



Performance through collaboration

KNOWLEDGE SHARING GUIDE FOR GROWER GROUPS

PROJECT 1.2.006



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DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this report are solely the authors', and do not necessarily reflect the views of Southern Cross University, the Cooperative Research Centre for High Performance Soils or the people consulted during the research project.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

SCU	Southern Cross University
CSU	Charles Sturt University
SoilCRC	Cooperative Research Centre for High Performance Soils
CWFS	Central West Farming Systems
BCG	Birchip Cropping Group
WMG	West Midlands Group
AIR EP	Agricultural Innovation & Research Eyre Peninsula

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1. INTRODUCTION

Grower groups want to increase their membership over the short to medium term, while delivering value to their members and other stakeholders. This Knowledge Sharing Guide is designed to be used as an easy reference for Australian farming grower groups and professionals involved in engagement, extension, education and other forms of knowledge sharing aimed at improving land and farm management. It has been developed as a part of the Soil CRC Knowledge Sharing Project (KSP), with a central purpose to identify and test effective knowledge sharing strategies for supporting improved soil stewardship. This project aimed to increase the number of landholders actively engaged in soil health improvement practices by having the four participating grower groups analyse their extension practices over a two-year period – in the areas of strategy, planning, prioritising, communicating and delivering.

Regional knowledge sharing plans for a range of knowledge sharing strategies and approaches were co-developed with local farming organisations, based on grower group priorities and previous Soil CRC research findings. These engagement strategies and approaches were then systematically tested over a period of 12 to 24 months through the use of evaluation forms and a reflective 'process diary' that was completed by the person implementing the event or other form of engagement. Full details about the methods of data collection can be found in the project technical report.

The learnings presented in this Guide have emerged from the process diaries, event evaluations and through discussions at regular project team and grower group catch-up meetings over the life of the project. There are specific pointers for the range of events and knowledge sharing projects farmer and grower group extension staff may need to use. The Guide includes basics as well as expanded ideas – these may not be suitable for all situations and audiences.

Incorporated into this Guide are key sections of a larger Digital Engagement Guide that detail specific (digital) strategies, activities and communications needed for effective knowledge sharing, event communications, organisation marketing, and awareness of the grower group individually. The Digital Engagement Guide is included in the full report and includes five succinct one-page ready references covering audiences, the purpose and plan for developing a digital strategy, monitoring strategies that are used, current and future strategies, and methods to identify and manage challenges and opportunities.

How to use this Guide

Please use this Guide as a tool to inspire discussion among your team about how to effectively share knowledge and engage farmers and other stakeholders in key topics that you or your organisation are focussed on. We know that each region and each organisation is different: use and adapt our learnings as you wish.

2. ENGAGEMENT 101

This study has shown the importance of farmers having access to capable knowledge sharing expertise with empathy and knowledge of farmers and their farming systems. Knowledge sharing and extension agents are far more than just a resource of information for farmers. There must be a relationship built on trust, respect, and a good rapport; there must be an understanding of landholder needs and an understanding (or commitment to learn) about how to address client needs. They must be able to facilitate opportunities that not only allow for the vital dissemination of knowledge, but also act as a social event in the calendar.

This project has shown that knowledge sharing is a multi-directional process and must always be seen as something that is reciprocal in nature, i.e., a mutual exchange. Looking at the relationship between a grower group and a farmer as an example. A grower group may engage with farmers to deliver new practices or ideas, but in turn, the grower group will be constantly learning from the farmers. Factors such as what drives farmers decision-making; local soil constraints; external market forces; what farmer priorities are; all influence how farmers are responding and adapting to constraints. Creating a community of practice allows for the extension experts themselves to be continually learning from each other, a process further enabled by the process of critical review undertaken at each engagement event.

In the following videos, Soil CRC Knowledge Sharing Project Leader, Hanabeth Luke, and soil consultant David Davenport, discuss some important points about working with and for farmers.

The full playlist can be accessed via the Soil CRC YouTube Channel

(<https://www.youtube.com/@soilcrc3649>).

Video 1. Working with communities: stepping in lightly



URL: https://youtu.be/Uc1V_f027LU

Video 2. Understanding your local farm context and industry



URL: <https://youtu.be/r4xML3Wv5sg>

Video 3. Understanding your landholder: drivers of decision-making



URL: <https://youtu.be/HKJBC5ya2zU>

Video 4. Tips for sharing knowledge in farming systems



URL: <https://youtu.be/mcTvhDfr-GI>

3. DEVELOPING A KNOWLEDGE SHARING PLAN

Our project team co-developed the key elements required for an effective knowledge sharing plan for a grower group or other organisations interested in improving their engagement efforts. Figure 1 shows the key components, which were developed based on existing data and priorities emerging from the regional Soil CRC Social Benchmarking Surveys (projects [1.2.004](#) and [1.2.005](#)). This was the first element identified. However, also raised by the project team was the importance of identifying and working with stakeholders from the outset to identify key priorities for knowledge sharing efforts, so the first two stepping stones were added. Motivators for change were considered (why improve?), and then linked with best practices to address a particular land management challenge (for example: erosion > ground cover). Different stakeholder groups can be identified through a range of different factors, for example, age, gender, farm management type, location, or rainfall zone, and key stakeholders to engage were identified.

The next stepping stone was drawn from findings of Soil CRC project [1.2.002](#), 'Why Land Management Practices are Adopted'. Common regional challenges to adoption were identified in this project, with some examples (i.e. the importance of seeing local success before investing in a new approach) noted below the stepping stone. Then, also using data from the regional social benchmarking reports, a number of key approaches to engagement were identified. The final stepping stone was used to link to any existing types of monitoring underway, such as adoption surveys, soil testing projects – but also linking to the main two monitoring approaches developed as part of this project – the Engagement Process Diary, and the event evaluation forms developed by the project team.

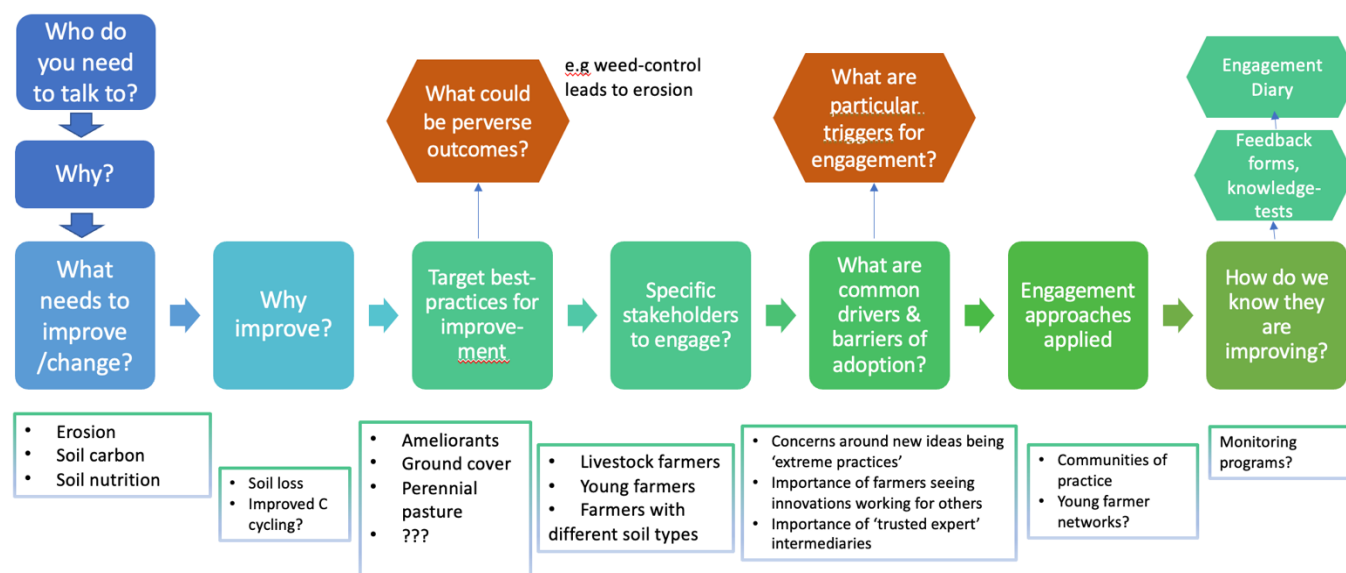


Figure 1: Elements of a knowledge sharing plan, developed by the project team

4. PLANNING YOUR ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Step 1: Determine your target audience for a particular event/strategy

Building on the knowledge sharing plans, our project team identified a checklist of questions that includes the following planning considerations:

- ✓ **Why are you engaging?** What priorities does your organisation already have in place?
- ✓ **Are there soil management practices you'd like to improve?** What are the challenges/opportunities you wish to address? Why are these important?
- ✓ **What is the solution that you are providing?** Does this complete the puzzle, or just add one part? Can you identify issues and possible associated practices?
- ✓ **Who are the groups or people you are seeking to engage?** Identify and map your stakeholders, such as established farmers, agronomists, consultants, advisors, local resellers, younger farmers, new farmers, women farmers, wider community.
- ✓ **What do you know about these groups?** What are your existing relationships with them?
- ✓ **What does your audience need?** What are the key messages to communicate, what knowledge does your audience wish to learn or share? Consider the 'Three rights': right timing, right issues, right 'trusted information'.
- ✓ Are there sub-groups of your intended audience who you might engage with differently?
- ✓ Are you aiming for incremental learning or more systemic change?
- ✓ Consider high-level priorities vs lower-level priorities. Can you combine the two?

Step 2: Plan your logistics

- ✓ **What are key priorities for the event?** What are your 1-4 key take-home messages?
- ✓ **Where will you conduct the event?** Online? In person? What is the best venue for the type of engagement and content you are delivering for the intended audience? Is there a farmer doing something different and/or well who might like to host an event that you could support?
 - **What is your timeframe?** Are you going to plan a single event e.g., immediate, urgent, seasonal recurring, or longer-term series of events? Do you have pre-existing milestones you need to meet?
 - **What is the best timing?** Time of day or week may enable or prohibit different stakeholders to be able to attend. How much lead-in time do people need to attend an event?
- ✓ **Who do you expect to show up?** Do you anticipate working directly with farm owners, managers or agronomists? What might be the information flow following your event?
- ✓ **Will you have a mix of formal and social components to your event?** Will you provide food and drink? Will you ask for participants to register for the event and if so, how will this be done and when?
- ✓ **Can you support a more diverse group to come by providing childcare on site?** This may inspire more younger farmers to attend your event.
- ✓ **What materials will you need to run your event?** E.g. does the venue have a projector?

Step 3: Select, brief and prepare your presenters, researchers, experts

Underpinning the following section is the need **to select and brief your presenters**, to align the expert with the topic and anticipated outcomes. The Soil CRC project grower group participants identified a set of guidelines **for the prospective presenter**:

- **Provide context:** The extension officer/project manager should provide the context of the event for the presenter to prepare appropriate information. Provide this material well in advance.
- **Information about likely attendees:** age, attitudes to topic, openness to new information.
- **Likely technical knowledge of the topic of expected attendees:** Is this a new topic for the target group or are there already learning and discussions occurring?
- **Indicate level of involvement of group:** Can they ask questions, make comments during the presentation?
- **Industry information:** Production systems in use, any current local/industry issues?
- **Related local projects:** Are there projects that the speaker may not be aware of?
- **Rainfall zone**
- **Recent speakers on similar topics:** It is useful to build upon or link to other presentations? There is no need to cover the same ground again.
- **Suggest some interactive questions at the beginning** to gauge awareness levels of attendees (hands up who does 'xxx', use of electronic polling tools)
- **Be ready for questions** and think about what is behind their questions (we call this "3D questioning").

Provide key tips for presenters

Box 1: Key considerations to advise presenters prior to the event.

Minimise information on powerpoints	Use photos and scenarios to explain concepts	Explain graphs fully
Engage audience from the start - ask questions	Keep checking in with your audience	Explain and link key terminology
Use worked examples in plain English	Use handouts so people can take notes	Allow time for questions

Encourage as much 'hands on' as possible; really know the base level of knowledge that you're presenting to and make sure to be very clear about that to your presenter/expert in the field! Amy Wright, AIR EP

- **PowerPoint content:** Use a small number of short dot points, limit the use of graphs (can add to a printed handout instead), ensure acronyms are defined, lots of white space, large font size, high contrasting colours.
- **Use photographs and scenarios** to walk the audience through ideas and concepts.
- **Explain graphs in detail:** Explain the x axis, y axis. For people looking at a graph for the first time they may take longer to process the information compared to a researcher that has lived the data for the past 12 months.
- **Be interactive with your audience from the start:** Continually check if technical information is understood and relevant.
- **Use 'worked' examples in plain English:** This is essential for same topic that's being discussed in scientific terms; use both plain English and 'technical terms' to ensure concept are understood.
- **Make links between different terminology/language:** Explain acronyms (don't leave the listener guessing or confused).
- **Have printed handouts and pens available:** This allows people to make notes against the slides.
- **Allow time for questions:** Don't completely fill time slot with the presentation.

One week before your event, check back with your presenter so you can confirm what they have put together is relevant i.e., what you want. Ask them to send slides through in advance.

Step 4: Get your audience to show up!

How events are set up is very important and includes marketing, content, and targeting the intended audience/s. Getting people to attend an event/activity, and then getting people to engage within the event/activity requires an entirely different set of tactics.

First, be very clear on the purpose, scope and intended goals of the event, and communicate these in advance. For example, is this going to be focussed on education about a current industry challenge, or inviting farmers, agronomists or others to participate in a new project? Is a key goal to facilitate industry connections, discussions, and shared understandings? Ensure your event does not clash with other events within the target region.

Advertise your event

Effective advertising is important to attract the target audience. Apart from the obvious of getting people to the event, effective advertising will ensure that the right people are there and are engaged, understanding what the day is about.

Make the message stick by using multiple communication modes and approaches. For example, use **social media to achieve a broad or targeted audience reach**, addressing audience needs through a tailored approach. However, understand that there will be a need for appropriate



Figure 2: West Midlands Group event flyer

communications to all types of participants, because communications are used in different ways by different demographics. For example, if you are seeking to bring older farmers along, you may wish to place an advert in a local newspaper, farming magazine, or on local radio channels.

Female farmers are more likely to access information via email, younger females more likely to use Instagram. Younger farmers may set up their own snapchat groups to share information about your event with friends.

Sending a reminder SMS from a communications person's own phone is read more often, as are personal phone calls – however, keep to a minimum to maximise impact when needed. Use **your existing relationships and networks** to help entice people along to your event.

Use a range of traditional media options for your area

- Local newspaper (photos of locals helps raise interest; articles in local newspapers.)
- Local radio stations, ads or interviews
- Industry monthly magazines
- Farmer/grower journals
- School newsletters/local publications/footy programs

Keep the message simple – make it easy to read for different stakeholders

- What is the event and who should attend?
- Why should they come? What is the value for them?
- Who is speaking/providing info?
- When & where?
- Catering & cost (if applicable)
- Include QR code links/phone/email to access further information and registration

Box 2: Planning for success

What are your 3 key messages and who will deliver them?

Who are your audience? Adjust group sizes especially when targeting a demographic such as younger farmers.

Consider the likely composition of your audience to decide on the best presenters.

How are you marketing it? Keep it simple so they don't feel they need to dress up, e.g., locate in wool or machinery shed - then casual & work clothes are OK.

What will motivate people to come?

Printed flyers don't need to be full colour, data and experience says often the details are what farmers read (ensure full information on day/time/location/phone contact number). Highly produced flyers can tend to signal that the event is too formal and may come across as exclusive. *Expectations are everything. Invest in marketing your engagement activity.*



Figure 3: West Midlands Group flyer for a Pasture-Field Walk that was facilitated by the farmer

5. PUTTING YOUR PLAN INTO ENGAGED ACTION

There are a multitude of different engagement strategies. How will you decide which is the best for your organisation? You have determined the purpose of your engagement strategies. You have ensured you have a clear plan for engagement and knowledge sharing in your organisation. You might wish to engage digitally, face to face, or via various forms of print media. There are many ways to engage, from general conversations on the radio through to farmer case studies in printed or online media. We have found that podcasts are a great way to share case studies and ideas – particularly with younger farmers.

Face to face events may include:

- Field days
- Short courses
- Workshops
- Sticky beak days
- Paddock walks (or drives!)

Traditional media may include:

- Farmer and grower journals
- Printed flyers
- Magazines
- Radio
- Local newspapers (photos of locals helps raise interest)



Figure 4: The West Midlands Group Pasture Event Series

Digital modes of engagement may include:

- YouTube clips and reels
- Podcasts
- Websites
- Webinars, including online case studies
- Social media: Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn
- Texting tools

Field days and sticky beak days

A number of farmer groups have traditions of annual field days to report on trials relating to soil health, crop and pasture production, and animal performance. These can take many forms depending on the anticipated size of expected attendance and type of information being presented. What our team has found is that farmer-led events, supported, promoted and facilitated by the Grower Group, work really well. These can involve farm walks/sticky beak days, soil pits, shed presentations, discussions and workshops.

“Get people participating from the start: often when people arrive they are a bit ‘shutdown’, nervous, they don’t really know how to engage so give people an opportunity to engage when they don’t have to be knowledgeable - to have a conversation in that way first.” Claire, CWFS

CASE STUDY 1: West Midlands Group Pasture Event Series

The WMG 'Pasture Event Series' developed and evolved across the period of late 2021 into early 2023 in response to several perennial pasture, ground cover and soil health related projects.

Beginning as an informal farm visit and discussion session (quite literally walking through pastures), the series grew across four subsequent events and a facilitated workshop, gathering interest and engagement from growers across the West Midlands region.

There are a multitude of factors that contribute to the successes of the Pasture Event Series, some of which were not entirely evident until reflection:

- Beginning with small scale, informal, 'entertainment' style events to garner interest, increasing the amount of 'technical' information and guests/speakers at events and finishing the series with a facilitated, reflective, learnings heavy workshop.
- Ensuring the events remained informal, non-confrontational, safe spaces for discussion.
- Ensuring the events remained farmer/producer led. Positioning the farmer/producer as the 'hero' at each event (i.e. not having WMG as the event lead but rather the guide or facilitator – illustrating this at the beginning of the event, allowing the farmer/producer to choose the tour direction, to lead the discussion and Q&A).
- Making sure that there was a good farmer/industry/research attendee and invitee spread (more farmers, less industry and research) across each event. This generally tends to happen organically, however there were occasions where the WMG team were active in inviting specific people to an event to supplement conversation, provide background information or as an alternative exemplar.
- Put a particular emphasis on using the right language on any promotional material. This included making sure to not use too many words or overly complex language, getting the 'call to action' or proposal ("why do I need to be at this event?") just right and setting expectations.
- Ensuring consistent and continued momentum, theme, and messaging across each event. Participants knew what to expect at each event, could see the events as 'connected' and were inclined to recommend the next event in the series to others.

Overall, the series demonstrated a considerable reach for project awareness and outcomes, being held over eleven local farms, engaging more than 200 attendees, and disseminating local knowledge surrounding perennial establishment, grazing management, ground cover and soil health.

As well as demonstrating particular benefit to local farmers and producers, the WMG team also continued to build internal capacity throughout working on the Pasture Event Series, including but not limited to facilitation, monitoring and evaluation, community engagement and design principles.

A selection of promotional materials and photos from the Pasture Event Series have been provided on the previous pages.

6. ENCOURAGING IN-PERSON ENGAGEMENT

- ✓ Keep it simple, use casual venues such as a wool or machinery shed so attendees don't need to change from work clothes or dress up.
- ✓ Based on the purpose you can adjust your plan to encourage small group interactions, providing increased peer-to-peer discussions and informal learning from each other.
- ✓ Provide an agenda ahead of time, and worksheets to encourage attendees to make notes and have questions ready.
- ✓ Test holding events at different times of the day, for example, breakfast meetings, short 2-3 hours so attendees can still get work done, depending on season.
- ✓ Allow time for informal chats with growers, staff, presenters, and between attendees.
- ✓ Deliberately allow for extra time at events to enable time for feedback, chats, networking etc. when moving between field sites
- ✓ Serve suitable, quality refreshments and allow time for people to enjoy them.
- ✓ Local farmer/s as host or panel or presenter boost local interactions, increase interest in adoption and practice change.
- ✓ Encourage attendees to "bring your own item" to test if applicable e.g., soil to pH test.

Box 3: Tips for face-to-face engagement

Grower group tips for face-to-face engagement

- ✓ Have a clear, visible, and detailed agenda on the day.
- ✓ Initiate an interesting icebreaker to get some chat happening. E.g. 'find someone who...'.- ✓ Personalisation of information delivery can make a huge difference to outcomes.
- ✓ High level theory or policy may not engage your audience, but you might find engagement improving once your discussion is clearly linked to practical outcomes.
- ✓ For in-person events, we suggest keeping it casual, not too formal in-person events, or having both formal and informal depending on topic/s and speakers.
- ✓ Half day on-farm events have great local appeal as it allows farmers to fit in work activities around the event.
- ✓ Keep it casual, not too formal – if growers go on-site to a farm property, they can attend in their everyday work clothes.



Figure 5: learning together in the paddock

Planning a targeted event

Think carefully about the group you wish to engage. What will they be interested in learning about? For example, if you would like to see more women or young farmers at your field days, might there be slightly different content you would include? For example, Soil CRC research is demonstrating that women and younger farmers are more likely to be interested in regenerative or natural resource management practices.

- Plan for opportunities to engage the quieter voices present at your event.
- Offer suitable times for young families, provide assistance with child minding.
- Consider bringing in a presenter who might be more relatable to your target groups.
- Include more chairs around tables, nibbles and activities to keep children occupied.

"Don't patronise workshop/field day participants as they often know more than they let on. Engage by asking about their experiences. This often leads to others joining in either to agree or disagree. It helps guide the presenter to understand local knowledge." Diana, CWFS

Case studies

Case studies are good as (semi) permanent links on your website. These can be of 'champion' farmers, or explain trials underway, featuring a local person and issue, using photographs, charts and graphs.

They are a great way to tell a story about a farmer or researcher who might be doing something innovative or different.



Figure 6: learning together in the field.

CASE STUDY 2: Connecting rural women

Event title: Tapping a natural resource

This event was the final small gathering of 15 women who participated in a CWFS project that aimed to build capacity, confidence and upskill women living remotely.

Key points:

- A relaxed atmosphere promoted openness and sharing of experiences and challenges.
- A local champion who shared generously of her own lived experience stimulated conversation and generated discussion.
- A strong network of women encouraging each other to stay connected and share their experiences of living in rural/regional NSW.

Quote: "All participants were fully engaged in conversations held, comfortable to express varying views on topics raised."

Embed social activities in your events



Figure 7: Students, project leaders and professors building connections

Our team has found that having a good balance of informative and social elements to your events can improve learning as well as build community connections and knowledge networks.

Getting the balance right will depend on many local factors – how far people are travelling, how many days your event/s run for? Think about refreshments that are relevant to your intended audience, for example, you might wish to bring some wine and cheese into the mix – or beer and sausages!

CASE STUDY 3: AGM and social networking

Event title: Livestock and cropping committee meetings, AGM & sundowner

A networking opportunity for WMG members and families.

Key points:

- Multiple delivery methods (verbal, PowerPoint, break-out discussion groups, posters, whiteboard session, round table) with plenty of opportunity for member feedback and questions promoted good engagement throughout the day.
- Local champions stimulated conversation and provided considered opinions and constructive comments.
- The sundowner/casual portion of the event allowed for much more relaxed discussion within smaller groups and promoted networking.

CASE STUDY 4: Rural women and youth event

Event title: CWFS Rural and Regional Women and Youth Conference 2023

This event was held to bring rural women together from across Australia.

Result: Engagement was high, with 150 women and young farmers in attendance.

Key points:

The resilient, resourceful and remarkable women and young people of the Central West NSW took centre stage at this year's 'CWFS Rural and Regional Women and Youth Conference'. With more than 150 attendees, a wealth of love and support, an array of high-profile expert speakers, and wonderful local and industry support, this event was a resounding success, uniting the women and young people who keep the rhythm of rural life alive.

For more than 15 years, Central West Farming Systems (CWFS) has been at the forefront of fostering growth and unity within rural and regional communities. The legacy of their 'Women and Youth in Agriculture' conferences, held in 2009, 2013, 2016, and 2019, paved the way for the remarkable 2023 edition. These previous conferences set a benchmark for the region and 2023 was no exception.

Keynote speakers included Jessica Rowe, renowned journalist, television presenter, and author; Claire Braund, co-founder of Women on Boards; and Phoebe Lane, Director of PKL Recruitment. With their inspirational stories and genuine engagement with attendees throughout the day, the conference left everyone feeling excited about the future in our regional communities.

The event also featured a panel of young local farming champions, alongside Grains Research & Development Corporation (GRDC) Northern Panel representative, Sarah Ball. A second panel session featured local female entrepreneurs, including Emily Sinderberry of EJS Business Services, and Gabby Neal of INTACT. In addition to these in-person speakers, video messages from Minister Tanya Plibersek, Minister for the Environment and Water, and Minister Jodie Harrison, NSW Minister for Women, were heard, emphasising the significance of the event and the local region.

CWFS, a not-for-profit organisation based in Condobolin, remains steadfast in its commitment to nurturing agricultural growth across a vast area of 14 million hectares in the Central West, with over 300 members actively contributing to this goal.

The 2023 CWFS conference was a terrific gathering of women and young people from diverse backgrounds, all committed to building a brighter and more sustainable future in local regional communities.

As the conference concluded, thanks were extended to the sponsors and speakers who made the event possible, including GRDC, Evolution Mining, NSW DPI, the Farm Business Resilience Program, the Rural Women's Network, Women NSW, the SQNNSW Innovation Drought Hub, the Southern NSW Innovation Hub and the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Future Drought Fund, who all played a crucial role in making the conference a resounding success.

For those who missed this year's event, there will be more opportunities in the future. CWFS will continue its mission of growing and inspiring the community in the years to come, bringing remarkable individuals together to build a brighter future for rural and regional communities.



Figure 8: A full house at the CWFS Rural and Regional Women & Youth Conference 2023.

Don't waste an opportunity to engage a broader reach of farmers

Things happen, and they usually happen to farmers – extreme weather, pandemics, mouse plagues, economic and industry shocks and knocks. Grower groups play a key role in supporting farmers through some of these tough times, and urgent issues can bring people together. Groups may at this point, have top priority important and urgent information to relay, but it could also be an opportunity to share some other priority information that is important but may not be perceived as quite as urgent. Have some ideas and strategies ready for engaging people when they come together.

CASE STUDY 5: A quick response to a community need

Event title: Safely recovering machinery

This event was held in response to a community request to assist farmers *safely* recover machinery from boggy paddocks during a challenging harvest due to very wet conditions. BCG worked collaboratively with farmers and community members to bring together a large but informative/helpful event in a timely manner.

Result: Engagement was extremely high, with approximately 600 growers in attendance - and feedback was overwhelmingly positive. While turning a major event around in 8 days was challenging, by meeting a need and being timely and topical, a great outcome was achieved.

Key points:

To address the differing needs of attendees, it is necessary to identify and cater for a variety of skill levels and interests/requirements.

- "Local champions" are important, providing local relevance and learned practical experience, as well as a networking opportunity.
- A variety of communication modes, such as presentations as well as activities/demonstrations in smaller groups, allows for more effective knowledge sharing and promotes engagement of varying personalities and needs.

"... the day was planned in such a way that over half of the time frame was opened up with 'choose your own adventure' where attendees could talk to machinery dealers, other farmers, and the other presenters or people on site with experience in vehicle recovery. This enabled more targeted engagement by attendees with their specific needs" – Kelly Angel, BCG

7. DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Digital engagement strategies have the potential to reach a wide and varied audience. Potential audience members may include farmer-producers but can also include a range of people such as representatives from industry, government, funding organisations, sponsors and the general public. The digital strategies you use have the potential to reach many people in varying roles across a wide and diverse region.

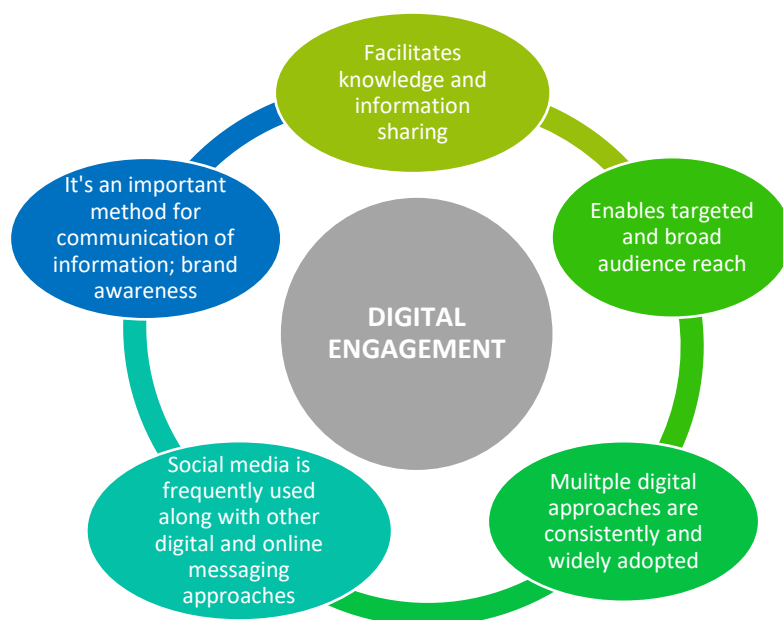


Figure 9: Key elements of using digital engagement strategies by grower groups.

Figure 9 provides the reasons for using all types of communications and digital means to get the message about an event to a broad audience and to encourage attendance (Ollerenshaw & Thompson, 2023).

Zoom workshops

- ✓ Test holding live events and on-line events at different times of the day.
- ✓ Advantages in recording an event is that people will watch at their own time, suitable to them. They can re-run and review presentations as often as they like to increase learning.
- ✓ Consider a **hybrid** event whereby a speaker is 'Zooming' in, then pair this with local facilitation, and or/additional presenters. The advantage of this potentially could be to run smaller events and run more of them which then can be used as a springboard to more peer-to-peer learning, also a more tailored approach and allows addressing more local issues.
- ✓ Invest in good internet connection and two-way audio equipment so presenters can hear any questions and ideally see their audience. People can put up with poor image quality, but they will rapidly lose interest if the audio quality is bad.

"Try to have a local agronomist or consultant there to help participants put in local context, plus they have the knowledge - not every extension officer knows everything." AIR EP

Webinars

- ✓ Timing is key, you will need to understand your audience to allow you to set the most appropriate time of day to hold your webinar.
- ✓ Allow pre-registration and automatic emails with the webinar link. Zoom has a function for this and it is quite simple.
- ✓ Good quality visual and audio.
- ✓ Clarity of purpose; be succinct.
- ✓ Have a bank of pre-thought questions in case your audience is there to just listen in, this can be done prior to the event by doing a call out in promotional material.
- ✓ A short webinar is a good webinar – no more than 1.5 hours.
- ✓ Host your recording back on your website or YouTube channel, this will allow you to monitor the views and analytics. Widely promote and share links to the recording.

Online content

Websites

- ✓ Easy to navigate with clear headings and pages.
- ✓ Keep websites up-to-date and have relevant local information i.e. live weather updates to encourage a one stop 'shop'. Refresh images regularly and include new content on the home page to retain interest.
- ✓ Reports, factsheet and trial results available in a downloadable format.

Videos

- ✓ Test the audio.
- ✓ Can have humour or out-takes or a dog wandering through.

Podcasts

- ✓ Interesting tag or description to bring in audience.
- ✓ Make easily available on common podcast apps (Apple Podcasts, Spotify & Listnr)
- ✓ Topics which are already known to pique interest.
- ✓ Can utilise snippets of recording as short video (Reels or TikTok) to bring in listeners from social media.
- ✓ Promote on social media at a time when people have time on their hands to listen e.g. on header at harvest.
- ✓ Good quality sound.
- ✓ Succinct.

Segmenting your audience using social media or other digital tools

Determining the audience within your group's digital engagement strategies is essential. Who is the intended audience of your digital engagement strategies? Will your audience be broad, or will you target different groups within your digital engagement? Will you need to tailor the digital engagement strategy to your intended audience? How will you do this?

Scope your potential digital engagement audience, consider their age and other characteristics. This may assist you in determining the preferred modes of sharing knowledge and information (digital and/or other) to different audiences. Do you have capacity to run a workshop or consultation

meeting with potential audience members to determine their preferred digital engagement strategies and the content or information they would like to receive via their preferred method? Figure 10 shows some of the key insights when using digital modes of engagement.

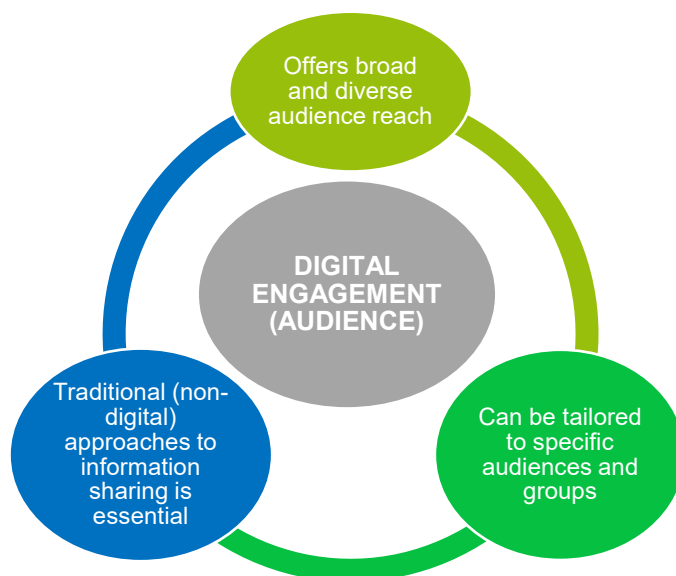



Figure 10: Key insights relating to the audience for intended digital engagement strategies.

Tips and tricks

- Pilot your strategies, trialling them with a small cohort to gauge initial feedback.
- Develop a plan outlining the mode and frequency of different audience messaging to ensure a suitable and achievable plan is set.
- Consider the need for targeting different information using different digital engagement strategies for different audiences.
- Ensure the messaging from the digital engagement techniques can be easily adapted for audience members who do not access information digitally.

Box 4: Considering your digital engagement

Social media: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X)

	<p><i>Key questions to help guide your plans and decisions about the potential digital engagement strategies for your intended audience:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is your intended audience? • What current methods do your audience members use for industry related information and knowledge? • What messaging, knowledge and information do you want to share digitally with your audience?
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8. Monitoring, analysing, reflecting, improving

Evaluation of projects and events improves our understanding of what works for a particular topic and situation and how to use the feedback to refine subsequent implementations.

How do you monitor your group's engagement?

Planning for evaluation includes deciding what needs to be measured. What are the things you are trying to improve? You can start with a baseline status 'estimate' or use outcomes of previous projects by encouraging feedback from everyone involved: staff, presenters and attendees can provide different feedback. Measurements can be collected from evaluation forms, attendee numbers, demographics, show of hands for interest question. Evaluation can include 'most significant change' analysis. Measuring this can be as simple as a show of hands before you finish (take a photo!). You can include the use of attendees' evaluations, or digital evaluation approaches such as Mentimeter, which allows for immediate feedback. You can also use digital metrics for online engagement and social media posts. Invite post-event and follow up questions, comments and requests in the week following the event, and make a note of the comments posted on social media. Organise follow up phone calls for evaluation a week or two after an event, which can be valuable in finding out what information really sunk in and/or stood out to the attendee. When you're chatting, ask them what they learned, and what will they do next. Other evaluation methods can be: questions from attendees, photos of people getting involved (photos attendees took at the event?), sticky note votes, attendee reports as you chat after the event, the local newspaper review, and 'meet-up in the street' chat in ensuing days or weeks!

Case Study 6 demonstrates how adoption of liming was improved and effectively measured through an extension project run by AIR EP on the Eyre Peninsula.

Reflect on events as a team

Put in place a process for reflecting on what is and what is not working. A key point we learned in our project is the usefulness of a group review. Use prompts and points to discuss how your event went, such as those within the Process Diary, provided in Appendix 1. Reflect on your event as a team and decide how to improve things for future events.

Box 5: How did it work?

Example of notes from an event evaluation

Topic: event preparation evaluation – (Sheep Workshop; source WMG PD, 10.08.2023, SK A short webinar is a good webinar – no more than 1.5 hours.

Event purpose: restore confidence in sheep sector in region, explore future sheep opportunities, have space for hands-on activities.

Comms activities used: mix of Facebook posts, LinkedIn, emails, eFlyers, text msg, phone calls.

Measurements: views/opened - Online newsletter opened: 315; Facebook likes: 22; Text messages sent/opened: 170/154.

Attendance: 62, more farmers than industry, higher % females, mix of age groups.

Outcomes: mix of participants, questions were varied from a mix of attendees, opportunity to ask questions on locals' aspects of sheep management.

Evaluation: allowed younger farmers to be comfortable asking Qs; presenters, interactive sessions focussed only on sheep so no value for non-sheep members.

Next time: comments on wording of flyers, advertising speakers?

CASE STUDY 6: Extension with measurable adoption rates

Project Title: Acid Soils Champions Project, Eyre Peninsula.

Summary:

Soil acidity presents a significant challenge on Lower and Eastern Eyre Peninsula where over 186,000 hectares of agricultural land are susceptible to acidification. Since 1999, the average lime application was about 77% of the estimated topsoil acidification rate, resulting in a cumulative lime deficit. Thanks to a series of extension programs from 2010, there has been an increase in lime sales in the region.

The extension components of the project included:

- Providing farmers with the knowledge and equipment needed to conduct pH mapping on their properties, using aerial photos and pH field kits, and explaining the costs and benefits of different pH mapping products.
- Conducting hands-on workshop-style programs for landholders. This extension program, known as "Farming Acid Soils Champions," aimed to enhance the knowledge and skills of 80 farmers to become advocates for managing acidic soils in the region. A series of workshops were held annually in different subregions of the Eyre Peninsula, selected based on having low pH levels or emerging soil acidity issues.
- Workshops focussed on how soil acidity affects other parts of their farming enterprise (nutrition, water use efficiency, and the ability to include more profitable pulses/legumes into their farming systems), and how to use pH mapping as a precision ag dataset both for liming and farming to land class.
- Soil Acidity Forums and a webinar in the final year of the project, bringing together past participants to share their experiences, learn about the results of long-term monitoring, and hear from researchers about the next steps in their liming programs as well as advances in monitoring and testing technology.
- Two case studies of participating farmers that changed their farming practices to incorporate lime spreading to address pH issues on their properties were developed and hosted online for accessibility.

Measurement of adoption:

The adoption of the program was assessed through various means:

- Assessment of pH levels at 35 pre-existing and 20 new 'emerging acidity' sites. This allowed for paddock data to be captured over time, with a sample size large enough to show what happened when farmers spread lime, sometimes multiple applications of lime, and what would have happened if no lime was spread.
- Monitoring lime sales through the Department of Environment and Water (DEW) annual soil acidity reporting which has shown a dramatic change in lime spreading over the period of the program (Figure 1).
- Evaluation forms distributed at events.
- One-on-one site visits with farmers.
- Informal discussions with pH mapping contractors, agronomists, and farmers, and a change in the type of questions people asked.

In summary, farmers in the program found the information interesting, timely and relevant to their businesses, and they gained valuable insights into the causes and impacts of soil acidity. They also acquired cost-effective methods to address soil acidity on their properties.

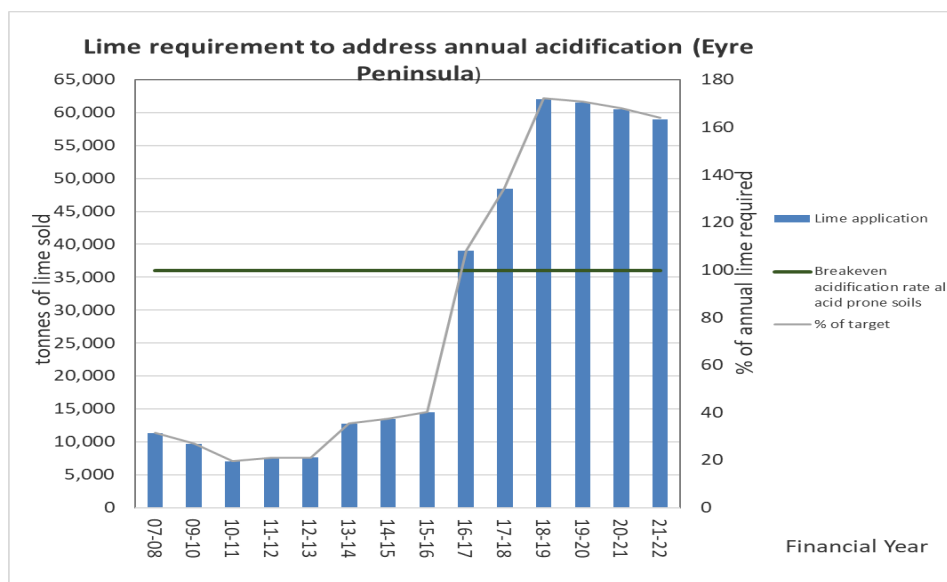


Figure 11: Lime use over time on Eyre Peninsula taken from survey of lime sellers (DEW, 2023). Early programs started around 2010, and the last program finished in 2023. The lime sales had been around 10,000 tonnes prior to 2010, which is significantly below replacement rates.

Most farmers expressed their intention to make changes in their property management based on the program, including:

- Increasing regular pH testing and paddock-scale pH mapping.
- Applying variable rates of lime to target specific areas.
- Incorporating lime into the subsurface through deep ripping or spading.
- Utilising Excel-based tools and models for managing acidity.
- By the end of the program, farmers at the forums were starting to consider the implications for a re-liming program, rather than just an initial lime application.

Key factors of success:

- Access to trusted technical expertise (information presented was credible and technically correct).
- One on one support available meant that any follow up questions during implementation were able to be addressed.
- There was a clear, tangible extension message and call to action.
- It is relatively simple to monitor changes on farm and see the benefits.
- Access to product - there is local good quality supply of lime.
- The workshop groups were small and capped at a low number to ensure robust discussion and learning.
- The workshops were hands-on, not just sitting and listening.
- The timing and location of workshops was negotiated with farmers and local extension officers to ensure attendance.
- The project worked with contractors, agronomists, lime sellers to help build demand for their businesses because it delivered win-win outcomes. A good relationship with lime sellers also allowed for good data collection, giving confidence that the message was being taken on board.
- Investment in a local monitoring program value-added to the extension program as it provided real data to discuss.
- The program was run over multiple years to enable ongoing discussion, support, and monitoring.



Figure 13: Participants of the "Farming Acid Soil Champions" workshop learning how to correctly conduct soil pH testing in field with a simple kit.

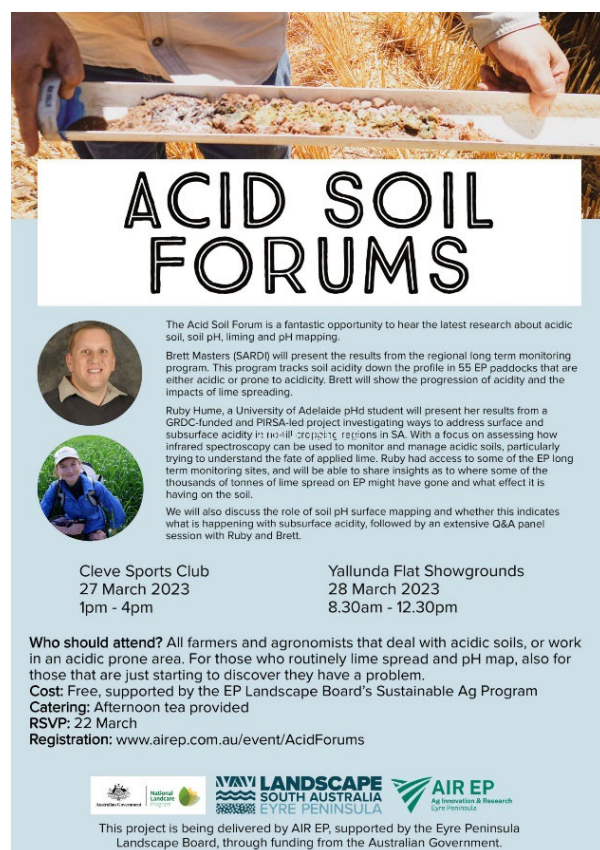


Figure 12: An example of the flyer used to promote the Acid Soil Forums in 2023.

Measuring online and social media data can assist with measuring performance outputs for audience engagement. Examples of these tools include Google Analytics, Mail Chimp metrics, eNewsletter reads, views on YouTube and webinars, 'likes' for social media, and retweets.

Further reading/useful links:

- [Google Analytics for Beginners](#)
- [Listening performance on podcasts](#)
- [X \(Twitter\) Analytics: Essential Tools and Tips](#)
- [YouTube Analytics: How to Use Data to Grow Your Channel](#)

"... the strength of digital engagement is that you can put a metric on everything."

Box 6: Monitoring your digital engagement



Key questions to ask when monitoring digital engagement strategies:

- Does the digital approach incorporate user and impact metrics?
- Do the available metrics answer the questions you have about usage, reach and your audience?
- What other options can you use to capture the impact of a particular strategy?
- Who, in your organisation, will be tasked with the role of interpreting the metrics and implementing changes or adjustments to the existing strategies?

9. Grower Group Conversations

A series of conversations were had with our participating grower groups, discussing key learnings and insights from the project. These discussions can be accessed on the Soil CRC's YouTube channel at the links below or via West Midlands Group's [Paddock Chat Podcast Channel](#).

Video 1. Reactive events and strategic engagement



URL: <https://youtu.be/qzmCyQ7fBNY>

Video 2. Engagement with farmers in challenging times



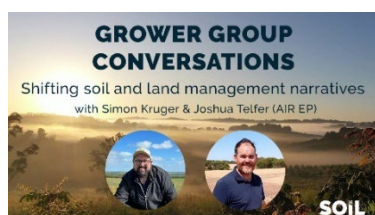
URL: <https://youtu.be/5qHX7oQS7wo>

Video 3. Knowledge sharing with the Pasture Walk Series



URL: <https://youtu.be/RkvIAnlQ7bY>

Video 4. Shifting soil and land management narratives



URL: <https://youtu.be/SOObS77kSXA>

Video 5. Top tips for farmer engagement



URL: <https://youtu.be/rudvUG-Xl4U>

10. Summary

The provision of information, support and education are important ways to increase knowledge and confidence in farm management practices. The next step is to explore effective 'extension' styles, models and information-sharing approaches, processes or platforms for engaging rural property owners in learning, dialogue and action. In identifying these approaches, it is also important to understand how landholders perceive and trust their local and regional organisations.

Many farmers are receiving support for immediate issues through private agronomists, but there is a need to also be thinking about a long-term systems approach to agricultural operations and grower groups have a key role to play in this. Complex paradigm shifting concepts require dedicated long-term thinking.

Farmers need the confidence to know that new innovations will make a difference and will be worth their time and capital investment, and that requires evidence of one form or another. New innovations, research projects, and early adopters need to be supported to continue building the evidence base for broader uptake of current recommended best-practice for land and soil management.

The figure below shows how knowledge flows along a general trajectory from no knowledge of a new innovation through to first information, ongoing messaging and discussion, through to practical considerations, investment and ideally, adoption.



Figure 14: Observations about the knowledge sharing pathways arising from this project.

APPENDIX 1

Soil CRC framework for engagement process diaries

*Please note that this framework can be repeated for a number of events over time

Date:
Event:
Location:
Name of event:
Purpose of event:
Name of note taker:

Prompts for note-taking:

EVENT PREPARATION

1. What engagement strategies have you used to promote this event? Please tick all that apply to this event:

Facebook posts	<input type="checkbox"/>	Twitter	<input type="checkbox"/>	LinkedIn	<input type="checkbox"/>	YouTube	<input type="checkbox"/>	Email	<input type="checkbox"/>
eFlyers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Podcast	<input type="checkbox"/>	Webinar	<input type="checkbox"/>	text message	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
									Please list:
Paid social media	<input type="checkbox"/>	Newspaper Ad	<input type="checkbox"/>	Newspaper	<input type="checkbox"/>	Poster	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	
Website activity	<input type="checkbox"/>	Online newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/>						

2. Have you assessed the impact of any of these digital engagement activities?

Yes ☐ No ☐

3. If yes, and where possible, please provide audience uptake/numbers linked to the following digital engagement activities for this event:

- Website visits/page views/access: _____
- Online newsletter opened: _____
- Facebook likes: _____
- Twitter notifications and number of followers: _____
- LinkedIn message views: _____
- YouTube views: _____
- eFlyer reads: _____

- Email notifications sent/read: _____
- Podcast views: _____
- Webinar attendance: _____
- Text messages sent/opened: _____
- Other: _____

Any notes on the pre-planning of the event?

WHO?

1. Who was invited? Composition by basic demographics (M/F/Age etc.)
2. Notes on who is engaged/showing up? Composition by basic demographics, age/gender (+ who didn't come?)

Good mix of ages and gender (please circle) Dominated by one demographic

1 2 3 4 5

Notes:

3. Who is doing the talking? Who might be sitting back? (think male/female, young/old, local champions, new farmers etc.)
 4. Is there an expert speaker present? Are they engaging the group well?
- Very engaging (please circle) Not very engaging
- 1 2 3 4 5
5. Any comments on how are they interacting with the group?
 6. Any 'local champions' present? – what role do they play at this event?
 7. Notes on other engagement processes/activities/projects that participants may be involved in (can this be surveyed?)

WHAT?

8. What key issues/practices are being discussed?

9. What sort of questions are being asked by participants?

10. What are key words & terms being used?

11. Are contrasting narratives present? Eg. disagreements on how things work

Varied discussions

(please circle)

Dominated by one point of view

1

2

3

4

5

Notes:

HOW?

12. Communication styles & modes being used at events? e.g. visual, powerpoint, activities, soil pit

13. SWOT analysis:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats

14. Quality of engagement going on? (please circle)

High quality

Low quality

1

2

3

4

5

Notes:

15. Any other key observations?

11. References

Ollerenshaw, A., & Thompson, H. (2023). Knowledge Sharing for Good Soil Stewardship: Digital Engagement Guide. Centre for eResearch and Digital Innovation, Federation University Australia.

Haigh, Y. (2023). CRC Knowledge Sharing Project: Policy Review. Project 1.2.006. Cooperative Research Centre for High Performance Soils, Callaghan. NSW, Australia.