



Agricultural Innovation and Research Eyre Peninsula (AIR EP)

Innovation Strategy

Innovation is often described in business strategy as one key elements for success, but what does it mean in relation to farmer/ grower groups like AIR EP and why should they have an innovation strategy?

This document will provide the answers to this question and provide the AIR EP board with a framework for an innovation strategy that will help it meet its broader goals and objectives.

Innovation in its modern meaning is "a new idea, creative thoughts, new imaginations in form of device or method". Innovation is often also viewed as the application of better solutions that meet new requirements, unarticulated needs, or existing market needs.

Quite often in the agricultural context innovation is the creation of a gadget/ piece of technology that provides a new solution to a relevant issue, leading to potential commercialisation, for example the Harrington seed destructor.

As AIR EP's core business is to be a professional farmer-directed organisation that drives the advancement and practical application of agricultural scientific research, development and extension in dryland farming systems, it's innovation strategy needs to encompass where innovation is needed to achieve its goals.

The reasons for AIR EP having an innovation strategy are:

1. to create a culture of innovation/ inclusive problem solving within the Eyre Peninsula farming community.
2. to increase all stakeholder (farmers, researchers, advisors, and associated business') engagement in the agricultural research, development and extension process on Eyre Peninsula, through their participation in the innovation process (collection of issues, ideas and potential solutions).
3. to generate a constant stream of ideas that will advance agricultural production, it's sustainability and profitability on Eyre Peninsula and have measurable impact on farming businesses.

The creation of new products for commercialisation isn't core business for AIR EP, but the board could be a conduit to assist growers that have developed products in finding support and direction leading to commercialisation.

What is the Innovation Strategy?

Systems to create and capture ideas, develop and test novel solutions and deliver them to end users (the farmers of Eyre Peninsula)

a. Capture of external ideas and innovation

a. *Bus load of researchers and extension people*

Rationale is bringing together people who don't have any pre-conceived thinking about the limitations of Eyre Peninsula farming systems and people who may never have worked together to provide new insights and innovation to help solve issues, improve farm production, profitability and sustainability.

This would be done through bringing five to six researchers/ extension people to Eyre Peninsula each with different backgrounds and working in differing disciplines (ie agronomy, funding bodies, animal husbandry, weed science, farming systems, extension and practice change, agricultural engineering, rural sociology, soil science etc) onto Eyre Peninsula for three to four days, visiting farmers properties in key locations to collect information on farming systems, issues and constraints (ie start at Ceduna and work across EP flying out of Port Lincoln). They will drive together in the one vehicle where they can share ideas and possible solutions. The discussions will be recorded by an AIR EP representative, new innovations expanded on (GAP and MAKAT analysis) and then presented to the board for consideration into new projects.

This may also provide a way of immersing and engaging top researchers on Eyre Peninsula, hopefully resulting in a positive experience, where they will be more likely to collaborate on future projects and follow through with some of the innovative thinking, bringing positive results to the Eyre Peninsula farming community.

To occur once every three - five years. Low and Mid rainfall groups to agree to final list of participants.

Measure of success: One of the suggested innovations developed into a delivered project per 5 years.

b. *Each year bring in at least one researcher and/or farmer from another region to Eyre Peninsula to speak at conference/ workshop per year*

Rationale: Having access to different thinking, from different regions is likely to stimulate innovation within the local community.

Beyond speaking at the workshop/ conference, it would be preferable for the researcher/ farmer spend one-two days on Eyre Peninsula mixing with growers and advisors so that opportunities for ideation are increased. If possible, for the researcher/ farmer stay for a week, it could evolve to become like a short-term thinker in residence where their ideas and experiences are documented and used to build on existing research gaps/ develop into new projects.

Researchers and farmers selected from a diverse range of backgrounds and research interests, not just the most issue of the day.

Measure of success: positive feedback from farmers attending the conference/ workshops. New ideas adopted.

c. *Organised trips of Eyre Peninsula growers/ advisors to other regions*

Rationale: Experiencing differing farming systems in differing regions and different farmers is likely to challenge current thinking, leading to new ideas and practice change.

Eyre Peninsula farmers and advisors travel together to a different region where they experience a mixture of farm and research program visits as well as visiting areas outside of their core farming business for example visiting the poppy industry in Tasmania, to stimulate more expansive thinking.

Follow-up: two to four weeks after returning the group that travelled together meet again to discuss key learnings, take home messages and innovation that could be developed from the trip.

Measure of success: positive feedback from the group that travels. Farmer practice change occurring. AIR EP develops new projects and linkages. An increase in the number of growers wanting to participate in the trip

Trips to be run every two years.

d. Annual capture of ideas from Eyre Peninsula farmers and industry

Rationale: local farmers and advisors are likely to have a high understanding of the issues they are facing, and the relative importance of them to their enterprises. If these issues are not only captured but also fleshed out into potential solutions it offers the opportunity for solutions to issues to be achieved faster, in a practical and easily adoptable manner.

AIR EP needs to keep abreast of what issues farmers across Eyre Peninsula are facing, but also to use EP farmers as a resource to help provide solutions to issues. Having growers more engaged with idea formulation is likely to keep them more involved in the R, D&E process and increase adoption levels.

Each year AIR EP's Low Rainfall and Medium Rainfall groups will dedicate time to the collection of issues (that are within AIR EP's scope of operation) affecting farming business. The issues will be further discussed in group setting to help provide understanding of the underlying causes and any potential remedies that warrant investigation identified.

The Low and Medium Rainfall groups should canvas wider for issues than just the committee members, to maximise the coverage and validate the range of issues.

AIR EP will need to have trained facilitators that are able to engage, listen, distil, capture and formulate ideas into potential solutions. Also, growers will need to be challenged to provide a good balance of issues that are both in need of immediate attention (ie that latest disease, or insect effecting production) and more strategic improvements that have the potential improve the long term profitability and/or alter farming systems in a sustainable way.

Measure of success: EP Farmers understand their issues are being addressed which will lead to increased AIR EP membership. One issue raised by growers is converted into a research project every two-three years.

Dedicated issue meetings (where issues are discussed and fleshed out into provide issues incorporated into R, D&E programs) to be conducted once per year, per rainfall zone (one in the medium rainfall zone and one in the low rainfall zone. All issues raised by farmers at all AIR EP events to be collated and discussed at the issue meetings.

e. Involvement of growers and advisors in research, development and extension projects.

Rationale: to increase the relevance of research projects to Eyre Peninsula farmers and to help in producing solutions to issues that are relevant and adoptable by farmers, a group of farmers are embedded in larger research projects to advise and focus the research process.

All AIR EP projects that are valued over \$100,000 per year that run for three years or more, are to have a steering committee of local farmers and advisors that are duly compensated for their time and input.

Depending on the project the steering committee will meet at least once per year to assist in planning and reviewing the project's research, development and extension activities.

Measure of success: farmers want to be involved on project steering committees, projects receive high levels of adoption by Eyre Peninsula farmers, projects receive good feedback from funding bodies.

People with the capability to manage the process of innovation

For innovation to be successful AIR EP needs to invest in people capable of driving the innovation strategy.

This needs to start with the AIR EP board embracing innovation as one of its key strategies and providing support (staff time and funding) to ensure that the innovation strategy is implemented. This may mean that a short update/ review of the innovation strategy needs to be a standing issue on the board's meeting agenda or discussed at least annually in a review of all AIR EP strategies.

AIR EP staff need to ensure that the innovation strategy is delivered, and its success monitored and report all activities to achieve this to the board.

AIR EP staff and contractors responsible for the delivery of AIR EP's programs and projects will need specific training so they have the skills to drive the innovation strategy and engage with all stakeholders, particularly Eyre Peninsula farmers. To reinforce this, dedicated innovation training to occur with AIR EP staff, contractors and board members to occur annually.

A culture conducive to sustained innovation under conditions of uncertainty and change.

Eyre Peninsula growers are used to operating in climates of large variations in weather conditions and commodity pricing, often resulting in many innovative solutions to a range of issues. The challenge for AIR EP is to bring growers together in situations where the strengths of ideation and problem solving are able to be captured, the ideas are then developed into deliverable solutions.

AIR EP will need to show leadership in driving innovation in the region, however this doesn't need to necessarily be overt at every AIR EP event but over time by adopting an innovation strategy Eyre Peninsula farmers will come to associate AIR EP as an organisation that listens, acts and involves on issues important to them to provide practical and profitable solutions.