

STRATEGY 2021+

Upper North Farming Systems Strategic Plan 2021-2026
Developed by the
Upper North Farming Systems Strategic Board 2021

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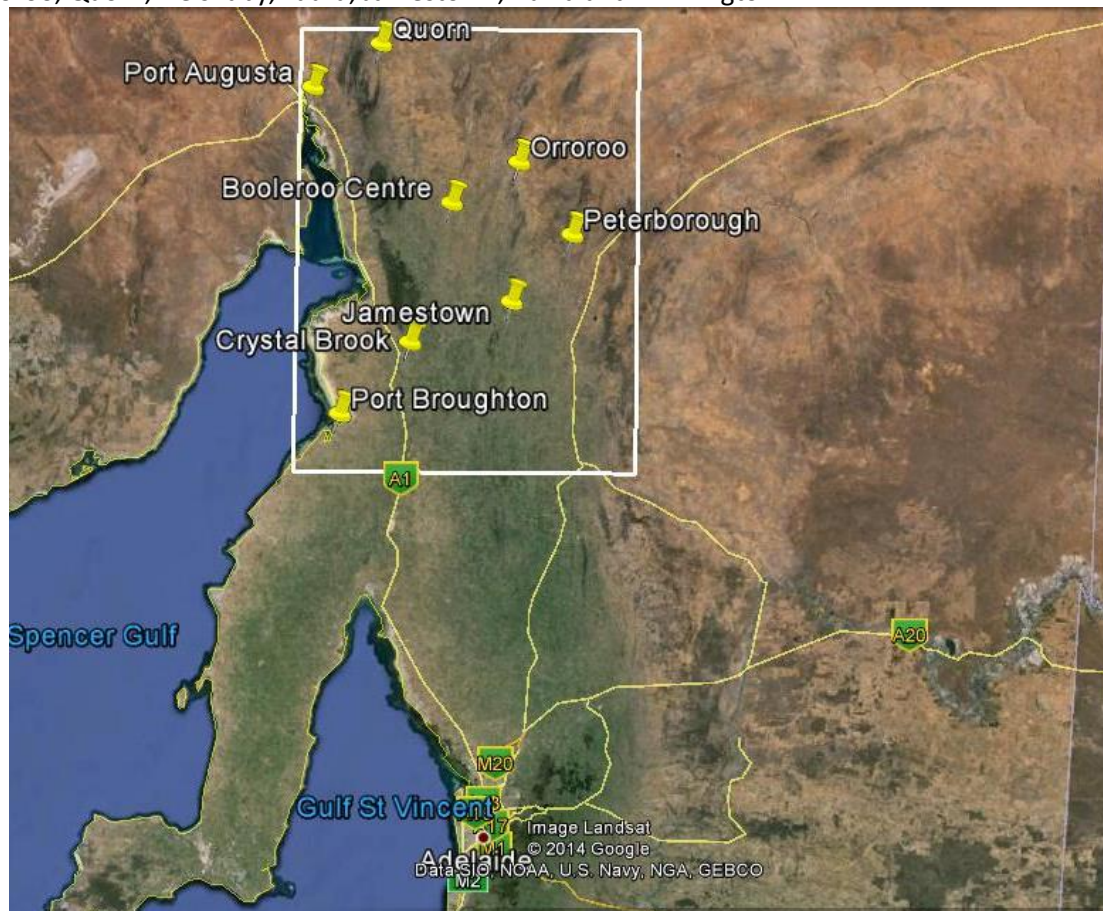
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This strategic plan was developed by the Upper North Farming Systems Strategic Board in conjunction with the Operations Committee, Staff and Members. The process was supported by Strategy Road.

Background

UNFS in Brief

Formed in 2001, Upper North Farming Systems (UNFS) covers a diverse geographical region in the Upper North Agricultural Region of South Australia. The region includes two distinct localities: 1) Coastal plain characterised by a mix of sandy and clay soils with warmer winters and hot summers and 2) Interior undulating higher altitude country with cold winters and generally heavier soil types. The district is predominantly a low rainfall zone, however there are areas of mid-level average rainfalls. Our region is bordered to the north and east by the pastoral zones and extends south to higher rainfall zones, encompassing the towns of Booleroo Centre, Port Pirie, Peterborough, Orroroo, Quorn, Nelshaby, Laura, Jamestown, Burra and Wilmington.



UNFS is a not-for-profit incorporated body that is managed by a team of volunteers and a small group of staff. The Strategic Board of 10 local representatives including farmers and advisors ensures good governance and direction within the organisation.

The Operations Committee includes Hub Representatives, the Strategic Board Members and Industry Representatives and is responsible for directing on ground trial work and extension activities to meet the needs of the farmers and agribusiness in the Upper North Region. The UNFS Hubs are small geographic or demographic groups that operate throughout the region to act as a conduit for member engagement and information transfer and as implementation support networks.

UNFS collaborates with research organisations and industry on trial work and extension activities throughout the district identifying and investigating key local research questions and building skill sets and knowledge to improve the overall sustainability, productivity, and profitability of farming enterprises in the region.

The Review Process

In 2020 an extensive survey of members was undertaken to review the effectiveness of the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan. The Operations Committee and Strategic Board undertook a series of facilitated workshops in 2020 and 2021 to review the survey results and reflect on the outcomes of the inaugural Strategic Plan. The Inaugural Strategic Plan 2016-2020 was an effective guide with limited change of scope required. The full summary of the review is in the Context, Appendix A.

Through this process of reviewing and interpreting member input, as well as analysing past activities, the evolving operating environment, realistic capabilities, and future ambitions for Upper North Farming Systems, the Strategic Board made the following determinations for the years ahead.

UNFS STATE OF PLAY 2021

Key strengths to build on



A Strong Base: 2001-2021

UNFS evolves to meet industry requirements and service members needs.



Trial, Research & Development:

Providing local, relevant information that members value.



An inclusive, welcoming community committed to helping members



Fulfilling an important community connection and information provision role in the Upper North.



The local hubs model:

An effective means of engaging more community members and facilitating strong networks.



Communication:

Within and beyond the membership improving continually.



Stronger membership numbers.



Strong balance sheet.

UNFS STATE OF PLAY 2021

Key challenges to navigate



Getting a clear, powerful message out to a wider community about who UNFS is and why community members should join



What are the next “big issues” that members will value RD&E in? How innovative or “blue sky” do we go?



Ensuring external perceptions reflect that the group covers low to medium rainfall environments



Engaging the “trusted advisor” community that support our farmer members (consultants / Agronomists) more deeply



Ensuring membership is reflective of the farming community demographics, engaging the next generation of farmers and leveraging elder experience.



Ensuring RD&E focus covers the breadth of our members farming enterprises - cropping, livestock and mixed farms



Evolving to a precision agriculture environment versus paddock-scale activities



Striking the balance between our role in facilitating social connection and the provision of relevant technical information

UNFS STATE OF PLAY 2021

In the context of a changing world, we need to be mindful of...



Environmental sustainability and community attitudes:

Soil health, carbon, climate change, the use of chemicals, social license



Labour forces:

Access to skilled staff and the shift to technical skill requirements vs farm hands; volunteer risk



Capital requirements to operate:
Access to funding sources, funding security and adequacy



Implications of market dynamics:
Local, international, changes in demands, trade risks, diversification



The changing nature of farms:
Corporate ownership, aggregated larger farms, family farms



The growing need the world has for what our members produce – food and fibre



Changing information sources:
The evolving role of advisors, traditional and social media, training providers



Maximising efficiencies in a changing climate:
Water, Nutrient and Resource use efficiencies



Community sizes and the role farming groups play in strengthening social fabric



Succession planning:
Ensuring a sustainable approach to leading and governing UNFS

Strategy 2021 - 2026



MISSION, VISION & VALUES



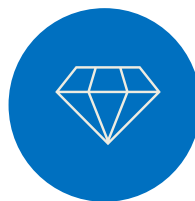
Our Mission

To help the farming community in the Upper North of South Australia build responsive and resilient farming systems.



Our Vision

Farms and farmers in the Upper North that are thriving, profitable, and sustainable.



Our Values

Partnerships. Honesty. Quality. Results. Governance. Open minds.
History. Awareness. Relevance. Community.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

Members

Goals

- 20% of farmers in the Upper North members of UNFS
- Continual annual growth of member participation in events
- An embodied member feedback and ideas culture
- A robust, sustainable hub model

Outcomes

- R&D activities that deliver tangible value.
- Increased relevance of UNFS to members
- More engagement of and participation by existing members
- More members, resulting in greater impact to the regions agricultural industry.
- Greater awareness of UNFS in the wider Upper North region
- Balance of social network and technical value proposition
- Each hub running 1-2 events minimum per year.
- We promote important conversations.

Actions



Communication and Engagement Plan

- Clarification & promotion of the Value Proposition of UNFS
- Appropriate & effective media vehicles
- Clear, consistent & purposeful messaging
- Member feedback mechanisms created & embedded in all activities



Hub model Strategic Review

- Clarification & promotion of the Value Proposition of Hubs
- Engagement of hubs in driving future focus
- Identification of appropriate hub delineation and definition
- Clear guidelines for operation of the hubs



Identify adequate & sustainable resources for member engagement activities

- Annual extension and engagement activity budgeting and review process established
- Identify investment needed to facilitate hub sustainability.
- Map pathways for hub coordinators to access support
- Identify and recognise partnerships and collaboration opportunities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

Research Development & Extension

Goals

- RD&E mix representative of our region & farm enterprise mix (cropping, livestock, mixed & social, economic, environment)
- Member driven RD&E priorities
- Sustained, deepened partnerships with key RD&E Organisations (Technical, funding & delivery)
- Expand awareness of the role & capabilities of UNFS with RD&E organisations
- Demonstrate best practice RD&E procedures

Outcomes

- Link our members to intelligence, insights and resources to help their future viability
- Deliver answers to important questions to our members
- Provide members with the tools to improve the responsiveness & resilience of their farming systems
- Translate “big picture” research to Upper North specific research.
- Keep UNFS at the forefront of changes that will impact our members
- Provide timely, easy to access output from R&D work

Actions



Implement a sustainable project pipeline model

- Annual future needs and priority identification process adopted
- Capture ideas and input from members via hub and other meetings
- Share project list with key industry bodies to assist prioritise funding directions.
- Encourage an “idea valued” culture
- Establish a budget line for project development



Operations Committee to lead & govern RD&E projects

- Meeting schedule for Ops Committee outlining project oversight cycle
- Annually review project list to assess comprehensive enterprise focus:
 - Balancing “meat and potatoes” projects with “blue sky” projects and
 - Representative of the mix of our members farming systems
- Implement effective post-project reviews incl. future project identification.



Effectively support member adoption & implementation of RD&E insights

- Staff trained in effective extension techniques
- Implement effective post-event review process
- Implement engagement & communications plan
- Establish a culture of adaptive management

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

Partners

Goals

- Be the “go to” delivery partner for agricultural RD&E activities in the Upper North of SA
- Increase the exposure of the UNFS Value Proposition – more partners knowing how we can be of value
- Active engagement of industry, advisors and agribusinesses – strong, 2-way supportive relationships

Outcomes

- Develop, expand and deepen key partnerships, both existing and new
- Partnerships covering technical, funding, delivery and collaboration
- Continual building of knowledge / informing ourselves of partner options
- 2-way communication pathways maintained with partners to ensure relevant and enduring relationships
- Funding adequacy, security & sustainability

Actions



Fostering Delivery Partnerships (RD&E)

- Develop a delivery partner prospectus
 - Utilise the Ops Committee to value-add project delivery through access to property owners and trial collaborators
 - A clear value proposition and delivery schedule for partners
- Foster collaborative approach to research: 2-way communication with funding bodies and industry. Joint funding applications. Shared project delivery
- Sponsorship Prospectus - Clear and transparent sponsorship and partnership arrangements with agri-business.



Facilitating Networks

- Support shared knowledge and professional development in regions agri-business
- Link growers-advisor-researchers to provide value proposition for partnering with UNFS in delivery.
- Aligned Marketing & Comms Plan: Support strong communication with partners and effective engagement activities for members.
- Provide networking and engagement opportunities between members and industry: value to sponsors, feedback loop for funders, access to implementation support for members.



Members needs / priorities represented in the industry

- Identify sustainable funds to enable industry involvement
- Participate in industry reviews & attend industry events and forums: ensure regional & member priorities & needs are represented.
- Feed project & priority list to funding & industry bodies to ensure funding priorities reflect regional needs.
- Annually reviewed Marketing Plan: Clear delivery of member & group needs and offerings to the public and industry.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4

Governance

Goals

- An employer brand position of “a responsible organisation” and “a great place to work”
- Financial viability & sustainability (healthy books)
- An engaged, active governance body applying good / best practices
- A member base confident in the operations of the organisation

Outcomes

- Transparency
- Financially responsible, focused on future viability
- Mitigate key person risk (succession & support planning)
- Data security & storage focus – protect a key asset
- Respected as a responsible investment of industry funds.

Actions



Effective Member Reporting

- Develop a model of review and continual improvement
- Identify key timelines and formats for effective information transfer to members



Policy & Procedures upgrade

- Implement an annual budgeting process
- Maintain good financial management procedures and processes
- Key policies and procedures identified
- Implementation plan developed



Implement a strong Project Management Framework

- Project management framework available to all staff and maintained to ensure relevance
- Linked financial and project management platforms.
- Shared responsibility across staff and regular reporting to committee for transparency and effective information sharing.



Develop and implement a robust technology framework

- Appropriate tools available to staff
- Tech support available to ensure staff efficiencies
- Data storage systems secure and robust
- Regular review of current and future needs.



Board & Staff Skill Levels Reflective of Organisation Needs

- Skill audit undertaken across staff & Board
- Skill needs assessment undertaken across organisation
- Training or recruitment process implemented to fill needs.
- Review and Reporting process implemented.

STRATEGY 2021+ IMPLEMENTATION

Strategic Activities	Delivery Timeline		Priority Area	Risk
	Drafting	Complete		
Implement a Marketing, Communications & Engagement Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarification and promotion of the Value Proposition of UNFS Appropriate, effective media vehicles Clear, consistent, and purposeful messaging Member feedback mechanisms embedded in all activities Clear delivery of member/group needs/offers to the public and industry. 	January 2022	January 2023	Members Partners Governance RD&E	Publicity event results in member distrust Off target delivery results in wasted funds.
Strategic review of the Hub model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarification & promotion of the Value Proposition of Hubs Engagement of hubs in driving future focus Identification of appropriate hub delineation and definition Clear guidelines for operation of the hubs 	March 2022	March 2023	Members	Hub model detracts from providing quality data and information. Lose credibility as a science-based organisation.
Identify adequate & sustainable resources for member engagement activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual extension and engagement activity budgeting and review process established Identify investment needed to facilitate hub sustainability Hub coordinators resource pack updated annually Identify and recognise partnerships and collaboration opportunities. 	June 2022 Annually	Annually	Members and Partners	Under resourced delivery results in unsatisfied members, reduced attendance and/or membership and lack of adoption across the region.
Implement a sustainable project pipeline model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual future needs and priority identification process adopted Capture ideas and input from members via hub and other meetings - encourage an "idea valued" culture Establish a budget line for project development 	October 2023	Annually	RD&E	Off target Projects lead to member disengagement Member priorities do not align with funding priorities leading to a lack of funding.
Clear Operations Committee Objectives and Annual Plan Developed: Operations Committee to lead & govern RD&E projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting schedule for Ops Committee outlining project management cycle Annually review project list - comprehensive enterprise focus: Implement effective post-project reviews incl. future project identification. 	October 2022	Annually	Governance and RD&E	Lack of clarity = poor outcomes and disenfranchised committee members. Lack of end-of-project review = missed opportunity to learn and improve.
Extension and Adoption Internal Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff Skills Audit undertaken Staff Training Plan developed and reviewed annually Implement effective post-event review process and implement a culture of adaptive management. Membership to a facilitator and extension network considered to ensure techniques and tools being used are industry standard 	June 2022	June 2023 Annually	RD&E	Under skilled and under resourced staff may result in poor adoption outcomes.
Members needs / priorities represented in the industry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify sustainable funds to enable industry involvement Participate in industry reviews & attend industry events and forums: ensure regional & member priorities & needs are represented. Feed project & priority list to funding & industry bodies to ensure funding priorities reflect regional needs. 	Annually	Annually	Partners and Members	Disparity between members needs and funding priorities Insufficient networks and skills to foster successful applications.
Fostering Delivery Partnerships (RD&E) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a delivery partner prospectus 	June 2023	June 2024	Partners and	Lack of clarity around partnership = easy to

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Utilise the Ops Committee to value-add project delivery through access to property owners and trial collaborators ii. A clear value proposition and delivery schedule for partners iii. Link growers-advisors-researchers to provide value proposition for partnering with UNFS in delivery. • Staff time funded to participate in collaborative networks. Foster collaborative approach to research: 2-way communication with funding bodies and industry. Joint funding applications. Shared project delivery. • Sponsorship Prospectus Reviewed Annually: Clear and transparent sponsorship and partnership arrangements with agri-business. • Support shared knowledge and professional development in regions agri-business: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Agri-business Skills Audit undertaken bi-annually ii. Research Partners meet annually to review projects and priorities • Provide networking and engagement opportunities between members and industry: value to sponsors, feedback loop for funders, access to implementation support for members, fosters advisor learning opportunities. 	Ongoing	Ongoing	Members	under deliver or deliver off target outcomes. Perception as unwilling to work with others would undermine long term regional outcomes. Long term financial viability reliant on partnerships to deliver and disseminate project outcomes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project management framework available to all staff and maintained to ensure relevance • Linked financial and project management platforms. • Shared responsibility across staff and regular reporting to committee for transparency and effective information sharing. 	Annually – June	Annually – June		
	November 2023	November 2025		
	February 2022	February Annually		
	Ongoing			
	Ongoing			
Implement a strong Project Management Framework	June 2021	June 2022	Governance	Poor project management = unmet contracts = lack of industry future funding.
Effective Member Reporting	June 2023	June 2024	Governance	Lack of effective reporting = distrust, poor perceived value, and lack of adoption of research outcomes.
Develop and implement a robust technology framework	Annually	Annually	Governance	Systems hacked and data compromised or stolen. Frustrated staff seek alternative employment. Lack of tech knowledge or support = staff inefficiencies.
Board & Staff Skill Levels Reflective of Organisation Needs	February 2022	Annually	Governance	Insufficient skills to manage effectively. Insufficient skills within team to manage projects and allow for succession.
Policy & Procedures upgrade	December 2022	December 2023	Governance	Poor governance = member distrust. Poor management = liability. Poor management results in lack of succession and staff turnover.



This Strategic Plan is for the regular review, critical assessment and calibration decisions of the Strategic Board of Upper North Farming Systems.