

Cotton industry shines at Annual Awards

On Wednesday, August 12, the cotton industry recognised five of its highest achievers at the gala 2009 Australian Cotton Industry Awards dinner held at the Crossing Theatre in Narrabri.

Close to 300 members of the cotton industry gathered at the Awards Dinner to celebrate the industry's finest researchers, growers and young achievers. The event showcased the incredible talent in one of Australia's leading agricultural industries.

The winners were announced by committed corporate sponsors – AgriRisk, Bayer Crop Science, Cotton Seed Distributors and Monsanto.

CEO of Cotton Australia, Adam Kay, said that the awards have continued to grow from strength to strength.

"The knowledge, innovation, excellent farming practices and strong personal commitment shown by each finalist and winner to our industry is outstanding. The number and quality of the nominees for this year's Awards demonstrates the depth of talent in our industry. I give my heartfelt congratulations to all nominees, finalists and winners of the 2009 Cotton Industry Awards," Adam said.

2009 AUSTRALIAN COTTON INDUSTRY AWARDS WINNERS

2009 Chris Lehmann Trust Young Achiever of the Year Award sponsored by Bayer Crop Science

Ben Stephens, Narrabri NSW

Ben has played a significant role in the cotton industry throughout his 12 year career, holding positions at the former ACGRA, the Lower Namoi Cotton Growers' Association and Cotton consultants Australia. He is currently farm manager at Auscott's Namoi Valley Operation. Ben is committed to remaining involved in the industry and participating where his skills and expertise can be of greatest benefit.

Ben was drawn to the cotton industry because he was inspired by the attitude of



Ben Stephens.

the growers, consultants and researchers, and how they were able to apply research and development ideas and produce improved crops. He envisions a bright future for the cotton industry, and believes that it will continue to advance the prospects of its members at all levels. Ben feels that the industry will succeed if generational change is acknowledged, but also if people from all demographics are involved in driving the industry forward.

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2009 CSD

Researcher of the Year Award

Dr Michael Bange, Narrabri NSW

Dr Michael Bange's career in cotton research spans over 12 years and has led to his current role of Research Scientist with the CSIRO Plant Industry Division, and with the Australian Cotton CRC. His research has provided numerous positive outcomes for the Australian cotton industry, and has greatly improved knowledge across many facets of cotton growing.

Over his career, Mike's research studies have included agronomy, decision support systems for the Australian cotton industry, crop physiology, cotton cropping systems and crop modelling for Northern Australia.

He is currently exploring and implementing methods to improve the cotton industry's access to climate information, and is instigating a program that will help improve understanding and integration of the impacts of environment and crop management on fibre quality. Michael has also undertaken research into plant population and sowing time effects on Bollgard II.

Over the years Michael has mentored many young researchers and industry personnel. He has worked in the United States with researchers in Texas and Florida on cotton decision support systems, cotton agronomy and physiology, and his



Michael Bange.



2009 Australian Cotton Industry Awards winners: (left to right) Dick Estens AO, Dr Michael Bange, Ben Stephens, Jamie Grant (Andrew Pursehouse was unfortunately unable to attend the event). (Photo courtesy of Margot Palmer)

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overall expertise in cropping systems research was acknowledged in 2004 when he was awarded with a distinguished Fulbright Scholarship.

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2009 Monsanto Grower of the Year Award

Andrew Pursehouse, Breeza NSW

Andrew considers cotton the most exciting and profitable crop to grow on his property Breeza Station, and he believes that the 'high risk and high reward' crop is well worth the challenge. Andrew believes that Australian cotton is some of the highest quality cotton in the world, and through research, investment and the work of committed growers, the industry will continue to improve in the years to come.

Andrew is actively involved in the cotton community as President of the Breeza Progress Association, a member of the Upper Namoi Cotton Growers' Association and was President of the Upper Namoi Water Users' Association. He has been involved in the NSW groundwater reallocation process and is committed to the ongoing success of the irrigation industry.



Andrew Pursehouse.

2009 AgriRisk Innovative Grower of the Year Award

Jamie Grant, Jimbour QLD

Jamie runs a very successful dryland cotton farming enterprise where he uses crop rotations that produce quality cotton at a lower cost, and facilitates this by modifying machinery to perform more efficiently and economically, and using optimised row spacing based on yield. Jamie believes that growing quality cotton is paramount and uses 60 inch solid row spacings to allow moisture to be metered to the plant,



Jamie Grant.

encourage even plant growth, and help the plant receive maximum heat and light units.

Jamie feels that dryland cotton will eventually play a bigger role due to the new production systems that are evolving that allow quality cotton to be grown in more marginal conditions. He contributes to the industry by regularly opening his farm up to growers, researchers and engineers from Australia and overseas so he can share his knowledge with the cotton community and keep the industry innovative and vibrant.

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2009 Cotton Service to Industry Award

Dick Estens AO, Moree NSW

The cotton industry has been proudly associated with Dick Estens over the years, from his first efforts in establishing the Aboriginal Employment Strategy, to overseeing the extraordinary success it has become today.

Dick has been farming cotton in the Moree area since 1981. He has always been a community leader, holding positions as Director and Treasurer of the Moree Plains Health Service, Director of the Barwon Health Service, and more recently as a board member of Reconciliation Australia. He has been an active member of the Gwydir Valley Irrigators Association and the Gwydir Valley Water Users Association, and Chairman of the Gwydir Valley Cotton Growers Association. Dick's outstanding work was also recognised when he was named Rural Leader of the Year by the Rural Leadership Group in 2000, when

he was awarded the prestigious Human Rights Medal in 2004, and most recently when he was made an Officer of the Order of Australia earlier this year.

Dick is best recognised as the founder and Chairman of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES). In 1997, supported by the cotton industry, Dick undertook a personal crusade to tackle the problems associated with high indigenous unemployment in Moree.

He set up the AES as an innovative scheme to find jobs for local Aborigines, and break down the barriers between the black and white communities. Overcoming tremendous prejudices from both sides, Dick worked hard to ensure that the scheme became increasingly successful. As proof of this success, the AES currently places around 450 Aboriginal people into employment each year.

The AES works on the premise of building self esteem and pride, along with peer pressure to succeed, within the Aboriginal community itself. By forging partnerships with local businesses and providing ongoing mentoring support, the scheme has become a model for indigenous employment that has helped turn around the future of Moree and other similar country towns.

Dick is a vocal and passionate advocate for the cotton industry, and his role with the AES allows him direct access to Australia's political leaders and opinion makers. Over the years, Dick has taken any opportunity to promote the cotton industry and he has been able to make many positive changes in how the industry is viewed as a result.

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(Back row from left to right): Service to Industry winner Dick Estens AO; Bec Diprose – Monsanto sponsor representative; Steve Ainsworth – CSD sponsor representative; Bayer CropScience Young Achiever of the Year winner Ben Stephens; Deidre McCallum – AgriRisk sponsor representative; and, Brett Mawbey – Bayer CropScience sponsor representative. (Front row from left to right): CSD Researcher of the Year winner Dr Michael Bange, Mrs Bange, Susie Grant, AgriRisk Innovative Grower of the Year winner Jamie Grant.