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## A THREE STEP MODEL TO PRACTICE CHANGE

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Change is going on in everyone's life. While some change is forced on us, most occurs because we decide to make a change to achieve a different outcome. During the Sustainable Grazing Systems (SGS) Program 1996 – 2002, a Practice Change Model (Fig. 1) was developed from extension theory and practical experience of producers, researchers and extension practitioners (Nicholson *et al.* 2003). The SGS program was spectacularly successful in supporting practice change. Over 8,000 producers made changes they anticipated would yield both financial (78%) and sustainability (81%) benefits (Allan *et al.* 2003).



Figure 1. Practice Change Model – making change is simply a three-step process.

### **Motivation stage – creating a reason or desire for wanting to change practices**

Motivation is created by the anticipation of a possible gain (the strongest desire) or a potential loss, and is an essential ingredient of every change. Genuine motivation is essential if interest and commitment are to be sustained – even small difficulties at this early stage can result in withdrawal of involvement.

### **Exploration & trialing stage – planning what changes to make and how to make them**

This stage involves working towards a solution through a series of logical steps that include: seeking a range of possible solutions that align with vision and goals; weighing up options; skills development; gaining support from an 'inner circle'; and, where possible testing changes on a small scale.

### **Farm practice change stage – making the change across the farm**

The rate of adoption from a trial to whole of farm will vary depending on whether the practice meets expectations and the capacity (skills, knowledge and financial) to implement change. Wide scale adoption often leads to new questions that if not answered effectively can lead to scaling back or abandonment and the investment lost. Peer recognition, personal support and encouragement and confidence are needed to maintain commitment, especially if results are below or slower than expected.

### **WHO BENEFITS**

The practice change model helps:

- Producers work through the issues as they identify an opportunity to change, and explore the implications of making the change, before finally building a new practice into their system;

- Those designing tools, products or programs that aim to achieve practice change on properties; and
- Extension practitioners identify the particular requirements of producers at the various stages of the practice change cycle, and therefore how best to assist producers move through the cycle.

### **TOOLS AND PRODUCTS CHECKLIST**

Appropriate, well-designed tools and products can greatly enhance the awareness, motivation, confidence and adoption of new practices. A series of check lists has been designed (Mason *et al.* 2003) to assist in the development of a tool or product created to support a practice change. **Part A** consists of a series of questions to explore/understand the practice change. **Part B** provides questions to assist with targeting the tool or product towards motivation, exploration and trialing, or to supporting the farm practice change. The number of positive responses to the questions in the checklist will increase the probability of success.

#### **Part A – Sample of the questions to explore and describe the practice change**

1. What is the desired farm practice change and the target market?
2. Is there strong ‘evidence’ that adoption of the desired practice change will reduce the negative impacts of the current practice and lead to a possible gain?
3. Is the negative impact of the current practice occurring rapidly or slowly?
4. What is the producer’s impression about the current practice once the tool or product is used?
5. Describe the goals a producer will require to be interested in this tool?
6. Is the alternative practice change simple to adopt and with minimum impacts (consequences) to other parts of the farm operation and is it easy to reverse (if desired) and cheap to implement?
7. What intellectual and social capacity is required to adopt the practice across the whole farm?

#### **PART B – Sample questions to match tools to the stages of practice change**

##### **Motivation stage**

1. Is training required before the tool or product can be used or the results implemented?
2. Can the tool or product be linked to locally relevant benchmarks?
3. Can the tool or product be distributed and demonstrated by a range of people?

##### **Exploration and Trialing stage**

1. Will the tool or product help demonstrate the impact of adopting a new practice within three years and will it help build understanding of the principles that underpin the practice change?
2. Does the tool assist producers to benchmark their situation and compare with their aims/goals?
3. Does the tool or product have the flexibility to be delivered in a one-on-one situation, a group, and in a ‘do it yourself’ situation, and appeal to a range of learning styles?
4. Do the data from the tool or product support discussions or family dialogue?

##### **Farm Practice Change stage**

1. Does the tool or product provide re-assurance that the change is beneficial, and build/maintain confidence and commitment to farm practice change?

Networks that enable producers and people in support roles to interact and actively learn from one another in a non-threatening environment can greatly speed up the change process.

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