

Wincott Inc – Women’s Industry Network - Cotton

Kate Schwager and Helen Dugdale
Wincott Inc., Krubi, Wee Waa

Introduction

Wincott is a network for all women involved both directly and indirectly in the Australian cotton industry, offering an alternative opportunity for them to increase their knowledge and develop their skills. The network caters to women of all levels of skills and confidence, who wish to learn more about cotton growing and the cotton industry through to women who may wish to undertake a broader role within the industry or in the wider agricultural sector. Wincott activities provide long term benefits and foster mainstream participation. The network is cost effective and uses existing industry structures and a wide range of resources to achieve its aims and objectives.

Wincott has continued to grow since it was formalised in 2002. The current database has 250 women from Emerald in Qld to Hillston in NSW, as well as from metropolitan areas and includes growers, consultants, researchers, partners of cotton personnel, spray applicators and many others. The current Wincott committee was elected at the Annual General Meeting held in Narrabri in 2005 and continues to implement the aims and objectives of the network. The committee is representative of the depth and breadth of Wincott as an industry group and of the women involved in the cotton industry.

Wincott’s focus is on providing information and linkages sourced from industry, government, community and from the members themselves in a coordinated manner through meetings, newsletters, field days, and training seminars. Wincott provides:

- A support network for Women in the cotton industry
- Communication between women in the industry and within the industry as a whole
- Increased awareness of industry issues
- An avenue for constructive feedback to both industry and government
- A resource network for the cotton industry
- Workshops and field days
- Support for women new to industry and supplies an information starter kit
- An updated database of members
- A quarterly newsletter
- Support for local area activities
- Information about all industry activities
- Coverage in all cotton growing regions

Ongoing Aims of Wincott

1. Continue coordination of communication and network activities via the Publicity Officer position as well as committee members in each valley.
2. Continue facilitation of learning and upskilling activities through meetings, field days and newsletters relevant to the members.
3. Provide opportunities to participate in various skills courses.
4. Promotion of the network to a wide range of women involved in all aspects of the cotton industry through networking with members and industry groups to encourage wider participation and membership.
5. Continue to be an information source for the wider cotton industry.

Award Winning Members

One of Wincott's members, Sandy Young, attended the Advancing Partnerships in Cotton Course in 2005. This is a communications and leadership course run by Wincott. The skills she gained at the course helped her in her position as Manager of the Australian Cotton Exhibition Centre. Sandy then went on to win the Cotton Industry Young Achiever Award.

In February 2006 our Wincott Publicity Officer, Kate Schwager, won the RIRDC Rural Women of the Year award for NSW and she has been able to generate a large amount of interest in the Wincott Group. She also attended the Australian Institute of Company Directors residential course held in Canberra in May 2006. Kate has also spoken at a number of venues including the CWA Conference (Narrabri), Nugan Group (Griffith). Upcoming functions include NSW RWN Women's Gathering, (Grafton), QRWN Conference, (Brisbane), "Women out West", (Dubbo) and the Department of Natural Resources Women's Day (Tamworth). This all helps to promote Wincott and the Cotton Industry to the wider community.

One of our committee members also nominated and was successful in winning the Cotton Research and Development Corporation award for Rural Industry Partnership Program for 2005. Alicia Dunbar, cotton grower from Emerald, was successful in achieving this award and attended, on behalf of the cotton industry, the Australian Institute of Company Directors residential course held in Canberra in March 2005.

In 2006 another Wincott Committee member Victoria Cush, Moree cotton grower, has also received a scholarship to attend the course.

Both these women are worthy recipients of this scholarship and have already made a significant contribution to their community, as well as the cotton industry, and will continue to do so.

Wincott Website

Committee members Ruth Quigley and Kate Schwager, from Webteam Australia, developed the website and launched it at our AGM in Narrabri in 2005. It has many more hits than we have members. Kate and Ruth ensure the website is kept up to date. It looks fabulous and is easy to navigate. It has all the information about Wincott activities as well as the latest cotton issues. It is a great asset as a conduit to and from the industry and to our sponsors. Also available are past Newsletters and a calendar of events. www.wincott.net.au

Promoting the Cotton Industry

Wincott has also promoted the cotton industry in the broader Australian community through articles in the Outback magazine, Queensland Department of Primary Industries' Women's Industry Trade Fair and NSW Agriculture's Rural Women's Network Country Web, Women's Weekly, Australian Cotton Grower Magazine, Australian Country Style Magazine, CRDC Spotlight Magazine, the newsletter of the Office for Women and the Regional Business Magazine. On a broader scale, through participation in the Australian Women in Agriculture forum, Wincott has been able to promote science-based discussion and disseminate information from industry researchers regarding issues such as genetically modified organisms, water use and environmental issues into the email forum, which is accessed by women in all agricultural industries. The Wincott newsletters transfer a wide range of information available through industry, government and local community sources into an organised and accessible format that many network members have used to pursue learning opportunities.

Wincott Starter Kit gives an excellent overview of the industry structure, research and production information and links to existing industry resources. It is being used by a number of industry personnel as a resource for new growers entering the cotton industry. It has been updated with current information in May 2006.

Establishment & Sponsorship

Funding from the Cotton Research and Development Corporation established the network and provided co-ordination for the development and research of relevant services. CRDC funding continues for specific activities, but Wincott has progressed its goal to become self sufficient through sponsorship from our gold sponsors: Monsanto, ANZ, Grant Thornton, and silver sponsorship from: Telstra, Bayer Crop Science and Drummuster.

Membership to Wincott is now free due to sponsorship.

The sponsorship arrangement is a winning combination for all concerned. Sponsors' messages are relayed to the 'other half' of the cotton industry via Wincott which in turn is able to function and disseminate information and the

women in the industry gain from this knowledge and become more informed with the facts about their industry.

Macarthur Consulting assisted in the development of a strategic plan which has enabled the committee to develop a business plan for implementation and management of the network for 2007. This business has donated its expertise in support of Wincott.

The Wincott coordinator is employed for 1 to 1.5 days per week and is the lynchpin supporting, coordinating and administering the network's services. In essence, the success of the network is reliant on the person coordinating communication from the various sources and within the committee.

Building knowledge develops greater understanding of industry issues and, therefore, the impact on the industry as a whole, as well as the community. Women involved in the cotton industry are a direct link between industry and the community and Wincott is an effective vehicle for them to communicate industry values, research, key issues and other sustainability issues to cotton communities.

Wincott Activities

Since Wincott's inception, the following are just some of the events Wincott members have had the opportunity to be involved in:

Dalby Field Day 2004 was held at Jeff and Marilyn Bidstrup's farm, "Warra".

This highlighted the increasing role of women in cotton production, research and technical support that occurs on the Downs. Queensland Cotton's Bronwyn Bartsch gave a brief insight into the American cotton industry with a talk on her study tour to California, particularly the different varieties of cotton grown in different parts of the US. The new attractant technology released this year under the product name Magnet has been a talking point within the industry. Dr Alice Del Socorro outlined to the group the way Magnet attracts moths and when combined with other insecticides kills the moths. Nevin Olm from the local landcare group, highlighted some of the positives from cotton grown in the area and the links to reduced salinity. Brett Bidstrup outlined one of the Bidstrup family's newest projects "breeding Assassin bugs", the next natural killer of heliothis. Jeff and Marilyn Bidstrup provided a tour of their insectories and the process for making "Vivus". Melina Miles from the DPI provided an overview of how IPM works and how it is being implemented successfully on the Downs. It was also interesting to see the clothing made from naturally coloured cotton grown on the Bidstrup farm.

Boggabri Field Day 2003 was held at John and Robyn Watson's farm, "Kilmarnock". The group learnt about how cotton grows and produces a quality fibre, how it is managed in terms of pests, diseases and water use efficiency and how best management practices can help relations between cotton farmers and communities. Mark Hickman of the Cotton CRC commenced the day with an explanation of basic plant physiology. Guy Roth from the CRDC explained why and how it produces fibre and the intricacies of water management. The group really enjoyed getting into the crop and trying their hands at using a beat sheet to monitor beneficial insect numbers. Cotton consultant Anna Madden discussed how insects are managed in the field to encourage predators and minimise chemical inputs. Several of the group mentioned that they had not realised how much is involved in making a pest management decision. Dr Mary Whitehouse captivated the group with her enthusiastic description of the role spiders play in the cotton crop. The day also included a visit to native tree vegetation plots, which John and Robyn Watson have established along the Namoi River and trials on the impact of defoliants on native vegetation. Cotton Australia's Ross Brown and Rachel Holloway from CRDC, led a discussion on the Best Management Practices Program.

Classing Tours have been held at Australian Classing Services in Wee Waa and Dunavants in Emerald. At both tours participants came away with a much better idea of how and why cotton receives premiums and discounts. Topics included the benefits and costs of Australia's adherence to US Department classing standards and the significance to growers of cotton specifications stipulated by spinners. Perhaps the most important conclusion reached by the Wincott women was that growers should closely monitor the ginning and classing of their own cotton until it is sold.

Information Days

To encourage more women in other valleys to become members, our aim is to hold information days in all valleys.

Wee Waa Information Day 2006

In March this year we held a very successful information day at the Seplin Estate Wines, Wee Waa. Our guest speakers were Robyn Watson, a cotton grower from Boggabri, on "Cotton and the Environment Do Mix Successfully"; Ann Maree Galagher, from ANZ Bank on "ANZ and the Community"; Anna Hurst from Monsanto on "GM/Bio Technology"; Phil Tucker from Drummuster on "Safety Around the Farm" and Dr Gabi Casewell from the Eyra Skin Care Clinic on "Skin Cancer and Skin Therapy". It was a very informative day with about 35 ladies attending. They found the speakers very interesting and gathered a great deal of

information about the topics presented. The feedback was very positive and we look forward to having a number of these in other valleys over the coming months.

Dalby Information Day and Field Trip 2005

In November 2005, 20 women attended an excursion to the Bayer Crop Science manufacturing plant at Pinkenba where all of the chemical formulations for Australia cotton crops are made. They also visited the Port of Brisbane where the facilities for all types of freight are found. They were extremely fortunate and privileged to be allowed into the Patrick Corporation terminal to see an entirely new system of handling containers. This was a rare opportunity to see something that the general public, and indeed much of the industry, would never normally be able to view. We are very grateful to Bayer Crop Science for offering Wincott this opportunity and for providing the impetus for the day.

Dirranbandi Information Day 2005

In May we had a very informative and relaxed day in Dirranbandi, with people from St George attending as well. There were three excellent speakers: Dr Gabi Caswell on farming and sun damaged skin; Sarah Hood on water use efficiency and how Australian cotton industry compares with the rest of the world; and Veronica Chapman on Natural Resource Management. Not only did we learn from these speakers about cotton and farm life, but the day was also another great opportunity to mix with women from other parts of the industry.

Warren Information Day 2004 – Colly Cotton organised an information day at Budda Station. The Wincott Publicity officer, Kate Schwager was the guest speaker informing people about Wincott activities. It was attended by 60 women. The feedback was very satisfying from those who attended. To date we have had a few new members from this valley and one attending the Advancing Partnerships in Cotton Course. We received very good press coverage in “The Land” and the “Queensland Country Life” Cotton Insert.

Other Workshops:

Succession Planning

Wincott are very pleased to announce in conjunction with Grant Thornton & Associates, Sydney, that a series of Succession Planning Workshops will be held in each valley. These workshops aim to equip key decision makers on the farm with the tools necessary to understand what is involved in Succession Planning and the importance of developing meaningful and effective succession strategies. Participants will gain an understanding of the issues surrounding Succession Planning and will be provided with a framework in which to prioritise and execute a

course of action. The framework is designed to ensure that long term wishes may actually be realised.

Promotion of Healthy Farming Families 2006

In February 2006 we were able to help CRDC promote the Healthy Farming Families Workshops. Some of our members attended the Wee Waa and Dalby 2-day workshops. 38 cotton industry people attended these workshops and were very impressed with the valuable information they received. Some of the comments from these workshops were similar to the following:

“The program was a wake up call to stop taking things for granted and start taking greater control of our lives – health, wellbeing and family safety”

“We are encouraged to make some changes to our personal and family life. Hopefully better health outcomes will lead to better farm outcomes!”

Meeting With Sugar Industry Women 2005

In February we hosted 20 women from the Sugar Industry. 20 local Namoi Valley women also attended this dinner meeting. Spokespeople from Cotton and Sugar gave a presentation about their respective industries. After that the conversations and comparisons just did not stop! One of the quotes from the Women in Sugar was that *“they wished their industry was as open and communicative about production and research as our cotton industry.”*

Wincott Skills Course 2005

The 2nd Australian Partnerships in Cotton skills course was held in March and May 2005. This was organized by Jon Baker, who also obtained the funding from the Federal Office for Women. Again, this was a great success with all participants gaining skills to improve their own business opportunities and community activities. This course was run by Jo Eady, the highly motivational facilitator.

Wincott Skills Course 2003-04

The first session of the Wincott Skills Course “Australian Partnerships in Cotton” was conducted over three days in late 2003. Guest speakers included Fiona Simson (Time Management and Business Skills), Chris Lehmann, Mark Hickman & Rachel Holloway (Agronomy, IPM, BMP), Peta Slack-Smith, Ruth Quigley & Joanne Grainger (Leadership & Personal Development). Speakers provided participants with interactive sessions, as well as personal experience and stories to inspire everyone. Dinners were held on both evenings of the first session to increase opportunities to meet with industry leaders and discuss key issues.

The second session of the Wincott Skills development course took place in March 2004. The topics covered included: Introduction Skills, Mentoring – Receiving and Providing, Myers Briggs personality styles, Communication Skills and Effective Representation on Management Boards. During dinner, women were also given an opportunity to use the skills learned at the course, meeting and interacting with industry leaders.

Annual General Meeting 2005

In August 2005, a very successful AGM was held in Narrabri and over 50 people attended with a number of guest speakers. These included Elise Munsie from Telstra Country Wide, Maree McKay from the Producer's Forum re GM Technology, Shayne Miller from Namoi Cotton on 'Cotton Marketing' and Dr Gabi Caswell from the Eyra Skin Care Clinic from Moree regarding skin cancer and skin therapy. There was very positive feedback from those who attended and all were grateful to have the opportunity to learn from these excellent guest speakers on such interesting and diverse topics.

Annual General Meeting at the Cotton Conference 2004

A very successful luncheon meeting was held at the Cotton Conference on the Gold Coast. Wincott appreciates the sponsorship of the venue from ACGRA. A new Executive was elected with Helen Dugdale (Narrabri) as Chair, Alicia Dunbar (Emerald) as Vice Chair, Ruth Quigley (Trangie) as Treasurer and Kate Schwager (Wee Waa) as Secretary/Publicity Officer. Other committee members elected were Helen Bates (Goondiwindi), Vicki Kuhn (Emerald), Shayne Miller (Moree), Jon-Maree Baker (Narrabri), Penny Anderson (Theodore) We received great press and over 60 women attended.

The women enjoyed a wonderful presentation from Jodi McLean (CRDC Narrabri) who was a recipient of the Science and Innovation Awards For Young People. Her topic was "Spilling the Beans on Genes - The Science of GM Cotton". The group were also able to hear from Barbara Wildin, Chair of the Fitzroy Basin Association, who was also the first female Mayor of the Livingston Shire. Her message on Natural Resource Management was *'for people to recognize and respect the diversity of the Fitzroy Region and be prepared to work together for better Natural Resource Management'*.

Vice Chair Liz Alexander and Jon-Maree Baker presented Wincott's Strategic Plan. This plan will help to ensure the ongoing success of the group.

Jo Eady from Rural Scope Pty Ltd summed up the day with the announcement of the new skills course Wincott will be running during 2005. The delegates heard from past graduates of the course as to how helpful they found the course in giving them the extra skills to succeed in their chosen profession and community involvement.

Annual General Meeting 2003 Goondiwindi

Cindy Hartwig, in a humorous but at times deeply touching manner, drew attention to the frequency and severity of the incidence of accidents on the farm.

Sonia Muir, co-ordinator of NSW Rural Women's Network, introduced those present to the role of RWN and opportunities they provide.

Betsy Turner gave a very interesting workshop on why Natural Resource Management is so important and how women can get involved in Catchment Management.

Fiona Simson from Training Improvements introduced the women to the basics of Personal Skills Development and Communication Skills and how they can improve on these areas.

Peter Cone from Cotton Australia introduced the new legislation with regard to chemical spray regulations. Women were provided with the background to some of the technical issues associated with the legislation.

Trent Humphries from Fiducian Financial Services explained to the women how to make the extra money go further.

Ruth Quigley who runs the Wincott website, and Kate Schwager who runs the Wincott database, gave the audience a first hand look at the website giving them a chance to understand the forum. They also introduced them to the basics of navigating the web and email.

Helen Zilm, Liz Alexander and Jon-Maree Baker shared their personal experiences regarding their trip to the World Rural Women's Conference in Spain. Cotton Research and Development Corporation sponsored two bursaries for Wincott members to attend the Spain Conference, with Jon-Maree being sponsored by NSW Agriculture.

General Meetings

During the Cotton Conference 2002 Wincott held a general meeting with guest speakers high-lighting water-related issues. Michelle Ward, Executive Officer, Macquarie River Food and Fibre updated the women on NSW water reforms, its future and the fact that women have something valuable to contribute and are needed in the water reform process. Brianna Casey, Executive Director of Queensland Farmers Federation, spoke on sustainable farming practices and the need for protection of environmental values through the sustainable use of natural resources.

Central Highlands Wincott members have also held some general meetings, attracting a good roll up of women from all areas of the Cotton Industry, including cotton growers, professional service providers of the industry, banking representatives who have a strong relationship with the cotton industry, and

project officers from both government and semi government sectors. Their guest speaker, Mr Adam Loch, Acting Executive Officer, Fitzroy Basin Food and Fibre, gave an overview of the Fitzroy Basin Draft Resource Operation Plan. After learning of the potential implications, the Wincott group prepared a submission to the Department of Natural Resources and Mines seeking an extension to the consultation period by 6 months. This gave adequate time for the cotton industry to digest the information contained in the Draft and respond in-depth to a number of issues and impacts on the industry and the Central Highlands community.

Wincott Central Highlands has organised quite a number of functions including Computer Training workshops and Commodity Trading in the Cotton Industry. All these workshops and field days have helped women in the industry have a much better understanding of the cotton industry.

Once again the Emerald committee held their Wincott Charity Shoot Day which was a great success. Raising over \$3500.00 for local charities.

The annual cotton dinner in Emerald again this year was organised by the Wincott members. This yearly event was attended by 310 people. Benefits of this night went to the local kindergarten (\$1800.00) and Mental Health Emerald branch received approximately \$2000.00.

Objectives, Milestones and Performance Indicators

Development of Strategic Plan – March 2004

Review of members' expectations & network services – March 2004

Development of Business Plan and funding options – June 2004

Presentation of Business Plan and funding options to members – August 2004

Implementation of Business Plan – 2004/2005

Ongoing – Continue momentum of services provided by Wincott, including newsletters, field days, regional workshops, meetings and skills courses.

Review of funding structure and Business Plan in October 2005 The structure of the business plan needed to be changed due to increased sponsorship and abolition of membership fees.

Future – Wincott has proven it will grasp and develop opportunities as they arise to the benefit of members, sponsors and the cotton industry community. Also Wincott continues to be a valuable and worthwhile asset to the industry and is an avenue for representation of another section of the industry.

Benefits for the cotton industry and for the community

Social Impacts - Wincott strengthens the linkages between industry and the community and is a direct communication tool between industry, research,

government and others to women who have a direct impact on the community's perception of the cotton industry. This is demonstrated through many of Wincott's activities. Wincott offers another opportunity for women to participate and receive important, relevant information but also to voice their thoughts on industry issues in a comfortable environment. Increased participation and communication is a significant benefit to the cotton industry and has a positive effect on the community perception at all levels highlighting the cotton industry's value and role within the community.

The Wincott communication strategy covers both the local "cotton community" through Ozcotton, ACIC, Cotton Yearbook and the Wincott Database, but also has communication linkages into the broader agricultural forum. Membership of AwIA and contributions to both NSW and Qld State agricultural departments provides a wide distribution of Wincott's aims and opportunities available through the network.