

# Innovation at Trade Show 2006

By Brian O'Connell

Irrigated agriculture represents about 28 per cent of Australia's gross value of agricultural production. Hence sustainable water use is of critical importance to the country in general and to all irrigators in particular. The nation's cotton growers are no exception — the industry has for decades sought improved water use efficiencies.

And for the past nine years the Australian Cotton Trade Show, in association with Nab Agribusiness, has reflected this concern by maintaining a focus on all aspects of irrigation best practice.

Last year we were pleased to be able to work in association with the Gwydir Valley Irrigator's Association (GVIA), the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust and the *Innovation in Irrigation* project to showcase the water saving achievements of Andrew Parkes, 'Keytah', Moree.

The obvious success of the on-farm field day on the Tuesday, and the grower forums and workshops at the Trade Show on the Wednesday, will see us repeat a similar exercise this year.

Harvey Gaynor is the General Manager of Auscott Midkin, a well regarded local grower, and one of the irrigators featured in this year's *Innovation in Irrigation* project who has demonstrated creative strategies ensuring high productivity for every megalitre of water used.

The GVIA on-farm field day 'curtain raiser' for the trade show will include the



**In-field workshops and demonstrations will again be a feature of the Cotton Trade Show.**

opportunity to meet innovative irrigators from various commodity sectors — and it will feature a visit to the Midkin lateral move installation.

## Alternatives to flood

Auscott started looking at alternatives to flood irrigation in order to maximise their returns from uncertain water allocations. "We had been working on our water use efficiency under flood irrigation, and were producing between 0.8 and 1.3 bales of cotton per megalitre," says Harvey. "But we just weren't making the gains we were looking for."

They varied their search and found an irrigation system that not only uses 30 per cent less water, but can also reduce the need for nitrogen fertilisers.

In 2002, Auscott installed an overhead

irrigator about 700 metres wide with a run of 2700 metres.

Lateral move systems have been used in cotton production for many years but these early systems used sprinklers which tended to spread crop diseases and the systems had difficulty keeping up enough water in the middle of summer.

The 'Midkin' system uses sprinklers in the initial germination stage but these can then be replaced by low energy precision application (LEPA) droppers.

In the first two years of using the lateral move system water savings of between 19 and 42 per cent were achieved and water use efficiency increased dramatically.

## Education and training

The project report also makes interesting reading in terms of the 'areas of interest' at the 2006 Trade Show. We have been in discussion with a number of growers about the development of the Trade Show site as the Australian Centre of Sustainable Agriculture (ACSA). They all felt that ACSA should, as part of its brief at least, address concerns they held about securing suitable staff at all levels.

These concerns were also expressed by Harvey in the *Innovation in Irrigation* interview.

"The overhead system requires far less physical labour to water the crops, but it does require a different approach to managing the irrigation system. In addition to requiring more mechanics to maintain the machines, the overhead system will change the shape of our workforce over time because we will require employees with different skills."



**Auscott has delivered water savings of up to 42 per cent with a shift from flood to overhead irrigation.**

The 2006 Trade Show has as a main focus the industry's concern for education and vocational training. Educators from both secondary and tertiary levels will be on site to explain how they can help to prepare our kids for fulfilling careers in our communities.

### Rotations on display

And again we were pleased to see the observation by Harvey that "looking ahead, Auscott is also investigating niche rotation crops such as mustard or

coriander to replace areas of the wheat, chickpea and sorghum crops to increase the return on their investment."

With support from Pioneer, rotation crop trials have been established on the Trade Show site. These will be the backdrop for a grower forum on the Thursday together with in-field workshops over both days.

For further information about the Trade Show please contact Brian O'Connell on 02 6778 3255.

## GVIA FIELD DAY 2006 Australian Cotton Trade Show 'Curtain Raiser'

DATE: Tuesday May 23, 2006

TIME: 12.30 pm

VENUE: Cascades Theatre, Gosport Street  
Moree — then buses to Auscott  
Midkin (30 km)

CONTACT: Anne Coote, Ph: 02 6752 1399

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