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Produced by the Cotton Catchment Communities CRC

Developing industry skills for our future, the CRC effort

Developing the skills of cotton industry personnel and the regional communities in which the Australian cotton industry operates are important aspects of the Cotton Catchment Community CRC.

To enhance the engagement between the cotton industry and the vocational education and training sectors, a National Training Coordinator (Mark Hickman) position was created. Over the past five years this position had been responsible for developing programs that will enhance industry skills and provide an industry connection with the vocational education system.

Cotton CRC has a diverse program for skill development which is implemented through close working relationships with the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC), Cotton Australia and Agrifood Skills Australia based in Canberra. The Cotton CRC is addressing skills development by:

Pre-vocational positions

Cotton Basics:

Farrar Agricultural Memorial High School in Tamworth NSW is currently offering students a Certificate II in Agriculture (specialising in Cotton Production). Students can complete this certificate as part of their year 9-12 studies. The certificate is commonly known as Cotton Basics, a nationally recognised qualification, which provides students with specialised skills which are sort by the industry. If any school is interested in this certificate, the teaching resources are available through *New South Wales Department of Education and Training*.



North West NSW machinery partnership program.

This program focused on developing skills for operating heavy machinery (tractors, implements, cotton pickers) within a cotton enterprise. The role of the Cotton CRC in this project was to provide direction and assistance in the design and content of the course. Niel Jacobsen from Agrifood Skills Australia led the project with funding from NSW Department of Education and Training's Strategic Skills Initiative. The training was provided by Toowoomba-based company, AgTraining. The course took place on a number of commercial properties using commercial scale equipment in north west NSW. The true success of this project was evident through the number of people within the community that contributed time and expertise. The "Best Employment Agency", local producers' equipment and land, Tocal College and Ag Training were essential components of the project. In total 22 people were trained and 15 found positions of work as a result of the two-year project.

Existing workers

Cotton Grains Irrigation management workshop series

A main focus of Cotton CRC's skill development program is to demonstrate how industry-funded research and development can be practically implemented at the field level.

To achieve this outcome certain extension activities were aligned to the Cotton/Grains Irrigation Series. Workshops were delivered in the field focusing on the practical skills needed for producers to increase their water efficiency. These skills include optimising the furrow irrigation scheduling, measuring a pump's efficiency in energy and water flow, and metering and performing a whole of farm benchmarking process.

All workshops contribute to units of competencies from the vocational education system. Producers are able to use



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these skills and knowledge towards an agricultural qualification whilst improving the farms production and environmental footprint.



Field to Fabric Cotton Course

Cotton CRC, in conjunction with CSIRO and CRDC have developed an industry course which focuses on improving all aspects of the supply chain for cotton production.

This course begins at the planting stage and concludes at the yarn formation stage before the product enters the clothing sector. The aim is for producers, contract pickers, ginning plant operators, marketers, millers and spinners to collaboratively undertake the course to learn how management at the field level can impact on the quality of the final product. Likewise, the spinning sector gains an understanding that certain attributes required in the yarn are heavily influenced by environmental factors of post farm gate processes.

2010 will mark the course's 10 year milestone. Course participants travel to the CSIRO's textile plant in Geelong Victoria to see first hand the operations of a commercial scale spinning mill in operation.

Managerial level

Certified BMP Farm Manager and Recognition of Prior Learning Assessments

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a foundation strategy for establishing a sound skills base within the industry. An RPL assessment is conducted by assessors from the vocational sector on farm with the producer. The assessment is a review of the producer's skills

implemented with their business. The process both recognises the individual strengths and identifies opportunity where gap training could benefit their business and themselves.

Recently the cotton industry accessed some federal and state subsidies under an initiative called the Productivity Placement Program, which supports producers to undertake this professional development. In addition the industry has established a best management award for managers who have gained a Best management Practice status for their business. These managers can now personally achieve a BMP status to acknowledge the BMP managerial skills they demonstrate. The award is known as a Certified BMP Farm Manager, which is the equivalent to a Diploma of Agriculture under the national vocational system.



This particular award, created by the Training Coordinator position and endorsed by Australian Cotton Industry Council, has recently been chosen as a national case study for an international labour organisation report 'Skills for Green Jobs in Australia'.

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