Fostering Cooperation for Esperance Farmer Groups

Esperance Shire, Local Farmer Group Network (LFGN) leaders met in Esperance last month to identify ways in which communication between their groups may be improved and resources shared.

“The distance between local farmer groups throughout the Esperance Shire encourages unique relationships within and between groups”, according to Paul Carmody, Local Farmer Group Network, Coordinator.

Working together at a local level is beneficial for the 12 farmer groups of the Esperance Shire which has more farmer groups than any other shire in Western Australia. As farmers face diminishing research dollars and high input prices, farmer groups are encouraged to seek common outcomes together.

‘Better organisation and communication between local farmer groups across the shire is essential to manage available research and development resources efficiently’, said Andrew Longmire, chairperson of the North Mallee Farm Improvement Group from Salmon Gums.

The Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) and The University of Western Australia fund the Local Farmer Group Network, whose aim is to connect local farmer groups throughout the wheat belt of WA.

Local Farmer Group leaders who attended the meeting in Esperance were from, Grass Patch Sustainable Farming Group, North Mallee Farm Improvement Group, Neridup Soil Conservation Group and Jerdacuttup Topcrop and Pasture Group.

The informal meeting allowed group leaders, some of whom who had not met before, to discuss topics including, improving productivity with increases in fuel and fertilizer prices, improving soil structure and health, and exploring paths to communicate with other groups in the Shire.

Genetically modified crops (GM crops), also were discussed at the meeting. According to Andrew Longmire, North Mallee Farm Improvement Group, “GM technology could help us minimise the risk of frost in our crops for good”.

Grass Patch Sustainable Farming Group member Faye Sanderson agreed, “One of the challenges the local groups face is distance. There must be a better way of communicating, given that many of the group leaders are busy organising their own group members and have limited time to connect with other groups”.

Local Farmer Group Leaders agreed they should meet again and on a regular basis to further develop information sharing and communication between the groups. The next meeting is planned for August 2006.

Growers who would like to know more about the Local Farmer Group Network should contact Paul Carmody (at UWA) 0427 997 878 or visit their website www.lfgn.org.au.

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