

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESTRUCTURED ACF  
Ms Maree McCaskill, Executive Director - ACF

Recent Changes: Groundwork for the Decade Ahead

The Australian Cotton Foundation (ACF) was established in 1973 to promote cotton and the Australian industry. It was also seen as the appropriate body for internal education and industry representation.

During these seventeen years, the Australian industry has grown from strength to strength. Change has been dramatic and rapid. Today, cotton ranks as the nation's fifth most valuable agricultural export.

Cotton has come of age. While taking pride in its many achievements, the industry must also shoulder the economic, moral and legal responsibilities of adulthood. The changes within the ACF reflect this new era.

The overwhelming grower support for a substantial increase in ACF's funding levy (from .25c to \$1) reflects an acute awareness of the need for increased cotton promotions and industry representation, especially in response to environmental concerns.

In response, the ACF Board elected to establish an independent Sydney based ACF office in November 1989. Under the directorship of Ms Maree McCaskill, the role of the ACF has broadened considerably.

While implementing the decisions inherent in the 1989/90 budget, the new executive established and staffed the head office, developed a strategic plan for the ACF, hastened the process of incorporation to ensure a fully accountable body, and confronted the environmental movement with a new agenda.

The Strategy: Priorities for 1990-91

ACF's Strategic Plan is a public document (due for publication in August 1990) which clearly defines objectives and strategies to enable the organisation to fulfil its mission.

ACF board and executive believe their mission is:

To be the key industry forum, ensuring the viable growth and development of the Australian Cotton growing and processing industries.

Aside from the essential secretariat and administrative roles, the ACF has four major priorities for the next financial year: environmental management, communications, legislative climate and cotton positioning and promotions.

**1. Environmental Management**

**Objective:**

**On Farm:** Foster, educate and influence growers, consultants, aerial operators and other industry contractors/participants in responsible practices in land care, chemical use and water management to maintain a sustainable base for cotton growing in Australia.

**Off Farm:** Facilitate, promote and influence processors, agricultural chemical manufacturers, farm input suppliers, transport operators, industry organisations, and government departments in creating and adhering to practices which support the development of a sustainable base for cotton growing in Australia.

**Strategies:**

ACF's environmental policy is based on the need to adopt a new approach to problem solving - one that involves environmental awareness, technical expertise and a willingness to adopt innovative and imaginative solutions.

The cornerstone of this strategy is an independent audit of the entire industry to access and document the current and potential impact on its environment and, where necessary, alter current practices.

The first stage of the audit will involve an industry overview and pre-assessment. From this information base, the industry can develop an environmental program to maximise current conservation opportunities and to minimise the impact of current operations.

The full audit will detail specific operations in key areas, including environmental safeguards, pollution control mechanisms, waste disposal, chemical use and water management. As well, the audit will evaluate the economic and social impact of the cotton industry from both regional and national perspectives.

To manage and implement the audit and to improve the industry's technical and regulatory liaison, ACF is appointing an Environmental Director and two rural based field officers.

Other strategies within the environmental policy cover education programs for growers and other industry operators; information packages for cotton growing communities; industry-led negotiations for standard, workable legislation; and open communication channels between the industry and key conservation/environmental organisations.

## 2. Communication

### Objective:

To become effective communicators with all facets of the Australian cotton industry, including individuals and organisations directly and indirectly involved in the production of cotton; the international arena; the government sector; the media; and the general public.

### Strategies:

This is a vital role within the industry. But the effectiveness of this role is dependent on the support and involvement of all of us. ACF can and will establish the channels to facilitate effective two-way communication both within the industry and between our numerous public audiences.

To foster participation and accountability and to maintain a ceiling on expenditure and staffing, the executive is committed to using fully the knowledge and resources of its members. This will include sub-committees of the board, project teams and regional reporters.

The executive will support this participation with media training and communications equipment where required.

Steps underway to achieve and maintain ACF communication policy include:

**Corporate Image:** the cotton symbol, corporate colours and public perception of ACF is under review. The final policy decisions will impact on all four 1990 priorities.

**Computer Systems Development:** master mailing lists, industry data base, media monitoring and analysis, information monitoring and evaluation, accident monitoring and reporting system, publications and audio/visual library.

**Liaison and Industry Representation:** industry organisations and committees, government departments and personnel, local communities and environmental organisations, textile and spinning industries, fashion and homewares sector.

**Media Liaison and Publicity:** research, background briefings, news releases, special features, photographs and personality profiles.

**Corporate Advertising:** advertising works hand-in-hand with public relations to generate a positive image of Australian cotton farming. The 1989/90 campaign has already made a small start in this direction.

**Publications:** a range of education and information material is scheduled for completion within the first three months of this financial year. These include \* Cotton Reels - an information package for students and the general public; \* Welcome to Cotton Country - tourist brochure; \* Q&A on Chemical Use in Cotton Production; \* Economics of Australia's Cotton Industry; \* Other promotional items - posters, stickers, postcards and a new cotton sample pack.

On a corporate level, scheduled publications are: \* The Cotton Reel - the industry's newsletter to be published six times a year; \* ACF Profile; \* ACF's Strategic Plan; \* ACF Environmental Policy (published at the completion of the audit); and numerous background papers.

The industry's teachers' resource kit - Natural Threads - is scheduled for completion in January 1991.

### 3. Legislative Climate

#### **Objective:**

To ensure the industry continually monitors and positively contributes to the development of legislation recognising grower, processor and community needs.

**Strategies:**

As the ultimate industry threats are regulatory, ACF is considering engaging a firm of Canberra lobbyists to monitor state and federal activities of importance to the industry and to make representations on behalf of the industry.

Independently, ACF ensures the industry's views are submitted to related government inquiries and committees, such as the Federal Government's Senate Enquiry into agricultural chemicals.

ACF believes the establishment of a chemical users group, for instance with the horticultural, grains and livestock industries, etc, to manage the agricultural sectors' interaction with environmental activists and government legislators is essential.

ACF is also pressuring the NFF to adopt a more pro-active stance on environmental issues and legislation.

**4. Cotton Positioning and Promotion****Objective:**

Create a positive profile of the Australian cotton industry as reliable producers of high quality product, as a major Australian agricultural export industry earning in excess of A\$750 million export revenue, and as a valuable natural fibre in the domestic fashion, homewares and industrial sectors.

**Strategies:**

With a major proportion of the 1990/91 budget allocated to the environmental strategy, ACF is relying on public relations activities to begin the longterm process of communicating the appropriate images of Australian cotton.

Initially, ACF is concentrating on coordinating fashion magazine coverage of cotton clothes by Australian designers, the generic promotion of cotton as an essential natural fibre, and regional events such as fashion parades or textile design competitions which feature cotton and cotton blend fabrics.

Already, applications for the use of the cotton symbol by manufacturers and retailers have snowballed. Current usage expires in December 1990. ACF is currently reviewing the use and promotion of the cotton symbols.

We are also reviewing and restocking the range of ACF promotional items.

#### Natural Advantages and Nagging Limitations

The industry has several inherent advantages which will contribute to the potential success of our objectives.

We are fortunate that this is a vibrant, independent industry, relatively unhampered by centralised marketing authorities.

There is a strong affiliation between growers and the research sector. The industry has proven itself as innovative, technologically adventurous and capable of rapid adaptation.

Our product has a high level of consumer acceptance, with ample evidence showing an increasing preference for natural fibres in fashion and homewares.

On the other hand, the restricted membership places an economic burden on one sector of the industry - the growers. ACF is investigating associate membership options as one means of increasing the our coverage.

The industry must accept that this entire program will be carried out with fewer than five full time staff members.

The resolute, articulate and well-organised environmental movement is a definite threat to our industry. In the longterm, it may also prove to be one of our greater opportunities.

In the meantime, ACF is charged with the responsibility of undoing many years of neglect and public ignorance about this industry. Our biggest and most testing challenge is to ensure the industry is not regulated out of existence.