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Introduction

Between May 1998 and May 1999, the Target 10 dairy extension project implemented a novel approach to participatory monitoring and evaluation referred to as the 'Story Approach', which, as far as we know, had never been attempted in Australia before. The purpose was twofold: to collect data about the impact of the project as a whole and to promote organisational learning within the project team.

About This Booklet

This booklet contains 24 stories that were selected by the statewide Target 10 Central Executive Committee. Five of these stories were then selected as the most significant accounts of change at a round-table meeting of 'key influencers' and 'purchasers' of the project. The process by which the stories were selected is elaborated in Part 2 of this booklet and is referred to as the 'Story Approach'. The 24 stories presented were selected from the 134 stories collected between May 1998 and May 1999. The stories originated from all of the four regions of Victoria where the project operates. They were written by staff from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE), farmers, industry representatives and educators. Stories were selected on the basis that they were considered by the particular selection committee to be the most significant accounts of change in the specified domains. These domains were arrived at by a participatory process (see Part 2) and are:

- Changes in farmer decision-making skills.
- Changes in on-farm practice.
- Changes in profitability or productivity.
- Any other changes.

The 24 stories presented in this booklet are accompanied by comments from the statewide Central Executive Committee about why they were selected. You are encouraged to read the stories and add your own comments in the spaces provided. It is hoped that you can engage with the stories and interpret them

from your own perspective, in much the same way that you might engage with a painting. For this reason, the stories have deliberately not been 'analysed' by an external expert but have been left in their raw form for you to interpret and draw your own conclusions. This whole process is aimed at helping stakeholders of the Target 10 project understand the overall impact that the project is making in the dairy industry. The idea of this is, firstly, to provide feedback to improve the project and, secondly, to demonstrate what is being achieved and what is not being achieved. The stories provide the 'rich picture' of individual experience to complement the more objectives-based evaluation of the individual Target 10 programs. Thus, the Story Approach should not be seen as a stand-alone approach to evaluation.

The aims of this document are to present:

- The five stories that were selected at the round-table meeting by the 'purchasers' and 'key influencers' of the project as best representing the sort of outcomes that they wished to purchase.
- The criteria that led to the selection of these stories at the round-table meeting.
- The 24 stories that were selected by the Central Executive Committee of the Target 10 project.
- The criteria that led to the selection of these stories by the committee.

Part 1: Feedback from the Round-table Meeting

A round-table meeting was held with eight participants who were considered to be 'purchasers' or 'key influencers' of the Target 10 project. These participants represented the Dairy Research and Development Cooperation (DRDC), NRE, the University of Melbourne and the DRDC regional development boards. The round-table meeting took the form of a facilitated group discussion in which all participants were asked to give their reaction, to the stories

(the same stories that are included in this report). They were then asked to nominate certain stories as being the most representative of the sort of outcomes that they were interested in purchasing. The five stories that were nominated are presented in Table 1. Each of these nominated stories is presented in Part 2. The comments about why these stories were selected are included with the stories.

Table 1. Stories nominated at the round-table meeting

Domain	Story number and title	Storyteller	Predominant theme
1. Farmer decision-making skills	1a Turned a loss into a profit	Extension staff	Systematic operational decisions made lead to feeling more in control of business
2. On-farm practice	2a It's all too hard	Farmer	Lessons learned: the need for one-to-one support
	2b I used my own blend	Farmer	Changing on-farm practice leads to financial saving
3. Productivity or profitability	3a I'll not be milking cows when I am 55	Farmer	Quality of life increases
4. Other changes	4a Knowledge is power	Farmer	Goals achieved in career steps

What the Stories Showed Overall

There was general consensus at the meeting that overall the stories demonstrate:

- Technical skill improvement after attending Target 10 programs.
- An array of unexpected positive outcomes achieved by the project and specifically with regard to changes in attitude, achievement of personal goals, and changes in the farm business and family situation.

'I was taken by those stories that tended to indicate that not only had the program delivered the technical outcomes that are being sought by the industry, but also that, for a number of participants, it had brought about a change in attitude and achievement of personal goals as well.'

'Some of the description of the logic that flowed through stories (the technical logic) was very, very good and showed that these farmers in question had really grabbed this technology by the throat and were really milking it. The other sort of stories that got to me were the life-changing ones. And those two types of stories really got to me.'

Why Specific Stories Were Valued Highly

Specific stories were highly valued by particular participants when:

- The change described in the story was clearly attributable to the project.
- The participants could relate to the story from their own experience.
- The change described showed a diversity of learning.
- The story demonstrated project reflection on negative events and subsequent learning.
- The change described in the story demonstrated teamwork in action.

In the case of most of the stories, there were considerable differences in interpretation of the stories; however, a full consensus was achieved that the story 'Knowledge Is Power' presented the most significant account of change. Because of this, considerable time was spent discussing why this story was considered to be so significant. Comments from the meeting included:

- The good thing about this event was the combination of the farmer having an articulated need and the training program being available at the right time.
- The program provided a stepping stone to another job and also into further education.
- It shows a congruence of personal goals and business goals.
- This story illustrates an example of how the program provided a springboard for farmers to go on to what they want to do without prescribing a single pathway.
- The farmer in this story has the right attitude. How can we encourage other farmers to adopt this attitude?
- How can we harness the learning from this story to learn how to encourage other young farmers to have similar success?

How the Stories Can Be Improved

One of the participants explained that some of the stories needed more background information to fulfil his requirement for evaluation information. It was suggested that the quantifiable figures in these stories should be converted, where possible, into dollar values. This would help people from other industries to understand the significance of the changes described. It was also suggested that specific types of stories could be targeted towards different evaluation audiences. For example, those stories regarding profitability should spell out the tangible outcomes in dollar figures and be accompanied by background data, such as regional production benchmarks.

'I think it's pretty unclear to the uninitiated what the changes actually mean in tangible terms. It's hard to know what 1,000 kg of solids per ha means if you're not a dairy farmer. A lot of people who are interested in these stories are not dairy farmers. I think the story is good, but a bit is missing. A lot of the stories don't go far enough, they don't take you right through to what it really means.'

What Qualities of the Project Were Illuminated

Participants stated that the stories illuminated certain qualities of the project, such as:

- The importance of discussion groups.
- The complexity of the farming systems and how one thing is dependent on another.
- The interaction of the technical and social systems.
- The strength of the Target 10 team in being willing to select negative stories.
- The enthusiasm of some of the extension workers.
- That the Dairy Business Focus Program really seems to bring the Target 10 package together, to help guide farmers through their learning experience with the project.
- That the way the Central Executive Committee interpreted the stories demonstrates that the project is focused and is aware of what it is trying to achieve.

What the Stories Showed about Evaluation and Project Planning

Some of the participants at the round-table meeting discussed the dangers of concentrating on predicted outcomes alone. Farmers respond differently to the programs; and therefore, there is a need to have a mechanism (such as the Story Approach) to capture the whole array of outcomes. One participant went on to stress how it is very important to think through the wider ramifications of the intervention rather than just to examine whether objectives have been reached. Another concept discussed was that, in addition to farmers responding differently to the programs, farmers also enter programs with varying levels of understanding and skill. This is often missed in other evaluation approaches but could be accommodated in the Story Approach if enough background information were given with the story.

Another issue that became apparent from the discussion was that many stakeholders are not necessarily clear what it is they want from evaluation.

'An interesting spin-off for me was that it forced me to think about what I meant by evaluation. It started to push my thinking about what we were really looking for. And that was the spin-off that got me going. I started thinking about what are we really wanting here, and I realise that we didn't know.'

Each stakeholder is guided by his or her own values and experiences when interpreting the stories. This was illustrated by the fact that initially there was little agreement between the participants of the round-table meeting as to which stories best represented the sort of outcomes that they were interested in purchasing. However, it was evident that, through discussion about the stories, participants were able to acknowledge the different values that the other participants held. By bringing these different values to the table, it is hoped that the participants then gained a more shared understanding of which of the unexpected outcomes outlined in the stories were desirable. Another useful outcome of the round-table meeting was that the project learned more about what sort of evaluation information the participants (purchasers and key influencers) require from the project.

Part 2: Evaluation Stories from the Target 10 Project, May 1998 to May 1999

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First Domain of Change

Changes in Decision-making Skills

- 1a Turned a Loss into a Profit*
- 1b Send Him Packing
- 1c Becoming Independent
- 1d Finding Direction
- 1e Using DFPA
- 1f Empowered

* Selected at the round-table meeting as the most significant story in the domain of changes in farmer decision-making skills.

1a	Turned a Loss into a Profit
Name of person recording story:	Dave Cole, Target 10 extension officer
Region:	Gippsland
Date of narration:	Round 2 - August 1998
Who was involved:	Jenny Gray and the Buln Buln discussion group
Where did this happen:	On the farm

Selected at the round-table meeting as the most significant story in the domain of changes in farmer decision-making skills

What happened?

At a Buln Buln discussion group meeting, the group was checking out the pasture wedge and grazing management (both excellent) on a group member's farm. We were standing near the cows, which had a condition score of about 4.5, when the owners told us how they had run out of pellets the previous week. They said: 'We were without pellets for two days and the herd (120 cows) dropped 200 litres, so we lost a few dollars, but they came back up when we put the 2 kg of pellets per cow back in.'

Jenny Gray, one of the group members, wanted to look at this a little more closely, and she actually calculated with the rest of the group what the milk loss was. They found that they had lost 200 litres per day (divided by the 120 cows), resulting in a loss of 1.7 litres per cow (costed at 22 cents per litre = a loss of 37 cents per cow per day). Jenny then looked at the costs saved, which were 2 kg of pellets per cow per day, at 25 cents per kg (a saving of 50 cents per cow per day). So rather than making a loss (which the owners thought they had done), they had actually made a profit, in the region of 13 cents per cow, per day.

But Jenny and the group didn't leave it there. They explored other options as to how it may have been possible to reduce the milk drop. They concluded that, because of the good pasture management and the excellent pasture wedge, the owners could have increased the pasture allocation slightly. This wouldn't have lost the wedge or affected the farm's growth rate, and they could have made even more money during the two days they were without pellets.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

After the on-farm day, Jenny Gray said: 'Twelve months ago, I would never have taken the initiative to work through an issue like this with the group.' As a result of participating in the Grazing Management Program and the Nutrition Program, Jenny understands the issues and is using the knowledge (nutrition, pastures, economics) and skills gained (including the fact that she is more confident with the group) to question what is going on. But more importantly, she took the group along with her as she worked it out.

What difference has it made already?

It enabled everyone in the group to focus on the bottom line, on the dollars. The other group members were questioning their own situations and strategies as a result of going through this little exercise.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- I selected this story because it was about the bottom line (dollars).
- It shows how the farmer used good decision-making skills.
- While the other two stories were also good, they were about situations where change had only just started to occur, whereas, in this story, there was evidence of more established change.
- All these stories are about taking a strategic decision and following this all the way through the hierarchy of outcomes leading to eventual impact.

Feedback from the Round-table Meeting:

- It is about the bottom line and it shows the overall picture.
- It shows how knowledge can be used. It shows personal change, not just knowledge gained.
- It shows good learning, flexibility and group-work in action.
- It applies Target 10 practices through to benefits in terms of profit and production.
- It demonstrates the importance of discussion groups.
- It demonstrates knowledge of participants of the value of inputs, leading to profitability.

Your comments

1b Send Him Packing

Name of person recording story:	Jason Leeman, Target 10 extension officer
Region:	Northern Irrigation and Southern Riverina
Date of narration:	Round 1 - 19 June 1998
Where did this happen:	Pilot Soils and Fertilisers Program

What happened?

This story is about a bloke who did a Nutrition Program with us this year and later attended a Soils and Fertilisers Program where he narrated this story. He was relating to me how he felt very confident, very empowered, with the knowledge that he had gained after completing the course.

A week after the participants from the Nutrition Program visited his farm, a feed salesman came, selling a product that had 'special' vitamin-mineral supplements in it. The salesman made the claim that this feed contained more energy, and therefore the farmer could feed less of it to his cows and milk production would still increase. Using what he had learned in the Nutrition Program, the farmer was able to challenge the salesman and ask him what the energy level was and why his cows would perform better. The salesman replied that the extra energy was in the vitamins. Knowing this to be incorrect, the farmer felt quite empowered and sent the salesman packing.

He was very keen to share this with the rest of the group and felt that he wouldn't have been confident to do this if he hadn't have done the Nutrition Program.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

One of the aims of the Nutrition Program is to help farmers make more informed and cost-effective feeding decisions. By having this basic nutritional knowledge, this farmer was able to converse with the feed salesman and make an informed decision about what to buy or what not to buy.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- This story shows very strongly how a farmer has gained confidence.
- It's about empowerment too.
- It shows how farmers have the confidence to face the salesman and put into action information learnt during the program.

Your comments

1c **Becoming Independent**

Name of person recording story:	Jo Crosby, Target 10 extension officer
Region:	South West
Date of narration:	Round 2 - 24 August 1998

What happened?

This story concerns a farmer who attended the Soils and Fertilisers Program. He had moved to the area from New Zealand 18 months previously, had already done the Nutrition Program and has since done the Dairy Business Focus Program. We got talking about his cows and his fertiliser plan, and this resulted in a farm visit after I had worked out his fertiliser requirements based on his stocking rates.

Later he rang me, after he had re-worked his fertiliser requirements based on production and taking grain feeding into account. He just wanted me to check the final figure.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

This farmer has gone from asking me to calculate things for him to working things out for himself and becoming independent.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- This story was more clearly about change and about what Target 10 is trying to achieve than the other stories presented.
- I liked it, as it is about gaining confidence.

Your comments

1d	Finding Direction
Name of person recording story:	Gillian Hayman, Farm\$mart facilitator
Region:	Gippsland
Date of narration:	Round 4 - January 22 1999
Where did this happen:	After a focus group meeting
When did it happen:	2 December 1998 in the evening

What happened?

Eight past participants of various Farm\$mart programs had met with an independent facilitator to discuss and evaluate the program through a focus group technique. (While these were Farm\$mart participants, I felt that this story should be included in this process as the Farm\$mart Program is the same as the Target 10 Dairy Business Focus Program.)

Discussions had been going for over two hours and supper followed. I arrived after supper and was chatting. Only three of us remained and I felt that one lady (Mary) really wanted to tell me something. We got the niceties out of the way, then Mary told me that the course had impacted on her and she had since enrolled in VCE subjects and was going back to school! Mary had struggled in the workshop with her vision and seemed to lack direction and purpose. She was obviously very proud of her decision.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

From a lack of direction and purpose, Mary had considered her options and decided to do something for herself. Her attitude, direction and self-esteem appeared to have changed considerably. She attributed this to the Farm\$mart Program.

What difference has it make already or will it make in the future?

With improved self-esteem and direction, endless opportunities will open up.

Comments from Gippsland Regional Committee:

- Is this really a story about Target 10?
- Farm\$mart is the same thing as DBF, only it is for all farmers. She wasn't even a farmer; interestingly, she ran an earth-moving business. A neighbour (who was a dairy farmer) actually suggested that she go along. The dairy farmer recognised that she needed to gain direction. So there is another story behind that.
- We are talking about messages that are going to benefit dairy farmers in the dairy industry, and I think that this is a good message.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- It is really important that we are having impact on non-dairy farmers.
- Good to see that the Target 10 messages are getting into other areas and are being recognised.
- It is non-department, but we are not likely to pick this sort of story up by any other process.
- It meets one of the criteria of Target 10.
- It is a good message for the future of Target 10, the sort of thing we are aiming for.
- It is a new story that we haven't been exposed to before.
- I still have a problem with why this story should be included and am concerned as to whether it is appropriate.

Your comments

1e**Using DFPA**

Name of person recording story:	Pauline Corcoran, dairy farmer
Region:	Northern Irrigation and Southern Riverina
Date of narration:	Round 4 - 21 September 1998
Who was involved:	Two people in a farming partnership

What happened?

In early 1996, a member of a Target 10 discussion group floated the idea of the group all contributing to an analysis of their financial data. Some members participated in this initial year, and all have contributed in two subsequent years. The format of the analysis has been refined over that time to be now called the Dairy Farm Performance Analysis (DFPA) Program and involves two or three monthly meetings for presentation and analysis of the results. The group analysis is fascinating as it lets the farmers compare the profitability of various farming systems. From the analysis, the farmers in question set a target of \$2,000 effective farm surplus (EFS) per hectare; and actions were taken to work towards this goal, actions such as better feeding of cows to gain a higher peak, more monitoring of calf growth, setting a fertiliser program at the start of the season, and upgrading of drainage to lift pasture utilisation.

The farmers have used the 'DFPA-calculated' tonnes utilised per hectare to work out a feed budget for the current season and can thus plan their purchases of hay, grain, water and agistment.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

Planning is now based on actual figures.

What difference will it make in the future?

Figures are readily available to support budgets should expansion be possible; the setting of a monetary goal acts as a guide for actions, setting priorities and monitoring expenditure; the yearly analysis allows for cost comparison both within the enterprise and against other enterprises.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- This story is really good as it is written by a farmer.
- It has practical application.
- Planning and the group interaction led to a positive outcome.

Your comments

1f**Empowered**

Name of person recording story:	Julie Williams, Target 10 extension officer
Region:	Gippsland
Date of narration:	Round 5 - 1 April 1999
When did it happen:	Between September and March 1999

What happened?

At a review day of the Dairy Business Focus Program to share how people had gone with their planning, one of the participants, Barb, was very pleased with herself and feels that she is now more 'empowered'. She has employed a consultant to help with decisions and bring new information into the family. Her husband grew up on a dairy farm and feels he knows best. The third person (the consultant) has helped her introduce new efficiencies and ideas.

She has recently organised her own holiday, something she's never done before, and she's making decisions for herself. Her husband has not supported her before, but now she believes she can do it. There is information available that she now has access to and is now confident to get on with it. She is also keen to do the DFPA Program, with a bit of help, to help with analysis of the farm costs and to help with decision-making.

Why do you think this is a significant change? The interaction with the DBF group and the awareness the program created has empowered this woman to seek out assistance to be more proactive in her decision-making.

What difference will it make in the future?

It will help her make more effective decisions in her farming business and her life generally.

Additional note from Gippsland Regional Committee:

- I should add that Barb actually went on holiday on her own, but this is not a story about the family breaking up. She got a lot out of the program and is now actively getting out and following some of the plans that she made during the DBF Program.

Feedback from Central Executive Committee:

- This story shows a considerable degree of change has occurred due to the program. She was left empowered to do things that she could not do previously.
- I chose this story because of the magnitude of change.
- Before it seems that the husband made most of the decisions; now there are more people making decisions in the family. That's a huge change.

Your comments

Second Domain of Change

Change in On-farm Practice

- 2a I Used My Own Blend*
- 2b It's All Too Hard**
- 2c The Man from Kerang
- 2d Production Graphs Help Change Practice
- 2e Target 10 Makes a Difference

* Selected at the round-table meeting as the most significant story in the domain of changes in on-farm practice.

**Selected at the round-table meeting as the most significant story about lessons learned by the project.

2a	I Used My Own Blend
Name of person recording story:	Sue Scott, dairy farmer
Region:	Gippsland
Date of narration:	Round 3 - 6 November 1998
Who was involved:	Sue and John Scott
Where did this happen:	In the kitchen and office
When did it happen:	20 October 1998

Selected at the round-table meeting as the most significant story in the domain of changes in on-farm practice

What happened?

We were discussing ordering fertiliser for our summer crops. In previous years, we have actually used the product DAP. We had heard that the price of DAP at Pivot had increased, making it more expensive for us. So I said, 'I believe we can actually choose fertilisers that would have the same components as DAP, and we could ring the fertiliser companies and ask them to mix something for us rather than buying a prescribed fertiliser.'

So I went into the office and got my Soils and Fertilisers handbook, checked the components of DAP and then went through the product listings of each of the companies within the folder and found the two products that I wanted to mix together. John actually rang and we costed the fertilisers - DAP versus the mixture - and we saved \$400 on just one spreading!

Why do you think this is a significant change? If I hadn't done the Soils and Fertilisers Program, I wouldn't have even have thought of this. So now we have more fertiliser to go on our crops and more money to save, by just doing some thinking and decision-making before we went to buy the fertiliser.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- It is written in the first person. When I was reading it, I could visualise Sue talking about it. This made it seem really real.
- It was a farmer writing about her own experience, so this was a more personal, powerful story.
- This story related what Sue had learned in the Target 10 programs to the change that was made. In a lot of the stories, the connection between the change and Target 10 is implied but not described as being directly connected.
- It conveys the message: 'I used my own blend; but I also used my own brain.'
- The saving of \$400 made in this story was just about one application of fertiliser. For the whole summer crop, this would generate a saving of \$1,000 and even more over the whole year.
- This story could also be about profitability.

Feedback from the Round-table Meeting:

- The story demonstrates technical competence.
- The Target 10 program led to productivity/profit improvement. Good attribution to Target 10.
- The dollars make it real, knowing what makes a product - components and options.
- It appeared to be more about common sense.
- They were really using the knowledge and skills gained during the Target 10 program.

Your comments

2b	It's All Too Hard
Name of person recording story:	Greg McGrath, dairy farmer
Region:	Gippsland
Date of narration:	Round 4 - 22 January 1999
Where did this happen:	Bena
When did it happen:	Winter 1998

Selected at the round-table meeting as the most significant story about lessons learned by the project

What happened?

A bloke did the Grazing Management Program and went back to his farm and started to implement what he had learned. At the start of the season, away he went, doing everything right. All of a sudden the weather goes crook and he gradually went back to his own system because he just didn't feel confident enough to go through with the job. His rotation shortened up, he ran out of feed, and he eventually was back farming the way he used to.

It's a story in reverse. But that's what happened.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

Farmers have to be confident to carry the practice change through difficult seasons. While the farmer believed the Target 10 messages enough in the first place, he didn't have the confidence to stay with it. He needed support at a critical time. And I have heard this same story before; it is a fairly common scenario.

What difference could it make in the future? Extension officers should try to find out when farmers are struggling. Some might need a bit more support.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- It is a negative story, but it gives great evidence of why we need an integrated approach.
- It also says that one program can't do everything.
- • We need a whole lot of other ways in addition to technical information.
- This story reinforces the need for the support system.
- This story is not negative about Target 10, but a very powerful story about how people need to change and how they need the confidence to move forward.

Feedback from the Round-table Meeting:

- I think that it makes a very clear point. Stories like this could allow us to really adjust the programs and arguably have a very big impact.
- It is interesting, as I have heard exactly the same story from wool and grains and dairy. So I think it is an issue far bigger than just Target 10, which represents a tremendous learning opportunity.
- There is probably more learning in this than any of the other stories.
- It is exactly the same for the extension officers who are trying to change the way they do their job. And when they feel they are right out on a limb and doing it hard, the easiest thing to do is to revert to somewhere safe and stable, to where they were before. And we have an obligation to those people as well because of exactly the same things that were in that story.

Your comments

2c The Man from Kerang

Name of person recording story:	Jason Leeman, Target 10 extension officer
Region:	Northern Irrigation and Southern Riverina
Date of narration:	Round 1 - 19 June 1998
Who was involved:	Jason and a farmer
Where did this happen:	He related this story over the phone
When did it happen:	18 June 1998

What happened?

This is a story about a bloke who did a Grazing Management Program and a Nutrition Program with us this year. He was very keen; and even when he had to miss one day of the course he sent a video camera with a friend, so that he could catch up on what he had missed! I have had a bit to do with him since then, and we have discussed some feeding decisions that he could make. Yesterday, he rang me up to report that he had sat down and balanced out a ration for his dry cows and had sent his feed away to be feed tested. On the basis of the feed test results, he made a decision on what he was going to feed his cows. He had also costed out the feeds, on a cents per MJ basis, before he purchased them, therefore making a more informed decision about what feed he was going to purchase. He was very excited about taking up Target 10 advice to weigh some hay bales. After discovering his hay bales weighed only 260 kg a roll, not 350 kg, he adjusted his ration balance for the cows. Prior to this exercise, he was considering buying more hay, but he was now able to make a decision that he did not need to purchase any more.

He was very happy with saving some money. He has estimated that, since the end of the Nutrition Program, his cows have put on at least half a condition score.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

It is example of using what has been learned on the course and applying it on the farm. As a result of applying what he has learned, he has won out in two ways: firstly, he has saved some money in feeding his cows; and secondly, his cows are in better condition.

What difference will it make in the future?

If individual farmers can win out in such a difficult season, it shows how making informed feeding decisions can really make a difference.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- This story shows how important knowledge can be to farmers.
- This farmer really went out of his way to get the information from a program.
- He managed to save money in the short term and has improved the condition of his herd.
- This is a strong example of applying the principles of the program and achieving positive short-term impact from it.

Your comments

2d Production Graphs Help Change Practice

Name of person recording story:	Rob O'Connor, Target 10 extension officer
Region:	Northern Irrigation and Southern Riverina
Date of narration:	Round 2 - 9 July 1998
Who was involved:	Rob O'Connor, Mary Ward, and a farmer
Where did this happen:	Around the home kitchen table
When did it happen:	July 1998

What happened?

We visited a farmer who had completed the Grazing Management Program. In the course of discussion, he pulled out his 1996/97 and 1997/98 production graphs. He told us that, while he was doing the course, he realised that he should have been on a longer grazing rotation for that time of the year.

He stretched out his rotation (15 days to 20 days) with the result that he fed his cows more pasture and produced considerably more milk than the previous year, as he showed to us with his production graphs.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

A simple, inexpensive change in farm management has resulted in improved production. It demonstrates that Target 10 does provide information that works.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- I like this story. It shows that people are doing their documentation and understanding what they are seeing; they are keeping records and have related it to the grazing rotation.
- It would have been better if the story had explained more fully about how he had achieved the increase in production.

Your comments

2e	Target 10 Makes a Difference
Name of person recording story:	Lindsay Jarvis, dairy factory manager
Region:	North East
Date of narration:	Round 5 - 15 June 1998
Where did this happen:	Dederang
When did it happen:	May 1998

What happened?

Part of my role as the local director of our cooperative is to 'pop into' Target 10 discussion groups in our area. There are eight groups in the North East, so often it is a few months between visits. Last month I visited the Dederang group on their visit to Brian's farm. Brian had always experimented with new ways of farming, with mixed success. This time he was bursting with enthusiasm. He claimed this was the 'best year (autumn-winter)' for 40 years. 'Never seen grass grow like this'. 'Cows in great condition'. When I reflected on the day I believe a lot of the credit is due to Target 10 and its service delivery:

- Brian was feeding his milking herd (very late in lactation).
- He had sown and over-sown many of his 'old' pastures with new varieties/species.
- He had used much higher levels of fertiliser and planned on additional fertiliser depending on the advice from the group.
- The dry cows were block grazing top-quality feed topped up with purchased hay.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

None of this is earth-shattering or new, but for the first time it all seemed to be part of a package that was working, and the enthusiasm and pride was clear for all to see.

What difference has it made already or will it make in the future?

Continue to integrate feed management topics in discussion groups with farm walks.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- This is an important story because of who it is written by.
- It is about the whole farm change, not just one component of it.
- It is about the impact of more than one program.

Your comments

Third Domain of Change

Change in Profitability or Productivity

- 3a I'll Not Be Milking Cows When I Am 55*
- 3b Feed Planning for Profitability
- 3c Saved Me \$2,000!
- 3d Doubled Herd's Late Lactation Production
- 3e Pasture Management Leads to Saved Cost of Buying Feed
- 3f Using Dairy Business Focus

* Selected at the round-table meeting as the most significant story about changes in profitability or productivity.

3a I'll Not Be Milking Cows When I Am 55

Name of person recording story:	Mark Saddington, dairy farmer
Region	Gippsland
Date of narration:	Round 2 - 21 August 1998
Who was involved:	Mark and family
When did it happen:	1998

Selected at the round-table meeting as the most significant story about changes in profitability or productivity

What happened?

We did the pilot Dairy Business Focus Program in March; and for the first time, my wife came along to something. We were able to look at our farm as a business, not just as a farm. As a consequence of doing the program, we did a few sums and made a few decisions. We worked out that we can afford to have her on the farm, and she has left her job at the bank. We will generate enough income on the farm to make it more profitable for her to be here. The kids will benefit from seeing her a lot more, and they won't be in day care. So far this year, this has made the calving so much easier, we have a joint input, and it has been such a turn around in my lifestyle. It has been so good.

We actually went to the accountant yesterday to get some financial advice on how we should be investing off-farm. He was amazed that what we are doing is treating the farm as a business. I said: 'Now everything that we earn on this farm is going to be put away so that I am not milking cows when I am 55 years old!'

We have got a debt-reduction program running for the next 12 months, but after that the money will be channelled to off-farm investment. I want to retire young enough to enjoy what we have been working towards for the last 20 or 30 years. My boss is 77 and is still working on the farm. If I am that fit when I am his age, I want to be touring around the world.

It has opened up our lives. We are now looking at off-farm investment, as capital investment on-farm is not that great. We are not going to invest in new machinery but are going to invest in contractors to do any work we can't do. There is no point buying new machinery, as it depreciates. Instead, we will buy shares and invest off the farm.

This proves that you can farm on 120 cows, you don't have to get big, and you don't have to milk a lot of cows. It just depends what you do with your money. If only we could educate the younger farmers to think ahead instead buying the largest SS Commodore or the latest dual cab. I followed the same track for a few years until we sat down and worked out where we were going and where we could be. We made a few mistakes in the past, but the past is the past.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- This story generated lots of discussion. But is it really about profitability or quality of life or changes in farm practice?
- The general consensus was that there needed to be more detail in the story for it to be clearly about profitability.
- It is a really powerful story that shows considerable change.

Feedback from the Round-table Meeting:

- The story showed strong evidence of attitudinal change, leading to self-improvement and goal setting. These people will be high achievers and reap the rewards. They will be good role models for others who desire similar rewards.
- This approach is okay, but it isn't necessarily a prescription for others.
- It has some good messages, but it hasn't got all the answers.
- This is a very good example of achieving the goal of the DBF Program: i.e., getting strategic thinking/planning followed by farmer action.
- I liked this story as it highlights the diversity in personal goals and ways to get there.

Your comments

3b Feed Planning for Profitability

Name of person recording story:	Greg O'Brien, Target 10 extension officer
Region:	Gippsland, Target 10 extension officer
Date of narration:	Round 3 - 27 October 1998
Who was involved:	Rob Grant
Where did this happen:	On Rob's farm in Glen Alvie, South Gippsland

What happened?

Rob (a dairy farmer at Glen Alvie, South Gippsland) used a Target 10 feed-budgeting computer program to assist in making profitable decisions about feeding, stocking policy and fodder cropping. This year he investigated the most profitable means of feeding his milkers and young stock. Keeping all the stock at home would result in a feed bill of \$40,000 (fodder conservation, summer crop, grain and nitrogen). Getting agistment for young stock at \$4/hd looked cheaper, but a leased block at \$120 per acre would halve the total costs (lease plus more silage cut and less grass fed). It also allowed high-quality carry-over cows to be kept rather than culled.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

It will save \$20,000 in feed costs. The computer program enables a range of options to be assessed quickly and easily. It is better than the past practice of rough on-paper estimates or instinct.

What difference has it made already or will it make in the future?

It will help them to manage their debt, it will ease the cost/price squeeze, and Rob continues to use the program to assess options, such as profitability/suitability of a maize crop, ability to feed more cows, when to use nitrogen and supplements and their cost. As a result, he saved \$20,000 this year.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- The other stories were not about changes in profitability.
- This story follows the whole decision-making process through and comes up with a figure.
- It has actually gone to the point where he has used this tool. There is a bit of decision-making stuff there, too, but the bottom line is there.

Your comments

3c **Saved Me \$2,000!**

Name of person recording story:	Frank Mickan, Target 10 extension officer
Region:	South West
Date of narration:	Round 1 - 10 June 1998
Who was involved:	A farmer in the Soils and Fertilisers Program
Where did this happen:	Heywood
When did it happen:	April 1998

What happened?

A pilot Soils and Fertilisers Program was presented at Heywood in south-west Victoria. Some calculations were done on day two; and by day three, a very 'switched-on' farmer had gone home and calculated the costs of nutrients that he had calculated that he needed for his farm. He had quotes from at least two fertiliser companies, and he calculated that a blend (from his own figures) would save him \$2,000.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

This man had obviously grasped the concepts of the calculations, shown by his ability to calculate the costing and levels of nutrients in the fertiliser blend.

What difference has it made already or will it make in the future?

After two days of the program, this farmer had already saved himself \$2,000 and will continue to do so in the future (although the amounts may vary). He can now check on the consultant's recommendations.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- I like it as it shows how a farmer applied what he had learned in a program to save him money.
- It shows that the information that is given in the programs does work.
- There is also an issue here about how the programs can improve the confidence of farmers and so help them to help themselves (empowerment).
- This story also illustrated how the farmer changed his behaviour.

Your comments

3d Doubled Herd's Late Lactation Production

Name of person recording story: Jason Leeman, Target 10 extension officer
Region: Northern Irrigation and Southern Riverina
Date of narration: Round 2 - 9 August 1998

What happened?

I was talking to a dairy farmer at a discussion group in August 1997. He was an elderly farmer (60+) who milked 60 cows on a small farm with his wife. He had attended the Target 10 Nutrition Program in May 1997. He told me that he wished the program had been around 20 years ago. He was able to double his herd's late lactation production (compared to previous years) from what he had learned at the course.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

I think this is significant because there was a dramatic production response, and it involved a farmer who doesn't fit the stereotype of the 'typical' Target 10 farmer.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- Again with the story there was insufficient detail to say whether there really were significant changes in profitability. It seems really hard to attribute profitability.
- This domain is also about changes in productivity, and this story does demonstrate that, but we can only assume that there were also changes in profitability.

Your comments

3e Pasture Management Leads to Saved Cost of Buying Feed

Name of person recording story:	Mary Ward, Target 10 extension officer
Region:	Northern Irrigation and Southern Riverina
Date of narration:	Round 4 - November 1998
Who was involved:	Darren and Leanne Welsh
Where and when did this happen:	Discussion Group 11/98 and phone call 12/98

What happened?

At a discussion group on the Welshes' farm, I asked Darren and Leanne about the hay they'd just cut. Darren said that last year he didn't cut any hay. I asked why they'd cut so much this year. Leanne said: 'This spring the pastures came from nowhere, Darren had picked up so much at that pasture course. Even Mum (farm owner) said she couldn't fault his grazing management.'

Darren said: 'We cut 600 big bales now and some lucerne will be ready to cut again in December. Other years we've spent \$20,000 on hay; this year we've been able to cut two years' worth of hay for a \$3,000 contractors' cost and some extra fertiliser, which, in the long term, is better for the soil and land anyway.'

From the Grazing Management Program, Darren improved his grazing rotation and fertiliser understanding and use.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

Through better pasture management, the farm didn't need to buy hay and saved over \$30,000.

What difference has it made?

Better quality pastures. Better managed pastures. Money saved.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- Mary rang this person to follow up the story in light of the feedback about the need to get more information about the stories from the last the Central Executive Committee meeting.
- Saved \$30,000. Now, that's a nice round figure!
- It is even more significant as they are getting water from the Goulburn River irrigation system and therefore are under severe water restrictions this season.

Your comments

3f Using Dairy Business Focus

Name of person recording story: Lucy Peddie, dairy farmer

Region: South West

Date of narration: Round 5 - 14 April 1999

When did it happen: April 1999

What happened?

My husband and I are share farming, and our three-year term is up in April. We made a decision last year that we would lease a farm. After doing the Dairy Business Focus Program, we put a business plan together, and we sent it to three banks, proposing what we wanted to do and how much money we needed. We went to two of those banks when we knew definitely how many cows we wanted to buy. And we got the loan.

A similar couple did the same thing, but they paid a consultant to do a business plan. It cost them \$3,000 to do their business plan, and they went to several different banks before they got the loan. So it saved us \$3,000! We actually had banks ringing us too!

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

-
- Good, as it is written by a farmer.
 - It is more about financial benefit than profitability, but it is still a good story.

Your comments

Fourth Domain of Change

Other Changes

- 4a Knowledge is Power*
- 4b The UDV and Target 10
- 4c The Most Useful Information Ever Received
- 4d Family Starts to Communicate
- 4e Culture Change
- 4f Liberation and the Bank Manager
- 4g Target 10 Listens to Farmers

* Selected at the round-table meeting as the most significant story about other types of change.

4a	Knowledge is Power
Name of person recording story:	Matt James, dairy farm employee
Region:	Gippsland
Date of narration:	Round 5 - 15 March 1999
Where did this happen:	Foster
When did it happen:	1996

Selected at the round-table meeting as the most significant story about other types of change

What happened?

In 1996, I was working on a 500-cow dairy farm and had no input to the day-to-day running. But I wanted to have more input. I decided to do something about it, so I attended the Target 10 Grazing Management Program followed by the Nutrition Program. After completing these courses, I had enough knowledge to start making decisions, such as measuring growth rates and adjusting rotation lengths. Gaining this knowledge led me to start a new job on a 550-cow dairy farm where I am presently managing all feed requirements.

I have been able to maximise pasture consumption to 10 t/ha; and, with 1 to 2 tonnes of grain fed, this will achieve a production of 1,000 kg of solids /ha on 850 mm of rainfall per year. I walk the farm weekly to measure growth rates, allowing me to adjust the rotation to suit the growth rate. I fill the gap with grain so as not to waste pasture. When harvest comes, I can use this method to cut maximum fodder without sacrificing the cows' pasture.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

These changes, which I have been able to apply to the day-to-day running of the farm, have made the farm more efficient. I am also a more efficient employee now, and I have seen what I can achieve by furthering my studies. Last year I completed a diploma of agriculture (dairy farm management), and this year I'm studying an advance diploma (dairy farm management). My future plan is to manage the whole day-to-day running of a larger scale dairy farm in every aspect.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- This story is a good example of one person going on to do more learning and expand his horizons.
- It is good, as it is written by a farmer.
- It is about building confidence, and the story even got down to changes in productivity.
- It really shows the full picture.

Feedback from the Round-table Meeting:

- Good positive story about practical learning.
- Real change directly related to having done Target 10 programs (they look good in the resume) with measurable results as well.
- Substantial behaviour change as a result of the Target 10 program. But the profit/productivity impact is not so clear.
- Great story. Self-improvement outcomes, the subject has strong commitment to the industry and the desire to achieve. These are the people that will make the industry move forward.
- To me it is raw efficiency; that's what really gets me. It is almost the most you would expect to get from a program. The guy is really ready to roll and he has got the right attitude.

Your comments

4b**The UDV and Target 10**

Name of person recording story:	Mike Boyde, Target 10 extension officer
Region:	South West
Date of narration:	Round 1 - 9 May 1998
Who was involved:	A group of farmers at a UDV meeting
When did it happen:	April 1998

What happened?

The UDV had a meeting just up the road at Glenorminston College, and one afternoon a chap called Peter Marriott stood up and said: 'You guys have to realise that Target 10 has changed the culture of the industry.' They looked at him a bit funny and they said; 'What do you mean, Peter?'

He replied: 'Well, 10 years ago people would never talk about building a "feed wedge", and Target 10 has introduced the concept of a feed wedge. Whether it is a farmer who participates in Target 10 or not, this is the way people have started talking and it has ended up becoming a part of the normal culture.'

Why do you think this is a significant change?

This comment coming from a leader in UDV is pretty interesting. Pretty rare, too! We have to recognise that we can't be sure if Target 10 has caused this change in culture on its own. But it is significant that a leader in the UDV is of the opinion that this change in culture was caused by Target 10 and therefore also recognises that the impact of Target 10 is broader than just the programs that we are running.

What difference has it made?

If people are thinking about feed wedges, then the original purpose of Target 10, which was to increase pasture consumption by 10%, is actually beginning to be achieved. Target 10 is being recognised as a contributing agent in this process. This signifies that there is a long-term impact: it doesn't happen over night. To me, it reinforced the fact that we have to keep the Grazing Management Program rolling and that it is a very significant thing that we have to keep a focus on.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- This story illustrates how the wider farming community has embraced the concept of the 'feed wedge'.
- It is significant because it shows impact beyond the immediate participants of the program.
- It shows impact of the project at the community level.
- As the conceptual framework states, Target 10 believes that, for change to occur, the community must be supportive of change. This is an important illustration of how the community has embraced change initiated by the Target 10 project.

Your comments

4c The Most Useful Information Ever Received

Name of person recording story:	Toby Leppin, dairy farmer
Region:	Gippsland
Date of narration:	Round 2 - 24 June 1998
Who was involved:	Farmers in a discussion group
Where did this happen:	In the car on the way home from the group
When did it happen:	May 1998

What happened?

After our last discussion group meeting, we had a chat in the car on the way home. Most of the people in the discussion group have now done the Nutrition Program. They said it would have to be the most 'useful farming tool or information that they have ever obtained in the whole time they have been farming'. Some of these farmers have been farming for over 20 years.

We all agreed that the Nutrition Program was the most useful information. Now we know why our cows are skinny! You talk to most farmers and they would probably rate this as the most important type of information they have taken in. Before, it was very 'stab in the dark' with regard to what you were feeding and what was happening. Now, it is all just there, and it is very clear cut. We have recently had a couple of seasons where we have had to put these skills into practice, because things have been difficult in terms of growing pastures.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- This is about change, how they have put skills into practice.
- I am concerned about the comment about 'skinny cows'. This was originally said as a bit of a joke only.

Your comments

4d Family Starts to Communicate

Name of person recording story:	Nadine Markham, Target 10 extension officer
Region:	South West
Date of narration:	Round 3 - 7 October 1998
Who was involved:	A participant from the Camperdown DBF workshop
When did it happen:	16 September 1998

What happened?

During a Dairy Business Focus workshop in Camperdown, a female participant become upset about the way her family business operated. She, her husband and her parents-in-law all worked on the same property. She was upset because she had no idea of their financial position, and her immediate family had a very small living allowance. She claimed that, after 20 years of living like this, of having no financial control, let alone any idea of the financial position of the farm and being left out of strategic decision-making, she had had enough. (She told a story of how she thought the farm had no money, when her parents-in-law bought the farm next door and virtually paid cash for it, with no consultation with her or her husband.) I tried to encourage her to contact a rural counsellor, as did other participants, because she was very upset. I then spoke to a rural counsellor and told her about this farmer's situation and invited the rural counsellor to the next meeting. To my surprise, the farmer did not speak to the rural counsellor at that meeting.

To my further surprise, this troubled dairy farmer submitted her Dairy Farm Performance Analysis (DFPA) input form with some other DBF participants. At this next workshop, I then approached this farmer and asked why she hadn't spoken to the rural counsellor. She said that she had initially been frightened to stir up trouble and make the situation worse. She then explained that, to complete the DFPA input document, she had to call a family meeting and get her husband and parents-in-law to help complete the sheet, as she had no idea about the financial situation of the farm. At that meeting, she was amazed at how willing her parents-in-law were to explain the costs and income. She began to see that her parents-in-law were prepared to share information with her and her husband, but that she had never asked them to!

We then talked about trying to arrange regular family meetings and that, if her parents-in-law thought they were a waste of time, to find excuses, such as filling in the DFPA form, to hold such meetings. She realised that she didn't need to threaten to leave if things didn't change and that, by being pro-active, she could solve her own problem.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

For the past 20 years, this farmer had been unhappy with her situation. After a three-day workshop and given the practical task of having to complete a physical and financial DFPA input form, the family has started to communicate.

What difference has it made already or will it make in the future?

The farming relationship with her parents-in-law had got to point where she could tolerate it no longer. This relationship has now become more sustainable/tolerable and, with improved communication, not only should all concerned be happier, but this may also lead to changed farm management practices and an increase in profit.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- There is lots of emotion in this story. It has a very personal approach. It was a gripping story. It had a beginning, middle, and an end!
- People reading this story got involved in the story, and it was well written.
- The lady in this story has found out that she can communicate! This is about a change in communication. But it is also about potential change in a lot of other things.

Your comments

4e**Culture Change**

Name of person recording story:	Joy Coulson, Target 10 extension officer
Region:	South West
Date of narration:	Round 4 - 27 January 1999
Where did this happen:	Warrnambool Target 10 discussion group
When did it happen:	11 January 1999

What happened?

Active members of the Warrnambool Target 10 discussion group (15 farmers, a group that has been formed for two years) met to discuss their previous year (1998) as a group and to decide on their future. There was every chance that this group would decide to disband due to poor numbers at some meetings. However, during discussions, group members said that they had gained much from the opportunity to ask questions and to learn in a non-threatening environment - the confidence to challenge and to be challenged on their farm operation - and from the social aspect of the group. The group decided to go on a 'membership drive' to maintain the discussion group in 1999.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

The dairy farmers, along with Target 10, have provided and developed a culture and environment that farmers value and that they are therefore committed to.

What difference has it made already?

The farmers in this group have developed relationships, developed their knowledge, gained increased confidence to continue to learn and question farm management ideas and theories and thereby improve their decision-making ability and on-farm practice.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- Positive value put on gaining confidence to be challenged etc.

Your comments

4f Liberation and the Bank Manager

Name of person recording story:	Mike Weise, Target 10 extension officer
Region:	South West
Date of narration:	Round 5 - 13 April 1999
Where did this happen:	South West
When did it happen:	Autumn 1999

What happened?

A young couple who were unhappy on the family farm came to a Target 10 Dairy Business Focus Program. During the three months of the program, they decided to 'bring to a head' their unhappiness about the lack of control they had on their family farm. They were not able to convince their aging parents to let go. So they decided to go it alone as share farmers. They went to a bank, secured a loan, negotiated a share agreement and are now over the moon at their new independence.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

The bank supported the loan application because of the high-quality application, which I think was partly due to the program. The DBF Program that they attended included a workshop on how to effectively fill out such applications, and they used some of the lessons learned to fill out this application.

What difference has it made already or will it make in the future?

In the last few days of the program, this couple had big smiles on their faces. It liberated them to make difficult, operational and tactical decisions based on the vision they had devised (which included independence).

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- The value of this story depends very much on how it is interpreted. I interpret it by putting an emphasis on the big changes that have occurred due to deep thinking.
- I reckon that this is where the future of the industry is - in those sorts of people challenging the way we do things - especially business relationships.
- Some at the regional committee opposed this story as it appeared to be about splitting a family up, but it could have liberated both families.
- One of the biggest business barriers in the farming sector is that young people are not given a go. This story has exciting implications.

Your comments

4g Target 10 Listens to Farmers

Name of person recording story:	Gerard Herrick, dairy farmer
Region:	Northern Irrigation and Southern Riverina
Date of narration:	Round 5 - 30 March 1999
Where did this happen:	Rochester
When did it happen:	September 1998 to February 1999

What happened?

The Nanneella/Timmering discussion group is a very active and committed group of dairy farmers who believe that the Dairy Farm Performance Analysis is a very important tool in assisting us to successfully manage and adapt our businesses.

When we assembled in September 1998 for the presentation of our 1997/98 figures, a large number of changes had been made to the DFPA. These alterations were in many areas, including the format of presentation, workbooks, graphs and the driving emphasis (i.e., return on assets).

We were very disenchanted with this reconstruction of what we considered was previously an extremely useful tool. The group believed it was not as useful as it once was and that we would not continue to use it, if some areas could not be re-modified. We came away from the presentation with the resolve to find out why changes had been made, by whom and for what reasons.

This led to lengthy e-mails and phone calls between NRE staff and myself. I was trying to explain why we believed the modifications were unsatisfactory from a farmer's point of view and why we would like to see alterations. NRE staff were explaining to me why the changes had been made and by whom and at whose request.

After much discussion, it was agreed that the changes that were made were too extensive and more farmer consultation could have been appropriate. It was agreed that a compromise could and should be reached. Adjustments were made to the DFPA and presented to the group in February 1999. The program was very well received by all in attendance. It is now a program that can be strongly recommended to other farmers.

Why do you think this is a significant change?

The significance of all this is that it proves that the people at Target 10 are prepared to listen to 'grass roots' farmers and are prepared to include their ideas and thoughts in projects and programs that are directly related to the needs of the farmers.

What difference has it made already or will it make in the future?

The difference that has already been made is a program (DFPA) that is more relevant and useful to all dairy farmers across the state. I have also been given the faith that any ideas or concerns I have in the future for anything concerning Target 10 programs will be heard and listened to and, if appropriate, taken up. For the future, the benefits will be that all farmers within our group should have confidence in Target 10 in believing that they will develop and deliver programs that are constructed not only with the farmers in mind but also by the farmers and because of the farmers. As a group, we are pleased that our voices were heard and acted upon. Thank you.

Feedback from the Central Executive Committee:

- This is a really powerful story.
- This shows how important negotiation and communication are.
- It shows how important it is to consult with farmers before enacting change.

Your comments

Part 3: The Story Approach

The Tale Behind the Story Approach

The Target 10 dairy extension project aims to develop the Victorian dairy industry through programs that improve farm viability and sustainability. Information from research is extended to farmers through extension programs which include courses, discussion groups, newsletters, target graphing, feed budgeting, comparative analysis, field days, focus farms, demonstrations, farm visits and other media. In a concerted effort towards evaluation since its inception in 1992, the Target 10 project had completed extensive benefit-cost analysis; and individual programs have been evaluated against their objectives. However, in 1998, there was still a feeling that some of the project impact and outcomes were not being captured.

When the economic analysis came back with a figure of \$62 million net economic benefit to the dairy industry (Appleyard 1996), a typical stakeholder response was 'Well, that's great, but I want to know who has got that money and what effect this is having!' The project purchasers (funders) in particular wanted more information than this figure could give them about the impact that the program was having on individual farmer's lives.

A large dilemma faced by the project management was how to evaluate the overall non-economic impact of the various initiatives and activities. In other words, 'was the value of Target 10 more than the sum of its parts?' They also sought to understand the unexpected outcomes. Messages and pleas for help were placed on Evaltalk², and considerable research was carried out. All the evaluation experts seemed to come up with different answers, but none of these seemed appropriate.

At around the same time, a student (Jessica Dart) was searching for an extension project as a case study for PhD research and wished to test a novel approach to participatory evaluation and monitoring: through the use of stories. While working in India on a farming systems development project, Jessica had heard of this 'Story Approach', which she felt could provide the 'rich picture' of the overall project impact and would complement the other evaluation efforts.

After introducing the Story Approach to key project stakeholders, an agreement was made that the approach would be implemented across the whole project for a period of one year. While many sceptical voices were heard at the start of this 'experiment', there is now growing enthusiasm for the approach; and already several other extension projects across Australia are implementing versions of this approach.

The Approach Explained

The 'story', or 'evolutionary', approach was developed by Rick Davies in Bangladesh in 1994 (Davies 1996) but, as far as we know, had never been formally used in Australia. It is a participatory approach, as all the levels (committees in this case) of the project are involved in deciding the sorts of change to be recorded. The approach is a form of 'monitoring and evaluation' for program management and is designed to run throughout the life of a program.

There are three main parts to the approach (as practised in the Target 10 dairy extension project):

- Establish domains of change.
- Set in place a process to collect and review stories of change over a 12-month period.
- Conduct a secondary analysis of the stories.

Stage One: Establishing Domains of Change

In the first stage of the process, the evaluation audience (Target 10 stakeholders) identified three 'domains' of changes that they thought needed to be monitored at the project level; for example, changes in profitability. These domains were established using the Delphi technique, which is a form of interactive (postal) surveying that utilises an iterative questionnaire and feedback and provides participants with an opportunity to revise earlier views based on the response of other participants, until some desired level of consensus is reached. Unlike 'performance indicators', these 'domains' of change are not precisely defined but are left deliberately fuzzy; and it is initially up to field staff to interpret what they feel is a change belonging to any one of these categories.

The survey was sent to 150 stakeholders of the Target 10 project. In the two rounds of the process, response rates of 70% and 50%, respectively, were achieved.

² 'EVALTALK' is an international e-mail discussion group that is affiliated with the American Evaluation Association and has over 1,500 subscribers.

The domains of change chosen for monitoring are listed below;

- Changes in on-farm practice (received a total of 60 votes).
- Changes in profitability (57 votes).
- Changes in decision-making skills (16 votes).
- Any other significant types of change.

During the last round of the Delphi process, several people pointed out that it was important to monitor all 12 domains of change offered. For this reason, the fourth domain of change was left 'open' to allow participants to include stories that concerned issues or events that were not covered by the three specific domains.

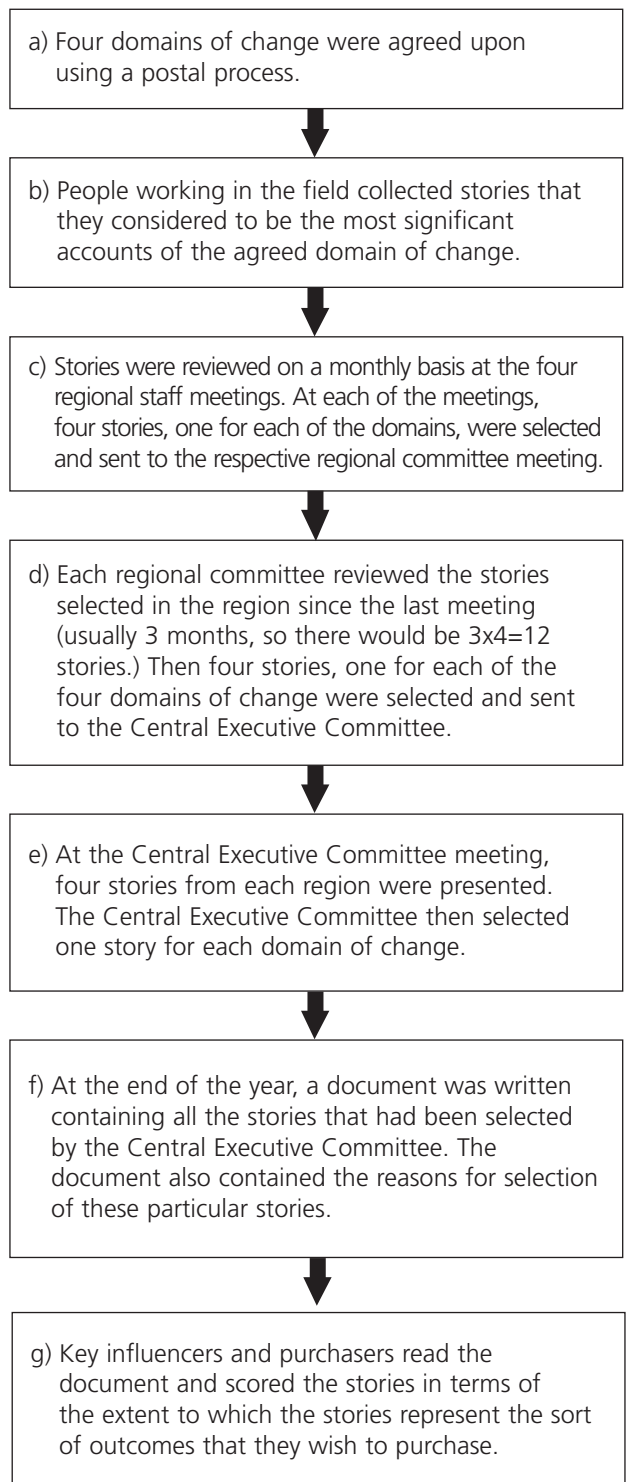
Stage Two: Collecting and Reviewing the Stories of Change

The next stage involved the collection and review in each region of stories of significant change (according to the defined 'domains' of change that had been nominated using the Delphi process). The stories were collected by those most directly involved (e.g., farmers, extension staff, and other collaborators). Each level of the Target 10 project hierarchy (i.e., the regional project committees and the statewide Central Executive Committee) was then involved in reviewing a series of stories and selecting those that they thought were the most significant accounts of change.

The various committees were required to document which stories they selected and what criteria they used. It is intended that the monitoring system should take the form of a slow but extensive dialogue up and down the project hierarchy each month. At the end of the trial period, a document was to be produced containing all the stories that had been selected by the Central Executive Committee over the period of the year. (This booklet represents that document). The stories are accompanied by the criteria that the Central Executive Committee used to select the stories. Finally, a panel of 'key influencers' and 'purchasers' was asked to review the stories selected by the Central Executive Committee and select the stories that they considered to be the most significant accounts of change (the process is further elaborated in Figure 1).

Stage Three: Secondary Analysis of the Stories

In addition to the production of a document containing selected stories and readers' interpretations, the story process itself is monitored and additional analysis is carried out.



* At each stage of selection, the reason that the particular stories were selected must be recorded

Figure 1. Main steps of the Story Approach

Part 4: Findings

Despite the fact that the readers are encouraged to interpret the significance of the stories themselves, a basic secondary analysis has been carried out to describe the characteristics of the stories.

How Many Stories Were Collected and When?

Over the year, 134 stories were recorded and documented. The story review process has occurred at five Target 10 Central Executive Committee meetings and over 10 regional committee meetings.

Who Were the Storytellers?

The three major regions of the project all contributed approximately the same number of stories to the process (see Table 2). When the mean number of stories per team member for each region is considered, it becomes apparent that there is little difference between the four regions.

Table 2. Percent of stories per region

Region from which the stories originated	Per cent of total	Mean number of Stories per staff
Gippsland	46%	3.8%
South West	39%	3.9%
Northern Irrigation	38%	3.5%
North East	9%	4.5%

The majority of the stories were written by staff from NRE (who were mostly Target 10 extension staff.) However, of the 24 selected stories a higher percentage were written by farmers than in the total group (see Table 3). Feedback from the Central Executive Committee explains how farmer stories were perceived to be more powerful than stories written in the third person. It is also interesting to note that four out of the five stories nominated as most significant by purchasers were also written by farmers. Clearly, stories told directly by farmers are valued by many of the project stakeholders.

Table 3. Origin of the stories

Written by	Per cent of total	Per cent of selected
NRE staff	77%	62%
Farmers	13%	30%
Other collaborators	10%	8%

Which Programs Were Mentioned in the Stories?

As Table 4 illustrates, the stories cover all the programs, and 10% of them concern farmers who had attended multiple programs. However, there is a higher proportion of stories about farmers who had attended multiple programs in the selected stories than from the total group. Feedback from the Central Executive Committee suggested that stories that were about consolidating learning through various programs were especially valued. This is reflected in the selection by the Central Executive Committee of a proportionally higher number of stories authored by farmers who have attended multiple programs.

Table 4. Programs mentioned in the story

Target 10 program involved	Per cent of total	Per cent of selected
More than one program	10%	20%
Discussion groups	15%	8%
Grazing Management Program	18%	17%
Nutrition Program	17%	13%
Dairy Business		
Focus Program	16%	21%
Soils and Fertilisers		
Program	15%	8%
Dairy Farm Performance		
Analysis	9%	13%

What Were the Stories About?

En masse, the stories present a picture of many farmers implementing part or all of the Target 10 message and of farmers gaining from the programs in unexpected ways. Some of the common themes running through the stories are issues such as feeling more in control of the business, feeling empowered to challenge the consultant, and gaining increased family communication after the identification of mutual goals. There were also multiple stories about the far-reaching benefits those farmers new to the area or to the industry can gain through the Target 10 activities and networks. Table 5 lists some of the themes that have been the subject of multiple stories. The most frequent theme described in the stories (11%) concerns how farmers experienced an increase in production after adopting Target 10 practice

It is also clear from reading the stories that the storytellers value the concept of empowerment and of farmers thinking for themselves rather than using a recipe book approach. In total, 34% of the stories make some mention of increased control, independence or empowerment.

The stories cover a whole range of topics and subjects. To gain a picture of the spread, the stories have been categorised into broad themes and arranged using Bennett's hierarchy of outcomes (see Table 6). However, it should be pointed out that each story may contain several themes, so the stories have been categorised by the theme that rates highest in the hierarchy of outcomes². For example, a story categorised as practice change will generally also contain themes such as changes in knowledge and attitude, which rank lower in Bennett's hierarchy of outcomes.

It is clear from Table 7 that stories that are situated higher in Bennett's hierarchy of outcomes are more likely to be selected by the Central Executive Committee. The round-table meeting participants also allocated high scores to the stories that contained themes relating to the higher levels of the hierarchy (Level 7 or 6). Thus, it can be inferred that most stakeholders of the project value the stories that are about behaviour change and consequences of this change.

Table 5. Description of themes that have been the subject of multiple stories

Main theme	Per cent
Change to Target 10 practice leads to increased productivity (pasture growth /utilisation, milk production or condition score)	11%
Positive reaction to the Target 10 project (useful information, unbiased information or meeting farmer needs)	9%
The importance of discussion groups and sharing information	6%
Change to Target 10 practice leads to saving money	6%
A change of practice after making systematic decisions about operational issues rather than using rules of thumb	5%
Empowered to make a strategic long-term decision	5%
Identification of operational problem using skills acquired in a program	5%
Systematic operational decisions lead to feeling more in control of business	5%
Empowered to deal with external experts through skill acquisition	5%
Evidence of farmers taking up on-farm practices that were recommended by the project	5%
Overcoming negative attitudes toward the project or project messages	4%
Farmers new to the industry gain valuable network through the project activities	3%
Gaining a new understanding of the importance of the basic principles of pasture management	3%
The importance of learning the think rather than following a recipe approach	3%

²Bennett describes a chain of events assumed to characterise most programs in extension (Bennett 1977). He uses this chain of events to depict a hierarchy of objectives and evidence for program evaluation. Bennett lists seven levels of goals in extension and claims that it becomes more difficult to evaluate at higher levels of the hierarchy, as it becomes more difficult to show that changes at these levels are the result of extension activity and not of other factors.

Table 6. Grouping of stories by theme using Bennett's hierarchy

Level of Hierarchy	Description of theme and number of stories belonging to each category (N=127)								Total
Level 7: Consequences of change	Quality of life increases 1 (1 selected)	Goals achieved in career steps 3 (2 selected)	New farmers to the industry gain valuable network 4	Improved pasture growth/ consumption 7 (1 selected)	Increased milk Production 6 (2 selected)	Production maintained in harsh conditions 1	Increased condition score of herd 3 (1 selected)	Money is saved 8 (5 selected)	33 (12)
Level 6: Change behaviour	Evidence of farmers taking up T10 recommended on-farm operational practices 5		Empowered to make a strategic business decision 7 (2 selected)		Changed practice in terms of communication within family 2 (1 selected)		Changed operational practice after systematic analysis of figures rather than rule of thumb 5 (2 selected)		19 (5)
Level 5: KASA Skills and empowerment	Identifying operational problem through acquisition of new skills 6	Calculations done independently 3 (1 selected)	Calculations based on accurate figures rather than approximation - lead to breakthroughs 4	Empowered to deal with external experts through skills acquisition 6 (1 selected)	Systematic operational decisions made lead to feeling more in control of business 6 (1 selected)	Women gaining more recognition in family through skill acquisition 2			27 (3)
Knowledge and awareness	New knowledge becomes incorporated into the prevalent culture 2 (1 selected)	Gained a new understanding of importance of pasture management 4		Gained deeper technical knowledge of operational process 1	Gained deeper understanding of strategic thinking and business planning 2	Importance of learning how to think rather than following recipe 4		13 (1)	
Attitude	Overcoming negative attitudes toward the program 2				Attitude towards an element of the Target 10 message 3				5
Level 4 Reactions	Project provides useful, good information 4	Project provides unbiased advice 2	Project is meeting farmers needs 2	Importance of team work 2	Importance of on-farm days 2	Importance of discussion groups 7 (1 selected)		19 (1)	
Other	Lessons learned: farmer ownership 1 (1 selected)	Lesson learned: about confidentiality 1	Lesson learned: limits of the program 1	Lessons learned: needing figures to solve problem 1	Lessons learned: what can happen with only partial understanding 1	Lessons learned: coming unstuck in harsh seasonal conditions 2 (1 selected)	Lessons learned: the need for one to one support 1	8 (2)	
Other	Evidence of the spread of Target 10 messages and practices to non-Target 10 participants 3								3

Table 7. Level of Bennett's hierarchy

Bennett's level	Per cent of total	Per cent of selected
7	26%	50%
6	15%	21%
5	35%	17%
4	15%	4%

To Which Level of Bennett's Hierarchy Do the Stories Correspond?

Level 7, Consequences for the target group - 26% of stories

In total, 26% stories were concerned with higher level consequences of the Target 10 project. The largest proportion of these stories concerned increases in production after adopting Target 10 practices. This was expressed in terms of increased milk production, improved pasture growth, improved pasture utilisation, or increases in the condition score of the herd. There were also several stories told of how farmers had made financial savings after putting into practice knowledge that had been gained during Target 10 programs.

In addition to issues of productivity and profitability, there were also some stories that concerned overall improvement in family quality of life and the achievement of articulated life or career goals. Another unexpected consequence told in three stories was that the project had provided an invaluable social and business network for farmers new to the industry or to the geographical area.

Level 6, Behavioural changes in the target group - 15% of stories

Stories categorised into Level 6 concerned behaviour change but did not explicitly mention the consequences of these changes. The changes described in this category ranged from operational changes to long-term strategic changes based on considerable planning. There were also stories of changed practice with regard to communication between family members.

Level 5, Changes in knowledge, attitude, skills, motivation and group norms - 35% of stories

The most frequent themes in this category referred to issues such as empowerment and feeling more in control of the farm business as a result of increased knowledge and skills. Several stories demonstrated skills acquisition in terms of how farmers had been able to solve technical problems using the skills that they had gained from attending Target 10 programs. Several stories were about farmers gaining a much deeper understanding of why certain basic operational practices (especially pasture management) are so important.

Level 4, The farmer's opinion about extension activities - 15% of the stories

Fifteen per cent of the total stories were not specifically about change but concerned farmers' positive opinions of project activities. It is striking that seven of these stories were independently written on the importance of discussion groups. Discussion groups are clearly a most valued event.

Other, 9% of the stories

Some of the stories did not fit within the framework that was adapted from Bennett's hierarchy. This was especially true of some of the stories about lessons learned. Three of the main messages that came out of these stories were that:

- Farmers may need more support in implementing new practices during difficult seasonal conditions.
- Farmers with only partial knowledge of the Target 10 practices can run into serious problems.
- Farmers should be consulted before making major changes to the programs.

Part 5: Discussion

Impact of the Target 10 Project

En masse, the stories present a picture of many farmers implementing part or all of the Target 10 message and of farmers gaining from the programs in unexpected ways. The most frequent theme for a story (and also the most frequent theme of selected stories) concerned farmers who have changed to Target 10 recommended practices and gained an increase in production. The second most common theme for a story concerned farmers who had adopted Target 10 practices and, as a result, experienced short-term financial savings. These findings are consistent with the aims of the project and support the conclusions of the overall evaluation report (NRE 1999) that the Target 10 practices do have an impact on increased production and short-term profitability.

However, in addition to stories concerning production and profit outcomes, many stories concerning other types of change were collected and subsequently selected by the Target 10 committees. The major themes running through these stories were that farmers, after attending Target 10 programs, felt:

- More in control of their business.
- Empowered to challenge the consultant.
- That they had gained increased family communication after the identification of mutual goals.
- Empowered to make strategic long-term decisions.
- Able to make systematic decisions about operational issues rather than using rules of thumb.
- Able to achieve goals in career steps.

Impact of the Approach on Organisational Learning

This 'experiment' has been viewed as a positive learning experience by those who participated most actively in the process (the members of the regional project committees and Central Executive Committee). It is planned to continue the process (albeit in a modified form) into the next phase of the Target 10 project. Also, it is likely that the method will be picked up by other projects within NRE.

The process of collecting and analysing stories has seen farmers, collaborators and NRE staff sitting together at committee meetings discussing and interpreting qualitative data, casting evaluative judgements and negotiating about what constitutes a significant change. As the process went along, it was noticeable that the stories were improving and that the storytellers were getting more skilled at capturing impact and presenting the stories.

They were also learning what sorts of themes were valued by other project stakeholders. After six months, the stories seemed to be more 'finished' and more about change in the specified domains. The implication from this is that, not only was the project learning to run the process, but also the storytellers were responding to the feedback from the committees. The feedback itself also showed signs that the review committees were also becoming more focused in terms of what they valued in a story. It appeared that both the storytellers and the committee members (farmers, educators, industry representatives, and NRE staff) were getting better at conceptualising impact.

Did Issues Covered in the Negative Event Stories Get Acted Upon?

The majority of the stories (90%) are about positive change. However, several negative stories were selected by the regional committees and, therefore, did get presented and discussed at a Central Executive Committee meeting.

In total, 10% of the total stories collected concerned some element of 'bad news'. The key areas for project learning from these stories were:

- Farmers may need more support when implementing new practices during difficult seasonal conditions.
- Farmers with only partial knowledge of the Target 10 practices can run into serious problems.
- Farmers should be consulted before making major changes to the programs.

There was no formal system for implementing changes in the project as a result of these stories. Feedback from the Central Executive Committee suggested it was extremely beneficial to read and discuss bad news stories. It is hoped that, in the next phase of the Target 10 project, a system will be incorporated into the continuous improvement component of the project. However, all the stories were read widely; and it is quite possible that these lessons have been stored in the organisational memory system of the project to inform future action.³

³Recent research using stories to aid organisational learning has shown that people are much better at remembering a story than a list of bullet points. For this reason, it has been suggested that storytelling within organisations can foster an increased organisational memory capacity (Shaw et al. 1998).

Advantages of This Approach

The evaluation stories yield information that would have been missed through a conventional performance indicator approach. Performance indicators cannot easily measure empowerment. It is incredibly difficult to predict which indicators should be used to monitor change in order to gain the full spectrum of social impact. In addition to this, the fact that 25% of the stories are not specifically related to a single program provides information regarding change that would have been missed if evaluation were only conducted on a program-to-program basis.

In total, 26% of the total stories collected deal with outcomes, both intended and unintended, that can be classified as measuring 'the consequences of change' (Bennett's Level 7), which are typically found to be hard to measure and difficult to attribute to project intervention though conventional evaluation methods.

Conclusions

While not underrating the power of this methodology to produce data that describes the impact of Target 10 both in relation to specific changes and overall impact, it is suggested that the most significant impact of this 'Story Approach' lies in the intangible area of organisational learning. Specifically, there have been noticeable improvements in terms of gaining a richer and more shared understanding of what the project has achieved and what is valued as a positive outcome by the project. Further research is currently being conducted on the impact of the Story Approach on the project.

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