

CottonInfo: Connecting growers with research

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Two key quality issues at picking...

Moisture:

Moisture at picking has a significant impact on cotton's fibre quality. It can lead to colour degradation (spotting) and discoloration which affects the colour grade: the fibre becomes yellower and less bright with the trash sticking to the lint. It can also impact seed quality, with more moisture equaling less germination and vigour.

In addition, cotton that is picked wet will result in cotton being twisted on the spindle, which may cause picking interruptions (as picker doors will become blocked); lead to seed cotton being more difficult to process in the gin; and mean that excessive drying is needed during cotton ginning, causing fibre damage. It can also increase the risk of modules self combusting.

General rules of thumb:

- If moisture is present on vehicles, it is most likely that cotton is too wet to pick.
- If you can feel moisture on the cotton it is too wet. Seed cotton measured on a moisture metre should be less than 12 percent (keeping in mind that machine picking can add two percent moisture, and green leaf will also add moisture).
- The seed should feel hard (it will crack in your teeth).
- A handful of cotton squeezed in the palm of your hand will spring back to

near its original size if the moisture is acceptable for picking.

Round module considerations:

- Round modules are smaller in size than traditional modules, which means there is less dilution of the cotton from across different picking times and moistures. The last round module picked each night will have significantly higher moisture than those picked in the middle of the day. From a ginners' perspective, this is an issue as they are unable to respond to rapidly changing moisture levels to gin efficiently.
- There is less surface on each round module exposed to the air to allow for moisture to evaporate. Round modules clumped tight in a sausage formation will limit airflow.

What can you do?

1. Avoid picking wet cotton
2. Ensure sufficient air flow between modules
3. Notify your ginner of modules that may be moist so that they may be ginned first, or at least monitored in the module yard.

Contamination:

Contamination of cotton with foreign substances lowers the value of the product and often causes problems and increased costs for those processing the cotton, both at the gin and at the spinning mill. Australian cotton is recognised as one of the least contaminated cottons in the world and receives a premium - so any contaminants lower the value of the product and can potential damage our reputation.

Most contamination occurs at picking and module building, including:

- Natural contaminants: rocks, wood, leaf, bracts, bark, green leaf, burrs, grass and honey dew (caused by aphids and silverleaf whitefly).
- Man made contaminants: torn cotton tarps and plastic wrap, twine, oil, hydraulic oil, grease, pieces of metal and equipment, food wrappers, drink bottles, mobile phones, cleaning rags (and even a quad runner!).

What can you do?

1. Conduct a site inspection before putting a module down (to avoid rocks,

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grease, dirty and discarded cotton). With round modules, avoid cotton stalks where possible as they can tear the plastic.

2. Check tarp quality of conventional modules and condition of plastic wrap of round modules.
3. Train all workers to watch out for contaminants. Provide facilities to clean up and isolate rubbish (for example, providing rubbish bins).
4. Employ careful management and good practices, like [Come Clean. Go Clean.](#)

Where to go for more?

- CottonInfo's [Australian Cotton Production Manual](#) contains a chapter on harvesting and delivering uncontaminated cotton.
- myBMP [Fibre Quality module](#).
- [FIBREpak](#).



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