

Cotton Fact Sheet

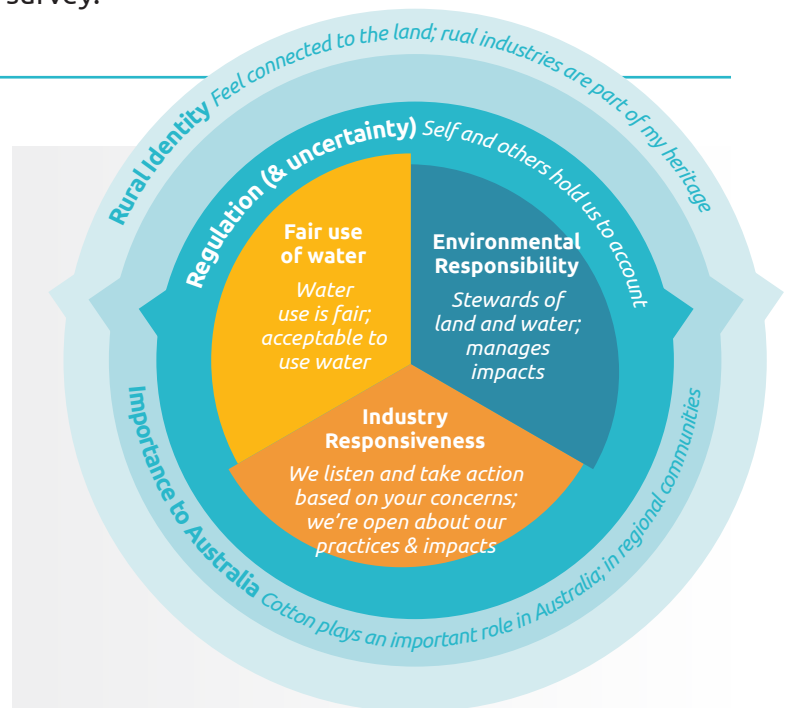
Taking a deeper dive into the data from the Community Trust in Rural Industries (CTRI) research has allowed the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) to better understand the key drivers of trust in the cotton industry. A nationally representative sample of 1,000 Australians from across the country were engaged via an online survey.

Key drivers of trust

The key drivers of trust in the Australian cotton industry are:

1. Procedural fairness
2. Environmental responsibility of cotton
3. Belief that water use in agriculture is fair (allocations of water and appropriate use)
4. Belief that government is regulating cotton
5. Importance of the cotton industry to Australia.

Other less significant predictors of trust in the cotton industry are rural identity (i.e. a connection the land, and rural industries being part of Australia's heritage) and explicit uncertainty (i.e. community members being unsure if there's a best practice code for cotton; not being familiar with how water is allocated; and not knowing about worker conditions).



A framework for enhancing community trust in the cotton industry

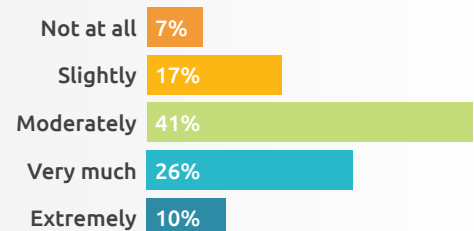
Trust in the cotton industry to act responsibly

77% of community members trust the cotton industry to act responsibly.

36% trust the industry 'very much' and 'extremely.'

Only 7% don't trust the cotton industry 'at all' to act responsibly.

How much do you trust the cotton industry overall to act responsibly?



Industry responsiveness



Almost half of those surveyed (**44%**) **believe the Australian cotton industry listens to and respects community opinions.**



44% believe the Australian cotton industry are prepared to change its practices in response to community concerns.



42% believe the cotton industry hasn't taken enough action to respond to concerns around water use, while 39% gave a neutral response. This shows a potential lack of understanding of how water is managed and presents an opportunity for the cotton industry to engage with and educate the community, showing their responsiveness to community concerns.



Doing something is better than remaining silent

The research showed that when the cotton industry is silent about an issue the community cares about (like water use), community members assume the industry has something to hide. Being proactive on issues of importance to the community and holding industry participants accountable attracted much more positive community sentiment.

When the community can see the cotton industry actively responding to issues of concern, particularly around water and the environment, their level of trust in and acceptance of the industry was higher.

Community trust relies on people believing the cotton industry is doing enough to achieve best practice.

Comments such as 'when groups representing rural industries like cotton speak out against individual rule-breakers, I feel like I can trust them' and 'when rural industries like cotton acknowledge their mistakes after public outcry, I can forgive the mistake' show that when the cotton industry is seen to acknowledge an issue and hold individuals accountable when they misuse water resources, community members feel they can trust the industry.

This should give the cotton industry the confidence to embrace the challenge and have conversations with the community. The survey responses show the community is ready to engage. This requires a level of vulnerability but having the conversation shows industry responsiveness – which is critical to maintaining the community's trust.



What does this mean for the cotton industry?

A second phase of work was undertaken for the cotton industry to test an intervention strategy for community trust. This was based on a key finding from the focal study survey: that community members expect the cotton industry to hold growers accountable for their actions. The aim of this work was to provide clarity around alternative policy options for cotton industry stakeholders.

A survey was conducted with five groups of community members exposed to a mock news article detailing an alleged water theft incident. Five versions of this article were presented, a different version for each group, with the response of the cotton industry varying in each. Mock news article excerpts representing industry responses to an alleged water theft incident', ranged from very defensive *'It's a bit rich for people who live in the city to criticise something they know nothing about - what happened to 'innocent until proven guilty?'*, to very strong action *'We understand the concerns of the community and until we are 100% satisfied that all allegations are disproven, we have taken decisive action. The Australian cotton industry body has suspended the membership of the producer in question,'* taken to preserve public confidence that the industry is taking the issue seriously. All participants completed a survey before and after the news article to assess how the industry's response affected key measures like trust and perceptions of responsiveness.

Results were mixed. As expected, the very strong action condition yielded the most positive participant responses toward the cotton industry on a range of measures including responsiveness. But in the defensive condition, the cotton industry was effective in convincing participants that the industry did not use more water than it was entitled to, however the responsiveness of the industry was also seen to be lowest in this condition. As a result, further work is now underway delving deeper into the community's responses, to gain clarity around the findings.

Cotton growers are important to Australia's way of life

73% of respondents agreed that cotton growers play an important part in society, with 77% agreeing the cotton industry plays an important role in the regional communities where it operates.

Importance

Cotton farmers play an important role in Australian society

☹️ 8% Disagree



☺️ 18% Neutral

The cotton industry plays an important role in regional communities where it operates

☹️ 6% Disagree



☺️ 18% Neutral

#The research was undertaken by Voconiq an Australian data science company built on a platform of research developed by Australia's national science agency CSIRO.

Visit the [CTRI website](http://www.agrifutures.com.au/national-rural-issues/community-trust/) for further information ›
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