

Cotton Conference offers something for everyone

The Cotton Conference countdown has started! It's only a matter of weeks until the 2006 Cotton Conference takes place at the Gold Coast Exhibition and Convention Centre.

The aim of this year's conference will be to examine the foundations of the industry — from a triple bottom line perspective. What are the factors which are affecting the profitability of the cotton industry? What are the current and future environmental issues? What about the industry's social and community responsibilities?

Issues featuring heavily in the conference program include biotechnology, quality and marketing. These issues are seen by many as the cornerstones from which the Australian cotton industry can seek to address some of the crucial profitability challenges which the industry currently faces.

Chair of the Australian Cotton Growers Research Association (ACGRA), Hamish Millar, says that the program of speakers will satisfy all areas of cotton industry interest.

"The program is diverse yet focused — we have the global perspective, the local angle and the hands on detail."

"It will include frank discussions on some of the key issues facing our industry today — some of these discussions will be thought provoking, some may be controversial and others will be plain old interesting," Hamish said.

The big picture

Following an opening address from Hamish Millar, the conference program will turn to the 'big picture', with the National Farmers Federation (NFF) CEO, Ben Fargher, taking to the stage to discuss



Ben Fargher, NFF.



'Australian Agriculture and Cotton in Agriculture'. Ben was appointed CEO of the NFF in February 2005 having previously held the position as NFF's Senior Policy Manager, Trade where he was responsible for international trade negotiations and quarantine.

The conference continues with further examination of some of the global issues which may impact upon the industry in the future. Tony Pearson, Head of Australian Economics at the ANZ Bank will talk in detail about the Australian economy, and Dr Chris Mitchell, Leader of Climate, Weather and Ocean Prediction at CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research will share his extensive knowledge about climate change and the potential impacts these trends may have on the cotton industry. Chris has been involved in the science of greenhouse gases and climate change for more than 10 years.

Opportunities for Australian cotton

The conference program will dedicate a significant proportion of time to the issue of expanding and developing market opportunities and will ask questions such as: How can we guarantee the security of current markets in the face of increasing competition? How can we differentiate our product? Can and should we brand Australian cotton?

Providing answers to some of these thought provoking questions will be Chair of the Australian Cotton Shippers Association and General Manager of Queensland Cotton, Bob Dall'alba.

Bob thinks that there is a clear opportunity for Australian cotton to be the upland cotton quality leader — replacing the previous benchmark SJV.

"The Californian SJV crop production has fallen to 1.05 million bales in 2005 and production is likely to fall further.

"Our branding project for Australian

Cotton is about reinforcing the quality image of our cotton and extracting a premium for it.

"Success in replacing the benchmark will enhance our chances of maintaining and increasing our current premium."

The linkages between the development of new markets and the branding of BMP cotton along the lines of its quality and environmental performance are obvious to many key players in the industry. The Natural Heritage Trust funded 'Pathways to Environmental Management Systems' project has, over the past two years, been exploring these opportunities as well as developing guidelines for the extension of the BMP program along the entire length of the production chain. Project Manager for the EMS pathways project, Alan Williams, says that the project has allowed the development of a framework for the delivery of a branded product which will enhance the industry's ability to supply assured quality.

"Discussion with domestic and international merchants, spinners, retailers and brand owners has clearly demonstrated that the significant level of R&D investment in breeding and in the BMP Program has provided a solid platform from which to build a competitive advantage," said Alan.

"Discussions with growers and other key industry personnel at the conference should help to move this issue forward"

In parallel with the EMS Pathways project, work commissioned by the Australian Cotton Shippers Association and Cotton Australia has been underway to develop a range of options for a 'brand'

...20▷



Tony Pearson, ANZ Bank.

for BMP cotton. This includes the development of a logo, identity and tag-lines. Sarah Reiter, General Manager of Cato Purnell Partners, who have been commissioned to undertake this work, will talk at the conference about the complexities of the branding process.

Profitability

Day two of the conference will examine in detail issues which are affecting the profitability of the industry and look at current and future trends. Profitability trends which have been benchmarked for over 10 years will be presented by Boyce & Co's David Newnham who has for the past four years produced the cotton industry's comparative analysis publication on behalf of the Cotton Research and Development Corporation.

General Manager of Research and Extension at the CRDC, Bruce Pyke, will discuss some recently published work which examines the economic and production implications of Bollgard II and Roundup Ready.

Bruce says that one of the key areas will be Bollgard II refuges, and whether they represent short term pain for long term industry economic gain.

"Refuges are still considered to be the cornerstone of our pre-emptive resistance management plan for Bt cotton and all of the information gathered to date by our researchers on the threat of resistance from *H. armigera* to Bollgard II serves to underline the importance of maintaining effective resistance management," Bruce said.

"One problem not well addressed is the need for growers to rely on unsprayed cotton or pigeon pea crops as refuges as



Sarah Reiter, General Manager, Cato Purnell Partners.

the percentage of Bollgard II on farm increases.

"Many growers see this as a direct cost or opportunity lost rather than as an integral part of managing a Bollgard II crop.

"At present a grower who effectively manages his unsprayed refuge crop receives no more incentive than one who puts it on his worst land and provides only token management of it."

Profitability forums

Three concurrent sessions and one plenary session will run on day two of the conference, each addressing a different aspect of industry profitability from a triple bottom line perspective — profitable industry, profitable farm, profitable environment and profitable community.

Executive Director of the CRDC and Chair of the 'Profitable Farm' session, Bruce Finney, says that across the board, growers are having to contend with increasing costs of production as well as decreasing prices, all of which is having a significant impact upon the bottom line.

"If the industry is to remain profitable and viable into the future, growers need to understand the long term implications of some of the social and environmental factors which will affect profitability now and into the future."

Biotechnology

It wouldn't be a cotton conference without biotechnology featuring heavily in both the conference program and in many a 'Cotton Club' discussion. This year will be no exception with Auscott CEO, Dave Anthony, chairing a session examining future trends, traits and technologies in biotech.

"Australia's cotton industry illustrates the outstanding benefits that the era of biotechnology is bringing to agriculture and society as a whole, including reductions in pesticide use exceeding 70 per cent," Dave said.

"Biotechnology is helping us move quickly away from traditional dependence on one or two production technologies to more integrated farming systems which offer exciting opportunities on farms, across catchments and in our communities."

Crop protection

The third and final day of the conference will see attention turn to crop protection, with some of the industry's leading researchers taking to the stage to inform delegates of recent R&D outcomes and forthcoming developments.

Speakers include Dr Sharon Downes, Research Scientist in Evolutionary Ecology, who will report on work which integrates



Bruce Finney, CRDC.

two approaches to adaptively manage the evolution of resistance by *Helicoverpa* spp to Bt toxins within transgenic cotton.

IPM will be the focus of a presentation by Dr Lewis Wilson. In recent years, the adoption of Bollgard II cotton coupled with widespread use of IPM principles has allowed dramatic reductions in insecticide use in cotton.

"But some pests formerly controlled by sprays targeting *Helicoverpa* now survive and can be a problem" Lewis said.

"These include green mirids, green vegetable bug, jassids and late season thrips.

"Sprays to control these pests disrupt of beneficial populations, increasing the risk of outbreaks of secondary pests such as mites, aphids and whitefly."

Farming systems

There are three words on everyone's lips ... water, water, water! And water use efficiency will be a major focus of the Farming Systems session at the conference.

ACGRA member and Director of the CRDC, Glen Fresser, who will chair the Farming Systems session, says that cotton irrigators are leading the way in the measurement of on farm water use and irrigation optimisation, but that more can and will be done.

"Water remains the major limiting factor in cotton production and one of the key management and political challenges facing the industry today.

"We rose to the challenge with pesticides and we must now rise to the water challenge.

"Success will come from many different angles — it will come from breeding and biotechnology, it will come from catchment scale management and it will come from managing and measuring our on-farm water use more effectively.

Hands-on research

Following the success of the 2004 'Hands-on Research' sessions, delegates will again have the opportunity to get

'hands-on' with many of the industry's leading researchers and scientists.

Practical demonstrations of current R&D will be demonstrated during these sessions which will include:

- Whole farm water management;
- Overhead (irrigation) optimisation;
- Managing on-farm water storages;
- Irrigation of high retention cotton;
- Calculating the cost of your refuge;
- Black root rot;
- Integrated Fusarium management;

- Managing your greenhouse gasses; and,
- Fish friendly farms.

This brings the conference to a close, with a long night of partying ahead for conference delegates at the Cotton Industry Awards Dinner. ACGRA's Hamish Millar thinks that this annual awards ceremony is a fitting way to end the conference.

"The cotton conference is a celebration," Hamish said.

"It is a chance to catch up with old mates and make new ones."

"Growers big and small, young and old should take this opportunity to come together, learn something new, take some ideas home, and have a good time in a fabulous location as well.

"Hope to see you all at the Gold Coast!"

The Australian Cotton Growers Research Association would like to thank the Foundation Sponsors of the Cotton Conference — the Cotton Research and Development Corporation and Cotton Seed Distributors — for their continuing support.

EXCEL Agriculture

Excellent product. Excellent service.

+ the way forward



Fertiliser Rigs

- ✓ Up to 3 tonne capacity with exceptional stability and ease of lifting
- ✓ New low draft shank and clamp assembly for simplistic reliable operation
- ✓ Offering an unrivalled 770mm of underframe clearance for brilliant trash flow
- ✓ Proven stainless steel metering units for corrosion resistance
- ✓ Variable rate technology available



Crusader

- ✓ Medium duty centre or side busting rig for economical primary tillage operations
- ✓ New low draft shank design offering exceptional trash flow and simplistic reliable operation
- ✓ 4-row to 12-row configurations with optimum weight distribution for easy lifting
- ✓ Economical upgraded in-line shear release clamps



Excel Penetrator

- ✓ 4, 6, 8 row
- ✓ Side busting/centre busting capabilities
- ✓ Adaptable for gassing, dry fertiliser using Excel's new rig mounted fertiliser boxes
- ✓ 5/8" inline shear bolts
- ✓ Unrivalled trash clearance



Cultipacker

- ✓ Machine can be pulled one way for aggressive soil breakdown and the other way for refining the soil before planting

Excel also stock a wide range of spare parts

NEW EXCEL CULTIVATOR NOW RELEASED

Call the Excel boys for details

Also available:

- ✓ Module Builder
- ✓ Rubber Tyred Roller
- ✓ Lilleston Rig
- ✓ Millenium Planter
- ✓ Rolling Cultivator



New Excel Cultivator

Call now — our components fit most implements

EXCEL Agriculture

A DIVISION OF GREAT WESTERN CORPORATION PTY LTD (ABN 91 064 434 475)

Australian made and owned

Cnr Yaldwyn & Buckland Street,
PO Box 665, Toowoomba Qld 4350
PH: 07 4636 9100
FAX: 07 4636 9140
www.excelagr.com.au

Brian Moran
0427 722 925
Dan Ryan
0427 700 779
Brian Campbell
0427 293 653