Working with the Female Farming Community on Upper Eyre Peninsula

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Key messages
• The ‘women’s only’ learning environment is beneficial for many women.
• Groups need a local group coordinator.
• An annual Training Needs Analysis process allows all group members to contribute to planning the group’s annual training calendar.
• Logistics of training for women needs to consider training during school term time, at a time during the day when children are at school, available childcare days and in a local venue to reduce travel time.
• Social interaction is an important part of the learning experience and group dynamics.

Why work with the female farming community?
Partners in Grain (PinG) is a national initiative facilitating professional development opportunities for all partners in grain businesses, aiming to strengthen the knowledge and generate innovation in the grains industry. The project is funded by Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) and has been running for nine years.

Partners in Grain SA works primarily with women and young people in the grain industry to encourage continuous professional development. It has a number of groups across the grain growing regions of South Australia and after consultation with local women, a Training Needs Analysis Workshop was held at Minnipa. The project also offered women in the region the opportunity to participate in a Woman's Field Day at the Minnipa Agricultural Centre (MAC) to allow women to experience what a Field Day at the Centre is like and encourage women to attend the annual MAC Field Days in the future.

The aim of the project is to increase opportunities for women on Upper Eyre Peninsula to participate in professional development to enable them to increase their involvement in their farm business. Initial discussions with local women highlighted a lack of training opportunities for women in the community that was targeted to their needs and delivered in a method that suited their requirements.

How was it done?
Partners in Grain Groups
Partners in Grain identified that the Upper Eyre Peninsula was a region where it had no groups running. In February 2010 discussions were held with a local female farmer about the concept of PinG, if there would be interest in the Minnipa area and her role as a volunteer group coordinator. In April 2010 a Training Needs Analysis Workshop was held with women interested in participating from the Minnipa region, 11 women attended this workshop. At the workshop women were asked to think about issues for their business and industry in 2010, what their business and industry may look like in five years time and to identify what some of the skills and knowledge they will need to manage this change. This process came up with a number of training topics which the group prioritised as their training activities for 2010. The Minnipa Group then completed three training activities in 2010 including grain marketing, off farm investing and a social event for group members and families pre-harvest.

After a successful start with the Minnipa Group, groups at Wudinna/Kyancutta and Streaky Bay were also formed. Both of these groups also have volunteer group coordinators. In June 2010 members of the Wudinna/Kyancutta Group participated in a Training Needs Analysis Workshop to develop a training program and completed two workshops in 2010. The Streaky Bay group did not do a Training Needs Analysis Workshop but completed three workshops.

All three groups will continue in 2011, with all groups planning to participate in a Training Needs Analysis Workshop during the year to reassess training requirements.
An evaluation was done after each workshop to ensure the material was appropriate and to gauge what the women plan to do with the information they have learnt. In 2011 individual women from all three groups will be interviewed to determine practice change that has occurred within their businesses as a result of the training they have participated in.

The volunteer group coordinators have also been networked with other group coordinators from across South Australia so the groups can share information about future training ideas.

**Minnipa Agricultural Centre Women’s Field Day**

A Women’s Field Day was held at MAC on 22 September 2010. The Field Day was a joint activity between PinG SA and MAC. The format for the day was a conference style with a number of speakers in the morning and in the afternoon the women were given a tour of MAC and an opportunity to speak to research staff. The day concluded with small groups working on evaluation questions and discussing if women would attend the main field day in 2011. The day was well received by the women present with most indicating they would attend a similar event if held again. Most women indicated they still would not attend the main MAC Field Day for varied reasons.

**What does this mean?**

- The ‘women’s only’ learning environment is beneficial for many women as it can be run at times that suit family commitments. They often feel more comfortable to ask questions and share information.
- Groups need a local group coordinator as this keeps ownership of the group in the community and assists with logistics when organising events. When the group is first starting people are often more comfortable talking to someone they know. As this is a volunteer position it needs to be circulated around the group.
- Logistics of training for women needs to consider training during school term time, at a time during the day when children are at school or childcare and in a local venue to reduce travel time. This reduces the barriers for women attending training and still allows women to get children on and off school buses and home in time for family commitments.
- Social interaction is an important part of the learning experience and group dynamics. Often women don’t have time to catch up socially with other women in their local community or the group has women from outside their immediate circle of friends, so the group is creating community networks. The lunch and smoko breaks are important for social interaction but most women leave as soon as the workshop is over as they need to collect children off school buses.
- The three groups on the Upper Eyre Peninsula have developed and run themselves in a similar manner to the other 10 PinG groups across SA. Each group has different training priorities but grain marketing, office management and off farm investing have been the main training areas in 2010.

**Where to from here?**

In 2011 Partners in Grain will continue to support the Minnipa, Wudinna/Kyancutta and Streaky Bay groups and has also received funding from the EP Natural Resources Management Board to run Training Need Analysis Workshops at Kimba, Lock and Cummins.

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