

SEARCH CRITERIA

Model	Model A: Empowerment Model
Industry	Olives
Focus/Level	Industry
Outcomes	Building management Skills
Special Interest Groups	Other

1. PROJECT TITLE:

Peel Olives Feasibility Study (1997)

Reviewer Fionnuala Frost and Debra Pearce

2. FUNDERS:

The project was funded by the Government of Western Australia through the Peel Development Commission, Agriculture Western Australia and the Rural Adjustment and Finance Corporation (RAFCOR), the predecessor to FARMBIS

3. PROVIDERS:

The Peel Olive Association, with the assistance of staff from Agriculture Western Australia and the Peel Development Commission, managed the identification of needs, contract development and letting, and the appointment of consultants to investigate the identified needs. Consultants Ernst and Young, with Dr Stan Kailis, were appointed to the project. Peel Olive Association member Dr Sally Gomes-Trent assisted with report management, final preparation and editing.

4. KEY CONTACTS:

Mike Baker, President, Peel Olive Association, bakerm@inet.net.au

5. INDUSTRY/ISSUE/GEOGRAPHY

The Peel Region comprises the Shires of Murray, Waroona, Boddington, Serpentine-Jarrahdale, and the City of Mandurah, in Western Australia. At the time of the Peel Olives study, there was limited olive industry development within the region, although interest was growing. A lack of local information was affecting decision-making in relation to investment in the industry.

6. PROJECT CONTEXT

The Peel Olives project emerged as a result of growing enquiries to Agriculture Western Australia (AWA) (now the Department of Agriculture) for information relating to the growing of olives in the Peel Region, south of Perth. In 1997, AWA, in conjunction with the Peel Development Commission, whose roles include the fostering of new industries in the region, agreed to work together to assist prospective (and current) olive growers to investigate opportunities for the industry.

This was within the larger context created by the establishment by the two agencies (and other groups in the region) of the Peel Rural Land Use Taskforce, which looked at varying opportunities for improving the position of agriculture within the region and considered options for using rural land and facilities. The needs and ideas of both existing and potential landholders in the region were considered by the Land Use Taskforce. Prospects for a local olive industry fitted within this scope.

7. PROJECT NICHE

At the commencement of this project, there were no regional olive associations operating within Western Australia, and although scientific research into the industry was occurring, extension was relatively broad. Further, information related to specific growing requirements under Western Australia conditions was very limited and anecdotal. Numerous “generic” enquiries for information relating to the olive industry were received by AWA, although the ability to provide more than “generic” responses/information was limited by a lack of local information and an inability to work with potential growers on a one-to-one basis, as some may have liked.

Rationale for the development of the Peel Olives study was thus two-fold, with the agencies and the group members having complementary goals. For the agencies involved, the aim was to bring together interested community members to facilitate the investigation of the industry. For the group members, who were involved for a range of personal reasons and interests, the Peel Olives study aimed to identify the “ideal” growing requirements for olives and to compare those with the features of the Peel region, in order to assist with decision-making at the individual or farm level.

In short, the agencies focused on process, the group focused on outputs, and both the group and the agencies aimed for sound outcomes for industry development.

8. PHILOSOPHY/APPROACH

The approach taken by AWA and the PDC was to facilitate empowerment and adult learning by encouraging potential growers to take an active role in the industry research process. By “intervening” in the industry development at an early stage, the agencies provided a foundation for a whole-of-chain approach to olive production in the region.

The facilitation approach included making explicit from the outset the limited role of the two agencies in supporting the industry research and development, and the finite time and resource commitment of the agencies. This meant that from the beginning, the participants in the project were aware that the role of the agencies was to assist in establishing the group and in the sourcing of preliminary information. The agencies also supported the group throughout the process of appointing consultants to undertake a feasibility study for olives in the region, and through managing the consultants.

9. RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING STRUCTURES

A \$20,000 research project was commissioned by the Peel Olive Association with support from the Peel Development Commission and Agriculture Western Australia.

Consultancy firm Ernst and Young were appointed to the project with the assistance of University of Western Australia olive research Dr Stan Kailis. Peel Olive Association member Dr Sally Gomes-Trent assisted with the report production in order to ensure the study was reflective of group needs, and able to be easily read and understood by those involved in the Peel Olive Association.

10. PROCESS/METHODS USED

The establishment of a steering committee to facilitate the study of the opportunities for an olive industry in the Peel Region resulted from a public meeting to discuss olives in the Peel Region, held in Mundijong in November 1997. Individuals interested in working together to investigate the industry were asked to nominate.

Thirteen community members initially nominated to join the steering committee. This group opted to form the Peel Olive Association prior to the feasibility study being

undertaken, which contributed to group strength and a project ownership. The Association membership covered a range of interests, including small, hobby-scale landholders and large corporate ventures.

The feasibility study addressed issues of climate, soil types, irrigation options (given regional conditions), harvesting, processing and marketing considerations. All of these issues were considered within the context of resources available to the region and/or in Western Australia. Further aspects of the study included potential regional development implications and employment opportunities.

The choice by the steering committee to form an incorporated association and work closely together from the outset contributed to other activities and outcomes. The 1999 Australian Olive Conference was secured and successfully run from the Peel Region, at the instigation and under the guidance and support of the Peel Olive Association. This was the first time this conference was held on the west coast.

11. IMPACTS TO DATE:

In excess of 30,000 olive trees have been planted in the Peel and immediate surrounds, following the feasibility study and using the advice of the study and the knowledge which the Peel Olive Association have collectively gained. For a number of reasons, large corporate plantings have taken place elsewhere in WA, but the report has encouraged existing Peel landowners to consider olives as a viable crop.

The concepts of shared knowledge and participatory learning have provided a platform upon which the Peel Olive Association was established, and from which its strength has been maintained over recent years.

12. EFFECTIVENESS:

The effectiveness of the approach taken by AWA and the PDC was examined by AgInsight in a 1999 review of the process. Principles (for participatory approaches to new industry development) which emerged from this study included:

- “Public meetings and field days will attract individuals with a specific interest in a new industry.
- Members of a new industry have a personal, and ideally some vested interest in the industry.
- Shared vision and optimism of the potential of olives as a new agricultural commodity provides important interconnectedness between members.
- Personal satisfaction, a feeling that contribution is being made to furthering the industry and that the group is well supported are important factors that maintain and possibly increase membership.
- A shared vision provides the common ground from which the Association makes its decisions. Diversity of approaches and opinions within the context of the shared vision provides for dynamic and scoping discussion.
- Government agencies will often be in a position to provide resources such as venues and office support to new industry groups. Providing these services supports a group in its formative stages.
- Partnerships between government agencies potentially bring new perspectives, group support and ideas to new industry groups.”

From the review undertaken, and from considering the relationships developed between Peel Olive Association and other sectors of the Australian olive industry, it appears that the approach taken has been successful. AWA and the PDC were able to withdraw strategically but in an open manner from the group, while still being

available when needed to assist with advice. The outcome has been a strong group not dependent upon agency support for its survival.

13. PROJECT DOCUMENTATION AVAILABLE:

Peel Olives Feasibility Study, prepared by Ernst & Young, Dr Stan Kailis, Dr Sally Gomes-Trent, for the Peel Olive Association.

AgInsight, 1999, *Peel Olives Process Evaluation Report*, Prepared for Agriculture Western Australia.

14. ISSUES:

15. COMMENTS/CONCLUSIONS:

The approach taken by AWA and the PDC involved facilitating participative learning then easing back to enable the grower group to go forward on its own merits and skills. The Peel Olive Association has grown in strength, partly due to this approach, and partly due to the enthusiasm of the participants and a willingness to approach learning from a cooperative perspective. The whole-of-chain view to this new industry, adopted from the outset, has, it appears, contributed to sensible investment decision-making in the region.

16. REVIEW METHODS:

Review of relevant literature and personal history of involvement in the Peel Olives project. Information provided by Mr Mike Baker, President, Peel Olive Association for this report is appreciated.