

# CGS: In for the long haul

■ By Melanie Jensen

**T**HE original charter of Cotton Growers Services back in 1979 was to be industry-leading crop protection specialists. This aim remains at the heart of the company today, as it celebrates 40 years as a major face of the Australian cotton industry.

Established in the traditional home of cotton country at Wee Waa, the business was first run out of a shared office while a complex was built in Boolcarrol Road, not far from the current site.

CGS was incorporated in May 1979 under the leadership of Herman Mani, managing director of Ciba Geigy Australia Ltd and Jurgen Reckefuss who led Schering Australia Pty Ltd, specifically to address a market need of providing focused stewardship for a range of insecticides commonly used in the cotton industry. Over time and through a series of company mergers and acquisitions, CGS today is owned jointly by Bayer and Syngenta.

From the Wee Waa office, the staff of just five serviced growers in the Namoi, Gwydir and Macquarie valleys, becoming a pioneer in bulk chemical storage and handling.

Forward 40 years and CGS now comprises 11 branches with 60 staff in major cotton growing regions. Head office is still in Wee Waa, with branches in Emerald, Dalby, Goondiwindi, St George, Gunnedah, Hay, Hillston, Warren, Narrabri and Moree.

The focus of the company has endured – experienced teams supplying crop protection products, seed, agtech and advice based on industry research, overlain by much-valued local experience.

As the General Manager of CGS for over half of its existence, Rob Dugdale says it is the quality of the people and the loyalty and quality of its customers that are powerful drivers as well as memories for him. Rob retired from CGS late in 2019.



CGS management group, branch managers and board members at the head office in Wee Waa. Back: John Ash (Branch Manager Dalby), Alan Bowring (BM Hillston), Christie Chapman (BM Gunnedah), Andrew Stewart (BM Goondiwindi), Jack Sharp (Market Development Manager), Peter Jensen (Administration Manager), Peter Rozendaal (CFO), Alex Brooker (BM Warren) Front: Maximo Frantantoni (CGS Board – Syngenta), Stephen Ainsworth (CEO), Mal Pritchard (BM Moree), Tony May (CGS Board – Bayer), Lisa Anderson (BM St George), Simon Chorley (BM Wee Waa and Narrabri), Peter White (National Sales Manager), Paul Luxton (CGS Board – Syngenta).

“During the past 40 years CGS has been instrumental in delivering to its customers innovative technologies as it has evolved from mainly lift and shift of huge volumes of pesticides,” he said.

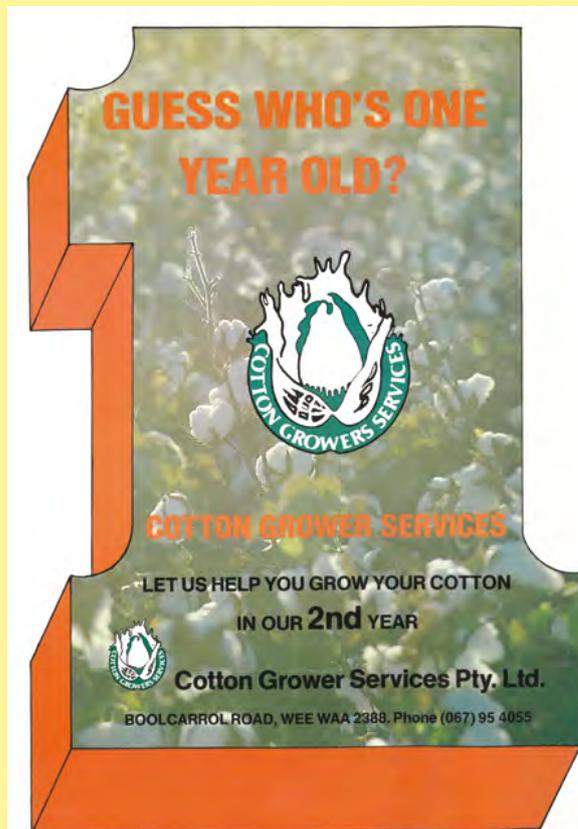
## A UNIQUE RECORD?

There are no records kept of this sort of thing, but it would be surprising if the history of cooperation between *The Australian Cottongrower* and CGS could be matched. CGS advertised on the Inside Front Cover of the very first issue of the magazine and have been there every issue for the past 40 years – every magazine and *Cotton Yearbook*. The only time they have not been on the Inside Front Cover are the few occasions that we wanted to run a ‘special’ cover and they agreed to move to another prime position in the magazine.

CGS started only a few months before the first issue of *The Australian Cottongrower* and the two organisations have developed together.

Far from taking them for granted, we take the opportunity on our 40th “birthday” to thank them and look back on a great partnership.

Of course, there are a lot of other companies and organisations who have provided great support over the past 40 years, but this partnership has been unique.



CGS had its first birthday as the second issue of *The Australian Cottongrower* was published.

"It has been and remains a provider of expert consulting services and more recently has developed the DecisionAg platform providing customers with the most effective agronomic management tools.

"Over the past 40 years we have seen the arrival of miraculous technologies, computers, the internet, mobile phones and biotechnology.

"The next 40 years will be equally as exciting without doubt: remote consulting, satellite-based crop scouting, crop sensors and genetic advances will become commonplace.

"Maybe our cotton growing regions will all have good mobile phone coverage and access to acceptable internet speeds by 2059!"



Stephen Ainsworth (CEO) with Jack Sharp (Market Development Manager).

### Future role

Current Market Development Manager Jack Sharp says going forward, the future role of CGS will be to help growers utilise new technology and science to bring real value to their operations.



Christie Chapman, CGS Branch Manager at Gunnedah.

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**STAY CLEAR**  
WHEN POWERLINES ARE NEAR

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empowering

The advertisement features a background image of a cotton field during harvest. A green harvester is visible on the left, and a powerline tower stands on the right. A yellow diamond-shaped warning sign with a lightning bolt symbol and the text "STAY CLEAR WHEN POWERLINES ARE NEAR" is positioned on the right side. The text "WHEN YOU'RE POWERING THROUGH THE HARVEST, LOOK UP AND LIVE." is prominently displayed in the upper left. The Essential Energy logo and tagline "empowering" are at the bottom right.



**Lucas Findley (owner and director Findley Farms), Simon Chorley (Branch Manager Narrabri and Wee Waa) and Peter White (National Sales Manager) in front of Pioneer P1756 corn.**

Naturally, the core values of stewardship, old fashioned service and crop protection will drive how this is achieved.

"CGS has and maintains a customer focussed approach to business, one in which our customers choose to deal with CGS.

"It's a great place to work and our culture of service ensures our staff and customers are our biggest asset.

"CGS believes in its staff, always supporting training and career development. It has a dynamic business model that has overseen the introduction, management and improved stewardship of many chemicals and technologies, as well as strong support for research and development in the cropping industry."

Jack says navigating the agtech world and decision agriculture can be a minefield for growers, there is so much to take in.

"We are aiming to do the legwork around finding the most suitable products for our clients; the crops they grow and the regions they live in.

"Through offering growers innovative products, technology and services we aim to optimise inputs and maximise outputs."

### **Third generation customer**

Luke Findley's grandfather Bill started with CGS when they first opened in 1979 and the company has been the family's main suppliers for the majority of the past 40 years.

Located west of Wee Waa, the Findleys have been in the Namoi Valley since 1962. Luke says today the main crops they grow are cotton and corn, with pulses, grain crops and "anything else that we can turn a profit on."

In terms of why the partnership has endured, he says, "First of all, and this is the easy part, when you call, they answer and deliver.

"The second part is a willingness to go on the journey with the farmer and continually help them achieve their goals: if there's a will there's a way.

"While CGS offers the reliable, transparent delivery of product which is the basis of such a business, delivering chemical is the



**With 25 years under his belt, John Ash (Branch Manager Dalby) has seen a lot and says the biggest challenges have been insect and weed resistance, and fusarium wilt – plus of course the weather.**

least important service they provide, as there are many suppliers out there who can get chemical, put it in a truck, deliver it and send you an invoice at a fair and reasonable price - it is the extra services they provide.

"CGS see themselves as Cotton Growers Services, and not just as a 'chemical company'.

"If you want to try something, let them know and they will make it happen.

"They are genuinely as interested in new ideas as I am and are always motivated to help.

"I mentioned growing garlic at one stage, and by the end of the day had contacts on garlic growers to meet, when to plant in our valley, and whether or not it would be viable.

"They also have the experience at their disposal, to go back through the past 40 years and re-look at previous ideas and theories.

"Sometimes looking back can be just as valuable as forward, and CGS have the people who have seen the development of the entire industry."

### **Going forward**

The cropping industry recently has experienced extremely difficult seasons, both climatically and politically while maintaining an encouragingly positive outlook. CGS has the same outlook and sees great potential for advancement and expansion of the cropping industry.

"We are and will remain at the forefront of technology, utilising all tools available, enabling better decision making so that our growers are the best in the industry," CEO Steve Ainsworth said.

"Our DecisionAg offering continues to evolve, encompassing advancements in technology, quantifying the benefits of data driven management decisions to support and improve the production and profitability of our growers.

"Going forward, there are always challenges in agriculture, some we can predict and some we cannot.

"Our role is to ensure we are proactive in foreseeing those challenges, and dynamic in our approach to managing them."

CGS is proud of its record of retaining staff for long periods and today, many have been with the company for decades.

## New captain at the helm

Steve Ainsworth has a long history in the cotton industry, bringing a wealth of knowledge and management experience to replace Rob Dugdale, who retired as CEO in late 2019.

As incoming CEO, Steve's aim is to lead a great team of people to build on the fantastic 40-year legacy of CGS and ensure the business is resourced to service the changing needs and expectations of its customers.

"Our aim is simple: to actively listen to our customers, understand their needs and expectations and above all, always deliver on our promises."

The agricultural landscape is changing as technology takes an even firmer hold on decision making and crop management.

Future disruptions are to be embraced, not feared according to Steve.

"My lived experience in agriculture is that disruption and change are the constant themes.

"Arguably the productivity benefits delivered on farm today are a product of the many changes and disruption that have occurred over the past 40 years or so.

"One only needs to look at the big improvements in crop protection, the broad adoption of crop rotation, the great improvements in crop breeding, the use of supporting technologies such as biotech, integrated approaches to pest and weed management and the adoption of high fidelity Decision Agriculture as examples; all of which have improved farm productivity and industry sustainability.

"Change and disruption need to be embraced, but they need to be viewed through the lens of the customer, to ensure this perspective and the benefits are ultimately captured by farmers."

The role of the company's culture and ethos has been critical



Rob Dugdale.

to its success and is in no small part the enduring legacy of Rob Dugdale's leadership and his approach to customers and business.

"Our goal is to have a lot of satisfied customers who are happy to do business with CGS," Rob said.

Steve says Rob's approach was always absolutely clear and has always resounded strongly with him.

"Specifically, this ethos is 'we always treat people with respect, we always listen more than we speak, we always act with integrity, we always deliver on our promises, we always have fun and we always look out for each other'.

"It is fantastic to be part of such an engaged and professional team and while clearly the industry and farmers are facing some very tough challenges at the moment, our resolve to support our customers through this time is unwavering."

## Kerry Watts: Success comes from people

Cotton Growers Services (CGS) started as a unique and fairly improbable partnership in cotton marketing between two normally highly competitive companies, Schering and Ciba Geigy.

CGS was formed to market products from both companies which had application in the cotton industry.

Kerry Watts had worked for Schering in NSW with minimal contact with the cotton industry. In 1979, he received an 'offer that he couldn't refuse' for a two year contract to start the CGS operation in Emerald. After the two years was up, the plan was to revert back to working for Schering again. In those days, the only CGS office was at Wee Waa and the representatives in the other towns worked out of the boot of their cars, as Kerry put it.

"Initially the main thrust of the company was to provide technical backup for products, but it gradually evolved into a marketing company."

After two years at Emerald he got another 'offer that he couldn't refuse' – this time to take over from Wayne Fischer as CGS Marketing Manager based in Wee Waa.

In those days, Jack Warnock was the technical manager for the company and he was followed in later years by Terry Naughtin and John Morris.

In July, 1986, Kerry took over as Marketing Manager of the company and in October of the same year, as General Manager.

"By this time, the chemical service industry was changing with the suppliers looking to take a back seat and leave the distribution to specialist independent resellers. CGS had established an efficient distribution network and Ciba Geigy and Schering decided to open



Kerry Watts.

the whole thing up by selling their products through other distributors while allowing CGS to handle products from other manufacturers. For the first time, suppliers had to compete on the level of service and expertise they could offer rather than on the products they could supply.

"The point to the whole exercise is that a company succeeds not because of products or technical services

but because of the people you have working with you," says Kerry. "It says something about the quality of the team from CGS that many of those who were around in 1986 are still with them today and I still see CGS as an excellent team with the ability to get through."

After 12 years at CGS, Kerry moved on and has helped establish some major cotton industry companies, most recently Growth Agriculture, and has been instrumental in bringing some important products to market including Sero-X, Pred Feed and B&B Flow.

Kerry's successor at CGS was John Allison who was then followed by recently retired Rob Dugdale. Remarkably, the company has only had four general managers in 40 years before the recent appointment of Stephen Ainsworth to the role.