

Corn and cotton combine well as cropping companions

By James Holden

We all like to see world records tumble, especially when it's Australian swimmers and athletes setting the new performance benchmarks. But there's one world record about to be smashed that Australian cotton growers will not enjoy. It's world cotton production, which the United States Department of Agriculture is forecasting at over 105 million bales for 2004. This is 10 million more than last year and an all time high.

Much of this extra cotton will come out of China and Brazil. These signals have put the bears in control of the New York market and have forced the price per bale down to well below AUD \$350 over the past couple of months.

That's making many cotton growers seriously consider what they are going to plant this season.

But there are many cotton growers, regardless of the price per bale, who are already growing corn as a companion crop to cotton.

One of these is Glenn Fresser of 'Mayfield' near Dalby. Glenn is a long-term cotton and corn grower. He says the two crops work very well together.

Last season Glenn grew 180 hectares of Pioneer 3237 corn for feed grain, all of which was sold to a local feedlot.

"We can plant corn in September and by the end of February it's ready to harvest and has stopped taking up moisture," he says.

"This means all the rain we get from then on goes into the soil for the next crop."

Glenn says he sees higher cotton yields on country that has come out of corn.

"The corn stubble breaks down and adds organic matter," he says. "The soil is always in better condition after a crop of corn," he adds.

Glenn says last season's yield from the September-planted 3237 ranged from 10 tonnes per hectare to over 12 tonnes per hectare where precise water management practices were used.



Glenn Fresser says cotton and corn work well together on his Dalby farm.



Bruce Picone of Garah near Moree says he sees better cotton yields from fields coming out of corn.

Bruce Picone of Garah near Moree says corn fits in well with other crops grown on the family farm — especially cotton.

"We get better cotton yields after growing a crop of corn," he says. "I think it's because of the way corn conditions the soil and adds organic matter."

The Picones grow Pioneer 3153 to make corn silage for 'Tallawanta' feedlot, which is part of their farming operation.

"If we're going to include silage in a ration, it needs to be more than just a roughage," Bruce explains.

"Silage from 3153 has such good energy value," he adds.

Denis Kruger, farm manager for GCM Pastoral Pty Ltd, would like to further explore the benefits of corn in the Macalister farm's operation on the Darling Downs.

"We harvested 665 tonnes from 88 hectares and received \$205 per tonne (on-farm) for it as feed corn. So it was certainly a worthwhile exercise," Denis says.

"I also think it fits well into the cotton rotation, not just from a profit point of view, but also as a soil conditioner."

The 3237 was planted in December, it received one irrigation and it was harvested in late May.