

Leading the way on Lower EP

- * New research group provides focus for Lower EP
- * Driven by a young committee
- * Working on local issues and providing links to national projects

In just over 12 months the Lower Eyre Agricultural Development Association, LEADA, has evolved from an idea into an active farming systems group, with 70 members and funding for several trials.

LEADA was conceived and initiated by local farmers and rural businesses with support from member groups of the Ag Excellence Alliance. Sharing the experiences of established farming groups on topics ranging from creating a constitution and applying for funding, to setting-up trial sites, has helped fast track LEADA's development.

"PIRSA and DWLBC have been very supportive providing Greg Secomb and now Kieran Wauchop as our coordinator; their input helps turn the committee's ideas and enthusiasm into actions," said Kingsley MacDonald, inaugural chairman of LEADA.

"We have a committee of eight farmers and the majority are under 45 years old, so it is a very dynamic group."

LEADA aims to tackle production and resource management issues in the region more effectively by working with existing district groups to address locally driven issues.

The GRDC Southern Panel provided LEADA with advice on forging stronger links with the High Rainfall collaboration group, which provides linkages between all farming systems groups in the higher rainfall districts.

On Lower EP annual rainfall ranges between 400-500mm and soils from alkaline to acid, many of which are gravels over clay. Issues of soil drainage and nutrient leaching are some of the greatest challenges faced in the region and addressing these is the objective of the group's first major research project.

With funding from the National Landcare Program Community Grants a research project has been established under the title of 'Improving the water use efficiency of Lower Eyre Peninsula cropping systems'.

Three trial sites have been established at Wangery, Koppio and Ungarra. Treatments of deep ripping and placement of nutrients at depth (20-30cm) are being tested at each of the trial sites. Nutrients placed at depth include zinc, copper, lime and gypsum.

The objective of the trial is to try and improve water and nutrient infiltration into the clay to increase rooting depth and root growth. Currently water and nutrients are lost as they hit the clay layer and move horizontally rather than percolating down the soil profile.

In addition to establishing trials LEADA is providing a link between the region and State and nationally run research projects.

"Before the formation of LEADA the Lower Eyre Peninsula lacked a focal point for research and consequently was being overlooked when researchers were locating trial sites.

“By creating a farming systems group in this area we are able to piggy back on large research programs, run in areas with similar climates, soils and production issues as well as to initiate locally relevant research.”

Examples of this are the role LEADA has played in the collection and distribution of information about stem rust its collaborating with YPASG and SANTFA on NLP funded projects on interrow sowing and competitive cropping for weed control and linkages with the Grain and Graze program.

LEADA is not only about new research it also aims to provide growers with topical technical information.

In March LEADA, in conjunction with the Lower Eyre Peninsula Bushfire Re-establishment Program, organised the first Lower Eyre Peninsula Ag Expo. The event was designed to be a ‘one stop shop’ for growers to access the technical information they required for the coming season.

The Expo was a great success attracting growers and industry members from across Lower EP many of whom became members of LEADA. The Expo is expected to be held annually.

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