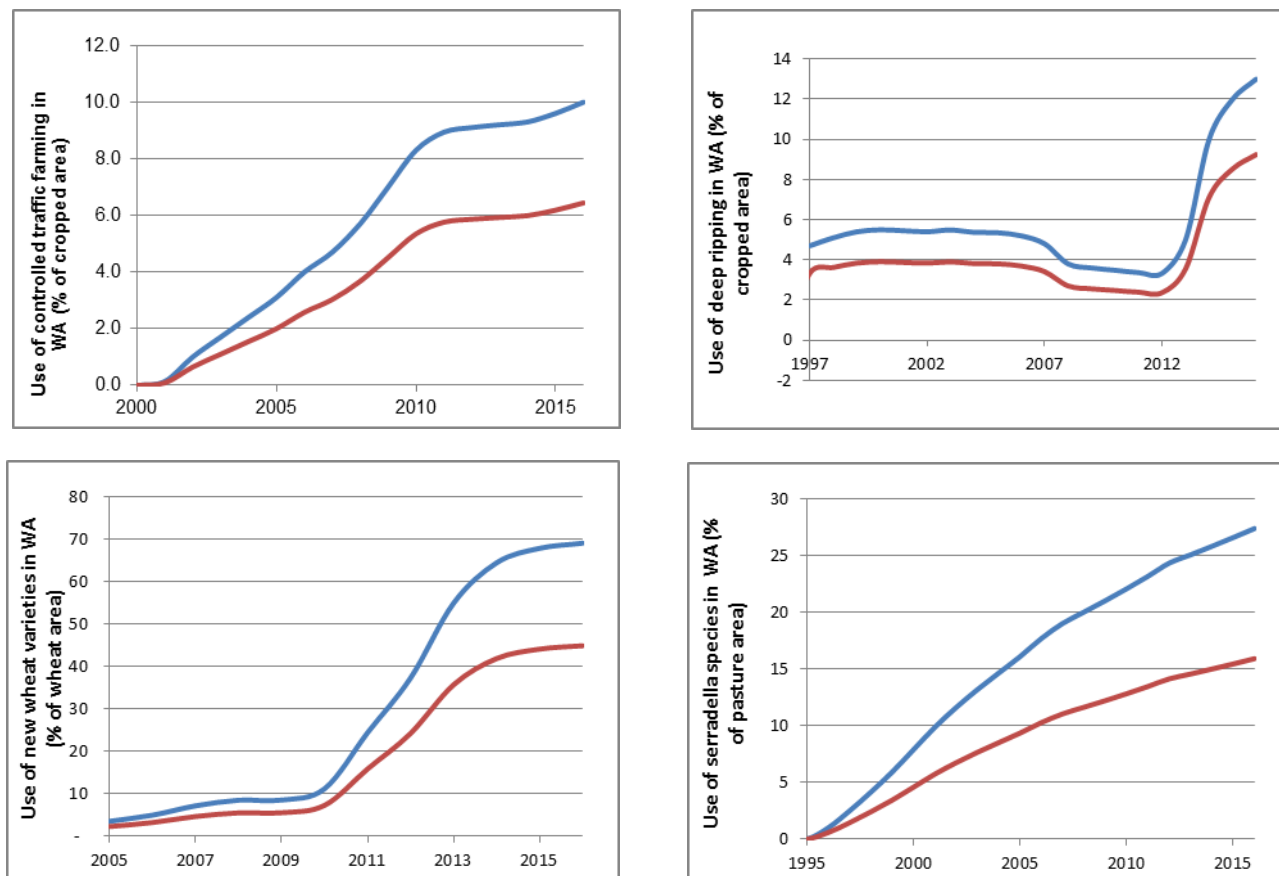


Figure 2: Estimated percentage of case study land management practices in Western Australia with and (hypothetically) without grower groups

Notes:

1. Blue line = with grower groups, red line = without grower groups.
2. Top left: Controlled traffic farming.
3. Top right: Deep ripping.
4. Lower left: New wheat varieties (Mace, Magenta and Yitpi – new wheat varieties prior to this had significantly lower benefits to grower and haven't been included in this analysis.).
5. Lower right: Adoption of serradella and biserrula pasture species.

Sources:

- Adoption of tramline farming rose from 3 growers cropping 10,000ha to an estimated 75 growers cropping about 300,000ha in 2004 (Lemon 2004).
- The average percentage of cropping area where controlled traffic farming is used (weighted across the central, eastern, mallee/sandplain and northern regions of Western Australia) was 5.7% in 2008, 8.9% in 2011 and 9.3% in 2014 (GRDC 2015b).
- From a survey of 230 growers across the Western Australian grainbelt, it was found that 6% of growers use controlled traffic farming on all their cropping area, and 16% on some of their cropping area (DAFWA 2016). Similarly, it was found that 30% of growers have used deep ripping on all their cropping area, and 15% as needed.
- The average percentage of cropping area where deep ripping is used for Liebe Group area of influence was 5.2% in 2006, 3.8% in 2008 and 3.3% in 2012 (Petersen 2006, 2008 and 2012).
- Adoption of deep ripping decreased as adoption of controlled traffic farming and deeper working points increased during the years 2005 – 2012, but adoption has increased with the understanding that deep ripping complements these practices.
- Wheat varieties included are those with >10% coverage of wheat area sometime between 2004 and 2016 (Zaicou *et al.* 2008, Curtis *et al.* 2009, Trainor *et al.* 2015). New wheat varieties include Mace, Magenta and Yitpi and replaced wheat varieties include Calingiri, Carnamah and Wyalkatchem.
- Plant breeders rights for Cadiz, Erica, Margurita and Eliza cultivars of French serradella were established in 1996, 2002, 2002 and 2010, respectively (Loi and Revell 2017).
- French and yellow serradellas and biserrula were grown by 20-30% of growers in 2008 (Hogg and Davis 2009).
- 18% of pasture area was re-sown each year in 2015; 31% with traditional subterranean clover and annual medic varieties, 25% with French serradella, 17% with biserrula 17% and 10% with yellow serradella (Nichols *et al.* 2007).

Table 4: Select projects focussed on each case study land management practice

Key projects	Year(s)	Examples of grower groups involved
1. Controlled Traffic Farming		
DAW718: Development of Tramline Farming Systems for WA Cropping	2001-2005	WANTFA, MIG, Liebe Group ⁴
Northern Agricultural Catchments Council (NACC) CTF project	2012-2013	NACC, Liebe Group, NSPNR, FBG, SEPWA
DAW243: Minimising the effect of compaction on crop yield	2015-2019	Northern Agricultural Group (NAG), Yuna, Mullewa FDI, MIG, Liebe, West Midlands Group, WANTFA, Southern Dirt, NSPNR, Stirlings to Coast, FBG, SEPWA, SPAA
Management of surface water control for CTF NLP project 043053	2005-2007	Liebe Group
Investigation of N dynamics in CTF systems GRDC RCSN project	2014	SEPWA
2. Deep ripping		
DAW00223: More profit from crop nutrition DAFWA GRDC project	2014-2016	NAG, West Midlands,
DAW00243: Minimising the effect of compaction on crop yield	2015-2019	Northern Agricultural Group (NAG), Yuna, Mullewa FDI, MIG, Liebe, West Midlands Group, WANTFA, Southern Dirt, NSPNR, Stirlings to Coast, FBG, SEPWA, Yuna
WMG00002: Diagnostic protocols for compaction	2015	West Midlands
Yuna project involving member's ripping trials	2014-2017	Yuna
GRDC funded project Deep Ripping, Deeper Deep Ripping & Water Use Efficiency	2016	MIG
GRDC RCSN GER9 Deeper deep ripping and N use efficiency project	2016/17	Managed by Agrarian groups involving NAG, Mullewa FDI, MIG
RCSN trial deep ripping/non-wetting soils (Derk Bakker)	2013/2014	RAIN
3. Adoption of new wheat varieties		
DAW00249 Tactical wheat agronomy for the west – GRDC and DAFWA	2015-19	South East Premium Wheat Growers Association (SEPWA), Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network (RAIN), North Mallee Farm Improvement Group, Stirlings to Coast Farmers Inc, Yuna Farm Improvement Group (FIG), Mullewa Dryland Farming Initiative (MuDFI), Northern Agri Group (NAG), Mingenew Irwin Group (MIG), LIEBE, East Koorda FIG, Far East Ag Region (FEAR), West Midland Group (WMG), Facey, Merredin FIG (MADFIG).
Early seeding – a climate change adaptation method in the NE Ag Region of WA - RCSN/GRDC – DAFWA	2015	
DAW00218 Wheat agronomy systems profitability – GRDC and DAFWA	2011-15	
DAW00147 Wheat variety specific agronomy – GRDC and DAFWA	2006-11	
4. Adoption of serradella and biserrula pasture species		
Centre for Legumes in Mediterranean Agriculture (CLIMA) projects National Annual Pasture Legume Improvement Program (NAPLIP). Funders: MLA, GRDC, AWI Pasture Australia. Funders: MLA, GRDC, AWI Focus Paddocks. Funder: GRDC More Profit from crop Nutrition (MPCN II). Funder: GRDC BPSP0013: Pasture legumes in the mixed farming zones of WA and NSW. Funders: MLA, AWI	Various	Association for Sheep Husbandry, Excellence, Evaluation and Production (ASHEEP), Corrigin Farm Improvement Group (CFIG), The Facey Group, Fitzgerald Biosphere Group (FBG), The Liebe Group Merredin and District Farm Improvement Group (MADFIG). Mingenew Irwin Group (MIG), Nyabing Farm Improvement Group, NAG, RAIN, Stirlings to Coast Farmers Inc., West Midlands Group (WMG) Western Australian No-tillage Farmers Association (WANTFA)

⁴ There were not many groups in existence at this stage

The shape of the hypothetical adoption curve in the absence of grower groups for each case study land management practice depends on two assumptions (Equation 1):

1. The percentage of current adoption in the presence of grower groups, and
2. The percentage of adoption attributable to grower groups rather than other sources.

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \text{Adoption in the absence of grower groups (ha)} \\
 & = \text{Adoption in the presence of grower groups (ha)} \\
 & * (1 - \% \text{ attribution to grower groups})
 \end{aligned}
 \tag{1}$$

The Farmer Interviews conducted by this project asked respondents their perceptions of the percentage of adoption of their land management practices that can be attributed to grower groups. Results are shown for the case study land management practices in column 2 of Table 5. Most of these respondents are members of grower groups.

Results of the Grower Group Survey indicate that 51% of all farming businesses are members of a grower group. It is assumed that adoption that is attributable to grower groups by non-members is one-quarter of the percentage attributable by members. The estimated attribution of adoption of each case study land management practice to grower groups is estimated to be between 29 and 42%, depending on the land management practice (column 3 of Table 5).

Table 5: Perceived attribution of adoption of case study land management practices to grower groups by members, and extrapolated to all growers

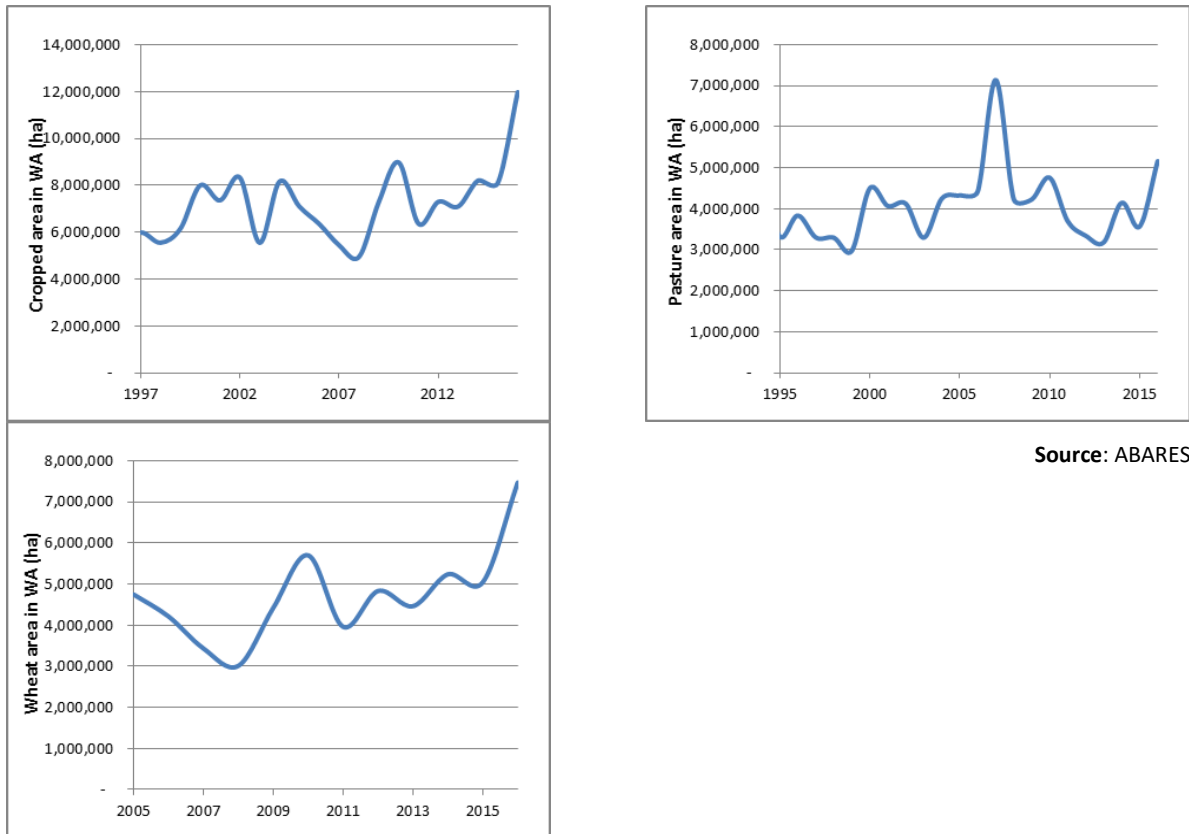
Case study land management practice		Grower group member’s perceptions of attribution of adoption to grower groups (%) ^a	Estimated attribution of adoption by all growers to grower groups (%)
1.	Controlled traffic farming	56	36
2.	Deep ripping	46	29
3.	New crop varieties (wheat)	66	35 ^b
4.	New pasture varieties (serradella and biserulla)	66	42

^a Source: Agknowledge Farmer Interviews Report 2017. Results suggested that grower groups are the third most influential source of information for decision making, behind family/other farmers and fee-for-service advisors.

^b Weighted by industry perceptions of attribution of adoption to grower groups.

The percentage of adoption of each case study land management practice is multiplied by the area of cropping land (in the case of controlled traffic farming and deep ripping), wheat area (in the case of new wheat varieties) or pasture area (in the case of new pasture varieties) (Figure 3) to estimate the area of each practice adopted with and without grower groups (Figure 4).

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Source: ABARES

Figure 3: Cropped, wheat and pasture area in Western Australia (ha)

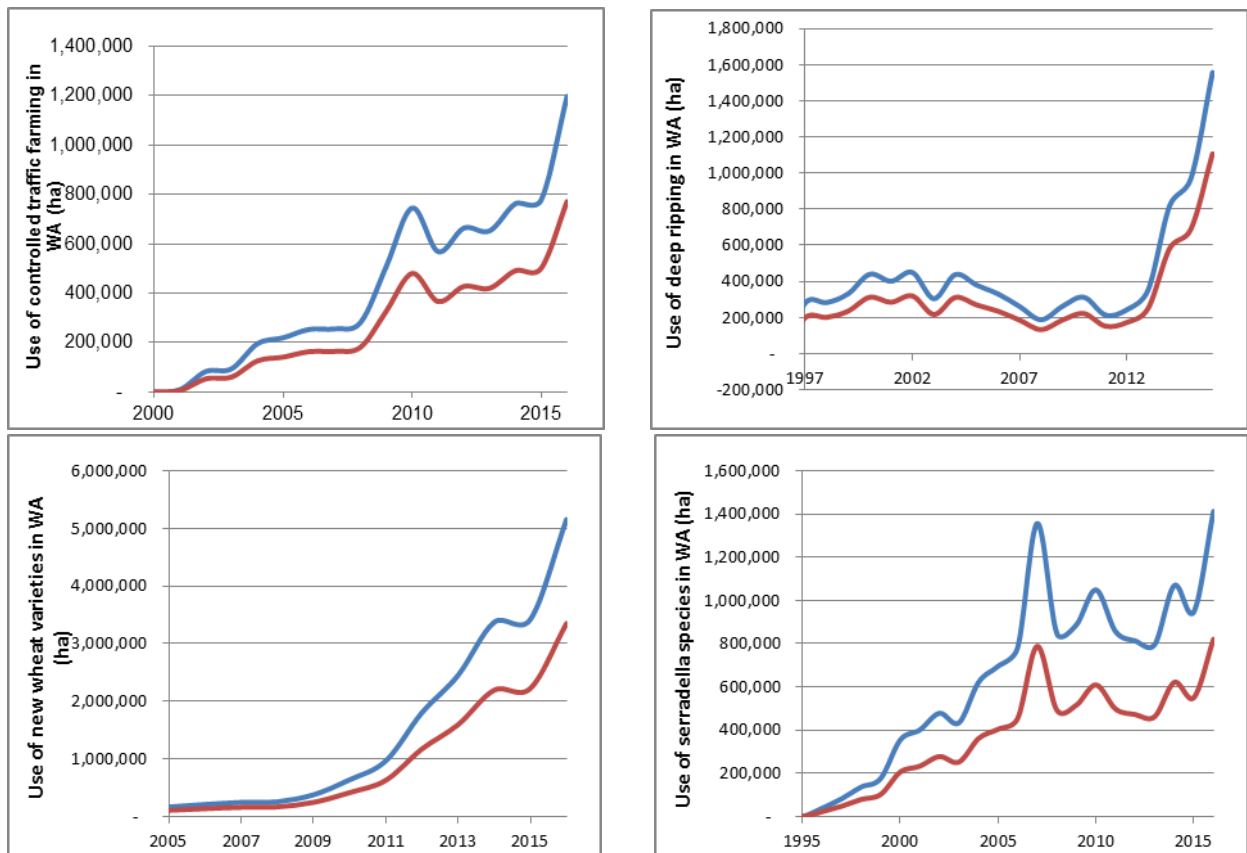


Figure 4: Estimated use of case study land management practices in Western Australia with and hypothetically without grower groups (hectares)

Notes:

1. **Blue line** = with grower groups, **red line** = without grower groups
2. Top left: Controlled traffic farming. Top right: Deep ripping. Lower left: New wheat varieties (Mace, Magenta, Yitpi). Lower right: Adoption of serradella and biserrula pasture species

The difference between the ‘with grower group’ and the ‘without grower group’ curves is the adoption of each case study land management practice that can be attributed to grower groups. The difference between these curves for each land management practice is shown as the ‘standard’ level of attribution in Figure 5. Sensitivity on this standard level of attribution is shown with low, standard and high levels of attribution.

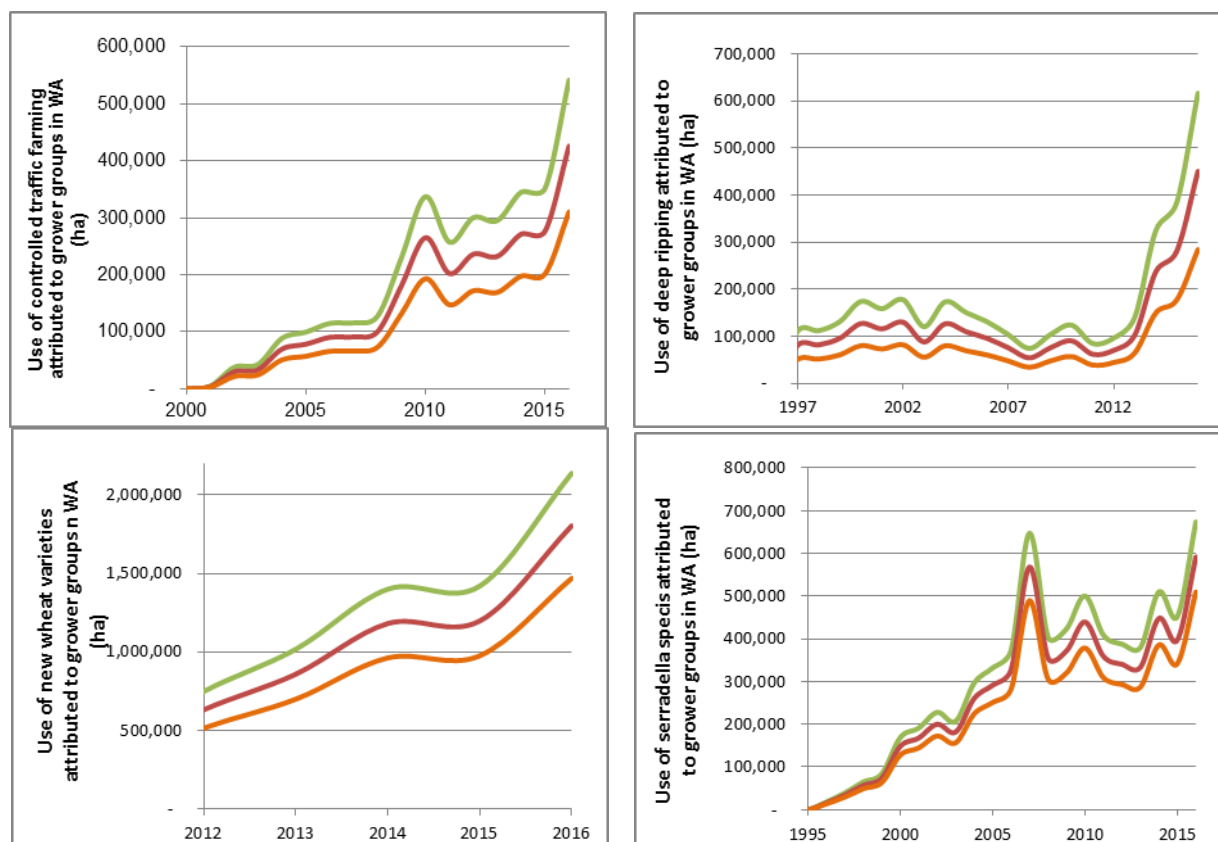


Figure 5: Low, standard and high levels of adoption of case study land management practices in Western Australia attributed to grower groups (hectares)

Notes:

- **Green line** = high
- **Red line** = standard
- **Orange line** = low
- Top left: Controlled traffic farming
- Top right: Deep ripping
- Lower left: New wheat varieties (Mace, Magenta and Yitpi)
- Lower right: Adoption of serradella and biserrula pasture species

3.2 Estimating the direct benefits of adoption of case study land management practices

The direct on-farm benefit of each case study land management practice is assumed to be the net increase in gross margin due to the practice. The increase in gross margin due to adoption of each case study land management practice is calculated as the increase in crop or livestock yield due to adoption of the practice, multiplied by crop or livestock price and minus the costs of the practice, as shown in Equation 2 and Figure 6 (the latter for controlled traffic farming, deep ripping and adoption of new wheat varieties only). Where a practice needs a significant up-front fixed cost investment (as is the case for machinery purchases for controlled traffic farming), these costs are annualised over a 10 year period. The benefits of adoption of serradella and biserrula pasture species are assumed to include benefits to the sheep meat and wool sectors as well as the cropping sector through improved soil fertility and reducing selective herbicide use. The net benefits through time of rotations that include serradella/biserrula compared with those that do not are estimated to be \$6/ha/year (Doole *et al.* 2009).

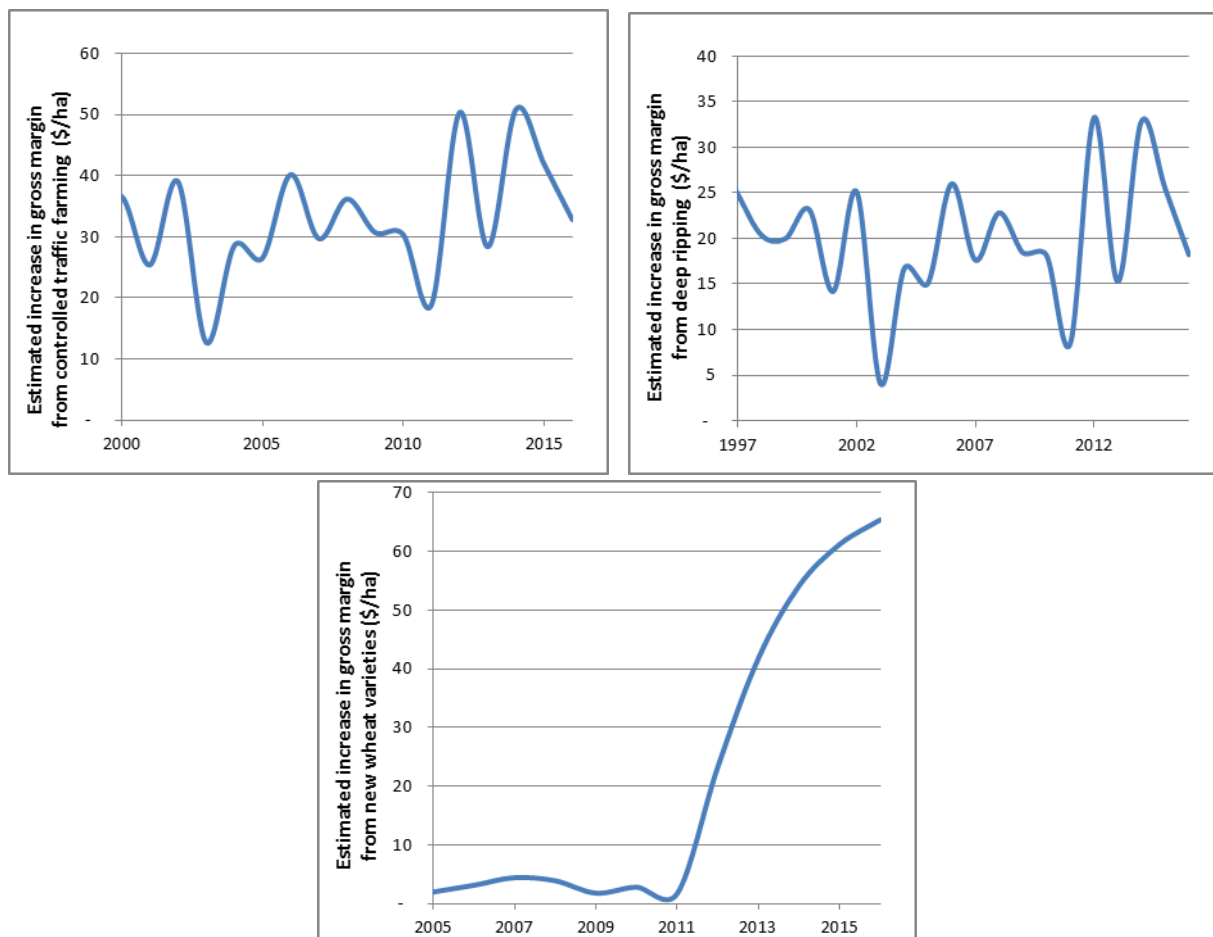


Figure 6: Estimated increase in gross margin due to adoption of controlled traffic farming, deep ripping and new wheat varieties through time

Notes:

- Top left: controlled traffic farming
Top right: deep ripping
Lower left: new wheat varieties (Mace, Magenta and Yitpi)

Explanation and sources:

- Controlled traffic farming and deep ripping: Based on yield boosts from controlled traffic farming and deep ripping of 10% and 8% respectively (Blackwell *et al.* undated, Petersen 2015, Webb *et al.* 2004), multiplied by a weighted average crop yield each year (including barley, canola, lupins and wheat), multiplied by a weighted average price adjusted for CPI and minus the fixed costs of each practice converted to a per hectare basis by dividing the total fixed costs by the average farm size and the period of time over which they are expected to be paid (10 years).
- New wheat varieties: Based on a calculated increase in a weighted average yield increase from new wheat varieties (Mace, Magenta and Yitpi) compared with old varieties (Calingiri, Carnamah and Wyalkatchem) ranging from 0g/ha in 2005 to 250g/ha in 2016 (Trainor *et al.* 2015), and multiplied by wheat price adjusted for CPI and accounting for wheat grade premiums, minus the cost of seed purchase converted to a per hectare basis by dividing to total fixed costs by the average farm size and the period of time over which they are expected to be paid (10 years).
- Benefits from reduced costs of fuel, fertiliser, and weed and pest control are offset by increased cartage costs and levies.
- The net benefits through time of rotations that include serradella/biserrula compared with those that do not are estimated to be \$6/ha/year (Doole *et al.* 2009).

Benefit of a land management practice (\$/ha)

$$= \text{Increase in crop or livestock yield due to adoption of the practice (t/ha)} \\ * \text{crop or pasture price (real \$/t)} - \text{cost of the practice (\$/ha)} \quad (2)$$

3.3 Estimating the direct benefits of adoption of case study land management practices attributable to grower groups

Multiplying the estimated increase in gross margins due to adoption of each case study land management practice (Figure 6) by the estimated adoption of each practice attributable to grower groups (Figure 5) provides an estimate of the benefits overtime of grower groups for each practice (Figure 7).

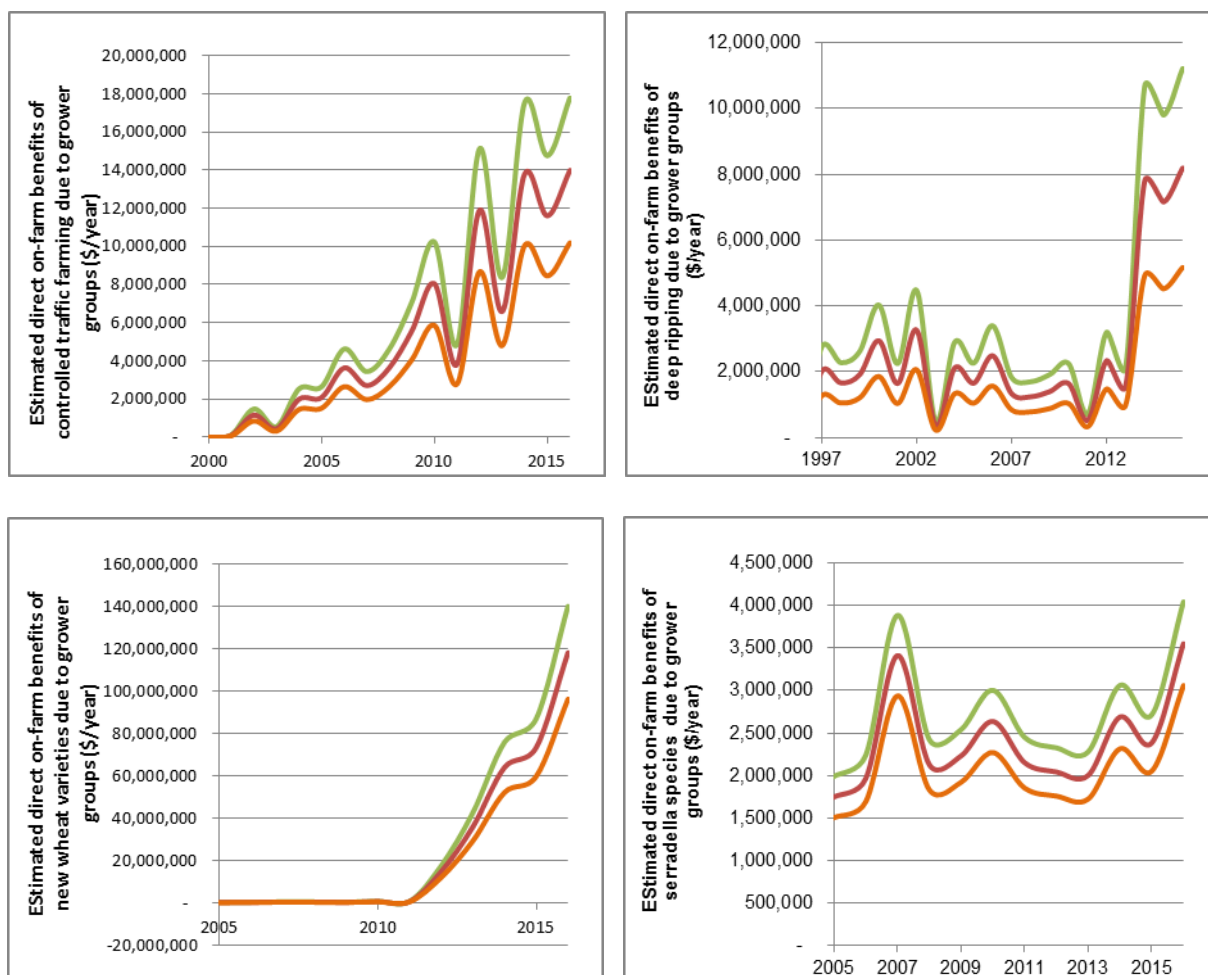


Figure 7: Estimated direct on-farm benefit of case study land management practices in Western Australia attributed to grower groups (%/year)

Notes:

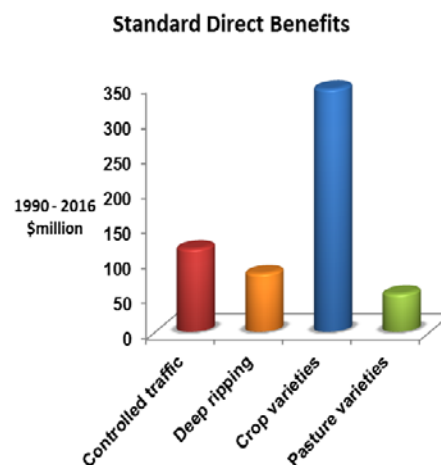
- **Green line** = high
- **Red line** = standard
- **Orange line** = low
- Top left: Controlled traffic farming
- Top right: Deep ripping
- Lower left: New wheat varieties (Mace, Magenta and Yitpi)
- Lower right: Adoption of serradella and biserrula pasture species

Using a 5 percent compound rate⁵, these direct on farm benefits through time can be compounded to a present value as shown in Table 6.

⁵ The compound rate is used to compound past values to a present value. It is equivalent to a discount rate that is used to discount future values to a present value.

Table 6: Present value of the cumulative direct economic benefits of case study land management practice attributed to grower groups (1990–2016 in 2017 \$million)

Case study land management practice		Low	Standard	High
1.	Controlled traffic farming	86	118	151
2.	Deep ripping	52	83	113
3.	New crop varieties (wheat)	281	345	409
4.	New pasture varieties (serradella and biserulla)	47	54	62
TOTAL \$m		466	600	735



3.4 Estimating the indirect benefits of adoption of case study land management practices attributable to grower groups

The indirect flow-on economic value to the Western Australian economy of adoption of case study land management practices due to grower group activities is estimated through output multipliers. Output multipliers can be used to measure the total value of production by all industries of the Western Australian economy arising from a dollar increase in the value of production from a given industry. Output multipliers from relevant sectors in the economy are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Estimated output multipliers for relevant industries in Western Australia

	Wheat	Barley	Canola/ oilseeds	Lupins	Crops (weighted average)	Sheep (animal)	Sheep (wool)	Beef cattle	Dairy cattle
Initial effect	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Production-induced effect	1.14	0.64	0.89	0.93	1.01	0.68	1.18	1.24	1.01
Consumption-induced effect	0.51	0.66	0.38	0.37	0.53	0.51	0.67	0.71	0.90
Total multipliers	2.65	2.30	2.28	2.31	2.54	2.19	2.85	2.95	2.91

Source: Type 2A State Multipliers calculated from DAFWA Input-Output Tables 2005/06

The output multipliers for the wheat industry suggest that for every \$1.00 of output generated from this industry in Western Australia (initial effect) there is a production-induced effect of \$1.14 and a consumption-induced effect of \$0.51. The production-induced effect stems from increased demand for goods and services that supply inputs or service production of wheat (such as fertiliser, machinery, cartage). The consumption-induced effect stems from increased expenditure of households due to increased incomes. Adding the initial (direct) \$1 increase in output to the production and consumption-induced (indirect) effects, leads to a total benefit of \$2.65.

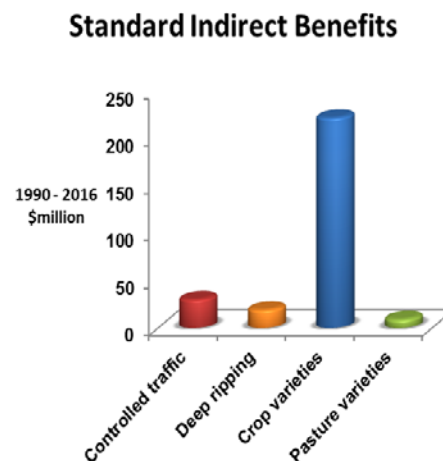
Multiplying the change in the value of output due to each case study land management practice by the indirect multiplier for crops (the total multiplier minus the initial effect), provides an estimate of the indirect benefits from the practice each year. Note that due to drops in crop prices and/or yields, the

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change in output can sometimes be negative leading to a negative indirect effect. However, the positive indirect effects in other years significantly outweigh the negative effects leading to a total positive compounded cumulative indirect effect over the time frame as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Present value of the cumulative indirect economic benefits of case study land management practice attributed to grower groups (1990–2016 in 2017 \$millions)

Case study land management practice		Low	Standard	High
1.	Controlled traffic farming	22	30	38
2.	Deep ripping	12	19	26
3.	New crop varieties (wheat)	181	222	263
4.	New pasture varieties (serradella and biserulla)	8	9	11
TOTAL \$m		223	280	338



3.5 Estimating the total economic benefits provided by grower groups

The total economic benefit attributable to grower groups from adoption of case study land management practices is estimated by adding the direct and the indirect benefits of these practices (Figure 8). This amounts to approximately \$900 million in total, ranging from \$690 – 1,100m.

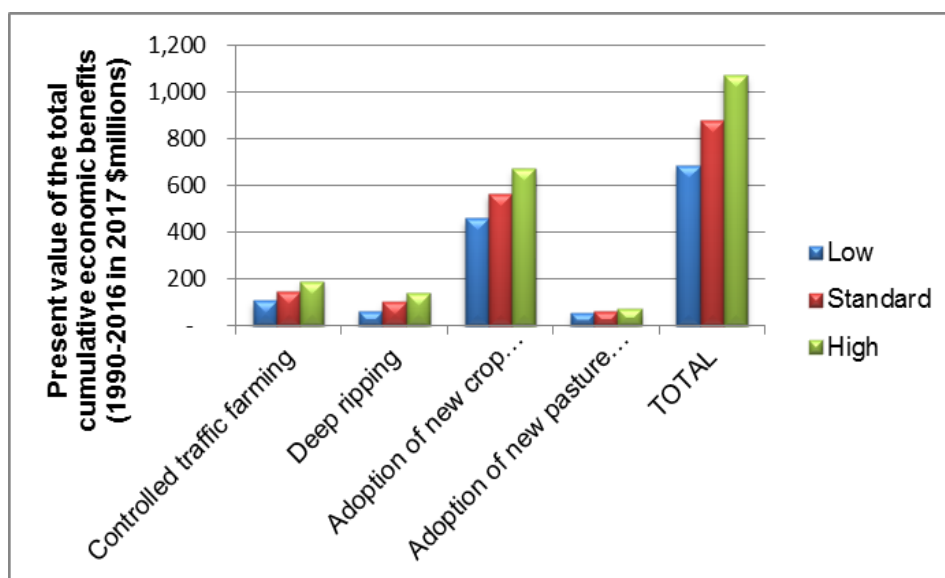


Figure 8: Present value of the cumulative direct and indirect economic benefits of case study land management practice attributed to grower groups (1990–2016 in 2017 \$ terms)

Based on results from the Grower Group Survey, it is estimated that the four case study land management practices contribute approximately 30% of benefits from all grower group activities (Table 3). This suggests that the indicative total economic benefit provided by grower groups for all activities is in the order of \$3.0billion (cumulative 1990 – 2016 in 2017 \$ terms), ranging between \$2.3bn and \$3.6bn. This is an average of \$120million/year (ranging from \$90m/yr to \$150m/yr).

The results of the Grower Group Survey reveal that, over the past three financial years, expenditure of all grower groups is approximately \$10m/yr, and in-kind contributions value approximately \$2m/yr for a total contribution of \$12m/yr.

Dividing the total benefits (\$120m/yr) by the costs of running grower groups (\$12m/yr) reveals a benefit cost ratio of approximately 10 (ranging from 8 to 12).

This suggests that every dollar spent by grower groups (including in-kind contributions) generates an economic value to the Western Australian economy of approximately \$10, which is a very good return on investment.

Table 9: Present value of the cumulative economic benefits and costs of grower groups and costs

	Present value of the cumulative economic benefits and costs of grower groups (\$million/year)		
	Low	Standard	High
Estimated total benefits	92	117	143
Expenditure	10	10	10
In-kind contributions	2	2	2
Estimated total costs	12	12	12
Benefit cost ratio	8	10	12

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