

## **Padfert - extension experiences**

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Padfert is a computerised whole farm fertiliser decision support package (1) which has been used with 20 farmer clients in 1988/89. These farmers have reacted positively to the format and approach and are providing valuable input into the development of Padfert.

Only one of these clients has their own computer, however, all responded well to the hands-on approach with the portable computer. Taking the computer on to the farm has proven advantageous over office consultations. The farmer and family are at ease in their own home, records are at hand and all members of the family can contribute to the discussions. The computer is seen as new, novel and an 'independent' judge.

"Good yields are a result of good luck rather than good management" is a common adage, so setting yield goals is something that farmers rarely do. Using Padfert stimulated interesting debate between farm family members on the concept of setting yield goals pre-season. Yield probability tables are being developed on screen for crops, soil types and seasons to help with goal setting.

All farm data are entered and processed in a little over an hour and a concise summary printed. Up to four farms can be handled comfortably in a day. If the cropping/fertiliser programme changes, records can be quickly updated and outcomes assessed.

Padfert raised discussion of management strategies and as a result fertiliser test strips have been included in paddocks on several farms in the 1988/89 season. These will provide the focus for farm walks with the client group as well as field days for the general farming community.

Padfert provides the framework within which extension workers can help farmers bring together all the available information into a useful form for making better fertiliser decisions. The data used by the package can be easily updated as new research results become available and with the benefit of local on-farm experiences.

Despite speed and ease of use, there is a limit to the number of farms that can be handled by QDP1 extension personnel. To overcome this problem we plan to train local fertiliser resellers in the use of Padfert. This group have access to computers but often have limited experience in fertiliser management. Access to Padfert will improve their fertiliser management resource base and will ensure that Padfert rapidly reaches a far wider audience.

The co-operating farmer group provides useful feedback to research and relevant data for other extension information services. It is anticipated that the work with this group will be expanded to include more whole farm management extension.

1. Ada, R., and Vance, P. (1987), Proc. 4th Aust. Agron. Conf., Melbourne 355.