

Cotton Trade Show turns 10 in tough times

By Brian O'Connell

So, according to our weather forecasters and most of the metropolitan media, the drought is over! It's really great news isn't it? Well, its better news than we've had for some time. Mind you, news of a flood that has just happened, rather than one that just might would be even better.

Droughts tend to be at the forefront of your mind when you're planning anything in cotton — trade shows included.

It was limited water (that drought again), low cotton prices at planting time, the higher cost of inputs, and higher perceived risk relative to crops such as sorghum and corn that saw growers reduce cotton plantings last year.

And it was these very issues that were addressed at grower forums, in-field workshops and rotational crop trials at the 2006 Australian Cotton Trade Show. We believe growers will again be seeking input on these issues — and others — at this year's event. And by "other issues", believe me when I say that I hope we will all be happily standing in the rain trying to recall what you do on a cotton farm in a wet year!

SURVEY RESULTS

After last year's event we again sought feed back from growers and exhibitors. Some 300 survey forms were posted out to growers in each valley. There was a 30 per cent response rate which is very high for a survey such as this.

We are now entering our 10th year and the annual attendance figures (Table 1) reflect the changes in the cotton industry

TABLE 1: Attendance Australian Cotton Trade Show

Year	Growers and staff	Other visitors	Total
1998	918	609	1527
1999	1220	1300	2520
2000	1566	800	2366
2001	1703	1700	3403
2002	1580	824	2404
2003	1583	1417	3000
2004	1318	737	2055
2005	1405	523	1928
2006	1154	411	1565



Over 93 per cent of cotton growers have been to the Cotton Trade Show over the past nine years.

over this period. The available irrigated area has remained roughly the same but it is now in the hands of fewer growers. Growers who, driven by seasonal and market necessity, are rationalising both 'what' they farm, and 'the way' they farm.

Late picking a factor

The poor season was a major reason given for non-attendance in 2006, but not the biggest one. More important was the late picking in many areas. This shouldn't be a problem this year with picking well underway.

Around 74 per cent of growers surveyed go to the Trade Show mostly or always and most intend to go to the Trade Show in 2007. Only seven per cent of growers surveyed never attend. This indicated a very pleasing level of support for the Trade Show among growers.

Seventy-six per cent of growers surveyed say they have bought something as a result of visiting the Trade Show in the past nine years. But only 15 per cent of respondents said they did any business as a result of the Trade Show in 2006. It was not surprising that the 2006 Trade Show seemed slow for many exhibitors.

From their perspective there weren't enough growers on-site in a mood — or perhaps position — to do business.

EVERY SECOND YEAR?

Thirty per cent of exhibitors and 22 per cent of grower respondents suggested we go to a Trade Show every second year, alternating with the Cotton Conference. Of course, that means that about 80 per cent of growers went to a Trade Show every year.

As always there are pros and cons to this suggestion but it may well become academic for all of us if seasons and markets continue the way they have for the past few years.

The alternative year proposal is certainly an option. Another option is to change the focus of the event in this "off" year. As are all cotton growers at the moment, we are considering all options.

SO WHAT'S ON IN 2007?

We will maintain and extend those features that we have identified as being of particular interest to growers:

- New product releases;
- Topical grower forums and in-field workshops; and,
- Extended crop rotation trials.

Grower forums

- We take a look at climate change and its ramifications at farm level — in particular, opportunities for trading carbon credit.



The Cotton Club at the 2006 Trade Show.

- Water use efficiency is always an issue — this year it's a \$10 billion issue. We have invited Malcolm Turnbull, the new Minister for Water and the Environment, to help us come to grips with the Water Package and what it means in terms of infrastructure and compensation. But we don't know whether he can make it at this stage.

Grower workshops

We are all painfully aware of the need for water use efficiency and once again we will workshop the latest in water moni-

toring and delivery systems together with evaporation mitigation to retain as much of the stuff as possible.

That same pain mentioned above compels us to also look more closely at machinery use efficiency. Are you sure you are getting the best out of your gear?

Rotation crop trials

The Pioneer Seeds corn trials are back this year, this time planted on the drip irrigation area — and the local pig population is excited by this. Their enthusiasm for the crop poses challenges with fencing

the trials but certainly reaffirms the corn's suitability as a feed grain. There are new varieties for your consideration — varieties that deliver agronomic benefits in a cotton regime and are suited for biofuel production.

We also have high yielding wheat and sorghum trials going in. Properly managed these crops have the potential to maximise returns at times of limited water availability — and they too will have a role to play in any future biofuel industry.

Precision farming

Once again this industry's passion for innovation has seen the return of all the leading suppliers of precision farming technology. The latest in guidance and monitoring systems will be on display. You can now sit in your office and watch your cotton grow, even if your office is in downtown Tokyo.

But in May I recommend you get out of your office wherever it may be located, get off your farm and come and join what remains the biggest gathering of growers and service providers on the cotton industry calendar.

We look forward to seeing you again at Moree, Wednesday May 30 and Thursday May 31, 2007.

“Business success starts with recruiting and retaining the best employees.”

These are the questions that need to be answered!

- ▲ *Having difficulty filling permanent vacancies for many months?*
- ▲ *Have you had to lower your standards to fill permanent vacancies?*
- ▲ *Spending a lot of time and money trying to recruit new employees?*
- ▲ *High staff turnover is an operational problem?*
- ▲ *Unreliability in terms of attendance and performance is an issue in your business?*
- ▲ *The absence of quality labour is significantly impacting on your profitability?*

If you have answered 'YES' to the majority of these questions — you need to talk with us



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