

Working together in a changing world

■ By Michael Murray – General Manager, Cotton Australia

THE world as we have known it has changed. The outbreak of the global pandemic Covid-19, or, coronavirus, has rocked our nation, and at the time of writing, looked set to continue rocking us over the coming months.

There are so many unknowns about this virus and the impact it will have on our people, our country, and our industry. What is certain is that information and rules that apply at the time of writing will not be the same when you are reading this.

While there are many sources of information available, for agricultural specific information I would urge you to look first at the National Farmers' Federation's Australian Farmers website – farmers.org.au.

This website will be maintained with up-to-date and accurate information on how Covid-19 is impacting agriculture, and what assistance is available.

Naturally, we will be constantly updating our own website, using social media and traditional media to keep you informed of cotton industry-specific matters relating to this pandemic. Visit cottonaustralia.com.au for more information.

I also want to remind you that the team at Cotton Australia remains available to answer and address any questions or concerns you might have, and if we cannot answer you straight away, we will track the information down and get back to you. Your Cotton Australia regional manager remains your local contact and is available by phone or email, and, at the time of writing, remained able to visit you on farm if required.

Like many businesses and organisations, Cotton Australia has largely moved to a work-from-home footing, but rest assured, our capability remains strong, and we continue to do all that we can to advocate for our industry.

I realise that we are absolutely flooded with information around Covid-19, and while in many ways this can be depressing, the seriousness of the situation cannot be underestimated.

This will be an enormously challenging time for us as individuals, families, businesses, communities and nation, but if we all play our part, we will get through it.

For many in our industry this challenge has appeared while they are still enduring one of the most severe droughts in our history; while for others, the first sign of recovery has emerged with recent rains and flows in some catchments. Either way, we understand the huge mental, physical and financial strain this has put on our growers, their families, employees and all who support our industry.

We must first redouble our efforts to look out for each other. Take the time to talk to your neighbours, your acquaintances and those that you interact with each day; and if you have concerns, please contact one of the professional or volunteer counselling services that are available.

As we all get used to 'social distancing' we need to ensure that we find new ways to maintain meaningful social contact and effective communication. The Cotton Australia team has already adapted to video conferencing as a core component of our work routines, and I'm sure it will be a work process we will continue using after this crisis.



Michael Murray.

As you, your families and employees 'bunker down' to get through the coming months, I would like to urge those of you who have not yet reached full accreditation in *myBMP* to dive into it and work towards completing that goal. As someone who regularly engages with government on your behalf, I cannot emphasize just how important *myBMP* has been for our industry in putting us to the fore and protecting us from draconian regulations.

Governments cite us an example of how industries should be proactive; and they recognise the leadership our industry has demonstrated over the past 20 years.

While ever it is safe for our regional managers to do so, they will visit you on farm and help you through the process. If farm visits are not possible, they will still be only a phone call, email or even a video conference away.

By investing time in *myBMP* now, you will not only be future-proofing your business, you will be future-proofing your industry.

In return, the Cotton Australia team will continue its extensive efforts to add value to *myBMP* accreditation, both in terms of our social licence to operate, but also by seeking any opportunity to provide a financial incentive. Already, Bayer provides a rebate of \$1 per bale produced off licence fees, and for those growers recognised by the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), there remains some ability to trade credits.

As I finish off this column, I just wish to emphasise our support and solidarity to everyone impacted by this virus. From those infected, to those who have lost loved ones, to those on the healthcare frontline caring for people, to those who have had their employment impacted, to those whose businesses have been shut down – our industry is behind you and our thoughts are with you.

These coming months are going to be a challenge for us all. But if we remain united and completely focused on doing what we as individuals need to do to mitigate the spread of this illness, then we will get through this. Remember, if you are impacted by Covid-19 – both physically and emotionally – you are not alone, and support is available.

I'm incredibly proud of our industry and the way we continue to get back on our feet after being knocked down again and again by things outside our control. We must draw on that resilience and determination more than ever before in the months ahead and stand with all Australians as we collectively deal with this pandemic.

Good times will return – but for now, we must all act sensibly and responsibly in the interests of humanity.