

Hitting the road with headline technologies



By **Catriona Nicholls**
Kondinin Group

ABOVE: Workshop participants enjoyed the shadows created by raised barley beds on a hot afternoon at the Thomson Farm near Katanning. (Photo: Greg Lawrence)

Recent path to adoption workshops and forums are proving successful in their goal to increase the knowledge and confidence of advisers and other 'next users' in extending 'headline technologies' according to FFI CRC Adoption Manager, John Powell.

The 'headline technologies' are 13 key products and outcomes that came out of more than 50 research projects in the former CRC Salinity.

During the past nine months events have been held in Katanning, Western Australia (October 2007), Cummins and Minlaton, South Australia (February 2008) and Tammin, WA (April 2008).

"Essentially the intention of the events was, firstly, to invite people who have the biggest influence on the adoption of new farming and grazing technologies in their region – the key movers and shakers," John explained.

Participants included researchers, public and private advisers, farm consultants and leading producers.

"By bringing these people together we gave them a chance to see the technologies operating in commercial farm environments.

i key points

- Workshops and forums brought together key movers and shakers across four regions
- Events had both on-farm and inside sessions to accommodate different learning styles of participants
- The event format allowed an in-depth discussion about the merits of the technologies between a diverse group of participants.

"Secondly, we wanted to sit the diverse group down in an informal setting to really get a clear understanding of the pros and cons of the technologies in each region."

"Each event had a regional focus, so it was about looking at the technologies relevant to the region and inviting people most likely to influence adoption of those technologies."

The third principle behind the events was that by providing a relaxed setting and sufficient time through table groups, each group (researchers, advisers and farmers) could really grill each other on potential benefits and challenges, face-to-face, over an extended period.

"This is an opportunity these people don't normally get."

John believes that one of the real success stories from the events was the level of exchange between the participants.

"I think this was because we had drawn together such a diverse group of people who bring their own background and experiences with these technologies," John suggested.

Katanning workshop

Finding the best ways to spread the message and get farmers using CRC Salinity technologies was the focus of the *Path to Adoption* workshop held during late October 2007 in Katanning, WA.

More than 40 participants attended the two-day workshop, which provided an overview of the technologies and gave insights into ways for extension officers and other specialists to spread the news.

A field trip to selected farms in the Katanning region demonstrated perennial pastures and saltland grazing systems, as well as engineering-based technologies, such as raised beds.

After a series of presentations that provided extra theory and data about the technologies seen in field, participants worked in small groups to provide feedback on how FFI CRC can increase both an understanding of the

technologies and confidence in advisers about promoting them to farmers.

There was strong support for more commercial-scale demonstrations and trials to provide further proof of the technologies' advantages and the development of subsequent 'bullet-proof' agronomic packages. Advisers recommended the development of training programs to help them deliver the packages.

Cummins and Minlaton workshops

In SA, the headline technologies were presented at two one-day *Profitable Perennials in the Landscape* forums during February 2008. The events aimed to extend CRC research outcomes to 'end users' (primarily land managers) and a wider audience. Both events were well attended and included land managers, Landmark advisers, researchers and consultants.

Dr Anna Dutkiewicz, SA Adoption Manager for the FFI CRC from the Department of Water Land and Biodiversity Conservation (DWLBC) explained that the focus topics for the forums were lucerne, saltbush and other perennials and their role in increased production, livestock gains and the management of dryland salinity in the region.

"In the morning sessions, speakers presented CRC research outcomes on the suitability and benefits of lucerne in farming systems. Speakers at both forums included Trevor Dooley (Rural Solutions SA), David Maschmedt (DWLBC), Dr Bill Bellotti (The University of Adelaide) and, at Cummins, local Landmark agronomist Jarrod Kemp," Dr Dutkiewicz said.

Local land managers Peter Treloar and Neil Forrest also shared their own experiences with lucerne on-farm.

Afternoon sessions saw presentations on saltland pastures from researchers Jock McFarlane (Rural Solutions SA), Liz Abraham (SARDI) and land manager Geoff Kroemer.

Final presentations from each workshop, from land manager Gavin Rehn and researchers Jim Franklin McEvoy (FFI CRC) and Craig Neumann (DWLBC) covered the role of saltbush.

"Respondents to follow-up surveys from the events indicated that they gained new knowledge and understanding from the presentations, in particular, on saltland pastures and saltbush followed by lucerne and other perennials," Dr Dutkiewicz said.

"The feedback also suggested the CRC needs to ensure grower experiences are documented and transferred to others to fill the gap between research and adoption."

Tammin workshop

All 30 advisers and other 'next users' who influence grower decisions rated the workshop at Tammin as 'useful to very useful' in increasing their knowledge and confidence in advising on technologies featured at the workshop.

The workshop featured 'headline' technologies for whole farm and landscape water management in the eastern wheatbelt of WA, including lucerne phase farming, saltland pastures, and oil mallees.

Day one of the workshop started with presentations on the technologies from lead

CRC researchers Perry Dolling, John Bartle and Ed Barrett-Lennard.

Participants then learned more about the practical side of the technologies on four farms, where growers talked about why they adopted the technologies, the challenges in adopting them, and whether they delivered the anticipated benefits.

"There was lively discussion and networking through the day (and night) among the participants," John Powell said.

Table group sessions on day two saw growers, CRC researchers and 'next users' having in-depth discussions about the merits of the technologies. They also put forward their 'big ideas' for what should happen next to increase adoption of the technologies.

The 'big ideas' to come out of the Tammin workshop were:

- Promote lucerne to croppers as a tool to preserve cropping yields and land value, instead of promoting it as part



ABOVE: Land manager, Gavin Morgan, uses 2 m deep soil pits to demonstrate the effect of lucerne in preserving his future grain yields at the Tammin workshop. (Photo: John Powell)

of lucerne-livestock systems to address waterlogging and salinity

- Promote saltbush as part of normal farm and landscape management, rather than something to do when land is no longer useful for anything else
- Establish regional partnerships between the Oil Mallee Association, State agencies and Shires, for co-ordinated oil mallee industry development. ⚡

More information

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Fellowship recognises post-graduate perennial work

Dion Nicol is one of only two students nationally to win the highly contested 2008 AW Howard Memorial Research Fellowship that recognises students who have a research project pertaining to the development, management and use of pastures.

A Curtin University of Technology Environmental Biology Honours graduate, Dion has been acknowledged for his outstanding post-graduate research with native legumes.

Dion's work focuses on using native perennial legumes as an alternative to lucerne to improve the productivity of Western Australian low-rainfall regions.

"I am particularly interested in low rainfall soils and the chemical constraints restricting root growth of current crop and pasture varieties," Dion said.

"My studies in environmental biology provide an excellent background to study native legumes.

"WA has a unique environment and a diverse and well-adapted native plant population. I hope to use this diversity and adaptability to find crops that will grow well in stressful environments."

Hailing from WA's central wheatbelt, Dion hopes the field trials on his uncle's property will capture agronomy and water usage information on two legume species – *Cullen cinereum* and *Cullen graveolens*.

"The legumes, found as wild populations in low rainfall areas, could be a future profitable crop for the WA wheatbelt."

"In natural grasslands, these species are highly productive and remain so much longer than almost all other herbage under water stress. If successful, they could provide an income from summer rain and stored soil moisture while reducing recharge."



Dion has started his doctoral studies at the University of Western Australia (UWA) with assistance from the FFI CRC and UWA's School of Plant Biology.

The \$15,000 AW Howard Memorial Research Fellowship bursary will help finance Dion's research and field experiments. ⚡

More information

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