

**The Purpose Story¹ Controlled Traffic Farming & Futureprofit
- Towards an interactive and integrative model for agency initiatives**

Nancy Rowe
Futureprofit Extension Officer
Department of Primary Industries, P.O. Box 94, Moura 4718

One of the few predictable features of the 1990's and the approaching twenty-first century is that these times have been and will continue to be marked by significant change. Change involves people. Change also, inevitably involves conflict. However, wisely managed conflict can have positive outcomes. An initiative such as Controlled Traffic Farming (CTF) has facilitated major changes within farming practices that conflict with traditional ideas and concepts. In dealing with these changes producers, research and development officers, extension officers, consultants, manufacturers and business groups have been employing one of the most powerful tools available - stepping outside of existing paradigms. This paper will examine how producers and agency staff have been facilitating change in Central Queensland (CQ) enterprises. Within the context of this study an aspect of the future direction of the CTF initiative in CQ will be explored - this aspect focuses on linkages with other major agency and rural projects such as Futureprofit and is in response to a perceived problem. Before highlighting these linkages though, it is useful to examine the nature of change and how it has progressed in CQ.

The Nature of Change

Change is a complex process underpinned by a range of models, concepts and ideologies. By definition change is a generic term, which subsumes a whole family of concepts such as 'innovation', 'development', and 'adoption', It can be either planned or unplanned. As Pascale (1997: Pg 39) notes:

Change happens - to paraphrase a bumper sticker!.....The only question is, will you effect change or will change affect you ? ...One way of thinking about change is to imagine that you are standing in the surf on a beach. As the waves roll back you feel the water attempt to pull you out.... If you go with the pull, more than likely you will glide over the crest of the next wave.

Adopting change often requires a person to move outside of his/her established ways of operation. Barker (1990) refers to these people as the 'Paradigm Pioneers'. In the area of cropping the CTF 'revolution' and its inherent changes, is gaining momentum across Australia. Many people have decided to effect change.

In CQ 'over the last five to six years CTF has been adopted partly or completely on nearly fifty cash cropping properties' (Cannon et al 1997). Change has occurred at unprecedented rates since 1991 when six producers decided to 'adopt' and trial this 'innovation' or 'development' known as CTF. As explained by Cannon (1997) at the National Landcare Conference:

Farmers who trialed areas rapidly moved to whole farm adoption. Why?

¹ The Purpose Story as referred to by Senge (1992) places the projects within a context of 'where we've come from and where we're heading'. 'We' goes beyond individuals, groups or agencies. The power of the Purpose Story is that it provides a side of ideas that integrates and gives meaning to the area being examined.

- *CTF is a whole-farm, systems package*
- *CTF has scientific and financial benefits*
- *CTF involves action learning and adult education*

Certainly the increasing number of producers adopting the system change indicates that CTF is proving a safe bet. Certainly the system provides tools for change.

Tools for coping with change

Farmers carried out much of the early research which enabled Australia to develop profitable agricultural industries. The development of wheat-harvesting and cultivating machines such as the stripper harvester by Bull in 1843, the stripper harvester and winnower by McKay in 1884 and stump-jump cultivating equipment by Smith in 1876, were the result of research work carried out by farmers. During the 20th century, scientists have carried out most agricultural research. State Government departments have carried out most of the applied research and extension (Reid pp 16/17). With CTF as with several other current initiatives, there is a move to once again involve farmers directly with research efforts. This has meant a change with 'extension techniques. Various strategies or tools have been used.

Descriptors of the processes and types of strategies being employed by Department of Natural Resource CTF staff in CQ include the following:

- *Action Research*
- *Adult Learning*
- *Individual & Group Support*
- *Focus Groups*
- *Conferences*
- *Workshops - producer, agency & external perspective's*
 - *SWOT Analysis*
 - *Action Plans*
- *Networking*
- *Research & Publication*
- *Practical*
- *Results & Outcome Orientated*

If change is to be effective there must be a common understanding of the 'project' and a commitment to learn from all involved. Producers and agency staff involved with the CTF project demonstrate a commitment to team learning (Pers comm. Yule, Cannon, Chapman, Radel, Ross, Prior, Reddy, Dunn & Seng). As Senge (1992 pp234/35) states:

*When a team becomes aligned, a commonality of direction emerges ...
A synergy develops... There is commonality of purpose, a shared vision*

Within the CTF team there is evidence of dialogue and discussion².

² Dialogue comes from the Greek 'dialogos' - dia meaning through and logos meaning the word. In dialogue people are no longer primarily in opposition, nor can they be said to be interacting, rather they are participating in this pool of common meaning which is capable of constant development and change. Dialogue goes deeper than discussion. Discussion is where views are presented and defended providing a useful analysis of the whole situation (Senge 1992 pp.240/41)

Review of the SWOT Analysis from the Challenging the Future Conference³ suggests that participants have been engaged in critical reflection and have taken time to think insightfully about and to explore complex issues.

A critical issue to emerge from the Conference was confirmation by producers that it is becoming increasingly difficult to deal with multiple government initiatives. A common understanding, shared by agency staff, is that problems emerge when multiple initiatives/projects demand implementation and evaluation. A major area of concern is that those initiating change often display a lack of understanding of the many elements of change impacting on the farming system at various levels and within various contexts.

Dealing with Difficulties: Collaborate, Co-Ordinate & Support

Dealing with this issue of how producers and agencies are coping with multiple priorities has led to closer linkages being developed between projects. For example, collaboration between CTF and Futureprofit (FP) staff has started to overcome this difficulty.

Futureprofit is part of the national property Management Planning (PMP) Campaign. Within Queensland PMP is implemented as the Farm Business Planning Program - Futureprofit. Futureprofit delivers an integrated workshop series and one off workshops that address holistic management of farming enterprises.

In Central Queensland, CTF staff regularly contribute to Futureprofit workshops, as do staff from the Sustainable Farming Systems project. A coordinated and integrated effort on the part of local staff in Central Queensland is a major strength for producers involved with the projects. Following is an example of a joint activity between project staff and producers.

A combined Controlled Traffic Farming and Futureprofit one off Workshop has been trialed in Central Queensland where a conventional farming system was compared with zero till and CTF. The focus of this Workshop was to enable participants to economically 'map' their management systems prior to and after the implementation of Controlled Traffic Farming.

Participants developed a financial model of their business without change. Changes with Controlled Traffic Farming were then identified and assessed. Whole farm profit budgets were prepared for the without and for the with change enterprises. Figures used were based on what participants expected to happen within their enterprises on average.

Calculated Business Return on Assets was quite different with the implementation of Controlled Traffic practices. The major differences were in overall farm costs - with savings on fuel, oil, repairs and maintenance / machinery replacement allowance and labour. It was felt that there was potential for long term yield increase with the greater potential for opportunity cropping. According to Chudleigh (pers comm) 'Changing from a conventional system to fully implementing the CTF option has the potential to significantly increase the financial performance of a farm business - it is estimated that there is potential to at least double the return on assets with a change from

³ 'Challenging the Future' was the Controlled Traffic Farming Conference held in Yeppoon, Central Queensland on February 28th and March 1st 1998.

conventional farming to implementation of the CTF option.’ Farmers concurred that there are real benefits from implementation of the system.

Working with another project area enabled this group to test management changes in a different environment to a ‘focused’ CTF activity. Such opportunities must add rigour to the CTF research and findings.

Where to from here?

Developing meaningful linkages between project development and delivery is a key concern for agency staff and producers in CQ. There are substantial gains for all stakeholders to better co-ordinate the development, implementation and evaluation of projects. Currently high profiled projects are achieving results for producers. Developing teams across projects has the potential to improve cohesion, working relations, impact, motivation, performance and success. ‘Teams have the potential to change the mathematics of work. For high performance teams the productivity math is $2+2=6$ ’ (Dewhirst pg33). The potential exists to develop truly high performance teams across agencies/project areas and producers.

Initiatives such as Controlled Traffic Farming and Futureprofit are proving to be both participatory and functional programs/practices for producers. Dialogue and discussion are supporting people with decision-making and planning. It is critical that such initiatives continue to interact and develop co-ordinated approaches to help achieve the vision of a viable and sustainable rural community in our region.

Moving beyond our ‘project paradigms’ towards a more interactive and integrative model for agency initiatives will challenge us all. Without doubt there may be ‘conflict’ but it is timely to bring together our many agency and community elements. Synergism is paramount.

References:

Cannon, R.S., Yule, D. & Chapman, W. (1998) *Controlled Traffic Farming Workshop Report on Challenging the Future Conference*, Capricornia Resort, Yeppoon, February 28/March 1 1998

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