

The Link

FarmLink Newsletter

Vol 35. - Spring 2013



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Dear Members,
Welcome to October and our Spring edition of The Link. We trust you find it a good read. Inside you'll find reports on a number of our recent events including the Mixed Farming Forum, Research and Innovation Expo, Barellan Field Day and a very successful WA Study Tour - Learning the Best from the West.

Grab your pens and calendars - there's also some details about upcoming events and calendar dates for next year. Yes, it is less than three months to Christmas!!!

We'd particularly like to remind you of our **Annual Dinner** being held next week at the Junee Reefs Hall. Our Dinner over the last few years has become a bit formal, so we've altered the format a bit this year, hoping to make it a more relaxed and enjoyable event. This is our last FarmLink event for 2013, so please take the opportunity to maybe book a table, but certainly come along, catch up with some mates and let your hair down before all the work of hay cutting, windrowing and harvest sets in. I believe there are a group of WA travellers who are looking forward to the catch-up opportunity. We're also hoping the out-of-town venue makes it a little easier to attend. Bus options are a possibility if there is demand - please let us know if you'd like us to help you organise one from your area.

2013 has been another successful year for FarmLink - we certainly seem to be busier than ever and at this stage all of our trials look great. I'm really hoping for some great research outcomes for you in the New Year.

Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre looks a real picture at present, and I'm particularly pleased with the way our hard work out there has paid off. The Centre is attracting a huge amount of interest from across the country, and many see it as a great model for the future of agricultural research - a true public / private / commercial partnership that is working well. Thank you to all involved, particularly Temora Shire Council, our Management Committee and of course, the researchers.

This issue of The Link is a somewhat sad one for me as I prepare to leave FarmLink at the end of the month. After almost four exceptionally busy years in this role, I'm looking forward to a change of pace and direction with a move back to being my own boss, farming at Coleambally. I also hope to continue to do some consulting and contract work off-farm, and if we don't start to see an increase in irrigation water allocations soon, I may be spending more time off-farm than on-farm!!

I am particularly proud of what we have achieved as a team over the last four years, building FarmLink into the business it is today. I believe it is well situated to advance to the next phase of its development, and I am happy to be handing the reins over to a capable new CEO, Cindy Cassidy who will commence duties in late October.

I will treasure the relationships built, opportunities created, memories stored and friends made for many years to come and will be a very interested observer of where FarmLink goes in the future. It has been a demanding role, and I have had to deal with some personal challenges in the time, but its also been great fun and extremely satisfying to see the business develop. I wish all staff, the Board, members, sponsors, contractors and partners every success in the future and thank you all for your support over that time.

I look forward to catching up with many of you over the next month or so - and there's another good reason to come to the Annual Dinner!!!

Best wishes
Jon Cobden, CEO

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Managing Risk

WHAT NUMBERS DO YOU USE WHEN YOU'RE FORECASTING YOUR BUSINESS PERFORMANCE?

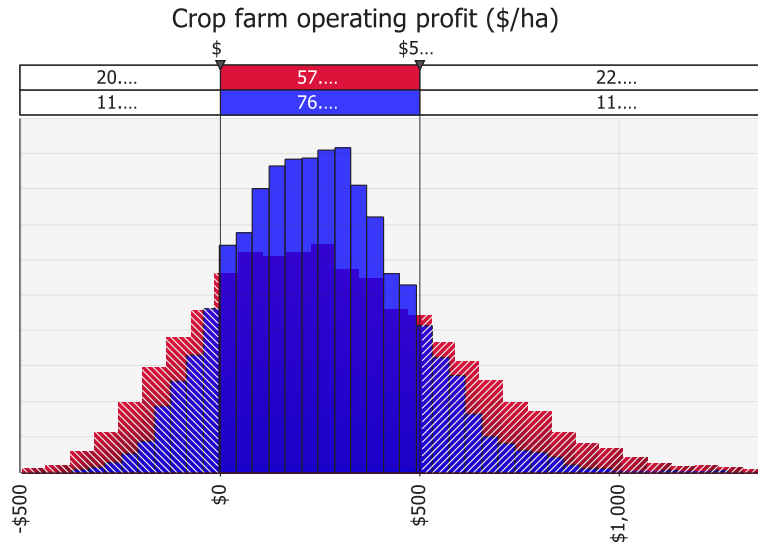
Most of us, including your bank manager, use averages - the average rainfall, the average yield, the average price ...

The problem with using averages is that we rarely, if ever, get them. They are just half-way between the extremes of this country - the 'land of droughts and flooding rains'. In fact if we get results somewhere in the middle we usually don't have too many problems surviving. It's the outliers that hurt us; those extremes of low and high profitability. We all know the consequence of a low profit year, but do you plan for what happens in a high profit season? Some of the worst decisions we make are in these extreme income years. Both high and low. Agree?

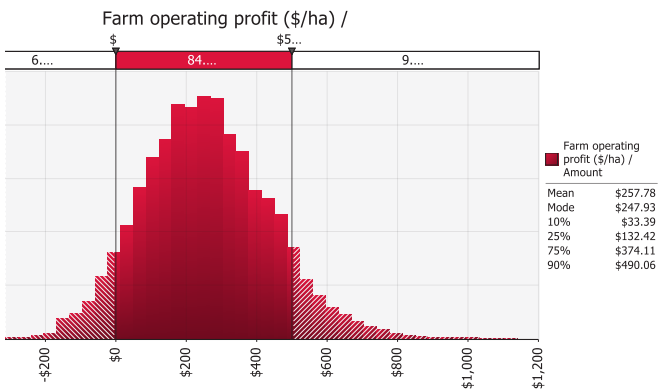
These high and low areas represent risk in your business - good risk as well as bad risk. So, what is your appetite for risk? And does it change? You bet!

Do you truly understand risk management, or like most of us, just hope to use the right balance of enterprises to come up with a good outcome? More isn't necessarily better- you can't be a jack of all trades, and whilst every extra enterprise presents synergies, it also creates trade-offs for the whole business.

A number of our members have been working with FarmLink staff on a risk measurement tool that can take in up to 32 different profit variables in a farm business - yield and price for sure, but also things like grain quality, market opportunity, topdressing decisions, lambing percentage, wool cut, supplementary feed costs, timing of lambs to market and so on.

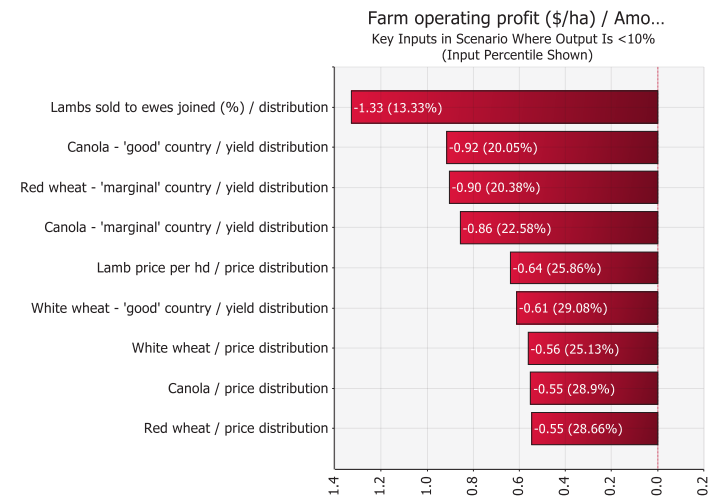


We've been able to identify the most risky variables for each farm business we've studied, and that has created quite a few surprises for those farmers involved. For some it has confirmed what they thought they already knew, but now we've been able to put some odds around it - how often the event is likely to occur, and what impact it is likely to have when it does. Now we can set about making some management plans around these events, and therefore better risk-assuring the business.



So, wouldn't some better questions at the start of the year be:

- what are the riskiest enterprises I have in my farming business?
- how can I make those enterprises less risky?
- which decisions that I make throughout the year are the riskiest?
- what can I do about making better decisions in these areas?
- how can I increase and take better advantage of the upside risk in my business?



We think this represents a great opportunity for farming businesses in the FarmLink region, and we'd love to hear from you if you'd like to help us further explore and ground truth this tool. **Please contact Jon or Tony at the FarmLink office.**

News and Events



FARMLINK RESEARCH ANNUAL DINNER AND FAREWELL FOR JON COBDEN, CEO

You would have received your invitation to the FarmLink Research Annual Dinner recently. This event is now a joint event as we farewell FarmLink's CEO, Jon Cobden.

Date: Friday 11th October, 2013

Venue: Junee Reefs Hall, Junee Reefs Road.

Time: 7.00pm

Cost: \$60 per person incl pre-dinner drinks, canapes, two course dinner and drinks.

RSVP: Judith Neill P: 02 69244633 or email farmlink@farmlink.com.au

ARIAH PARK DISTRICT FIELD DAY - AUGUST 5TH

52 farmers, consultants and reps attended an information session and district bus trip of the Ariah Park and Ardlethan districts. The event was a combined initiative of the Mirrool Creek Landcare Group, FarmLink Research, Landmark, Elders and A.L. Chalmers and Sons. The morning session, held in the Jets football club rooms, saw an overview of a current soil moisture probe project on the properties of Matt Dart and Michael Denyer. Paul Bruest from FarmLink Research presented on the practical applications of moisture probe information and Yield Prophet.

Nitrogen application was discussed by John Angus, CSIRO, and Jim Laycock, Incitec. James Hunt, CSIRO, finished the formal session covering increasing yield with early sown varieties and the impacts of grazing livestock on soil and crop yields.

The bus trip started at Charlie Clemson's, Ardlethan looking at advanced early sown Bolac. Established soil moisture probes and yield prophet were reviewed at Paul Griffin's also at Ardlethan.

A CSIRO/FarmLink Research project at Geoff Tidd's on stubble management and a DPI project on pasture trials were also inspected.

The day officially concluded at the Ariah Park Bowling Club. The organisers of the day would like to thank the Ariah Park Central School for catering the event and the presenters, landholders, representatives and agronomists who attended.



MIXED FARMING FORUM - TEMORA, JULY 31ST

A very successful Mixed Farming Forum was held in July at the Temora Ex-Services Club. This event was generously supported again by the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee CMAs.

We have been pleased to see this event develop to be one of the key events on mixed farmers' calendars, and feedback from this year's event was again very positive. We look forward to hosting the next one in 2015.

Mixed farming is about managing risk by including a number of different enterprises in the one business. We generally think a mixed farm needs to involve livestock, but a mix of any enterprises, including off-farm income streams all help to build robustness into the business. We've got some really interesting work coming up around understanding risk and managing it better, so please keep an eye on this space.

Key presentations on the day include:

John Kirkegaard - Grazing Canola,

Sally Martin - Understanding and Managing Variability in Livestock

Phil Graham - Feed Budgeting in Drier Times

Cam Nicholson - Risky Business

Nigel Phillips - Opportunities with new Pasture Species and Practices

Ed Clayton - Omega 3 and Gender Ratio of Lambs

Neil Clark - The Future of Mixed Family Farming



News and Events

FARMLINK RESEARCH EXPO - TEMORA, SEPTEMBER 11TH

The Temora Agricultural Innovation Centre hosted the annual FarmLink Research EXPO giving local farmers the opportunity to interact with researchers displaying a variety of cropping, pasture and farming systems.

A great group of farmers turned out to see the trials looking their best on what was a perfect sunny day.

The trials on the Centre relate to farming in southern NSW and it is rare to find this number of trials in one patch.

More than ten research companies were involved this year where the morning session involved three groups being led on a tour of trial plots. The EXPO was officially opened by former deputy premier Ian Armstrong. Federal Member for Riverina Michael McCormack also addressed the crowd and got involved with tours of trials.



Pictured above: Federal Member for Riverina Michael McCormack with Jon Cobden and Agriculture students from St Anne's Temora.



LUCKY GATE PRIZE WINNER - FARMLINK RESEARCH EXPO

All attendees at the FarmLink Research EXPO had the chance to win 1 tonne of wheat seed proudly donated by Pacific Seeds. Pictured above is Karl Schilg from Pacific Seeds congratulating Darryl Kitto. Darryl receives 1 tonne of Pacific Seeds latest wheat variety Lancer.

WA STUDY TOUR

Thirty six enthusiastic FarmLink members recently spent eight days touring the Central Wheat Belt area of Western Australia. This tour was funded by a GRDC Industry Development Award, FarmLink Research and the tour participants themselves.

Highlights of the tour included visits to the Australian Herbicide Resistance Initiative at UWA, the Dryland Research Institute and Managed Environment Facility at Merredin and, as always several visits to farmers across the region to engage with and understand their businesses, their issues and of course to kick the tyres of any machinery they had lying around!

We were fortunate to stay one night at New Norcia, a Benedictine community north east of Perth. Some of us stayed in the actual monastery - and it didn't appear to have any new cracks visible in the morning!! The scale and grandeur of the architecture in this community was amazing and all tour participants particularly enjoyed the night - a great place to visit and stay if you're touring the West. More information: www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au/

Rain followed us wherever we went and we seemed to get wet at least once a day - the group has been tentatively booked for a re-visit by WA growers in late spring to ensure their crops get enough rain to finish! We were all hopeful we'd be able to bring some of it back east as well.

Feedback from the group has been very positive and we were all impressed with the ingenuity and persistence of the farmers we spoke with in overcoming some quite major challenges within their farming systems.



Pictured above and below: Enthusiastic WA Study Tour Participants.



News and Events

BARELLAN CROPPING GROUP FIELD DAY - SEPTEMBER 20TH

Growers and advisors from the Barellan district gathered for a field day to inspect local trials and demonstrations. FarmLink have been supporting the development of the Barellan Cropping Group and there has been a great response so far. The day's itinerary was compiled by David Elwin, AgnVet Barellan, Barry Haskins and Matt Ryan, Ag Grow Agronomy and Paul Breust, FarmLink Research. 50 growers attended the day to inspect pasture species trials, a pre-emergent and post emergent herbicide matrix demonstration, grower paddocks split between disc and tyne seeding equipment and a run down on the latest moisture probe technology and how it might be applied to management decisions.

A really novel approach to minimising risk from early "dry" sowing was demonstrated by local farmer Phil Bourchier. His approach was to twin sow Canola and Wheat dry into the paddock with the view to removing the least favoured species depending on how the seasonal conditions developed. His approach was to use low cost farmer saved seed and use his first herbicide application to remove the unwanted crop. He removed the canola from his wheat and now has a very healthy wheat crop established from 25kg/ha of seed. The day concluded with refreshments at the Barellan bowling club.



Many thanks to the Savages, Phil Bourchier, Dave Elwin, Barry Haskins, Matt Ryan, Angus MacLennan, and everyone who supported the field day.

FarmLink Project Update

CROP SEQUENCING

Crop Sequencing is a GRDC funded project in collaboration with CSIRO and NSW DPI. This project is evaluating the benefits to various cropping systems from using a range of break crop options. Trial sites are located at Wagga Wagga, Lockhart, Eurongilly and Junee.

The trial site at Eurongilly is in the second phase of determining the efficacy of a range of systems on ryegrass control in a high resistant population.

A critical message to come from this and other work is that one year of control is not enough to reduce seed bank numbers, see table below. In plots with total control in 2012 there were on average 20 viable seeds/m². This would compute to approximately 6,000 seeds/m² from 20 viable plants in 2013.

Pictured left: High input wheat following Lupins 2012.
 Pictured middle: Wheat on wheat low input.
 Pictured right: Project steering committee members inspecting ryegrass populations at the Eurongilly trial site

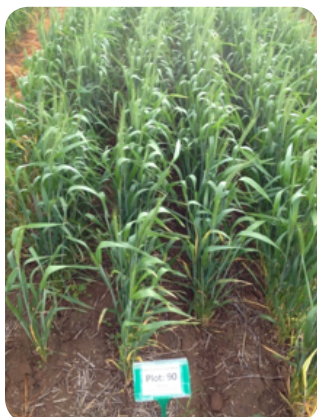


Table 1: Ryegrass seed bank and costs for crop system options.

Treatment	Herbicide costs \$/ha	Ryegrass panicle numbers No./m ²	Seed bank residue Seeds/m ²
Untreated	0	1042	n/a
Wheat low cost	56	504	487
Lentils	67	215	95
Wheat high cost	142	78	66
Lupin	65	43	67
Canola low cost	62	32	46
Canola high cost	46	0	14
Fallow	35	0	29
Lupin BM	68	0	15
Pea BM	66	0	22
Isd		147	89



A Future Vision for the Australian Sheep-Wheat Belt

THE 2013 HOWARD ORATION - Emeritus Professor Ted Wolfe



Scientists expect to be understood by farmers and it is important for them to provide a reciprocal understanding of the current circumstances of farmers, for each to benefit and the environment to remain healthy. And the current business models of most mixed farms in Australia are not viable and they need to be overhauled for family farms and rural communities to survive.

There were three key messages given by Emeritus Professor Ted Wolfe of the Graham Centre for Agricultural Innovation at Wagga Wagga, in his Howard Oration presented at the 22nd International Grassland Congress in Sydney on 15-19 September 2013 – a pre-eminent global forum held every four years. The event has 1000 delegates from over 60 countries.

The oration was in memory of Amos William Howard whose foresight recognised the great promise of sub clover– now one of the most important pasture plants in Australia.

Professor Wolfe pointed toward five properties of any farming system that need to be considered to gain an industry-wide understanding of the 'big picture'. These include the productivity, sustainability, economic performance, social well-being and political acceptability of agricultural industries, systems and regions.

Professor Wolfe also described four big problems that undermine the current performance of the famous Australian sheep-wheat belt, a mixed farming system which produces an important range of crop and livestock products for domestic consumption and export.

The first problem is a plateau in the production of Australian crops, particularly wheat which appears to be due to limitations in the supply of nitrogen in crops, a consequence of insufficient areas and quality of N-fixing legumes in the mixed farming system.

A second issue is the need to reconcile agricultural objectives with natural resource management goals, such as the need to conserve significant areas of remnant vegetation, provide habitat for migrating birds, protect soils from erosion, reduce air and water pollution.

“Too often, there are groups of agricultural and environmental scientists working in isolation, with each group rejecting the approaches of the other. There is a need for these groups to work collaboratively with each other and with farmers to produce healthy landscapes and provide ecosystem services, some of which may be crucial for the survival of the planet.”

“Farmers need a range of incentives to contribute towards carbon sequestration, biodiversity and other environmental stewardship objectives, which otherwise may produce long-term ecological gains for society but at an economic cost for the landholder.”

The third issue he highlights is that most mixed farms are making a business loss each year. “Declining terms of trade, highly variable incomes due to rainfall and market fluctuations, the rigidity of farm costs and unfair local and global competition have contributed to the financial predicament of farm businesses, a predicament that has to some extent been masked by an upward trend in land values.”

“Australian farmers are inadequately rewarded. The current business models of most mixed farms in Australia are not viable and they need to be overhauled for family farms and rural communities to survive. Traditional agribusiness practices and a lack of trained agribusiness professionals are holding agriculture back.”

Finally, Professor Wolfe will draw attention to the ‘specialise or diversify’ conflict that is at the heart of the decline since 1975 of the sheep enterprise on Australian mixed farms.

“Most farmers enjoy sowing and harvesting crops but they must also sow pastures and graze livestock upon them to gain the synergies from the mixed farming system, ensuring nitrogen supply for crops, controlling weeds and coping with drought.”

According to Wolfe, the answer here appears to lie in the complementary skills of the business partners who operate each farm or group of farms. The complexity of multiple farm enterprises can be addressed by at least two individuals specialising within the farm business, to ensure that each enterprise receives the attention to detail that is required to maximise business success.

“Successful farm families or partnerships occur when producers share an absolute commitment to seeking out and evaluating information, enterprise by enterprise and for the farm business as a whole. The top farmers are not necessarily early adopters but they plan carefully and control costs tightly. In short, generational change is happening in the sheep-wheat belt.”

“The benefits that may come from innovation in the economic, financial and social aspects of agriculture are as important as refining the technology of production. We must turn around the situation where more than 50% of farm families are experiencing financial and emotional stress.”

“In the Australian sheep-wheat belt, policies at the R&D, industry and political levels must take into account agricultural stability and community well-being. There is a need for a nation- building approach to land management, much as New Zealand does with its dairy, sheep, horticultural and wine industries,” Mr Wolfe concluded.

Diary Dates

OCTOBER 2013

FarmLink Research Annual Dinner and Farewell for Jon Cobden, CEO

11 October, Junee Reefs Hall, Junee Reefs Road
RSVP: FarmLink Research 02 69244633

GRDC Quality Grain Storage Workshop

Harden 8 October, Cootamundra 14 October, Wagga Wagga 15 October, Cootamundra 16 October
More information: Peter Botta M: 0417 501 890

Hart Bros Annual Spring Field Day

9 October, Old Junee
More information: 02 6924 7206

Graham Centre / NSW DPI: Agricultural Agribusiness & Advisor Field Day

15 October, Wagga Wagga
More information: 02 69334402

Biological Control of Weeds: PROfarm Course

22 October, Wagga Wagga
More information: 02 67631276

Stock Plan Training Workshops

25 and 31 October, Temora

More information: Melissa Henry M: 0438 452 109

Profitable Sheep Nutrition and Management

29 October, Temora

More information: 08 8842 3192

2014 - GRDC Grower Update, Wallendbeen 14th March

LACHLAN AND MURRUMBIDGEE CMA FUNDING FOR LANDHOLDERS

Expressions of Interest for drought lot feeding facilities, subdivisional fencing for improved grazing management, alternative stock water supply provisions and boxthorn control in rangeland grazing areas. EOI's close 5pm Friday 25th October.

For more information visit: www.murrumbidgee.cma.nsw.gov.au/getinvolved/investment_program.aspx
Lachlan CMA - Melissa Henry M: 0438 452 109

RIRDC RURAL WOMEN'S AWARDS

Nominations for the 2014 Rural Women's Award close on 31 October 2013. Download the Entry Form from the RIRDC Rural Women's Award webpage www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn/rirdc

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EXECUTIVE in PROFILE

Robert McColl, Rannock



Above: FarmLink Executive Member Robert McColl.

Rob and his wife Joh operate a contract farming and management business in the Binalong/Galong District, as well as recently purchasing a small farm near Boorowa which is mainly cropped with dual purpose varieties which allow for autumn and winter cattle trading opportunities as they arise.

Rob completed a Degree in Farm Business Management at Orange Agricultural College in 1999, which allowed him to study a number of different fields including whole farm analysis and planning, cropping systems and production as well as Chinese studies.

Following University Rob and Joh worked and travelled in the USA for six months then Rob operated combines in the UK during the summer of 2000, gaining a detailed insight into European production of wheat in the high yielding (12t/ha) and long rotation (30years +) areas of Bedfordshire.

On returning to Australia, Rob worked as production manager of a grower piggery and turf farm in Toowoomba, supplying turf to Brisbane and western Queensland. The operation of the two enterprises together was intensive to the say the least!

Having grown up in the Greenethorpe/Harden district, growing crops is in the blood. Getting the next crop better than the last is the aim each year when the spray rig fires up for the first fallow spray. While the drought years from 2002 were a tough experience it has shown how we can improve our water/nitrogen/chemical use in a number of ways.

Rob and Joh have three children who are growing up in agriculture, allowing them to decide for themselves what they want from agriculture into the future. Rob believes that if the industry as we know it is to have a solid future more emphasis needs to be placed on re-engaging people with agriculture and demonstrating that it is a good industry to be involved in.

Rob believes FarmLink is now an extremely important tool for growers as a repository of current research and data as other resources are thinning on the ground for growers to access. Rob has been the Chair of the Harden Murrumburrah Landcare Stubble project for a number of years and was a graduate of the FarmLink Rural Leadership Program 2011.

FarmLink Executive

- Charles Kingston, The Rock (Chair/ Director)
- Matt Dart, Ariah Park (Director)
- Steve Day, Lockhart (Director)
- Darryl Harper, Barmedman
- Rob Hart, Junee Reefs
- Bruce Holden, Coolamon
- Jeff Hoffmann, Lockhart
- Ernie Idiens, Canowindra
- Derek Ingold, Dirnaseer
- Ian Jennings, Coolamon
- Lyndon McNab, Quandialla
- Mike O'Hare, Beckom

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- Paul Breust, Research and Development Coordinator
- Tony Pratt, Research Technical Officer
- Phil Moroney, Farm Supervisor
- Judith Neill, Administration
- Karen Giddings, Communications Coordinator

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