

# 2021 a year to look forward to for Australian cotton industry

■ By Adam Kay – CEO, Cotton Australia

**A**FTER a challenging past year, the start of 2021 has provided us all with an opportunity to move forward with a sense of hope that the year ahead will be a better one.

For our Australian cotton industry, I am optimistic the next 12 months will see many positive outcomes for our growers, environment, rural communities, and broader industry personnel, as we collectively bounce back from drought and the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As we start 2021, I am encouraged that our crop forecast remains much improved on last season, although still below average, with about 2.5 million bales expected to be grown this year. I send my best wishes to our growers as they enter the final phase of the growing calendar and prepare for a busy picking period over the coming months, and I hope we all continue on the road to recovery from drought.

Our industry has many things to look forward to over the coming year, including developments in the following important areas.

## Trade changes

In October last year, it became clear to our industry that the



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National Development Reform Commission in China had been discouraging its country's spinning mills from using Australian cotton. Our industry worked with the Australian Government, including the Trade and Agriculture ministers' offices, to investigate the situation and fully understand what was going on.

It remains disappointing China has moved away from importing Australian cotton, even when, as we have heard from our overseas colleagues, spinning mills in that country continue to want to use our high-quality fibre.

But we are a resilient and agile industry, and when faced with unexpected challenges, we have a track record of persevering and succeeding.

Australia's cotton shippers have been working hard to secure new and smaller markets to sell Australian cotton into, and they remain confident they will find a new home for the whole crop.

This presents a wonderful opportunity for our industry to diversify and build new relationships with other countries, like Vietnam and Thailand. The Australian cotton industry has long enjoyed positive relationships with the many countries we export to, and we look forward to continuing and developing these relationships further in 2021.

## Navigating Covid-19 challenges

While the uncertainty surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic continues to linger, in 2021, Cotton Australia will continue to adapt its activities to suit the times, but ensure we are operating in an effective, Covid-safe way.

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Our regional manager and myBMP teams will continue to engage with our growers and support our industry as it operates in an efficient, sustainable and ethical way. Our policy, communications, and education teams will also continue their work and look for new ways to advocate on behalf of our growers, share our story, and ensure our industry is valued, viable and advanced.

While Covid-19 persists and challenges the ways we advocate for our industry, I am confident our Cotton Australia team will this year continue to succeed and provide immense value for our industry.

After being postponed last year, we still intend to stage the Australian Cotton Conference later in 2021 on the Gold Coast. We are working to build contingencies around Covid-19 into our planning, and we hope the pandemic will not disrupt this valuable industry event.

### Progress in protecting crops

Ensuring our crops remain protected from pests will continue to be a priority for us this year.

In January, Cotton Australia, on behalf of growers, applied to the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) to secure an emergency permit for the use of a mouse baiting chemical in cotton crops, after many cotton growing regions continued to be impacted by infestations of mice.

The APVMA permit approved the use of Mouseoff Zinc Phosphide Bait, plus other registered products containing 25g/kg zinc phosphide as the only active constituent, as bait in cotton crops. The emergency permit is valid until 30th June 2021.

Growers were advised to read the permit, which can be found on our website, and were strongly encouraged to follow the permit, the product's label instructions and directions, and follow best practice procedures when using chemicals.

### Advocacy work to continue

Our industry will this year continue its work to rebuild public trust in Australian cotton. We are an open and transparent industry, and over the next year we will continue to share our story with the community at large and highlight our achievements in efficiency, sustainability, environmental stewardship and best practice, as well as the areas we are working to improve in.

A cornerstone of this work is our education program, which already has some exciting initiatives in the works this year to boost knowledge of Australian cotton in the classroom. For example, in the coming months we will launch the latest edition of our Education Kit – a comprehensive encyclopedia of information about our industry aimed at teachers and students. This updated resource will provide our next generation with a strong understanding of the many facets of the Australian cotton industry, and I am optimistic it will grow long-term interest in our industry.

Also on the horizon this year will be our continued work with brands and retailers, as we collaborate with them on their journey using Australian cotton. Supporting established and upcoming brands as they increasingly turn to using Australian cotton in their products boosts our industry's long-term prosperity. By ensuring consumers know our industry's story and where their cotton garments come from, we are strengthening Australian cotton's place in our nation.

These are just a few snapshots of the positive, beneficial work and opportunities that lie before us in 2021. I am optimistic that, despite the challenges outside our control, our industry will pivot and adapt as needed to remain prosperous and a real success story for our nation. I wish our growers all the best for the rest of the season, and I encourage anyone who wants to learn more about Australian cotton, or have their questions answered, to reach out to us – we are here to help and ready to share our story with you.



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