

Managing cotton farms through drought

By Peter Cone, Cotton Australia

Cotton Australia recently received funding from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) to carry out industry activities that assist growers manage their enterprises through the drought, develop more efficient irrigation systems and access a range of government drought assistance programs.

Cotton Australia is particularly grateful to DAFF for their significant support, particularly in such difficult financial times. The funding will go towards the types of activities and projects outlined below, which could include local field days, roadshow seminars, a special day at the Cotton Conference, a 1800 COTTON (1800 268866) number for growers to call to find out more information on drought assistance, and a section on Cotton Australia's website devoted to these issues.

From my role as Cotton Australia Policy Advisor, I've been seconded to co-ordinate this project and will be the primary contact for each of the projects. In addition to these tasks, I will work closely with those government agencies involved in the delivery of drought assistance and water use efficiency programs and will provide a



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conduit to those agencies for growers not wishing to approach them directly.

FIELD DAYS

Cotton Australia is offering a portion of the funds available under the DAFF Drought Project to underpin annual cotton growing valley field days with a focus on managing in low water situations and improving water use efficiency. It is hoped that this support will help to focus the industry on water efficiency issues through a tried and tested method, providing practical information and techniques presented by researchers and growers.

In addition, the field days will aim to focus on any innovative ideas which growers have employed in their local area to manage through the many difficult issues of the past few years. The field days will be incorporated into each of the major valley annual field days. An industry field day calendar is being developed and promoted in an attempt to generate interest across and between the valleys, so that information and advice can be shared across the industry.

ROADSHOW SEMINARS

A series of roadshow seminars is planned for early April (Queensland) and late April (NSW) in major cotton growing areas. The

seminar topics will be based on feedback from growers and will feature practical advice from expert speakers. Topics may include:

- Managing human resources;
- Generating off farm income and other opportunities during drought;
- Grower case studies on water use efficiency and managing through low water situations;
- Applying for and accessing government assistance; and,
- Financial management during drought.

The seminars will also showcase what other growers are doing in order to survive the drought in terms of water use efficiency and other strategies. It is hoped that seminar information will be compiled into a number of resources for growers that can be used in the future.

NEW WEBSITE INFORMATION

Information from the drought project will feature as a major part of Cotton Australia's revamped website (www.cottonaustralia.com.au). Prior to the roadshow seminars this section will contain information such as:

- Field Day calendar;
- Project summary and purpose;
- Profiles of roadshow speakers;
- Program of events;
- Roadshow location and dates; and,
- Links.

Once the roadshow seminars are completed, the content from the drought presentations will go live onto the website. The new "Drought" section will then reflect the content of the roadshow presentations and information kit and will include the following:

- Drought facts and figures (percentage reductions in crop size and hectares sown to cotton);
- Case studies of four growers interviewed who have employed initiatives to 'Survive the Drought';
- Links to drought support services ;
- Downloadable 'Managing the Drought' Information Kit/Guide;
- Promotion of the 'Drought Day' at the Cotton Conference; and,
- Photo library section with pictures of drought and of water use efficiency.



1800 NUMBER

1800 COTTON (1800 268866) has been set up to help growers access drought information and support for accessing government assistance programs. I will operate the number from Cotton Australia and will aim to assist growers both in finding out what forms of assistance are available as well accessing this assistance funding.

COTTON CONFERENCE

As part of the DAFF funding, Cotton Australia, together with ACGRA, has been

able to set aside a whole day of the Cotton Conference in August on the Gold Coast devoted to the latest research and technology on water use efficiency and maximising production from this valuable resource. Funding will allow growers to attend the day for free.

CONCLUSION

The funding from DAFF couldn't have come at a better time as the industry manages itself through one of the longest droughts in Australia's recorded history. A

key part of the strategy is that the funding is spent on what growers need most. To this end growers have helped determine which topics need to be covered at the upcoming Roadshow seminars and the Cotton Conference via a fax back form and through the Grower Members Advisory Committee.

Cotton Australia will continue to listen to growers and respond to their needs to ensure these funds are spent in the best possible way.



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