



Local approach lifts awareness and coaxes continued collaboration

By Laureta Wallace
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ABOVE: A series of regional briefings in South Australia has strengthened relationships between researchers, producers and other industry stakeholders. (Photo: Dr Anna Dutkiewicz)

The Future Farm Industries CRC (FFI CRC) officially introduced itself to South Australia earlier this year. The CRC team hosted a series of 'regional briefings' to explain its mandate and role in promoting and developing perennial pastures and alternative industries for Australian broadacre farming systems.

CRC researchers presented on both mature and new project work with the SA Adoption Team highlighted opportunities to engage in both research and extension activities through the FFI CRC regional networks.

Rolling out across the State during February and March, the briefings attracted a mixture of producers, business and agronomy advisors and Local and State government officers.

A briefing was held in each regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) area with locals helping determine the most suitable locations. The briefings were supported by the regional NRM boards, each providing a representative to chair the engagement sessions and facilitate a final discussion at the day's end.

The regional briefings were carried out relatively early in the FFI CRC's life to raise awareness of the what work was being carried on from the former CRC Salinity and what research lay ahead.

FFI CRC SA Adoption Manager, Dr Anna Dutkiewicz, said each regional briefing was unique.

"The content of each workshop was tailored to reflect the region's agri-ecological nature," Dr Dutkiewicz said.

"Many research leaders were very supportive of the briefings and keen to engage with regional networks."

FFI CRC program and project leaders were contacted and asked to nominate what projects they would most like to highlight.

For example, the Murray-Darling Basin workshop included presentations on:

- The FFI CRC's history
- *Enrich*®: profitable and sustainable mixed enterprise farmers incorporating perennial shrubs for grazing livestock
- Coorong Perennial Forages project
- *Saltland Knowledge Exchange* including an introduction to the *Saltland Genie* website
- Identifying regions where new woody biomass industries are most viable.

The presentations

The regional briefings followed a half-day format, which included short presentations and a discussion forum to finish. Complementing each briefing was another half-day workshop, *Responding to climate variability*, hosted by Rural Solutions SA on behalf of SA's peak farmer organisation, the Advisory Board of Agriculture.

"The second workshop was seen as way to value-add to the day for participants, and reinforced the inherent role that the FFI CRC has in addressing adaptation to climate change," Dr Dutkiewicz said.

RIGHT: Jock McFarlane, who presented on the *Saltland Genie* website, works the crowd at Naracoorte. (Photo: Dr Anna Dutkiewicz)

key points

- The FFI CRC explained its purpose and research program to South Australian farmers and other industry experts through a series of regional briefings during early 2009
- Feedback from the workshops revealed a strong interest in the *EverGraze* and *Enrich* programs
- Participants also indicated they were keen to find out more about carbon sequestration, native grasses and animal production when grazing fodder shrubs.

The verdict

Participants were asked to complete evaluations at the four briefings and, as a result, 23 responses were collected. Responses indicated a moderate to high understanding of the FFI CRC's structure, aims and programs (see Figure 1). The relevance and potential benefits of individual research programs to the regions were also perceived as generally high.

The *Saltland Genie* website was presented at all the briefings and was well received.

However, the willingness of participants to act on or follow up information from some CRC programs was a little disappointing. More than 50 per cent indicated they would seek more information, 20% said they would not and 30% were unsure.

There was, however, strong intent to follow up on particular projects, including *Saltland Genie*, *EverGraze*® and *Enrich* projects (see Table 1).

"There was a strong message coming through about the need for relevant, targeted local research with the accompanying economic analysis," Dr Dutkiewicz said.

"Participants indicated they wanted solid take home messages as well as options for farming to remain flexible in changing environments."

Tips for improvement

The discussion panel at the end of the day was beneficial according to Dr Dutkiewicz.

"It was a chance for people to tell us, the FFI CRC, which projects and activities they would be interested in becoming involved in and what they thought could be done to improve our research and adoption," she said.

There were suggestions for better collaboration between the CRC and the various regional NRM boards and other regional groups.

Participants also said they wanted more information on animal production from grazing shrubs, native grasses and carbon sequestration.

Collaborative linkages

"A key outcome of the briefings was the linkages developed with regional NRM boards and farmer networks and their willingness to act as conduits for FFI CRC activities through involvement in our Regional Advisor Networks," Dr Dutkiewicz said.

"They also strengthened bonds within the SA FFI CRC's research and adoption fraternity."

All in all, Dr Dutkiewicz believes the briefings largely achieved their intended purpose.

"We laid the foundations for effective regional adviser and support networks and raised awareness of the FFI CRC," she said.

"Attendance was lower than expected at a couple of briefings and we were disappointed the Northern and Yorke NRM Regional Briefing at Kadina did not go ahead.

"However, the opportunities generated were significant, resulting in a range of direct and indirect outcomes.

"Through the strengthened links between researchers, their projects and the participants we look forward to some new long-term collaborations."

One outcome was the suggestion for the FFI CRC to host future SA regional briefings that provide more targeted briefings on specific research themes such as woody crops.

Respondents showed keen interest in finding out more about research project outcomes in the years to come.

The FFI CRC SA team, which consists of Anna and Trevor Dooley both of the Department of Water Land and Biodiversity Conservation (DWLBC), are now following up on opportunities and ideas for how they can better serve SA's broadacre farmers. ↘

More information

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FIGURE 1. Average respondent beneficial rating of FFI CRC research programs

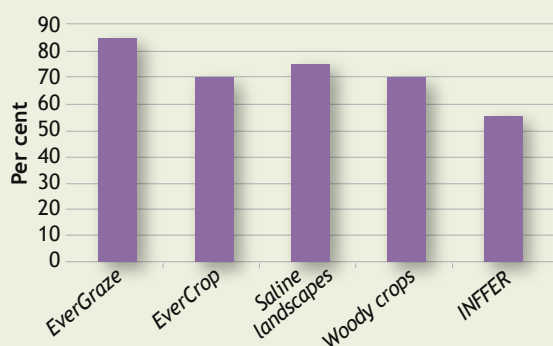


TABLE 1. Willingness of regional briefing participants to follow up on information relating to major FFI CRC programs

Are you keen to follow up on...	Response				Comments
	Yes	No	Unsure	Responses	
<i>EverGraze/Enrich</i>	16	2	3	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need economic analysis of trial results Need more research for low-rainfall areas Flexibility in agriculture is good Support tools are (for example, <i>Saltland Genie</i>) useful Need new species with high production Local trials/trial results are best Need strong take home message Climate change needs more discussion.
<i>EverCrop</i>	5	3	6	14	
<i>Saline landscapes</i>	7	3	3	13	
<i>Woody crops</i>					
<i>INFFER</i>	1	3.5	4.5	9	
Total response	35	13.5	20.5	69	

