

Wellbeing in cotton communities

In a joint venture, Dr Judith Stubbs and Dr Roy Powell have conducted a 12-month research project for the Cotton CRC to better understand community well-being in rural areas.

Some of these research findings will be presented at this year's Australian Cotton Conference.

"Understanding a community is a complex task, with a range of social, economic and environmental factors contributing to people's desire to live in an area and ability to remain there," explained Judith.

"We developed a framework to better understand life in 'cotton communities' both at a desktop level and from the point of view of local residents, businesses and services.

"We've piloted this framework in six communities in Northwest NSW and Southwest Queensland, and have found some strong similarities and some significant differences about life in these areas."

Judith is the principal of Judith Stubbs and Associates, a company that conducts research and publishes on a wide range of issues including regional economic development and sustainable development. Judith is also an Adjunct Professor at the University of NSW and is involved in several state government advisory bodies on housing and for the federal government on regional economic development.

Roy is a leading professional in the field of regional development. He is the executive chairman of CARE, the Centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics, an organisation based in Armidale, NSW, which provides consultancy and research services in regional, resource and business economics.



Judith Stubbs.

Benchmarking irrigation water use efficiency

"Benchmarking irrigation is crucial if an irrigation enterprise is going to improve its water use efficiency," according to David Williams, Advisory Officer, Irrigation, NSW DPI, Dubbo, who will be presenting the topic *Bales per megalitre – an industry wide evaluation of the 2006–07 season* at this year's Australian Cotton Conference, August 12–14 at the Gold Coast.

"Benchmarking data would not only be an invaluable snap shot of water use trends for a given season but the continued collection of this data over time would enable the cotton industry to show how it is improving and the rate of improvement in water use efficiency."

With 15 years experience working with the irrigation industry, David has been collaborating with the cotton industry to lift water use efficiency "through a coordinated industry approach to advisory, education and training services in all aspects of irrigation."

David explains that the cotton industry has also been "developing an ongoing process to capture water use information from growers and consultants".

"There are web-based tools available to collect this information, including the Water Benchmarking Tool and the commercially available Watertrack Rapid. The

significance of these tools is that calculations of water use indices are standardised and are defined."

"Unfortunately irrigation benchmarking data has not been recorded well in the past. Performance indicators measured were generally not well defined and calculations haven't been standard across the industry."

Recently the NSW DPI collected data from 41 cotton irrigation farms utilising Watertrack Rapid during the dry 2006–07 season. This data was then compiled anonymously so that individuals could compare their performance against the average for growers within their region or benchmarking group and the industry average.

In his presentation David will share some results from this 'first time' benchmarking of cotton irrigators from the different growing areas.

"The data from the farms shows a wide range in irrigation performance and water volume estimation and measurement across the industry. The presentation will focus on these results looking at the range in yield, water use and irrigation performance indicators across the industry," says David.

David has been a member of the National Cotton CRC Extension Team since 1997 and was co-editor and a contributing author of WATERpak.



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