

Responses to the Hort Innovation delivery partner extension survey



Introduction

The Hort Innovation Extension team sent a survey to 91 industry development and extension delivery partners for insights into their successful extension activities and the challenges they face. The intent of this survey was to investigate the extension support needs of Hort Innovation industry development and extension delivery partners. Information obtained from responses to the 24 questions will be used to understand the most appropriate support that might be provided to enable Hort Innovation to meet its Strategic Plan 2019-23 imperative of driving knowledge and innovation into horticulture industries.

Thank you to the 34 (37%) people who responded.

Results

The majority of respondents operate in the North East and South East Hort Innovation extension regions. Results indicated respondents work in the vegetable, tropical and tree fruit industries. Just over half are employed by an industry-based organisation, followed by state governments. Just over a third have been working in extension between 2–5 years followed by just over a fifth having over 21 years' experience. The percentage of time spent on delivering extension as part of their job varied across the board with 7% spending 80–100% of their time working in extension. The most common roles that respondents are currently in include Industry Development Officers (38%), Extension service providers (14%) and researchers (15%). Just over half of respondents were female. Most respondents were from Gen X (41–55 years old), followed by Gen Y (26–40 years old), then Baby Boomers (56–74 years old). Just over 40% have a bachelor's degree as their

highest qualification followed by just over 20% with a Masters. Although 19% were 'not sure' when asked where they see themselves career wise in 5 years' time, only 3% (1 person) indicated they saw themselves working outside of horticulture.

When questioned about the greatest strengths their role had, the answers indicated many interpreted this to mean themselves personally. The top three strengths are recorded as grower engagement and communication skills, focusing on client/industry needs and industry knowledge and experience. The extension approaches they currently find most success resulting in good levels of practice change by growers include on farm demonstrations and field trials (34.5%), one on one extension (34.5%), on farm meetings and training (20%) and workshops (20%).

Respondents considered the weaknesses of their extension role were lack of professional development, lack of flexibility with project funding and the geographical spread of their industry and the resources they use. The need to be able to meet regional grower needs when delivering extension via project funding was emphasised. The difficulty in delivering extension to industries with diverse needs was highlighted several times.

When asked about particular skills needed to get even greater impact from extension work, areas that were reported on the most were:

- Grower engagement
- Digital tools and social media
- Facilitation
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Peer-to-peer learning.

When asked to indicate the importance of certain extension skills and whether there was room for improvement, the highest priorities identified were:

- Planning extension activities based on industry needs (segmentation)
- Peer-to-peer learning for growers
- Using demonstration and trial sites effectively
- Collaboration.

Respondents work with industry stakeholders in various ways from networking through to collaboration and developing partnerships. Growers and industry bodies are the most common collaborators and partners for extension practitioners. This is followed by RDCs and state government Ag departments. NRM bodies and resellers were the least common collaborators and or partners respondents worked with.

Some interest was expressed in participating in a mentoring scheme (37%) and a number (39%) of those surveyed indicated their interest in being a mentor.

Over half (66%) of the survey responses indicated a high interest in learning new skills/developing knowledge through face-to-face events. In addition, 50% expressed an interest in participating in webinars, 37.5% in self-paced learning and 34% in reading material on their own.

Nearly half, 45%, of respondents are members of Australasia-Pacific Extension Network (APEN), which is the only national organisation focused on supporting extension professionals in primary industries, natural resource management and communities. APEN offers national and international conferences, education, and training, mentoring, and networking opportunities.

The Rural Innovation Research Group at The University of Melbourne provide

online extension training services on several topics pertinent to extension practitioners. When asked if they thought they needed additional skills in these areas (Q 22) all 32 participants indicated they did. The most popular area for training was for 'social media in ag innovation' (21%).

Final feedback from respondents on how Hort Innovation can best support extension professionals mainly focused on issues already emphasised previously in survey answers. Fit for purpose professional development, networking and mentoring opportunities were highlighted the most.

Individual question results can be found in appendix 1.

Conclusion

Information supplied by respondents in relation to length of time having worked in extension and the generation they fell into, supports anecdotal evidence those delivering extension are either heading towards retirement or just entered the industry, with few mid-career personnel. There is a concern amongst industry members that it is very probable many of the highly experienced extension practitioners will exit the profession within the next five years. Given respondents considered the most prevalent weaknesses of the extension role is lack of professional development, it is important to ensure that sufficient and appropriate training in extension is available and accessible, especially for the younger cohort.

It is interesting to note, the extension approach respondents currently find most successful for achieving good levels of practice change by growers were on farm demonstration and field trials (34.5%), which is an area they requested further training in. Further interpretation of the survey data will indicate whether it was the same respondents who indicated both.

Given the on-farm environment is where growers mainly operate, it is not surprising the extension approaches respondents currently find most successful for achieving good levels of practice change tend to be on farm.

Working within what is believed to be the confines of a relatively inflexible project contract were raised. With innovative extension practices being introduced into industry, Hort Innovation has an opportunity to consider flexible milestone and project contract options. Operating with insufficient funds to deliver what industry requests, was also highlighted. Improving industry member understanding of what can realistically be achieved with the project resources available may alleviate some of the stresses experienced in delivering extension. This is a shared responsibility between industry, Hort Innovation, and the delivery partner.

The geographical spread of industries and resources, and the challenges in meeting regional grower needs in a diverse industry was highlighted several times. The heightened use of online training and communication due to COVID-19 may influence its use on an ongoing basis and become common practice. This may assist in delivering extension to industries that have a wide geographic spread.

Undertaking market research to segment and successfully develop different target markets would also help overcome these challenges.

Respondents communicated there is a high need for professional development especially in the following areas:

- Grower engagement
- Digital tools and social media
- Facilitation
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Peer to Peer learning for service providers

- Planning extension activities based on industry needs (segmentation)
- Peer-to-peer learning for growers
- Using demonstration and trial sights effectively
- Collaboration.

Given a choice of four delivery methods, the most popular way for respondents to learn is face to face, followed by webinars. Learning in groups also seems to be the preference for most. The opportunity to easily network when face to face may be one reason for this. The desire to network across industries with other extension delivery partners to learn from each other, share experiences and collaborate was highly evident throughout the survey results (and is a key action item in the Hort Innovation Extension Strategic Plan).

- Given the expense, time and resources required for travel to attend face to face training, and the current need for online communication due to COVID-19, online learning may become more prevalent. As extension practitioners are currently forced to explore and become more proficient in online interaction, they may see greater opportunities for online professional development for themselves.
- In conclusion, these survey results demonstrated that respondents are already experiencing success in grower adoption of R&D outcomes and best management practices. This is especially true when activities are farm based. There is a great need for extension practitioners to receive further professional development, designed and delivered according to the different experience and skill levels of delivery partners.

Recommendations will be forwarded to senior management on opportunities to provide support to delivery partners practicing extension. Additional cross matrix analysis of age/experience/training etc. of the survey results will be carried out by the Hort Innovation Extension Team over the next few months to further assist in identifying the most appropriate support for delivery partners.

The Extension teams' initial recommendations are:

Hort Innovation is in a prime position to:

- Facilitate networking and peer-to-peer learning opportunities between delivery partners, whether national, regional, face to face or online
- Match relevant training providers to delivery partner needs
- Organise training opportunities, for example training activities linked to major events such as Hort Connections
- Consider flexible project contracting options
- This report will be shared with all delivery partners who were initially invited to participate in the survey.

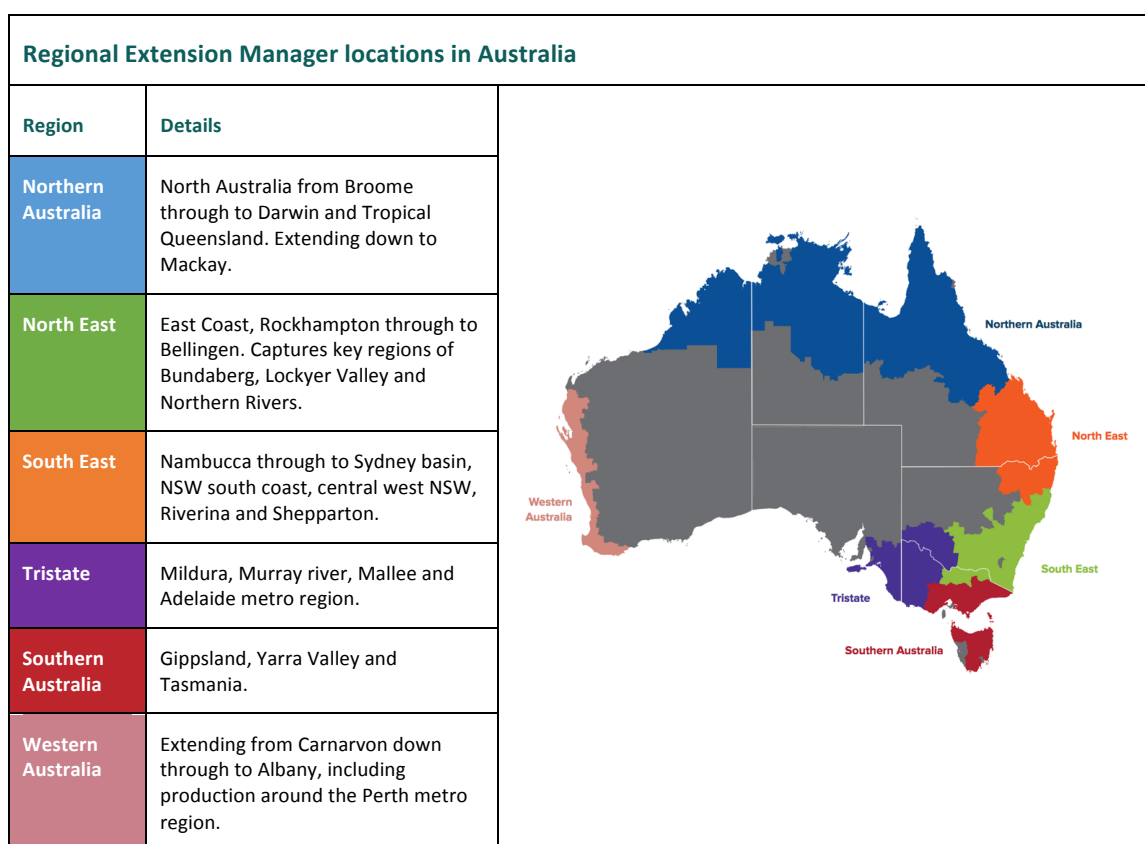
Appendix 1

Individual question results

Q1 Which region are you based in?

34 answered (100% of respondents). 5 out of 6 regions represented.

Hort Innovation has six extension regions. These regions have been developed with the use of LGA horticultural employment and ABS data. The majority of respondents operate out of the North East and South East Hort Innovation extension regions.



Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Northern Australia	14.71%	5
North East Australia	29.41%	10
South East Australia	23.53%	8
Southern Australia	20.59%	7
Western Australia	11.76%	4
Tristate	0.00%	0

Q2 With which industry do you mainly work?

31 answered. All industries represented.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Tropical	25.81%	8
Tree Fruits	29.03%	9
Vegetables, including melons	54.84%	17
Nuts	12.90%	4
Amenity (Turf + Nursery)	6.45%	2
Berries	19.35%	6
Other (please specify)	3.23%	1

Q3 What type of organisation are you based with?

34 answered.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Industry based organisation	52.94%	18
Government federal	0.00%	0
Government state	26.47%	9
Government local	0.00%	0
NRM organisation	0.00%	0
Private agronomy service	0.00%	0
Agribusiness company	5.88%	2
Landcare catchment group	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	14.71%	5

Q4 Current role

34 answered.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Industry Development Officer	38.23%	13
Extension service provider	14.7%	5
Industry Development Manager	5.88%	2
Researcher	14.7%	5
Project Coordinator/Manager	8.82%	3
CEO/DM	5.88%	2
Market Development Officer/Manager	5.88%	2
Communications Manager	2.9%	1
Development Horticulturist	2.9%	1

Q5 Three greatest strengths of your role in extension

29 answered.

This question was designed to find out the strengths of the role rather than the individual in the role. From interpretation' of the answers, Hort Innovation recognise this question may have been interpreted as 'What are your individual strengths in your role'.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Grower engagement and communication skills	29%	26
Focusing on client/industry needs	15%	13
Tech/science expertise	10%	9
Networking and brokering	10%	9
Industry knowledge and experience	8%	7
Resource development and dissemination	5%	4
Project management	3.4%	3
Progressive industry	2.2%	2
A passion for extension	2.2%	2

Q6 Three greatest weaknesses of your role in extension

27 answered.

This question was designed to find out the weaknesses of the role rather than the individual in the role.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Professional development needs	21%	18
Lack of flexibility of funding	14%	12
Geographical spread of industry and resources	9%	8
Pushed for time on delivering on expectations	8%	7
Unsupportive industry culture in relation to extension	6%	5
Lack of industry understanding as to what extension is	3.4%	3
Lack of influence over investments	2.2%	2

Q7 How long have you been involved in the delivery of extension?

34 answered. Range of experience within respondents.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Less than 1 year	11.76%	4
2 to 5 years	35.29%	12
6 to 10 years	5.88%	2
11 to 15 years	14.71%	5
16 to 20 years	5.88%	2
21 or more years	26.47%	9

Q8 What percentage of time do you spend on extension activities?

34 answered. Range represented by respondents.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
0 to 20%	20.59%	7
21 to 40%	14.71%	5
41 to 60%	26.47%	9
61 to 80%	17.65%	6
81 to 100%	20.59%	7

Q9 Gender

34 answered.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Male	38.24%	13
Female	52.94%	18
Prefer not to answer	8.82%	3

Q10 Generational group?

33 answered. Range of ages in respondents.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Builders (1925 to 1945)	0.00%	0
Baby boomers (1946 to 1964)	21.21%	7
Gen X (1965 to 1979)	39.39%	13
Gen Y (1980 to 1994)	30.30%	10
Gen Z (1995 to 2010)	9.09%	3

Q11 Highest qualification?

34 answered. Range in education levels.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
High school certificate	2.94%	1
Certificate III or IV	2.94%	1
Diploma	0.00%	0
Degree	41.18%	14
Graduate Diploma	5.88%	2
Masters	26.47%	9
PhD	11.76%	4
Other (please specify)	8.82%	3

Q12 Describe the three greatest challenges you currently face delivering extension services to growers?

33 answered.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Initial and ongoing grower engagement	18.18%	18
Delivering services which cater for industry diversity	12.12%	12
Value proposition to growers	11.11%	11
Professional development including peer to peer learning	11.11%	11
Time poor growers	8.08%	8
Project funded extension	4.04%	4
Lack of funding/resources	4.04%	4
Industry culture	3.03%	3

Q13 Particular skills you might be needed to build to get even greater impact from your work?

27 answered.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Digital tools, social media for use with growers	11%	9
Facilitation skills	10%	8
Monitoring, evaluation, reporting, improvement	9%	7
Peer to peer learning	6%	5
Communications and media	5%	4
Public speaking and presentation skills	5%	4
Accessing and maintaining grower data base	4%	3
Relationship/personal development	4%	3
Digital tools, social media for use with growers	11%	9

Q14 Top three extension approaches which are currently working well for you, where you see good levels of practice change by growers

29 answered.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Grower engagement and communication skills	29%	26
Focusing on client/industry needs	15%	13
Tech/science expertise	10%	9
Networking and brokering	10%	9
Industry knowledge and experience	8%	7
Resource development and dissemination	5%	4
Project management	3.4%	3
Progressive industry	2.2%	2
A passion for extension	2.2%	2
Progressive industry	2.2%	2
A passion for extension	2.2%	2

Q15 How interested are you in participating in a mentoring scheme?

Q15.1 Mentee Highly interested = 10 Not interested = 1

32 answered being a mentee.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Highly interested	21.88%	7
Neutral	21.88%	7
Not interested	15.63%	5

	Not interested	2	3	4	Neutral	6	7	8	9	Highly interested
%	15.63	3.13	9.38	6.25	21.88	6.25	3.13	6.25	6.25	21.88
No:	5	1	3	2	7	2	1	2	2	7

Q15.2 Mentor Highly interested = 10 Not interested = 1

28 answered being a mentor.

Top Three	Responses	No: People
Neutral	25%	7
Rated 7	14.29%	4
Rated 6 and 8 each	10.71%	3

	Not interested	2	3	4	Neutral	6	7	8	9	Highly interested
%	14.29	0.00	7.14	3.57	25	10.71	14.29	10.71	7.14	7.14
No:	4	0	2	1	7	3	4	3	2	2

Q16 Interest in using the following approaches to learn new material.

32 answered.

1 = not interested 10 = highly interested

Highly Interested 8 - 10	Percentage	No: people	Interested 6 and 7	Percentage	No: people
Face-to-face events	66%	21	Face-to-face events	15.63%	5
Webinars	50%	16	Webinars	21.83%	7
Self-paced learning	37.5%	12	Self-paced learning	23.13%	9
Material to read in your own time	34%	11	Material to read in your own time	37.50%	12

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Face to face %	3.13	0.0	3.13	3.31	9.38	3.13	12.50	12.50	18.75	34.38
Face to face No: people	1	0	1	1	3	1	4	4	6	11
Webinar %	3.13	3.13	3.13	9.38	12.50	6.25	15.63	18.75	15.63	15.63
Webinar No: people	1	0	1	3	4	2	5	6	5	5
Self-paced online learning %	3.13	3.13	9.38	9.38	9.38	28.13	0.0	3.13	15.63	18.75
Self-paced online learning No: people	1	1	3	3	3	9	0	1	5	6
Material to read on own %	3.13	0.0	6.25	6.25	12.50	25	12.50	0.0	15.63	18.75
Material to read on own No: people	1	0	2	2	4	8	4	0	5	6

Q17 Rate the importance of each topic to your work, and the room for improvement in your current level or proficiency

33 answered.

The biggest gaps between importance and proficiency are in:

- Planning based on needs (segmentation)
- Enabling peer to peer learning
- Collaboration.

Issue	Importance score 8 – 10 %	Importance score 8 – 10 No. people	Current level of proficiency 6 – 10 %	Current level of proficiency 6 – 10 No. People
Planning extension activities based on industry needs (segmentation)	81%	27	43%	14
Group facilitation and dynamics	50%	20	40%	13
Enabling peer to peer learning	80%	25	53%	16
Engaging with growers currently not engaged	60%	20	53%	17
Use of webinars to engage growers geographically dispersed	36%	12	42%	14
Use of social marketing	29%	9	31%	9
Using trials and demonstrations effectively	69%	23	56%	18
Using different monitoring and evaluation approaches	60%	20	56%	18
Brokering	38%	12	46%	14
Collaboration	81%	26	40%	13
Design led thinking / system innovation	48%	14	46%	13

Q18 Commitment to working with other stakeholders

31 answered.

Top three scores for each stakeholder: Yellow highest, blue second and green third.

	None	Networking	Cooperation	Coordination	Collaboration	Partnership
Govt. Dept				19% 6	23% 7	35% 11
Consultants			26% 8	16% 5	42% 13	
Industry bodies				10% 3	35% 10	42% 13
Other hort industries			25% 7	25% 7	26% 8	
NRM bodies	19% 4		25% 8	19% 6	19% 4	
Landcare/catchment groups	16% 3		26% 8	26% 8		
Resellers		25% 8	32% 10	16% 5	16% 5	
Private agronomist		25% 7	28% 8	28% 8		
RDCs				22% 6	29% 8	37% 10
Growers				13% 4	22% 7	51% 16
Other*			25% 1			50% 2

*Other includes universities, processors, other funding bodies

Q20 Where would you like to see yourself in 5 years' time

34 answered.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Industry Development Officer	9.68%	3
Industry Extension Manager	22.58%	7
Researcher	6.45%	2
Marketing Manager	0.00%	0
Trade Manager	0.00%	0
CEO	12.90%	4
Consultant	16.13%	5
Communications	0.00%	0
Producer	3.23%	1
Outside of horticulture	3.23%	1
Not sure	19.35%	6
Retired	9.68%	3

Q21 Are you a member of APEN?

APEN is the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network, an organisation for extension professionals in primary industries, natural resource management and communities. APEN offers national and international conferences, education, and training, mentoring, and networking opportunities.

33 responses.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Yes	45.45%	15
No	54.55%	18

Q22 Do you feel you need additional skills related to...?

The Rural Innovation Research Group at The University of Melbourne provide online extension training services on the following subjects.

32 answered.

Answer Choices	Responses	No: People
Social media in ag innovation	21.88%	7
Segmentation and adjusting advisory approaches	0.0%	0
Understanding why people change	12.50%	4
Working with your networks	9.38%	3
Tailoring delivery approaches to enhance adoption	15.63%	5
Making the most of knowledge assets	15.63%	5
Evaluation the impact in ag innovation and adoption	15.63%	5
Taking a whole farm approach to farm economics	6.25%	2
Principles and practices of conflict resolution and negotiation	3.13%	1

Q23 How should Hort Innovation best support extension professionals?

26 answered.

Open-ended responses.

Answer Choices	No: People
Fit for purpose training, networking, and mentoring remembering the different experience and skill levels of delivery partners (funded training 2)	14
Allow for regional needs of growers to be addressed in projects	5
Increase resources and support	4
Ongoing communication with delivery partners (transparency 1)	5
Allow for flexible project delivery	2
Connecting resources and project outcomes across industries	2
Encourage industries to network with each other, Victoria Hort Innovation network (HIN) in all states.	2
Encourage extension and adoption to be broader than traditional science based R&D	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trialing and explanation of Extension and Adoption Framework • Extension input into R&D projects • RD&E teams set investment priorities • Extension should be considered a baseline investment • Program wide M&E • Longer extension projects • Have an annual project call • Annual investment planning with stakeholders that aligns with industry strategic investment plan 	1
Strategic guidance	1

Q24 Final comments

4 answered.

Answer Choices	No: People
Start listening to industry and RD&E providers rather than yourselves and Agri politicians	1
Thank you for asking	3