

Information Transfer in the Cotton Industry

Planning for the Future

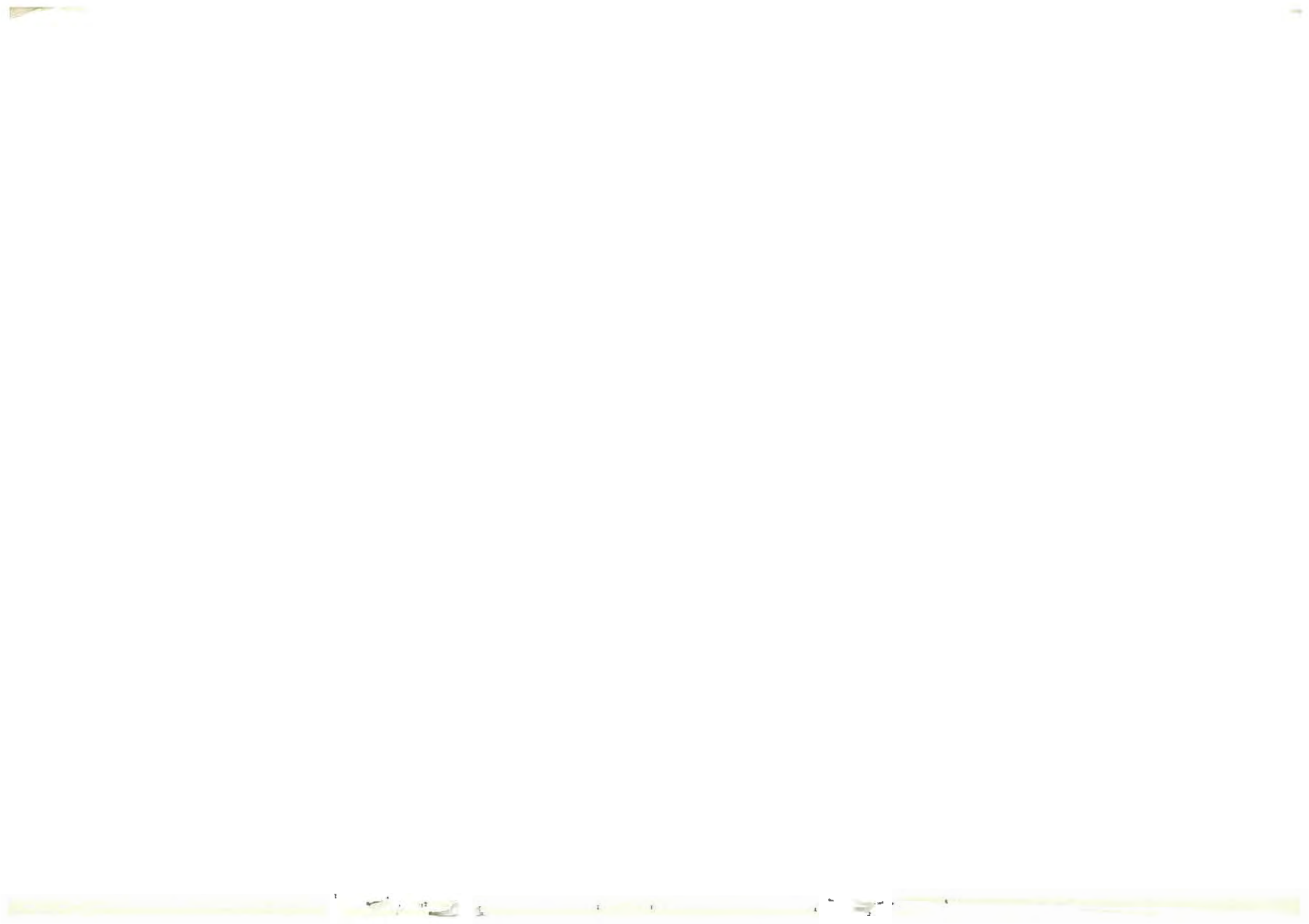
A Report to the Australian Cotton Conference

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A Cotton Research Council Project

Compiled by

Queensland Cotton and Siratac Ltd.



COTTON RESEARCH COUNCIL PROJECT

Research Information Transfer

The CRC contracted Queensland Cotton and Siratac Ltd. to conduct a survey on the transfer of research information into the cotton industry. This report has been produced to give a summary of the survey and the findings.

The Terms of Reference for the survey -:

How successful are current methods in transferring research results into the cotton industry ?

Does the industry support the formation of a Research Information Transfer Unit?

What are the Industry information sources: current , preferred ?

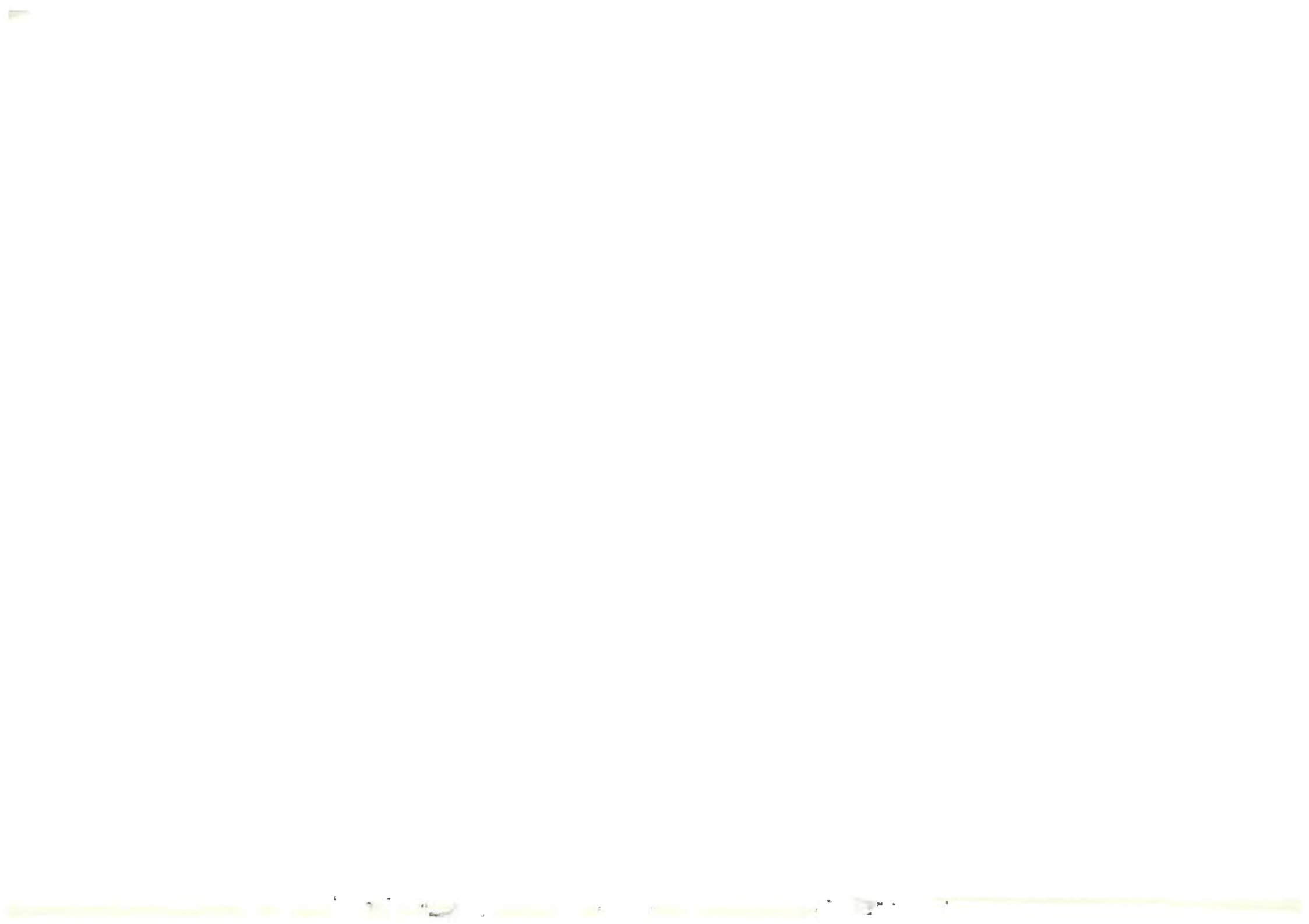
Make recommendations on the future of Siratac Ltd. in the short term and in the long run.

The survey was carried out as follows-:

During the survey two questionnaires were used. One questionnaire related to attitudes on Research and a proposed Research Information Transfer Unit. The other questionnaire related to possible commercial services, to gauge if there was a potential market demand for these services .

Growers were interviewed in each major cotton growing area in Queensland and NSW. Where interviews were not possible the questionnaires were mailed out . Areas covered by the survey were-:

| NSW | QUEENSLAND |
|---|---|
| NAMOI MACQUARIE GWYDIR BORDER RIVERS | ST GEORGE EMERALD BAUHINIA DOWNS BILOELA/THEODORE DOWNS/BURNETT |



To provide a cross section of views the following groups were also interviewed:

- Processors
- Qld. DPI personnel
- Consultants NSW & Qld
- Chemical and Fertilizer Companies
- NSW Department of Agriculture Extension
- Researchers - Dept. Agric. , DPI and CSIRO.

Overall, the survey covered in excess of 150 people, 130 of whom completed questionnaires. This has given a good indication of industry perceptions of the need for a more effective method to transfer research results into the industry.

Results of the commercial questionnaire indicated some proposed services have potential merit, these will be investigated further. Other proposed services drew no positive response and hence no further action will be taken.

Project Stages

This CRC Project is a three Stage survey. This report summarizes findings of the first stage.

Stage 2 of the Project covers more detailed work on the recommendations made in Stage 1. For example, to firm up the costs and to put priorities on the development of new and improved services. During this stage firm proposals would be put to the industry to obtain approval and to allow modifications. Feedback on these proposals will determine the final plan to put into effect in Stage 3.

Stage 3 of the Project is to put the plan from Stage 2 into effect. This would be accomplished by special project teams under the overall control of a Steering Committee.

Summary Results of the Survey

Attitudes to Information Transfer

The majority of persons surveyed indicated that the current methods of research information transfer were in the 40-80% effective range.

As regards the setting up of a specialized Research Information Transfer Unit, the responses were in the 60-100% approval range. It was indicated that this Unit should be outside any research body and that research and the transfer of research results into the industry should be separately funded.

The majority opinion was that the cotton industry and the research organizations should set up this body, and its direction should be controlled by both Industry and Research.

The survey team believes there are practical problems in setting up a body with two State departments and the CSIRO. To control the direction and activities of the Research Information Transfer Unit the industry should be prepared to fund the set up of the Unit itself.

Since the cotton industry has research done by several bodies, for example NSW Dept. Agric. , DPI Qld., CSIRO and Universities it would appear practical for the Research Information Transfer Unit to stand alone. It was felt that access to information and services, from this body should be available to all persons concerned with cotton production. There was, however, some reservation on access by the general public.

Information delivery methods

Persons in the survey sample were asked by what methods (computer, literature, personal), they currently obtained their information and what would be their preferred methods, if they had a choice.

The replies indicated that the majority received the information firstly by personal communication, secondly by literature, and thirdly from computer based systems.

In terms of preferred delivery methods there was a slight move towards more computer based information and a decrease in the information from personal and literature sources. The preferred delivery methods for information were in the order of personal/literature (equally preferred), then computer based .

Given that personal contact is still the dominant method of information transfer in the industry, the survey participants were asked to rank the preferred sources of personal contact: Researchers, Consultants, Other Growers, or Companies servicing the industry. Overall, Researchers and Consultants ranked equally and ahead of any other group.

As one moves further away from Myall Vale or any other Research Station the role of Consultants tends to increase and Other Growers become an important source of information.

If the industry does set up a Research Information Transfer Unit, then the Consultants will play an important part in channeling information to growers.

The Cost of Information Transfer

Since research is funded by the bale levy then, equitably speaking, research results should be available to all Growers in the industry at no cost. The survey respondents had no argument with this.

Information can be delivered in different ways. The delivery method (personal, literature, computer based) has a cost. This cost is not normally covered by the original research funding and ideally it should be recouped. When this was put to persons in the survey the majority responded in the 60-100% total agreement range. In effect they said "There are no free lunches."

This question then lead to what was considered an acceptable basis for charging.

For computer based information, Computer Time and Access Time ranked as the preferred methods, the idea of Free was the least preferred.

For literature based information, the preferences were , Annual Subscription followed by a charge based on Variable Costs and Minimum Costs (equal ranking). Again, Free, was not seen as a preferred option.

In relation to personal based information, a Consulting fee was the preferred option with Free begin a close second preference. This is consistent since, in primary production, information transfer has historically been done by Extension Officers.

Type of Information "Integrated" or "Stand-Alone"

Research results can be received as individual items of data from each area of research. In this case the Grower has to mix the results to get useful information specific to his needs

Alternatively, the data can be integrated together into a package that allows for the complex interrelationships in the production of cotton , e.g. soils, fertilizer, heat, water, plant varieties.

The responses to this question indicated a preference for research results to be presented in an integrated package. This does not necessarily imply a computer based system, but could be a well designed book or manual that leads the user through various paths and options to the best solution for a given set of conditions.

The future of Siratac Ltd.

The survey team makes the following recommendations as regards Siratac Ltd.:

- * Siratac Ltd. should operate as normal during the 88/89 cotton season and continue to provide the Siratac pest management and other services.
- * After the 88/89 cotton season Siratac Ltd. should be taken over by the Research Information Transfer Unit and then the company Siratac Ltd. will cease to exist.
- * At this point in time, the need to continue with an on line pest management service is seen as essential for two reasons:
 1. It is a fundamental component of the on going research program
 2. It is an important educational tool for the industry.

Information Transfer vs Research Transfer

During the course of this survey, it became apparent that the terms of reference for this project were too limited in their scope. The cotton industry obviously does have a requirement for research information, but it also has a requirement for information from sources other than research.

The schematic diagram (overleaf) presents an indication of just some of the information sources. The "Industry info clearing house" depicted is the main functional role of any information transfer bodies that could be formed by the cotton industry.

The way in which the future information transfer processes in the industry develop is only limited by the present lack of direction and co-ordination. This is not meant as a criticism of the way in which the industry currently receives and uses information, but as a fact that needs to be addressed if it is to do an even better job.

The industry currently has considerable resources available to it when it comes to the transfer of information e.g. researchers, The Australian Cotton Grower magazine, extension & private agronomists, consultants, Siratac. All that is needed is to develop better means of co-ordinating those resources.

This survey is a starting point for the industry to become more involved in developing information transfer services that are appropriate for its future needs.



Schematic of Information Transfer

