

Program aims to increase rural water use efficiency

QDPI's Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences' Farming Systems Institute is undertaking a WUE project titled "The Cotton and Grains Adoption Program" within Queensland's irrigated cotton and grains industries. The project is being conducted in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines (DNR&M) which is providing funds through its RWUEI.

The objective of this adoption program is to increase, by June 2003, irrigation efficiency in the cotton and grain industries by at least 10 per cent and have 70 per cent of growers adopting best management practice guidelines for irrigation which are being developed during the program. The program has industry ownership through Cotton Australia and AgForce and is administered through the Australian Cotton Cooperative Research Centre at Narrabri.

It is being supervised by and takes direction from a consultative committee with grower leadership and has representatives from all stakeholders including irrigators, consultants, agribusiness, the Australian Cotton CRC, QDPI Farming Systems Institute, DNR&M, Cotton Research and Development Corporation, the Australian Cotton Growers Research Association, AgForce and The National Centre for Engineering in Agriculture.

Project supervisors are Geoff McIntyre (principal extension officer, QDPI, Dalby) and Dr Phil Goyne (principal research scientist, QDPI, Hermitage Research Station, Warwick). Phil is also the project's coordinator and leads a team consisting of five development extension officers and a technical officer. These are located at Emerald, Biloela, Dalby, Toowoomba, Goondiwindi and St George.

This team is implementing an industry- wide participatory extension program working with the QDPI, Farming Systems Institute and The Australian Cotton CRC extension groups and grower committees. The extension officers are implementing an education program for growers which includes:



The Cotton and Grains Adoption Program is looking to increase irrigation efficiencies by at least 10 per cent.

- Developing an awareness of water management issues;
- Contributing information to and assisting with the development of an irrigation module for a BMP Manual which will be applicable to both the Cotton and Grain industries;
- Developing, demonstrating and promoting the implementation of the water monitoring systems on farm using simple practical methods and devices;
- Establishing an annual award system which provides incentives and opportunities to improve WUE and which recognises individual achievements or initiatives that have led to improved WUE; and,
- Conducting benchmarking surveys at strategic times during the project to evaluate performance and outcomes.

The implementation of the adoption of new irrigation technologies is being assisted by a financial incentives scheme which partly reimburses growers for their outlays. The economic, environmental and social benefits of the program are being monitored.

The impact of the program will be evaluated in relation to its impact on improvement in WUE, irrigators' movement to BMP and their awareness of and participation in the program.

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