



EverTrain® makes tracks in saltland education

By Kylie Nicholls
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ABOVE: Participants are briefed at a saline site at Brinkley, SA before developing a management plan as part of the 2008 South Australian Salinity Concepts and Management workshop (Photos: Damien Doyle, I&I NSW).

The innovative *EverTrain*® learning program is up and running with regional salinity workshops set to kick off during September this year.

Launched by the Future Farm Industries CRC (FFI CRC), the national online *EverTrain* program provides users with a flexible approach to learning, using a combination of training via the internet and practical skills development.

According to *EverTrain* project leader Deb Slinger, Industry and Investment, New South Wales (I&I NSW), *EverTrain* presents the latest research results from the FFI CRC in a usable form. Participants can go online and complete the learning before attending a regional workshop to get a local perspective.

"The difficulty with workshops is that participants can have different levels of knowledge and understanding," Deb said.

"*EverTrain* allows participants to go online and complete the training and assessment material so they are all at the same level when they get to the workshop to complete the practical skills.

"People are also time-poor these days and attending a four-day workshop can be difficult, so being able to complete part of the learning online before attending a one day practical workshop is an effective method of upskilling."

An important component of the *EverTrain* project is the opportunity for participants to be assessed and achieve accreditation towards a national qualification.

"The online assessments will take the form of simple question and answers using multiple choice and Yes or No answers so participants can get an immediate response and an actual assessor is not necessary," Deb explained.

"The program is ideal for a range of users including researchers, university students, agronomists, extension officers and farmers."

Pilot program success

A pilot *EverTrain* regional training workshop was delivered in South Australia during 2008. The workshop focused on salinity concepts and management. It was co-ordinated by a local FFI CRC representative with assistance from the *EverTrain* National Assessment Services Team.

Some of the learning outcomes from the workshop included being able to describe causes of salinity, identify indicators of salinity, sample and test water salinity,

identify appropriate practices and technologies for managing salinity and develop a salinity management plan and monitoring program for a property.

Results from an I&I NSW evaluation report on the workshop showed that 95 per cent of the participants agreed that the course content and delivery were well organised and delivered.

Most of the participants felt their level of knowledge on salinity processes and management was good to very good after completing the training. Important skills learnt during the course included gaining a greater understanding of salinity management options and identifying salinity indicators in the paddock.

Deb said due to the success of the *EverTrain* pilot training workshop, planning is underway for more salinity concept and management workshops to be held throughout southern Australia from September 2009 into 2010.

key points

- The *EverTrain* project offers participants a flexible learning approach using a combination of online training and practical workshops
- *EverTrain* can be tailored to specific regions and gives users the opportunity to achieve recognised accreditation, which could go towards a national qualification
- The *EverTrain* workshops, focused on salinity management, will be rolled out nationally during September this year, starting in Western Australia.

RIGHT: Participants felt the training improved their ability to identify and assess salinity indicators. (Photo: Damien Doyle, I&I, NSW).



Effective skill development

Major participants in the pilot workshop were Landmark agronomists and according to Deb, feedback from them on the *EverTrain* learning portal system has been positive. Landmark is a FFI CRC participant.

SA Landmark Agronomy Development Manager, Steve Watts was instrumental in organising Landmark agronomy staff to attend the pilot *EverTrain* salinity workshop.

He believes the agronomists, from recent graduates to ones with more than the five years experience, have benefited significantly from the workshop.

“Our young graduates and agronomists hadn’t been exposed to that level of salinity training before so it was a real eye-opener for them, while our more experienced agronomists also gained some new skills.

“It is difficult for our staff to have sufficient time for a four-day workshop so the *EverTrain* method is great. They can do the initial learning online in their own time before attending a workshop which really focuses on their skill development.

“The workshops’ timing is important for Landmark. Holding courses between November and February is our least busy time and the *EverTrain* delivery system has that flexibility to tailor it to our needs.”

Currently, the *EverTrain* system focuses on salinity concepts and management, but information and research outputs are being developed on a wide range of topics including soil biology and soil carbon. *EverTrain* will also link in with other FFI CRC programs such as *EverCrop*, *EverGraze*, *Saltland Knowledge Exchange* and the *Investment Framework for Environmental Resources (INFFER)* project. 🌱

➔ More information

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ABOVE: The innovative *EverTrain* learning program uses a combination of online education and practical skills development. A workshop participant is pictured testing groundwater salinity in the paddock. (Photo: Damien Doyle, I&I NSW).

EverTrain® develops salinity partnership

The lack of a comprehensive course in salinity management has created an exciting, new education partnership between two Western Australian agricultural groups and the Future Farm Industries CRC (FFI CRC).

The *EverTrain*® online training system will be used to deliver a saltland pasture workshop at Kellerberrin in WA during September of this year in conjunction with the CRC’s *Saltland Knowledge Exchange* project. According to *Saltland Knowledge Exchange* project leader, Dr Nick Edwards (SARDI), this is one of the first concrete examples of a partnership between the Wheatbelt NRM (formerly known as the Avon Catchment Council), the Saltland Pastures Association, and FFI CRC, specifically driven by continuing salinity issues.

Dr Edwards hopes it will be the first of many future opportunities for the *Saltland Knowledge Exchange* project to forge new partnerships with local industry groups and develop training programs and workshops, tailored to specific regions.

Through the *EverTrain* project, FFI CRC will deliver a range of online information for participants that can be accessed before or after each workshop.

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“Participants in this pilot training program will learn the basics of salinity and how it can impact on different landforms as well as the terminology used in online *EverTrain* modules. The face-to-face workshop will address what plants will grow in a particular salt-affected area, the agronomy of those species and how best to manage them,” Dr Edwards explained.

“The workshop is designed to be interactive through a combination of presentations and field activities.

“The advantage of the *EverTrain* module concept is that information can be tailored to specific regions.

“Workshop participants will also be given information on a real-life salt-affected site and asked to develop a management plan. This task will enable us to test their abilities to bring course elements together in a practical situation.”

While the *Saltland Knowledge Exchange* workshops will be launched in WA, the course will be suitable for other salt-affected areas in the southern states. The workshops are a key part of the *Saltland Knowledge Exchange* project and are strongly aligned to the project’s *Saltland Genie* website.

Dr Edwards said this initial workshop is targeted at Saltland Pastures Association Grower Support Advisors as well as other agronomists and advisory staff. Other versions will be developed for farmers and other target audiences in southern Australia.

“The workshop should give participants the information and tools they need to have the confidence to go out and provide salinity management advice to farmers. This includes selecting and preparing sites, establishment of appropriate pasture species and managing these saltland pastures for persistence and production,” Dr Edwards said.

The workshop is being run and funded by the Wheatbelt NRM, the Saltland Pastures Association, the Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA) and the *Saltland Knowledge Exchange*. The workshop delivery is being coordinated by DAFWA. 🌱

➔ More information

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