



Australian Government

Cotton Research and
Development Corporation

FINAL REPORT 2013/2014

Part 1 - Summary Details

Please use your TAB key to complete Parts 1 & 2.

CRDC Project Number: CGA **MacIntyre Cotton Growers Association**

Project Title: Cotton Picking Women's Picnic (CPWP)

Project Commencement Date: 1 January 2014 **Project Completion Date:** 30 June 2014

Part 2 – Contact Details

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Part 3 – Final Report

(The points below are to be used as a guideline when completing your final report.)



Strong, beautiful women and two ring-ins. Pictured from left are Rene Vander Sluijs, Chantal Corish, Macintyre Valley Cotton Growers' Association President, Nigel Corish, Vanessa Corish and Bec Fing. Pics courtesy of Barb Suhr.

Background

1. Outline the background to the project.

One of the major mental health problems facing rural Australia today remains men's lack of desire to seek help for depression and other mental health issues. The pressure of farm life impacts heavily on not only those who work in the industry but their families. Most often, women are the link in the chain between health professionals, and their partners / male relatives. The more resilient women are, and the better informed they are about the industry their partners work in, the better equipped they will be to act as those links and ensure family members take good care of themselves and maintain good mental health. To be proactive, women themselves must feel strong, knowledgeable and supported. The Cotton Picking Women's Picnic aims to cultivate this in the women who attend through inspirational speakers, cotton industry education opportunities, health & well-being stalls, and a general opportunity for friendship and resilience building.

The women business partners in the cotton business can also offer a lot to the industry. Many are skilled and highly qualified in a range of professional fields, however, often they are not directly involved in the day-to-day operation. This perspective, combined with some capacity building around the cotton industry could lead to innovative solutions, marketing and product development ideas.

Objectives

2. List the project objectives (from the application) and the extent to which these have been achieved.

Organisers of the 2014 Cotton Picking Women's Picnic aimed to:

- i) Develop a public relations campaign around the event and advertise more widely across the region, thereby targeting a wider audience to attract to the event; and disseminating widely the message that the cotton industry is taking a proactive role in achieving better mental health in rural Australian communities;

The Cotton Picking Women's Picnic received strong regional and online media coverage before and after the event. The following table depicts the media coverage received (Table 1):

Table 1: Media Coverage for the Cotton Picking Women's Picnic 2014

MEDIA	Print	Online	Radio	Controlled
Pre-event	Goondiwindi Argus Getting Out In Gundy (front page) Toowoomba Chronicle Queensland Country Life	Facebook site set up for the event. Xx hits?? Emailed invitation	Radio 2VM	Goondiwindi Argus advertisement Border Living Magazine Advertisement Getting Out In

	Border Living Magazine	sent to a list of 500 women.		Gundy Advertisement
Post-event	Goondiwindi Argus Cotton & Grains Outlook The Border News (front page) Goondiwindi Argus (donation to Care Goondiwindi for mental health story) Goondiwindi Argus (donation to Art for Ag story)	Queensland Country Life website – front page		None

- ii) attract double the number of women to the event than the 2013 picnic, to include a wider population of cotton growing women, including from the Namoi Valley;

The event attracted 130 women, which was a 30 per cent increase on the numbers from the previous year's event. Although not the goal number of 200 attendees, organisers still consider this a strong attendance, and the goal of 200 attendees remains an achievable one in future years.

An informal analysis of the day resulted in some reasons for why the numbers may not have been as high as anticipated, they include: one of Goondiwindi's major long-time events, the Picnic Races, being held only three days after the picnic. This event usually attracts many local women who may have felt they could only attend one event in the week. Also a water hazard at the event venue meant organisers had to discourage attendance of toddlers which may have discouraged mothers from attending. An attempt to mitigate this issue was made by employing the childcare services of the local PCYC which was utilised by 8 mothers.

- iii) provide an opportunity for attendees to further their knowledge of the cotton industry by hosting a short course version of the Field to Fabric course;

CSIRO contributed the costs for Rene Vandersluis to attend the day to speak about the Field to Fabric Course and the processing and end uses of cotton. Sixteen women attended the round-table discussion put on by Rene and feedback was that they found this to be highly informative and inspired them to learn more about the industry.

In addition to this, excess funding allowed a group of 18 growers to share dinner with Rene to discuss the challenges and opportunities that are facing the cotton industry post-farm-gate. This dinner was very well received and warmly appreciated.

- iv) Provide an inspirational guest speaker who can deliver the message of good mental health in rural communities;

Goodness Gracious Me's Toni Powell was invited as the key note speaker of the picnic. Toni delivered a speech which around gratitude and value of a positive mind. With women facing the "juggling act" of life, family and business, it was a great reminder to think positively and consider the "glass half full".

- v) Inspire and reinvigorate interest in the cotton industry through a fashion parade featuring successful Australian designers who utilise cotton.

This goal was achieved by making contact with Mercedes Benz Fashion Week marketing co-ordinator, Lindsay Bennett, to request information on a designer who may be interested in attending our picnic. Lindsay was very accommodating and sent our request to a few designers who he thought may be interested. Pia Du Pradal was very enthusiastic about attending the event with a selection of her winter collection. Except for transportation costs, Pia attended free of charge and shared a charter flight with the guest speaker.

A significantly positive outcome of her attendance and 'homestay' on the Corish family's "Mundine" cotton farm, was that Pia was re-enthused about the use of cotton for her collections, and has since become a great advocate for cotton among her designer colleagues. She returned to Brisbane and requested that Lindsay add a special cotton parade in the Mercedes Benz fashion week. As an opinion leader in her industry, Pia will be a positive and proactive unofficial ambassador for cotton and the cotton industry.

Methods

- 3. Detail the methodology and justify the methodology used. Include any discoveries in methods that may benefit other related projects.**
- Informal setting that lent to networking and an enjoyable day
 - School hours to accommodate mothers of school students
 - Child care to accommodate mothers of younger children
 - Health & well-being stalls as well as market stalls – these information stalls gave people "something to look at" without costing any money.

Outcomes

- 4. Describe how the project's outputs will contribute to the planned outcomes identified in the project application. Describe the planned outcomes achieved to date.**

This one day event will:

- Serve to build networks among women in the cotton industry.

Of the 130 women who attended the picnic, an estimated 60 were either wives/partners of cotton growers or somehow directly involved in the cotton industry and had many opportunities throughout the day to intermingle and get to know one-another.

- Further educate women about the cotton industry via a short course version of the Field to Fabric program.

Rene Van der Sluijs attended the day and delivered a short course in the afternoon of the event to a group of 16 women. To further utilise his attendance in Goondiwindi, a grower dinner was organised with Rene so as to afford growers the opportunity to meet with and speak to Rene – this dinner was covered by excess funds from the picnic.

Rene also attended the day with an information stand in conjunction with cotton Australia and cotton info.

- Inspire innovations that build the cotton industry, and encourage industry stakeholders to remain positive about the Australian cotton industry's future.

The picnic show-cased the cotton industry's vibrancy and proactivity, and role-modelled the forward-thinking nature of the industry and those who work in it. Organisers believe those who attended and those who heard or read about the picnic, would be inspired to want to be a part of the industry, or at least view it in high regard.

- Build rapport and understanding between women in the cotton industry and other women in the local community.

The culture of the day was one of informality and friendliness offering a great deal of opportunity for attendees to intermingle and enjoy each other's company, thus providing an opportunity for building rapport and understanding. The Cotton Australia/Cotton Info information stand also gave women the opportunity to learn more about the cotton industry.

- Provide women with a sense of support and mateship not only during the picking season but throughout the year.

All aspects of the day were designed to ensure a supportive and friendly atmosphere. The day also offered many opportunities to discover methods of self-care for those attending. For example: the key note speaker giving positive mental health advice; a women's well-being stall manned by a nutritionist, nurse, a child health worker and a psychologist.

- Be a source of information for women who want to find out how they can provide more assistance to family and community members who may be suffering from a mental illness.

The day was attended by two psychologists who were available for questions and provided brochures on mental health information. Also the local Health Support Facilitator was on hand with a stall to provide direction to anyone with issues and wanting advice on the best organisations to assist them.

- Raise awareness for local mental health projects and mental health issues.

As mentioned, a number of community mental health professionals were on hand to provide information and answer questions throughout the day, and also to promote the availability of a range of mental health facilities in the community.

- Position the cotton industry as one that has a sense of responsibility to the communities in which it exists.

With strong online and local media coverage of the event, Goondiwindi and the surrounding region received a range of messages that linked the cotton industry to being proactive about mental health in rural communities, and one that is particularly supportive of the well-being and mentoring of women in the industry.

5. Please report on any:-

- a) Feedback forms used and what the results were
- b) The highlights for participants or key learnings achieved
- c) The number of people participating and any comments on level of participation

No formal feedback was sort but media coverage and informal feedback suggested the days was a great success and was very well received.

<http://www.queenslandcountrylife.com.au/multimedia/45293/gundys-cotton-womens-picnic.aspx>

<http://www.stockandland.com.au/multimedia/45293/gundys-cotton-womens-picnic.aspx?page=1>

Budget

6. Describe how the project's budget was spent in comparison with the application budget. Outline any changes and provide justification.

Expenses were slightly down on the budgeted amount. This is largely due to the causal approach to the day removing the requirement for a marquee (reducing expense of HIRE goods). The cost of the fashion parade was also reduced by using local models.

Expenses not initially accounted for were childcare, thank you gifts, waitressing and decorations.

\$750 was also spent on an enrichment activity being the opportunity for growers to have dinner with Rene Vander sluijs.

We are seeking to extend this project into 2015. We are confident that we can utilise the remaining funds to run the event once again in 2015 thereby generating twice the "bang for your buck" in terms of CRDC's funding stretching to support two events, not just one. Whilst the budget for 2015 will be considerably less (\$1,725 surplus) than the 2014 budget we are confident that now that the event has a reputation that we can reduce our costs and still attract good quality speakers and increase our income by attracting more people and charging a little more. With an existing track record we can now also seek support from other sponsors.

Conclusion

7. Provide an assessment of the likely impact of the results and conclusions of the research project for the cotton industry. What are the take home messages?

The event draws together an audience (rural women) that has a powerful innate position, in their ability to access and communicate with their menfolk - a section of the rural community vulnerable to poor mental health. The picnic further empowers these women with the knowledge of how to communicate and improve the position of men with regard to their health.

The Cotton Women's picnic is fast becoming an admired event on the Goondiwindi Calendar as an excellent opportunity to momentarily take some time for women to come to come together for an informative and enjoyable day, supported by an industry that their community thrives on.

Through the picnic the cotton industry gained a positive thought leader in the form of fashion designer Pia du Pradal. This is an invaluable benefit as Pia talks positively to her colleagues and her considerably influential friends about the cotton industry. Furthermore, guest Speaker Toni Powell was engaged by the Border Rivers Chamber of Commerce to come back a few weeks later for a full day seminar.

Extension Opportunities

8. Detail a plan for the activities or other steps that may be taken:
 - (a) To tell other CGAs/growers/regions about your project.
 - (b) To keep in touch with participants.
 - (c) For future projects.

It is intended to hold the picnic annually in the region of Goondiwindi, and establish the event as one that continues to build a positive image of the cotton industry, and makes a

difference in the community by helping to overcome well-being issues experienced by rural Australians.

Organisers will keep in touch with participants through the local media, via the picnic facebook page, and via Wincott's newsletter and emails.