

The Potential for Community Based Social Marketing Using School Students as the Tools of Change to Increase Innovation Adoption in the Agricultural Industry

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Problem domain: Research and development in the agricultural industry has recently delivered several key innovations (Jago et al., 2013; Pannell et al., 2006), however achieving practice change across the industry remains a challenge. Several extension models have been developed and applied to facilitate the adoption of key innovations however in many cases they have yet to gain traction (Eastwood et al., 2017).

Research question and purpose: The use of community-based social marketing (CBSM) as a tool to facilitate behaviour change with respect to environmental issues such as recycling is well known (McKenzie-Mohr, 2013). We propose a research program which would explore the question of whether there is the potential of applying the CBSM method to change behaviour so as to increase technology adoption on-farm with a focus on implementing a ‘School Programs that Influences Family’ (SPIF) (Kassirer, n.d).

There are numerous examples of SPIF programs that have led to a positive change in the desired behaviour including:

- Reducing the use of cars and increasing parent and student use of bicycles to travel to and from school (Barris, 2005; Sporta, 2004).
- Decreasing the amount of packaging used in school lunches and at home resulting in less non-recyclable or compostable waste (Andrews, 2004).

The researchers propose to use students as key influencers of practice change, not only on their immediate family members but the wider agricultural community.

Development of the argument: Whilst there has been investment by the farming sector into Australian school programs, these have largely focused on student engagement and promoting career paths. The concept of CBSM SPIF contrasts with these endeavours in that whilst undertaking a student engagement process, the end goal is practice change on farms, essentially engaging students as agents of change in the farming community.

The idea for this project has developed from observations made by the researchers and direct feedback in which school based engagement strategies (designed to increase awareness of opportunities in agriculture for students) have led to practice change on the family farm.

An agri-tech learning module could be applied as a tool in the SPIF program context. Previous research has demonstrated that educational activities focussed on agricultural technologies engage students and consistently rate highly in student assessments and feedback (Cosby and Trotter, 2014; Trotter, 2014).

In this proposed program interviews and surveys will gather information on innovation transfer characteristics between students and their families. This will involve the use of online surveys and personal interviews with educators, students and their families, and the wider grazing community.

Conclusion: There is a unique opportunity to formalise a CBSM SPIF process to increase the adoption of agri-tech tools and systems on farm, through specifically designed learning models and resources. The key challenge will be the ability to quantify the impact that student engagement can have on innovation and technology adoption on the family farm and wider agricultural community.

If an effective method can be developed, it is hoped that industry and agri-tech companies will invest in the development of further learning modules and programs in high schools to increase the adoption of innovation on-farm.

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