

The evolution of a regional producer group

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Abstract. The Barossa Improved Grazing Group (BIGG) is a community-driven network of five livestock production and farming groups from the Barossa region in South Australia, including sheep (North Rhine Sheep Group), beef (Mt Pleasant Beef Group), dairy (Barossa Mid-North Dairy Discussion Group) and two (Angaston and Koonunga) local Agricultural Bureaux. The group delivers and communicates innovative projects for sustainable grazing systems while promoting natural resource management (NRM) outcomes.

BIGG evolved in 2012 after receiving a project grant from the Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges NRM Board that encouraged local producers to improve their pasture productivity. This was achieved through working with producers to develop individual action plans that addressed on-farm issues such as soil nutrition, pasture species selection and grazing management. These action plans were implemented and learning's successfully shared between producers and the wider community through pasture walks, monthly newsletters and media articles. The project spiked regional interest in productive pastures and also the impetus to build and cultivate relationships with a range of state and national stakeholders, industry partners and local businesses.

Since 2012, BIGG has received over \$400,000 in funding, supporting 17 projects. These include monitoring soil moisture in grazing systems, using innovative electric fencing for grazing management, recovery of native pastures after local bushfires and the effect of soil borne root diseases on the productivity of sub-clover pastures.

An advisory committee represented by its five farming groups, local government and industry representatives guides BIGG. Its projects are therefore 'driven from the ground up' and coupled with its strong commitment to extension, BIGG was awarded the 2014 Ag Excellence Alliance Sustainability Award in South Australia as 'an outstanding locally based grower group for its achievements in delivering greater NRM'. In addition, BIGG's Georgie Keynes was awarded the '2013 Westpac Agribusiness Innovative Young Landcare Leader Award' at the 2013 State Landcare Awards.

BIGG continues to grow as a group, and through the recent development of its inaugural strategic plan, has mapped out a path to deliver on its vision of being 'a trusted and valuable network supporting innovative, sustainable and resilient grazing businesses'.

Keywords: Barossa Improved Grazing Group, NRM action-plans