

Increasing the capability of Agriculture Victoria staff in soil science knowledge, development and extension

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Integrated soils management extension leads to improved soil productivity. This has been observed in individuals who work in soil knowledge transfer and extension and have gained access to avenues that enable their capability development. The Victorian Government, in particular the then Farm Services branch, recognised that whilst knowledge existed within the team and their networks, there was a need to increase the capability, capacity and confidence of the collective extension staff to deliver integrated soil management extension to improve soil productivity. This led to the establishment of a new peer mentoring group called the 'Soil Champions'.

The Soil Champions consisted of thirteen extension staff, from all regions across the state, who worked together to improve their understanding of soil management to support modern, innovative production systems across all sectors. Soil management skills and knowledge developed and tested by the group is extended to farmers and industry service providers with a view to ensuring consistent, evidence-based strategies to combat constraints to production.

A key to this style of peer learning and capability development, is the support that the group offered its members, where they can share the latest soil related products and services as well as teaming up with soil researchers to build capability to deliver improved services and soil science information to farming communities. The Soil Champions project has resulted in the development of a number of new partnerships across not only Agriculture Victoria and the greater Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, but has improved collaboration with the private sector service providers and other government and non-governmental organisations.

Improvements in the transfer of knowledge of soil science for enhanced decision making on-farm requires a pathway to implementation and the Soils Champion network has succeeded in achieving this outcome.