

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

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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.

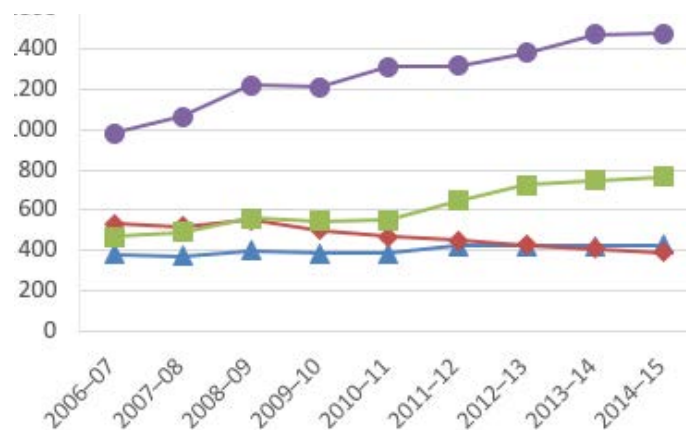


Fig. 1. National rural RD&E expenditure for the period 2006-2015: private sector (●), State and Territory governments (◆), university (■), Australian Government (▲)(Millist *et al.* 2017).

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)