

Ralph Schulzé: An industry legend

By David Dowling

The career of one of the most respected and devoted servants of the Australian cotton industry drew to a close with the retirement in August of Ralph Schulzé from his role as Executive Director of the Cotton Research and Development Corporation. For over 40 years Ralph has been a key participant in the development of the cotton industry as a researcher, corporate farmer and administrator.

As Glenn Fresser, Chairman of the ACGRA said at a special tribute at the Cotton Conference in August, "...without him, we just may not be where we are today." Such has been his impact over the past four decades.

His two key areas of interest have been the same two components which have created a sophisticated, high yielding, high quality cotton production system in Australia — research and varietal improvement.

Ralph graduated with honours from Hawkesbury Ag College in 1958 after, coincidentally, doing a project on an experimental cotton crop. He had been on a cadetship with the NSW Department of Agriculture, so after graduation and some in-service training, was posted to the recently established Experiment Farm at Narrabri in 1960.



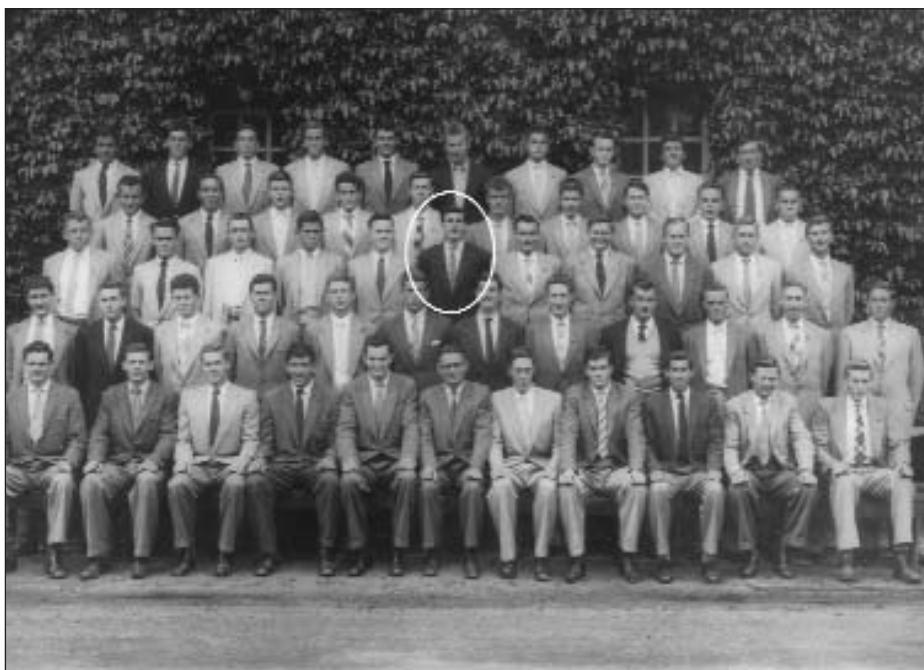
Ralph as a young researcher.

The farm, which had a staff of three, was set up to find the best ways to utilise the water from Keepit Dam. At first, cotton was way down the list, but encouraging early results soon had Ralph running trials on the basics of cotton production — time of planting, plant populations, variety trials, irrigation and pest management.

Ralph had three metre square trial plots all over the Namoi Valley. It had the effect

of introducing a lot of farmers to the existence of the crop and helped introduce him to his future wife, Merilyn, whose father had one of the trials.

The cotton trials caught the interest of young US farmers Paul Kahl and Frank Hadley and they came to Australia to check it out. When it became apparent they were serious about commercial production in Australia, the NSW Department of Agriculture sent Ralph to the US for a year to learn about cotton.



Ralph was second dux in the graduation class from Hawkesbury Ag College in 1958.



At work in Narrabri.

And when the Boswell company set about growing cotton west of Narrabri in 1964, the story goes that JG Boswell told his people to go next door to the research station, find a bloke called Ralph Schulz  he had met in California, and “buy him”. Thus began Ralph’s career with Auscott — as the company’s first head agronomist.

In 1967, he helped set up Cotton Seed Distributors and still remains as a director.

In 1970 he was promoted to Farm Manager at Auscott Trangie and moved to Narromine.

In 1981, Ralph moved back to Narrabri to co-ordinate the technical production of Auscott’s operations over three valleys. He was also Auscott’s liaison man with the rest of the industry, whether it be assistance to other growers, involvement with research or in general industry affairs.

Ralph has been a member of the Australian Cotton Growers Research Association since its inception and was a member of the Cotton Research Committee and then its replacement, the Cotton Research Council. When the Cotton Research and Development Corporation was developed in 1990, Ralph was the logical choice as the first Executive Director, a role he has filled for 14 years.

Among a host of other achievements in the cotton industry, Ralph was one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Australian Cotton Industry Council and in 1993, helped initiate action that led to the first Cotton CRC.

He has been involved in organising every Australian Cotton Conference held to date and was instrumental in making the first World Cotton Conference a reality in 1994.

He has been a member of many Australian delegations to the International Cotton Advisory Committee.

The list of achievements goes on and on.

As Glenn Fresser rightly intimated, Ralph has put his stamp on the Australian cotton industry — perhaps more so than anyone else. His shoes will be hard to fill.



Ralph met Frank Hadley and his family during his year in the US in the early 1960s.