

## **LEADERSHIP**

### **A KEY TO SHAPING THE COTTON INDUSTRY'S FUTURE**

There's no doubt that the Cotton Industry is one of Rural Australia's success stories. The Industry has grown rapidly since the early 1960s, and has few peers amongst the rural or manufacturing industries in terms of strong export growth. A unique feature has been the Industry's achievements, without Government assistance and intervention, in tough international trading environments (for example, successfully competing against heavily subsidized US cotton). The performance has been all the more creditable given the tough times that have been experienced by Australia's rural industries over the same period - in particular, as farmers' terms of trade and prosperity have declined markedly.

The recent Economic Assessment of the Industry, commissioned by CRDC, notes that while cotton growing is more profitable than alternative enterprises, and it is an efficient way of farming in the irrigation areas, the Industry has some major challenges to meet - for example water, chemicals and R&D issues just to mention a few.

Furthermore, within Australia, the overall rural sectors' political support and significance in the national economy is diminishing rapidly and even the national debate is dominated by social, environmental, labor and city-based issues.

As levels of cotton production in this country recover from the effects of the drought and expand, there will be a need to develop strategies to seize the opportunities being presented in the changing global marketplace - and in the fast growing Asian region in particular.

To grow in this environment, an environment in which external forces have traditionally driven and shaped the agenda, the Industry needs leaders who have the knowledge skills and networks to address the important issues, and who have the abilities to influence Governments, industry and the community. It needs men and women with vision who are capable of seizing opportunities for the Industry and overcoming threats facing the Industry. It needs men and women who understand the strengths and vulnerabilities of the Industry, and men and women who truly believe that the Industry shape its own future. A key will be their ability to recognise the important battles which will have to be fought for long term prosperity for the Industry, rather than those to be fought for short term gains.

If these leaders are to deliver a thriving Cotton Industry, they will need strategic planning, negotiating, lobbying and representational skills, as well as a thorough understanding of the increasingly selective and discriminating international market place. They will also need strong links with the leaders of the other industries in rural and regional Australia.

Unfortunately, the rural and regional sector is currently very much fragmented; with the many different industries often addressing common major issues on an industry by industry basis. As a result, many of the efforts are wasted - going into maintaining the status quo. The Cotton Industry cannot "go it alone". It needs to work with the other industries, maximising the collective knowledge and muscle of all of the industries in rural and regional Australia.

The development of strategic-thinking Cotton Industry leaders, with a shared vision for the future and the necessary skills to negotiate with and influence the policy makers, is essential. However, these leaders will not just "come along" and develop "on the job". It is critical that those with leadership potential are identified early and exposed to a range of experiences designed to develop their potential.

Professor John P Kotter, Professor of Leadership at Harvard Business School, made this point when he said:

*Successful corporations (industries) don't wait for leaders to come along; they actively seek out people with leadership potential and expose them to career experiences designed to develop that potential.*

To help meet the leadership need for all rural industries, Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation put \$1.3 million into establishing the Australian Rural Leadership Program. Launched in late 1992, the successful and increasingly influential Program provides an opportunity for industry leaders to build on their leadership skills, analyse and examine key national and international issues, interact with leaders in the Government, industry and the community, and develop key networks.

Conducted by the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation, the Program involves attendance for some 60 days in eight sessions over two years, conducted at various locations around Australia and overseas. Currently, there are two positions for the Cotton Industry on each course, one funded by CRDC and one funded jointly by Auscott, Colly Farms, Qld Cotton Corporation and Namoi Cotton Cooperative.

While the Australian Rural Leadership Program is a unique, major initiative, and will contribute significantly, it is not the complete answer to producing Cotton Industry leaders capable of operating effectively at the National & International levels. A key part of the solution lies in succession planning within the Industry to identify the future leaders. This is a weakness at the moment with often inappropriate political agendas and maneuvering seeming to decide leadership matters.

The Industry also needs a structured leadership development plan, which includes picking potential winners at the grass roots level, developing their personal skills and industry knowledge, and blooding them early on in some of the tactical battles. The Industry should also look at establishing a foundation/intermediate level development program of its own, perhaps after drawing on the experiences of existing courses such as the Australian Wheat Board sponsored Grains' Leaders Course or the Marcus Oldham Leadership Course. This would allow the Cotton Industry to start to shape its own leaders and drive its own agenda in this area.

These approaches, combined with much broader, professional development, including through the Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP), will provide the best chance of producing the leaders that the Cotton Industry needs at the higher levels. Those whose horizons and networks are limited to their own industry will not be up to the task.

While the ARLP is starting to become a catalyst for industries to focus on identifying leaders, it will realise its full potential when there is more active mentoring of high calibre people within the industries and more active industry involvement in the application/selection process.

Leadership is not about personal charisma, standing out in a crowd, or mesmerising an audience. It is about depth of commitment, persuasiveness of ideas and openness to continually learning more. Leaders in the Industry will be effective if they instill confidence in those around them that together they can achieve the results. This will occur if these leaders commit themselves to developing their conceptual and communication skills, reflect on their values and align their behaviour with these values, and learn to listen and appreciate others' ideas.

Successful leaders recognise that developing their knowledge, leadership skills and networks is a lifelong pursuit. They realise that if they do not take the time and trouble to keep up-to-date in this competitive society they will be left behind. This is particularly true in the world where the extent of knowledge is doubling every two years and soon it will be even faster. If you do not think about the future, and adequately prepare for it, you may not have one.

Cotton Industry leaders hold the power to secure and shape the future. In my view, the best leaders generally come from the grass roots of the industries, but they will not fulfil their promise without the effort to develop themselves. Leadership at the higher levels, in this rapidly changing world, is too complex and too demanding to be left to those who have not been properly prepared.

Mike Beckingham

Executive Director

Australian Rural Leadership Foundation Limited

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1. The first part of the paper is a review of the literature.

2. The second part is a description of the methodology.

3. The third part is a discussion of the results.

4. The fourth part is a conclusion and future research.

5. The fifth part is a list of references.

6. The sixth part is a list of figures and tables.

7. The seventh part is a list of appendices.

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