

# Drought and climate adaptation program

## **GrazingFutures Narrative** **Ag Advisor's Breakfast (St George)**

### **Focus of this narrative**

Graziers access information relevant to their on-farm management from a variety of service providers other than just departmental extension staff. This includes stock and station agents, agronomists, bankers, accountants, NRM officers, financial planners, stockfeed retail and insurance brokers to name a few.

Producers report that, on some occasions, advice from these sources may not match with best management practice or research results. Therefore, a pathway is needed for industry advisors to access up to date research and best management practices, and identify when/where to refer clients when an enquiry is outside their area of expertise.

The Ag Advisor's Breakfast provided an informal arrangement for advisors to gain technical skills and knowledge, as well as network with other businesses and advisors who service local producers. Jill Rigney (The Right Mind) was engaged as a guest speaker for a breakfast in St George on the topic "Leadership in the Bush" on 21<sup>st</sup> October, 2020. Jill's dynamic presentation provided insights into leadership, influence and impact, and how the most important communication skill is listening. This led to in depth discussions about the importance of listening in building relationships and rapport. Jill also touched on listening without judgement to create safe and trustful relationships with clients and colleagues.

### **GrazingFutures linkage**

*Objective 4: Partner with government, non-government agencies and other partners to deliver comprehensive support to grazing businesses and value add to existing services*

### **GrazingFutures collaboration to deliver this event**

A nominal attendance fee (\$10/head) was charged and Queensland Health covered the guest speaker costs. Balonne Shire Council also sponsored venue hire and provided a cash contribution towards catering.

The Ag Advisor's Breakfast was promoted as a GrazingFutures event primarily via email, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. The event attracted 20 participants, including speakers. It commenced at 6:30am and officially finished at 9:30 am, however participants were invited to stay and network if they desired, which many did until 10-10:30 am.

A mix of agronomists, retailers, resellers, state government departments and farming businesses were represented. Due to a clash of events, none of the GrazingFutures team could attend, however there was time on the agenda to provide some background on GrazingFutures to the audience. There was good audience interaction with the speaker and strong engagement as observed with people taking notes and asking questions. There was some networking, but future events could include icebreakers or other activities to improve participant interaction.

# Drought and climate adaptation program

This 'cohort' has not previously been targeted in this region and it was difficult to know if the event would be well received. Many of these advisors are resellers and agronomists who compete with each other for business. Their priority is ensuring they maximise their own business performance in a cutthroat business environment. Assisting each other is not usually a priority, however as they share and target many of the same clients it is beneficial to get-together for networking and capacity building purposes.

**What has changed as a result of the GrazingFutures Project** (knowledge, skill, attitude, aspiration, practice)

A group was created on LinkedIn and all who registered and attended the breakfast to build networks and relationships among Ag advisors in the St George region. After the event, a follow-up email encouraged participants to join the LinkedIn group to access Jill's presentation slides and other reference materials.

A short phone survey was conducted to gauge participant feedback with regards to the timing, format and duration of the breakfast, and interest in future events. A total of 8 of the 17 participants (47%) were surveyed and all said they would recommend the event to their staff and others.

It was during these follow-up phone calls that a participant expressed her gratitude and satisfaction, and requested future events include one on one consultation sessions with Jill Rigney and other professionals involved (paid for by participant). Half of the attendees surveyed post-event indicated they too would be interested in private consultations at their own expense.

The phone survey also confirmed the majority of participants would be interested in similar quarterly breakfast events to further develop skills and networks across the industry. The event also provides the opportunity to expand GrazingFutures relationships with these advisors and disseminate grazier resources through these networks. Future events must include engaging, experienced and high-quality speakers to ensure participants prioritise this professional development opportunity in their own time.

## **Other benefits or costs**

The time of the day for the event was favourable. This type of event is not the same as organising a field day or producer-based workshop. Advisors are often 'in competition' with other businesses and getting them in the same room can be difficult. However, these people provide frontline services to graziers and should be actively included in GrazingFutures extension activities. However, a very different approach is required to build foundational relationships, and staff turnover across some sectors can be very challenging.

**Created by:** Gina Mace (ConnectAg)

**Date:** 01/12/2020

**Permissions:** External use