

Ag Bureaus embrace issues not just location

The Agricultural Bureau of SA has a long history of providing a hub for social and technical support in rural areas. Last year saw the creation of a new style of Agricultural Bureau, the Biodynamic and Organic Agricultural Bureau (BOAB), a state wide group based on the common interest in biodynamic and organic productions systems. This milestone in the Bureau's history is mirrored by an increase in State wide topic based projects that unite Agricultural Bureaus across the State.

Gavin Dunn, organic grain producer from the mid north, is chair of BOAB. He explained that "the idea to form a biodynamic/organic farmer's group had been growing steadily. It was required to meet the increasing need for growers, producers, consumers, certification bodies and governments to understand each others requirements and issues."

"BOAB was initiated to provide a forum where everybody is heard, regardless of their background."

It was suggest that the group formed under the banner of the Agricultural Bureau of SA as it offers groups support in a range of ways. These include insurance, publicity and through the Advisory Board of Agriculture, bureau members have a direct line of communication with the Minister.

BOAB has already attracted 70 members from across the State. They represent industries as diverse as dairy production and manufacture to fruit and vegetable production, as well as meat and fibre production.

Several field visits have been organised by the group providing members with an opportunity to visit and learn from other biodynamic and organic producers. Like other Agricultural Bureaus, BOAB is based on a foundation of sharing and support for the progress of the industry as a whole.

The new AgBureau website at www.agbureau.com.au has details about BOAB under the Adelaide Hills Branches and is a source of information about AgBureau activities, including other State wide projects.

The Sustainable Land Use and Management of Sandy Soils project is funded by the National Landcare Program. Several demonstrations sites have been established in the South East, Mallee, Eyre Peninsula, Far West, Upper YP and Kangaroo Island, to look at the value of clay spreading, deep ripping and various nutrient treatments.

Over 500 farmers have attended field days linked with these site activities and some interesting early observations have been made. For example, in the Mallee a clear difference between 'good' and 'bad' sites and the type of clay being spread has been recorded.

Soil issues have been at the forefront of several AgBureau projects including the Better Soils that ran from 1998 to 2002. Following this, a consortium including the Barossa Valley Agricultural Bureau, Barossa Viticultural Technical Group, SARDI, Rural Solutions SA, DWLBC and Northern Adelaide and Barossa Catchment, Water Management Board initiated a project to investigate sodicity and potential methods of treating sodicity in vineyards.

The project has 18 sites based on 12 properties and has undertaken intensive soil testing, especially monitoring changes in soil chemistry following rain and irrigation. The project is looking at using specialist injection equipment for the deep placement of different remediation treatments.

Other projects relate to precision agriculture and work force development.

James McDonald, Executive Officer for the Advisory Board of Agriculture and the Agricultural Bureau of SA Inc, believes these projects demonstrate that the Bureau still plays a relevant and valuable role in agricultural innovation and supporting the states rural producers.

“The Bureau has evolved over its 118 year history, I am sure this ability to respond to changing needs is part of the reason we still have 100 financial Ag Bureaus across the state the largest number in its history.”

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