Managing and reversing the decline in funding for on-farm R&D

Wayne Hall
Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

When considering the issue of managing and reversing the decline in funding for on-farm R&D, the first question to consider is how much has on-farm R&D declined and over what time period – and are we also talking extension services? Unfortunately this first question is not easily answered as data at the appropriate scale (beef, on-farm, northern Australia) and over an appropriate time period is not easily accessed.

The best published data comes from ABARES (Millist et al. 2017) where they reported national rural expenditure for both extension (2005-2015) and R&D (2006-2015). What this report documented is that total national rural R&D expenditure has been increasing, extension expenditure has been generally stagnant, and that the private sector has been the main driver behind the increase in R&D expenditure (Fig. 1). What has declined is the funding by State and Territory governments for R&D.

It is highly likely that the decline in State and Territory funding for R&D represents a decline in on-farm R&D. In terms of managing for and reversing this trend there are a number of factors that publicly funded researchers need to consider:

- Can they access private sector funding, and how are aligned are the R&D objectives of the private sector with those of State and Territory agencies, e.g. public versus private good.
- Forming alliances with universities who may have access to different funding sources.
- Engaging closely with industry and industry groups in both the identification of R&D priorities, the roll-out of projects and the dissemination of project findings.
- Ensuring that project outputs are converted to a dollar amount wherever possible.
- Marketing the benefits (economic, environmental, social) of their R&D to decision makers.
- Critically assessing and prioritising all concepts and proposals so only those that have a clear and compelling answer to the “so what” question are supported.

References

Millist N, Chancellor W, Jackson T (2017) Rural research, development and extension investment in Australia (ABARES research report: Canberra)