

Swiss precision steers an Aussie innovation

Swiss based company Leica Geosystems has entered the Australian agricultural scene with an autosteer guidance platform with 'world first' technology at a cost effective price.

The new mojoRTK product platform features *No-Drift* technology which allows Leica to guarantee \pm five cm accuracy. The new technology is based on Leica Geosystems' world renowned GPS/GLO-NASS RTK positioning.

Virtual wrench

An additional new feature of the system is *Virtual Wrench*. This offers remote service and diagnostics capabilities via the Australian mobile phone wireless network.

"At the owner's request, a technician in Brisbane will see exactly what an operator in, for example Esperance WA, sees on the mojoRTK screen to assist with installation, training and service resolution," said Tony Witney, Australian Service and Support Manager. "In effect, the technician can be in the cab in seconds using *Virtual Wrench* support technology.

"This also enables the remote diagnosis of system faults, GPS/GLONASS availability and remote software upgrades. This means no more costly phone tag, and no more travel charges," Tony says.

"Effectively and economically servicing new high-tech equipment such as auto-steer can be a great source of frustration for farmers. *VirtualWrench* means farmers can minimise costly machine downtime and excessive service charges."

Cordless base station

Leica's mojoRTK includes an industry first all-in-one cordless RTK base station. Operation requires no cables for power, radios or antennas, allowing farmers to set up and get to work faster. The base station features an LCD user interface for easy set up and lithium rechargeable batteries.

In what you might think is gadget overload, the mojoRTK's autosteer guidance system incorporates an AM/FM radio with MP3 player input – the reason? It's the first to use the standard radio slot for mounting the guidance unit.

Using the tools provided, almost anyone can install the compact console. This saves farmers on installation costs, whilst reduc-

ing unwanted cab clutter – leaving a place for your lunch box!

The mojoRTK platform is built around Leica Geosystems' new 'MOBILE JOb console.

"Our aim was to make accurate RTK technology affordable to a much broader customer base than it is today," says National Reseller Manager, Glenn Clark. "To

achieve this, we realised that we had to meet the farmers' demands for reliability, simplicity and convenience."

The complete system including the mojoRTK *No-Drift* console, the cordless base station, and *Virtual Wrench* has a recommended retail price of \$16,980.

Leica Geosystems Ph: 07 3891 9772;
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The battery powered mojoRTK test site.

Drought impacts on cotton research funding

The decline in cotton production to its lowest level in 20 years is challenging the industry's ability to invest in research.

Australian Cotton Growers Research Association outgoing chairman, Hamish Millar, told ACGRA's annual general meeting that R&D funding was only sustainable due to the prudent fiscal management of the Cotton Research and Development Corporation in establishing a reserve buffer fund in more buoyant seasons.

But he warned that industry R&D expenditure in 2007 was the lowest for many years, and the current outlook is for little relief on the horizon, with existing and future projects under threat from depleted reserves and diminishing funding.

"Research and Development Corporation's collectively are under sustained pressure from governments to report better returns on government contributions to the RDC model. As an industry we need to lobby and advocate for the important investment government contributes to industry through R&D, and report positively through the triple bottom line framework.

"The cotton industry position is that we strongly support the continued investment in the current co-funding arrangements between industry and the Australian Government through the Research and Development Corporations."

He said the next five years will be an extremely important for the cotton industry, with the termination of the current Cotton Catchment Communities CRC coinciding

with the end of the CRDC's new five-year strategic plan, possible changes in Government and Government policies, an uncertain R&D landscape, and continuing funding issues.

One certainty, however, is ACGRA's commitment to the potential development of the cotton industry in northern Australia through NORCOM, an inclusive industry-based evaluation committee involving growers, researchers and technology and service providers.

"NORCOM will encompass planning for developing service provision, resistance management stewardship, biosecurity preparedness, and importantly strategies for local community and government consultation. The committee will also link closely with researchers in cotton projects in the north," he said.

He also acknowledged the importance of the biennial ACGRA Cotton Conference in helping to fund ACGRA and research activities. He commended Conference founding members such as Cotton Seed Distributors, and expressed appreciation of the generous financial support provided by the CRDC.

But the 14th Australian Cotton Conference to be held at the Gold Coast in August 2008 would be the most challenging yet for ACGRA he said.

The new ACGRA chairman is Ben Stephens, Farm Manager, Auscott Narrabri.

**Further information: Ben Stephens
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Out going chairman, Hamish Millar (left) and incoming chairman, Ben Stephens.

Strength in joint venture

CSIRO Plant Industry and Cotton Seed Distributors Ltd (CSD) announced the Cotton Breeding Australia joint venture, to fund cotton breeding and targeted research for a 10-year initial term.

Both parties will contribute \$2 million per annum for research, with CSD also co-funding the cotton breeding work previously co-funded by the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC).

The first stage of Cotton Breeding Australia has already commenced, with CSD funding the addition of a new breeder to CSIRO's Narrabri breeding team.

"Cotton Breeding Australia will see an increase in investment in cotton breeding and research, of approximately \$40 million over the 10 year period" says CSIRO Plant Industry Chief Dr Jeremy Burdon.

"It's a great example of the RDC model developing research to a point where it can be more directly funded by industry without additional grower levy or government funding."

"CSD has reached a point where it's able to reinvest into cotton specific projects and research," says Managing Director Peter Graham.

CSIRO and CSD recognise the very important contribution that CRDC and ACGRA have made to the Australian cotton breeding program to date, and look forward to the continuation of this contribution.

CSIRO-bred cotton varieties currently represent over 90 per cent of the Australian market and are well represented around the world.

Key areas for the breeding and research program include yield/quality improvements, drought and climate change tolerance, water use efficiency and disease tolerance.

CSD will also be funding additional capital expenditure to ensure that the increased breeding and research work has adequate resources to effectively bring the outcomes to the market.

Further Information:

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\$500,000 partnership to conquer cotton pests

The Cotton Catchment Communities CRC (Cotton CRC) has joined forces with Growth Agriculture Pty Ltd, a Wee Waa, NSW based business to commercially develop an exciting new insect management technology.

Research conducted by Dr Robert Mensah and the Semiochemical project team

of NSW DPI and funded through the Cotton CRC has led to the discovery of behaviour modifying plant extracts that are capable of managing cotton pests.

Guy Roth, Cotton CRC Chief Executive Officer, said the partnership between Growth Agriculture Pty Ltd and the Cotton CRC is very exciting as it provides the

opportunity to support and develop local businesses as well as honouring a commitment to increase the availability of alternative products to growers to help them adopt the best Integrated Pest Management practices.

"This new technology represents an economical and environmentally friendly alternative to using synthetic pesticides" Guy said.

Dr Robert Mensah, Principal Research Scientist of NSW DPI's Cotton Health Unit at the Australian Cotton Research Institute in Narrabri said the discovery and development of the leguminous plant extract (semiochemical) allows primary insect pests such as Helicoverpa and green mirids to modify their feeding and oviposition behaviour thereby reducing infestations on cotton crops.

"The new technology will reduce crop damage and minimise synthetic insecticide use without sacrificing cotton yield" said Robert.

Kerry Watts, managing director of Growth Agriculture Pty Ltd has been involved with the agricultural industry for over 35 years. Growth Agriculture Pty Ltd began operations in 1992 and is an importer, wholesaler and manufacturer of a unique range of products heavily focused on foliar nutrition and Integrated Pest Management in crop production.

"This partnership allows us to continue to develop and provide products which will enhance the production of cotton and other crops, enabling primary producers to maintain viable enterprise whilst taking due care of the land and environment" said Kerry.

For more information please contact Robert Mensah on 02 6799 1525 or Kerry Watts on 02 6795 3787 or 0428 211 113.



Kerry Watts and Greg Roth.

Cotton industry identity retires

After 37 years in the cotton industry, including 22 years as secretary of the Australian Cotton Growers Research Association (ACGRA), and organiser of 12 of the past 14 biennial Australian Cotton Conferences, David Swallow has retired.

David joined Cotton Seed Distributors Ltd (CSD) in 1970 as Quality Control Officer overseeing and supervising pure seed production, processing and laboratory testing.

He was appointed Assistant General Manager of CSD in 1980, and General Manager from November 1993 to December 1997. In November 1994 he became a Director and Secretary of Cotton Seed International Pty. Ltd. (CSI), serving on the CSI board until December 1997.

He became secretary of ACGRA in June 1985, also sharing responsibility for

organising and implementing several ACGRA Cotton Conferences. He also helped coordinate the International Cotton Advisory Committee's 59th Plenary Meeting in Cairns in November 2000.

He was a key member of the Blight Investigation Group (BIG) that within three years facilitated a reduction in the level of Bacterial Blight in cotton planting seed to less than 0.3 per cent, which was a precursor to the introduction of varieties resistant to Bacterial Blight.

David and his wife Judy, who has operated as chief of staff, head cook and bottle washer and jack of all trades at many recent cotton conferences, will enjoy retirement in the cooler climes of Orange in the central west of NSW, where apples, grapes and other horticultural delicacies rather than cotton dominate the landscape.



(L to R): Former ACGRA chairman Hamish Millar, David Swallow, and new ACGRA chair, Ben Stephens, at a presentation to mark David's retirement.