

Extension projects: A farmer's critique

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Extension projects within the farming community have become increasingly popular in the drive for greater productivity and profitability. Our farming business of Te Puna Farm has been involved with the Richmond Wrightson Deer Performance Project since its inception in June 1997, and we have gained significant benefits as a result.

One of the initial aims of this project was to focus on management issues that could improve the productivity and profitability of deer farming throughout the country. This management focus has been, and still is one of the great strengths of the project. As a result, RWDPP members have maintained a focussed and enthusiastic attitude toward the tasks requested of them.

The regular and structured contact that group meetings provide with successful farmers and professional people has probably delivered the greatest benefit to the group members. The opportunity to exchange information and work collectively on issues has led to successful management outcomes.

Group involvement has also allowed accurate benchmarking through the establishment of uniform monitoring procedures, to give valid comparisons between farms and systems. Benchmarking within our project has led to the development of a healthy competitiveness among group members to perform better than the previous year, and also better than the other members in the group. I have no doubt that this factor alone has generated productivity gains for group members.

The RWDPP has also served as a channel for gathering and viewing information from other farmers and projects. The influence provided by the group has enabled us to visit farms that would not have been possible as an individual.

The roles of the management committee and facilitator are crucial in the management of any extension project. In the RWDPP, management and facilitation has delivered results through providing a focussed direction, while being also receptive to group and outside ideas.

As a Richmond Wrightson Deer Performance Project member, the project has certainly exceeded the expectations I had at its inception. Productivity and profitability gains have been generated of which a large proportion can be directly attributed to the project.