

# 2004 Cotton Awards finalists

By Brooke Summers, Step Communication, Project Manager — Australian Cotton Industry Awards

The cotton industry has identified some of its highest achievers, with 19 finalists in the Australian Cotton Industry Awards announced at the National Australian Cotton Trade Show on May 26.

The candidates were shortlisted by industry judging panels in five categories, with final judging to be held by interview or on-farm in June. Winners will be announced at the Cotton Conference Dinner on the Gold Coast on August 12.

The impressive group of finalists includes a young agronomist achieving valley-best yields, a grower taking the cotton industry's message to thousands of urban Australians and a researcher using light traps to monitor the migration patterns of cotton pests.

"The response to our call for entries was very strong, and the calibre of the finalists indicates a strong future for our industry," Cotton Industry Awards Taskforce Chairman, Geoff Hewitt said.

"It's also encouraging that finalists are from right across the industry, from Emerald in the north to Narromine in the south, and from many sectors including research, growing and advocacy. I'd like to encourage everyone in the industry to come along to the Cotton Conference Dinner to support their local finalists and peers," Geoff said.



Geoff Hewitt announces the finalists at the Cotton Trade Show.

## THE FINALISTS

### ELDERS YOUNG ACHIEVER OF THE YEAR AWARD

**Chaseley Ross, Policy Advisor,  
Cotton Australia  
Brisbane, Queensland**



During her five years with Cotton Australia, Chaseley Ross has established herself as a leading lobbyist and spokesperson for the cotton industry in Queensland. She has played an integral part in the successful implementation of the BMP Program in Queensland and has used skills developed in the field to improve communication flows to growers, government and stakeholders. Chaseley now represents Cotton Australia on the

Queensland Farmers Federation (QFF) and has taken part in national and international forums regarding agribusiness, the cotton industry and agricultural issues.

Chaseley regularly goes above the "call of duty" for cotton growers, achieving a number of victories for the industry.

**Chris Maunder, Agronomist,  
B & W Rural, Moree, NSW**



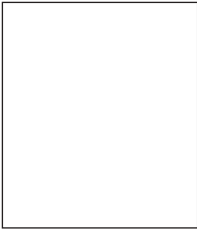
Chris Maunder graduated with a Rural Science Degree from the University of New England in 1995, shortly after starting in the cotton industry as an agronomist in the Macquarie Valley. After being badly burnt in a farm accident, he returned to his home area near Moree where he joined the team of B & W Rural for the 1997-98 growing season.

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Chris has since enhanced his natural flair for agronomy despite having to work in stifling temperatures wearing pressure garments for his burns. He owns and share-farms broadacre/dryland cotton farming country in the area.

The drought season of 2002–03 saw Chris put his advanced agronomy knowledge to great effect when he implemented a strategy to maximise Water Use Efficiency (WUE) in a limited water situation. Spectacular results followed with new standards set.

**Tim Richards, Agronomist, Auscott Moree, NSW**



Tim Richards completed his Bachelor of Rural Science and Post-graduate Certificate in Rural Science (Cotton Production) at the University of New England and has

worked as an Agronomist at 'Midkin' in the Gwydir Valley since 1997. Tim was recently promoted to 'Midkin' Farm Manager from his position as Chief Agronomist where his initiatives helped the farm achieve the highest field yield and farm yield average on Auscott farms.

Tim attained these results through production of the most profitable cotton possible while maintaining the social and environmental standards set by Auscott and himself.

Tim has organised at least two Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) funded researchers on 'Midkin' to trial their experiments. He has also achieved first place in the Gwydir Valley Cotton Crop Competition two years running (2001–02 and 2002–03) and was selected for the Marcus Oldham Rural Leadership Course in 2003. He is also an active member of the local community.

**COTTON INDUSTRY SERVICE TO INDUSTRY AWARD**

**Brett Austin, Theodore, Queensland**



It is with great sadness that Brett Austin has been posthumously nominated for this award. Brett was a valuable member of the Dawson Valley Cotton community

and a highly regarded figure in the industry. As Chair of the Dawson Valley Cotton

Growers Association (1998–2003), he embraced the Best Management Practices (BMP) program with the Austin farm producing the first bale of BMP cotton in Australia. This bale now sits proudly in Cotton Australia's Head Office in Sydney.

Brett was awarded a Queensland Cotton Scholarship to attend the prestigious Rhodes Cotton School in Memphis, Tennessee in 1998. His thirst for education continued, highlighted by his tour to the US to study the silverleaf whitefly which affected Central Queensland cotton crops in 2002.

His efforts were instrumental in containing the whitefly outbreak in the area. Brett was a member of the Cotton Evaluation and Development Committee and his Moura farm was involved in the trial of Monsanto's Bollgard II. Brett had a strong belief in sharing knowledge with his colleagues to ensure the industry could move forward.

**Iain McPherson, Goondiwindi, Queensland**

Iain McPherson has been consulting for the cotton industry in the MacIntyre Valley for over 20 years. He was a key player in forming the Boggabilla Irrigation Landcare Group, now seen as a leading Area Wide Management Group in the cotton industry.

Iain was also a central figure in the adoption of Integrated Pest Management and soft option chemistry in the cotton industry which has significantly reduced impacts on the environment. In 1997, Iain was appointed to the Executive Board of Cotton Consultants Australia (CCA) and became President of the CCA in 2000.

He has represented the CCA on numerous industry bodies where his input has been crucial in the attainment of better outcomes for cotton growers.

Iain's contribution to the cotton industry was acknowledged in 2002 when he received the Macintyre Valley Cotton Growers Service to Industry Award.

**Charles Wilson, Emerald, Queensland**



Charles Wilson is a long time cotton farmer from Emerald in Central Queensland. He is also a long standing advocate for the cotton industry, initially

as part of the Emerald Cotton Growers Association, then at state, federal and international forums.

Charles' continuing passion is the issue of water rights. He was a founding mem-

ber and secretary of the Queensland Irrigators Council (QIC). Charles' interest in water encouraged him on to the Cotton Australia Board, where he served with distinction as Chairman for three years. He also became a leading industry spokesman through his representation on the National Farmers Federation (NFF) and the Australian Cotton Industry Council (ACIC).

**Keith Harris, Boggabri, NSW**



Keith Harris joined the Upper Namoi Cotton Growers Association (UNCGA) in 1991 and took over as Chairman in the 1993–94 season. He served as Chairman during the next six years, when the industry in the Upper Namoi faced its greatest period of public scrutiny. In 1994, beef producers in North West NSW took action against the industry over the use of the chemical Helix.

Throughout the ensuing six year court battle, the Upper Namoi cotton industry was a constant 'green' target, with Keith regularly called upon to face hostile questions. He showed tremendous public relations acumen which included advocating Best Management Practices (BMP) and its effects on minimising potential adverse impacts on neighbours and local communities.

This included a 'Cotton Study Tour' to various established production areas to educate Gunnedah Shire Councilors. The Gunnedah Chemical Liaison Committee was also formed. Keith represented cotton growers on this committee which drew up the strict Gunnedah Chemical Spray Guidelines, later used as a guide for the NSW Pesticides Act. Keith is still on the UNCGA committee, is a member of the ACGRA, Chairman of the Boggabri Landcare Group and actively participates in various local and state water groups.

**Stuart Higgins, Darling Downs, Queensland**



Stuart Higgins has taken the cotton industry to a wider audience in urban and regional Australia through his "Grow Your Own" series on ABC Radio National. His commitment to a sustainable industry drove him to open his Jandowae property up to the public which often involved heated and emotional concerns.

From July 2002 to March 2003, Stuart

gave national and international audiences a chance to be “back seat farmers” for a cotton growing season. Listeners gained an understanding of issues affecting the cotton industry by voting on a series of real life cotton farming challenges, explained clearly by industry experts. By the end of the program, 12.5 bales of cotton had been produced and the profit (over \$3000) was delivered to three worthwhile charities.

Stuart has been a vocal activist on local, national and international stages. He has become a well-respected spokesperson for the cotton industry and produced an educational audio-visual CD on water use efficiency. He continues to work with ABC Radio National’s Bush Telegraph to raise awareness on water issues.

This commitment to educating the wider community about issues affecting the cotton industry has earned a number of awards including the United Nations Environment Award for Media Communications/Radio, the Queensland Department of Primary Industries Communications Award and a ‘Highly Commended’ at the Walkley Awards for Excellence in Journalism.

**BAYER CROPSCIENCE GROWER OF THE YEAR AWARD  
AND  
QUEENSLAND COTTON HIGH ACHIEVER OF THE YEAR AWARD**

**Emerald Agricultural Farm,  
Emerald Agricultural College**

Emerald Agricultural Farm is a cotton farm with a difference. On top of the usual demands of running a cotton property, the management and staff at Emerald Agricultural Farm also need to integrate learning outcomes for participating stu-



**Emerald Agricultural Farm, Emerald Agricultural College.**

dents as part of the Emerald Agricultural College Cotton program.

Due to its dual function, the farm has a complex management system including a property manager, business manager and an agricultural studies manager who need to work closely together to maximise the farm’s potential.

The team’s adoption of practices relating to water conservation, such as the use of C probes and the exploration of chemical spray alternatives, signal an innovative approach to farming.

The college has been a part of the BMP program almost since its inception and uses BMP as the basis for instructing students about systems that maintain environmentally sustainable farming practices.

**Columboola Cotton, Geldard Family, Condamine, Queensland**

Columboola Cotton owns three dryland properties in the Miles/Condamine area of southern Queensland and grew the first module to leave the Murilla Shire in 1989.

Columboola Cotton is the only dedicated dryland cotton grower among this year’s finalists.

Columboola Cotton views significant investment in technological and human resources as essential to managing a good cotton farm.

Columboola are strong advocates of BMP and believe its principles are extremely important in improving the public perception of the cotton industry and the safety for all people and industries living and working in the vicinity of cotton.

Columboola Cotton’s excellent management practices have led to excellent neighbour relations with its adjoining cattle and organic farming enterprises.

**‘Drayton’, Hamparsum Family, Breeza, NSW**

The pursuit of organic matter means no crops have been burnt at Drayton since 1982. This policy led to the invention of the cotton root cutter that has since revolutionised the cotton industry stubble management program.

Good operating procedures and systems, as well as staff development, are key to the continual success of the farm. Every operation on Drayton has a systems procedure document.

John Hamparsum, a graduate of the 2002 Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP) course, shares the lessons he learnt from the ARLP with staff, particularly in areas concerning the understanding and communication of people’s needs and personal goals.

Integrated Pest Management is the farm’s cornerstone philosophy with an aim to encourage and maintain beneficial pests for as long as possible.

John believes the BMP program has had more impact in improving the cotton industry’s reputation than any other program implemented by the industry. He believes it has lifted the level of professionalism of cotton growers, and is regarded by people outside the industry as an example of where agriculture should be heading.

**Wicks Farming Pty Ltd, Dalby, Queensland**

The Wicks farming properties are located in and around the Kupunn area approximately 30 km from Dalby. Management decisions are made by John Wicks and Ben Roberts with the business employing one other full time and two permanent part time staff.

The business has used an array of innovative measures to enhance production. These include being the first growers on the Darling Downs to utilise satellite guided self-steering tractors (two cm Beeline system), the use of cell grazing to minimise erosion within water catchments, purpose built cultivation equipment, innovative irrigation design and use of composted manure for soil conditioning.

The Wicks’ property has taken part in extensive environmental measures. They have planted over 3000 trees native to the area on less productive land to provide additional shelter and decrease wind erosion on lighter soils. This has also reduced waterlogging, maintaining the water table level and reducing the risk of salinity while having the added environmental benefit of rejuvenating the flora and fauna of the area.

**Buddah Pty Ltd, Narromine, NSW**

Buddah Pty Ltd is located 22 km from Narromine in the Macquarie Valley and operates three properties with a total area of 5474 hectares.

Improving soil health has been a major challenge at Buddah. This has been achieved in a variety of ways including a comprehensive trial to identify areas of poor water holding capacity and infiltration problems, cotton sown directly into standing wheat stubble, reduced tillage through the use of Roundup Ready cotton and improving organic matter.

This soil program has been complimented with a rigorous nutrition program. A comprehensive leaf analysis program, sampling in every field every week from mid November to mid March, hopes to

identify new base nutrient levels that contribute to high yielding crops.

The Best Management Practices Program has been fully embraced, with full certification achieved in 2001 and management heavily involved in the program in the Macquarie Valley.

People are seen as Buddah's most valuable resource, and current management is involved in nine industry organisations, showing commitment to broader industry issues.

### **Brownlie Enterprises Partnership, Pampas (Queensland) and Walgett (NSW)**

Clive and Helen Brownlie own and manage two properties as part of the Brownlie Enterprises Partnership. Culverthorpe is two km west of Pampas in Queensland and Nithsdale is 40 km east of Walgett in NSW.

The Brownlies have undertaken a number of innovative practices to improve farm production.

There is an emphasis on further education and training at both properties so that workers improve their skill levels, working toward the goal of managing a farm. This is coupled with flexible work hours allowing for a better family life.

The Brownlies see increasing their Water Use Efficiency (WUE) as an important part of their farming future. Clive

believes he can increase his WUE through faster irrigation cycles which will enable him to develop more country for irrigation and allow for more rotations.

He is also looking to modify farm design, keeping in mind that cotton may not always be the main crop. For example, running pipelines where they may need to be accessed for surface irrigation in the future. Clive would also like access to Brisbane's waste water which will aid his goal of a more secure water resource. Nithsdale was a pilot BMP farm and is coming up to its fourth audit while Culverthorpe has had its initial audit and has a second audit pending.

### **ACGRA RESEARCHER OF THE YEAR, SPONSORED BY CSD**

#### **Dr Michael Bange, Senior Research Scientist, Australian Cotton CRC/CSIRO**

Michael is Senior Research Scientist with the Division of Plant Industry at the CSIRO and with the Australian Cotton CRC. His fields of study are agronomy, decision support systems for the Australian cotton industry, crop physiology, cotton cropping systems and crop modelling for northern Australia.

His current projects include the application and development of the OZCOT cotton crop simulation model. He is also managing the development, support, field vali-

dation and evaluation of computerised decision support systems.

In association with Steve Milroy, he is conducting studies into the physiology and agronomy of cotton crops, specifically the physiology of cotton cultivars, crop responses to nitrogen, cotton crop development in response to extreme temperatures and the physiology of high retention (Bollgard II) crops.

Recognising the importance of climate, Dr Bange is exploring and implementing methods to improve the cotton industry's access to climate information.

#### **Grant Roberts, Farming Systems Scientist, Australian Cotton CRC**



Grant Roberts is the Farming Systems Scientist with the CSIRO's Division of Plant Industry and Australian Cotton CRC. His specialist fields are agronomy,

cotton cropping systems and weed control in cotton. The major topics for his research include examining options to manage cotton for earliness, and agronomy associated with herbicide tolerant cotton — particularly Roundup Ready cotton.

He is also looking at medium term rotation experiments, dryland weed manage-

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ment, the effect of herbicides on cotton weed status and soil biology, precision weed management in cotton, determining the potential for glyphosate resistance in cotton fields utilising Roundup Ready technology and agronomic factors contributing to cotton fibre quality.

Grant works from the Australian Cotton Research Institute at Narrabri with projects at Merah North, Bellata, Goondiwindi and Warra.

**Mark Hickman, Senior Extension Development Officer, Queensland DPI**



Mark is a Rural Science graduate from the University of New England, Armidale and has completed a post-graduate certificate in Rural Science (Cotton Production). He is currently studying a Masters of Science in Agriculture on mirid research.

Mark has 11 years experience with cotton production issues and is a senior member of the Australian Cotton CRC Extension Team.

Mark holds the position of CRC

Training Coordinator and is currently managing and delivering a nationally-based short course for cotton producers focused on Integrated Pest Management.

**Dr Peter Gregg, Associate Professor, University of New England, Armidale**

Dr Peter Gregg is responsible for undergraduate courses for third and fourth year Rural Science students, conducting research and supervision of honours and postgraduate research students in insect pest management.

Peter's research has focussed on the chemical ecology of noctuid moths (especially *Helicoverpa spp.*) in relation to host plants and in non-cropping areas, insect phenology and development in relation to the environment, methods for monitoring migration and local movement of moths including the use of tower mounted light traps. He is also looking at alternatives to insecticides for pest management in cotton, including biological control and mating disruption by pheromones.

Peter has a long and distinguished teaching career which arose from his scientific and cotton industry experience in the early 1970s. He has a long history in the cotton industry including involvement

in the heliothis inland group which showed insect migration links, the CRC Cotton Production Course and the development of Magnet. He has been a CRC Program Leader and a supervisor and mentor of many students who have contributed to cotton science.

**Dr David Nehl, Research Scientist, Australian Cotton CRC/NSW Agriculture**

David is a Research Scientist with NSW Agriculture and the Australian Cotton CRC. He is a specialist in plant pathology and cotton cropping systems. In particular, He has focussed on diseases that effect cotton crops, soil microbiology and Mycorrhizas.

Working from the Australian Cotton Research Institute, University of Sydney and University of Queensland, David's current projects include managing black root rot in cotton, the effect of cotton soil health on cotton root diseases, the diversity and pathogenicity of *Thielaviopsis basicola* and the sequestration of carbon below ground in cotton fields by arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi and cotton roots.

His research is widely sought after in the cotton industry and is regularly published in scientific and cotton journals. 