

| CASE STUDY

FARMING TOGETHER CULTIVATES COLLABORATION AMONG PRIMARY PRODUCERS

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A pilot program designed to provide farmers with knowledge, skills and materials on collaborative ideas to help boost their businesses has proved a major success for primary producers across Australia.

The two-year 'Farm Co-operatives and Collaboration Pilot Program' – more commonly known as 'Farming Together' – has successfully helped thousands of Australian farmers capitalise on opportunities, strengthen their financial position and be more attractive to investors. While the program initially set out to reach 2,000 primary producers, support

100 farming groups and fund 15 projects between 2016-2018, it eventually interacted with more than 28,500 primary producers from more than 730 groups, eventually funding 51 projects nationwide.

Delivered proportionally to farming groups within each state, the four central components of the program were:

- Expert support: facilitate independent and experienced consultants to supply tailored expert advice to farmers who retained control over the project.
- Farmer group projects: a competitive merit-based funding process for groups to complete activities.
- Knowledge exchange: delivered training resources to increase understanding of co-operative management and governance, comprising accredited training, workshops, manuals, fact sheets and videos.
- Communications: attracted participants and promoted the program's activities and success stories.

Designed and delivered by Southern Cross University, Farming Together assembled a national pool of more than 200 agri-consultants, assigning 122 of them for in-depth service provision ranging from collaborative business structures, business planning and legal services through to marketing, e-commerce and supply-chain logistics.

The program spanned a broad cross-section of farming industries in Australia, including abalone, agri-finance, bananas, beef, chestnuts, chicken, dairy, eels, fishing, forestry, garlic, grain, hemp, horticulture, IT, kangaroo, native bush foods and botanicals, macadamias, mustard, nursery, olives, oysters, pork, rice, sheep, sandalwood, tea,

timber, truffles, turf, wheat and wool.

Significantly, Farming Together worked with Australia's two leading co-op agencies to develop learning materials, while training packages were also developed and delivered to 94 co-operative directors through partnerships with the University of WA, Australian Institute of Management and the University of Newcastle.

Individual groups used the program to acquire value-add equipment, as well as to initiate and develop export sales, expand distribution networks, negotiate higher price supply deals, develop investment platforms and establish industry quality assurance benchmarks.

After completion of the program, participants were surveyed in the Final Evaluation Report (Clear Horizons, 2018), which yielded the following results:

- 73% indicated that a problem had been solved or a critical question answered.
- 65% reported that a collaborative project had substantially moved ahead.
- 54% responded that it had helped position them to access other funds.
- 54% reported they had been provided a solid foundation through strategic or business planning.
- 50% reported they had been assisted to formalise their collaborative group.
- 19% reported immediate on-farm returns as an outcome.

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