

More money in mud than dust

By Brian O'Connell

I had the pleasure of writing about the 'big wet' back in January — 120 mm of rain in one night on parts of the Great Dividing Range in northern New South Wales.

The downpour along the divide came at the end of a very wet week right across the Macintyre, Gwydir and Namoi catchments. There was a huge run-off that made its way down those rivers, significantly lifting levels in all the storages. Growers were given the opportunity for water harvesting and high-flow pumping into on-farm storages.

A BUOYANT INDUSTRY

As organisers of the National Australian Cotton Trade Show, we were happily able to report increased buoyancy amongst growers and suppliers in the cotton industry after the rain.

I can even more happily report that the rain that fell on the eve of this year's Trade Show saw a lot of smiling, if a little damp, growers arriving at the front gate on Wednesday, May 26 in Moree.

Through a process of ducking, weaving and elimination I get to do quite a few media interviews at the Trade Show. Most interviewers asked if we were disappointed that the rain had arrived in the wee small hours of the first morning?

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There's money in mud.

◁26...MONEY IN MUD

Disappointed? — We were delighted! This year we had more exhibitors than ever before and they were booked in by the middle of March. And the vast majority of them had moved onto their sites on the relatively dry Monday and Tuesday.

So the unknown, as always, was how many growers would respond to their invitation and turn up on the day? Well, an inch of rain on the old scale makes it difficult to pick the last of your cotton or sow the last of your wheat. So once again we had around 1500 growers and their staff visit the site over the two days.

And the number through the gate over the past five years has consistently been within about 10 per cent of that figure. It would seem that growers are of the view that the Trade Show is well worth a visit no matter what the season, the price, or the weather on the day.

The wet Wednesday produced a record first day attendance of growers. It supported the suspicion that most growers own a Driza-Bone and a four-wheel drive.

The rain cleared by lunch on the first day but not before the big fresh in the big wet landed some 100 kg of barramundi on the barbecues in the Trade Show Café. The wild territory 'barra and chips' was a big hit, as was the Texas Pit BBQ — slow cooked over ironbark coals from ironbark logs brought in at great expense from ironbark forests on the Great Divide — where this story started back in January.

PENT UP DEMAND

So the growers proved once again they prefer a wet track. They leapt out of the gates and onto the course proper — and talk about pent up demand! Exhibitors soon had smiles on their faces to match those of the arriving growers.

The Trade Show isn't just about buying and selling on the day. Its about getting a good comparison of different suppliers and keeping up with new products on the market. But this year was different. There was a steady stream of reports about "best sales ever" by exhibitors.



The Trade Show site stood up well to the wet weather.

One of the most colourful reports was that from a regular machinery exhibitor who said the only thing he was taking home from the Trade Show was his tent! Another story concerned a grower who turned up on a site first thing on the first day. He had visited that same exhibitor at last year's show and got three big quotes. He told the exhibitor he just didn't have the cash flow last year but he turned up this year to place the orders. One exhibitor is now convinced it's worthwhile being on site, even if just to show the flag.

So if you ask me was I embarrassed introducing Mike Carroll, General Manager Agribusiness Financial Services from the NAB and Ian Macdonald, NSW Minister for Primary Industries to open the show when I had a considerable amount of Moree mud smeared across the front of my shirt? Well, of course not! Because they know, and you know, and I know, that you can't grow cotton without mud.

The only problem with this year's Trade Show was the cancellation of the in-field demos. Next year the in-field demos in the cotton field will be back, unless of course we are really lucky and it's too wet to run them again — all that bloody mud!

On the following pages are a few of the highlights and new products presented at the Cotton Trade Show.



The interested audience at the 'Value of Water' forum.



Machinery manufacturers reported brisk business.