Empowering next generation agriculture

Innovation Working Group (Ag IWG) Session #4

Co-design workshop: UMP+ Phase 1 Pilot
Meeting Minutes

Monday 4 March 2025; 10:00am – 2:00pm
RSL Hall, Donaldson Street, Corryong

Facilitators: Karensa Menzies, David Lamb

Attendees: Alex Nicholas (producer), Amanda Farrelly (DEECA), Anna Paton (producer), Anthony Dore (producer), Cain Jenkins (producer), Charlie Paton (producer), David Lamb (Food Agility), Dennis Walton (AgVic), Ed Durham (producer), George Galbraith (producer), Jacob Hill, Kylie McCreadie (AgVic), Jo Mackinnon (UMI/ producer), Jo Nicholas (producer), Karensa Menzies, Lachlan Campbell (NECMA), Lucy Hickman (Food Agility), Mark Bourne (CSU Global Digital Farm), Matthew Spurgeon (community / local providore), Mollie Waters (producer), Maya Oya (community), Rebecca (CSU Global Digital Farm), Ross de Clifford (producer), Sophie Hanna (Riverine Plains), Toby Robinson (producer).

Apologies: Andrew Whitehead, Carley Hodge, Stephen Gemmill, Toby Jones.

Welcome & Recap

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country.

A brief recap of actions and activities since IWG-2 was provided, with participants referred to IWG-3 (Zoom update 21.2.25) presentation for further detail. The following two areas of note.

Foundational water work

- The briefing paper drafted to inform scope of work (Dec 2025) recommended an UM Producer consultation/survey to better understand the demand side of water for agriculture purposes, including a sense of scale of the issue/opportunity. This will be led by Ag IWG lead facilitator.
    (i) Water licence volumes – who has them, what are they used for?
    (ii) What and why water entitlements are not being used, appetite to trade and if not, why?
    (iii) If [river frontage] properties had access to more water, would they use it, what for?
- This will inform the development of a water literacy program (AgVic, NECMA, GMW); and to understand the opportunity cost of not utilising the water that is available.

Upper Murray Producer Plus (UMP+)

- The Expression of Interest for an UMP+ project was endorsed (late Jan 2025) by DEECA to progress to the application stage for funding. UMP+ will be developed and funded in two phases:
- Phase 1: Building UMP+ foundations and ecosystem (7 months). This phase will establish pilot farm/s with soil probes, data flows and farm dashboard integrations, trial a regional dashboard and build partner relationships. In road testing the ecosystem, Phase 1 will identify gaps, what works and determine what the detail of Phase 2 should look like. Candidate innovation themes for demonstration farms identified through earlier Ag-IWG activities will also be validated during Phase 1 with practical detail co-designed and mapped for Phase 2.
- Phase 2: (2 years) will build out the UMP+ ecosystem with 4 innovation themes & demonstration farms with enabling tech, practices and learning forums, and create an enduring UMP+ framework.

Today's workshop will explore and confirm the details for Phase 1 pilot farm/s.

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Introductions

All participants introduced themselves and outlined their interest in UMP+

Charles Sturt University (CSU): AgriPark & Global Digital Farm

Mark Bourne, CSU and acting director of Global Digital Farm, provided an overview of AgriPark and Global Digital Farms activities, including practical examples of working with industry and commercial partners.

Workshopping Phase 1 Pilot Farm/s

The focus of the pilot farm is to develop the ecosystem framework, using soil probes as the candidate technology to establish data flows, processes, etc. This can then be scaled across innovation themes and demonstration farms, benchmarking and group activities etc., in Phase 2.

Participants discussed and workshopped how they would like to use soil probe information.

To start, Ed Durham spoke about the soil moisture probe he has installed and how he wants to use it, including:

- to obtain the highest product yield for water use.
- to help make decisions, analysing if / when the soil water content meets the crop needs.
- what is the best time to water.
- whether there is a correlation with the Ag Vic data and what is on his probe,
- to share data and compare production with other producers
- water efficiency measure - understand what the best crop is to produce given the water available.
- sharing data - can opt to give permission to share and can choose data to be shared.
- would also like to know what information is already available, how to access and leverage

When opened to the group for their inputs, the following was noted:

- Use to improve farm margins – e.g. megalitres water/hectare/ $returns – Metrics that matter.
- Limited water available/allocated so want precise water use.
- Ability to have an app on phone that you can feed in data (soil type, weather, crop/pasture) and get results. [i.e. open one app that integrates and transforms multiple data sources].
- Further, the app [user interface] can integrate data from past – e.g. show weather and soil conditions and what diseases/pests are prevalent under certain conditions.
- Review data with BOM weather records – what patterns can be established for dry/wet seasons
- Access to better weather data - localised data & forecaster to get most out of the probe data.
- Would like multiple regional [probe] insights for benchmarking, group and peer learning.
- Ability to share to soil probe and water use data to inform or validate other local farm actions
- Develop soil story and case studies
- Keen interest expressed to have soil probes on different farm systems for Phase 1.
- No one present has soil moisture probes but many producers are interested in them.

To enable the above outcomes, data flows were considered by the group and a high-level schematic outlined: Data flows (moisture, temp, etc.) from candidate tech/source (soil probes) to a farm user interface (dashboard/app) that can input other farm data as well as outside information (e.g. BOM, NDIV) The user can give permissions for specific data to flow / be shared and/or visualised through a 'regional dashboard'. The regional dashboard would have multiple dynamics including but not limited to modules for producer benchmarking groups, can integrate multiple external data sources, can house or link to resources, case studies, etc., as well as an interface or module for various stakeholders to access and visualise specific data.

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Workshop participants agreed that the Phase 1 pilot should road test the above and establish a scalable framework with data processes, onboarding protocols, etc. for Phase 2. Mark Bourne indicated CSU / Global digital Farm could assist with this including selecting and implementing appropriate farm-level and regional-level dashboard software, as well as domain expertise. Mark also noted the opportunity to involve Corryong College in some capacity through CSU / GDF school initiative/s.

Project development timelines

- Funding applications are assessed by a DECCA panel, generally quite promptly and then sent to the minister for final approval. Amanda Farrelly (DEECA) noted that they have been experiencing delays in ministerial sign off on Community Transition Fund projects. This means that once UMP+ Phase 1 application is submitted, confirmation of funding may take 6 – 8 weeks.
- Aiming to submit the application for UMP+ Phase end of March, so anticipate an outcome from DEECA in late April / May. Phase 1 is 7 months with pilot farm activity across months 2-4. We are working toward Phase 2 commencing Dec/ Jan 2026.
- NECMA grants will be released on 1 July, for items such as soil moisture probes. In addition to upfront cost of a soil moisture probe, are some ongoing data collection and maintenance costs.

Agreed outcomes & next steps

- Agreed UMP+ Phase 1 pilot farm will use an existing soil probe to road test data flows and establish a scalable framework for Phase 2 with data processes, onboarding protocols, etc. This will include trialling data interfaces (dashboards) at both the farm and regional level and integrating publicly available weather data such as BOM.
- CSU confirmed they have the expertise and capacity to provide advice and assistance in setting up data ecosystem for Phase 1 pilot farm. Workshop participants agreed CSU would be a good UMP+ project partner.
- Mark Bourne (CSU), Karensa Menzies (Ag IWG lead) and UMP+ Steering Committee to scope and agree details for UMP+ – CSU project partnership, including detail required to complete the DEECA application for funding.
- Project application for phase 1 to be submitted end of March, and assessment will take approximately 6 – 8 weeks.
- A field trip for UM producers to CSU / Global Digital Farm to see what they do and maintain momentum was suggested and endorsed by all. UMI and UMP+ Steering Committee to organise.