

The New Research & Development Corporation
for Cotton

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To better understand the new Research and Development Corporation I feel it would be appropriate to review cotton research historically, as background to the soon to be created corporation.

When cotton was first grown in Australia, mainly in Queensland, (as a result of the United States Civil War), whatever research was done, was done on a regional basis by involved individuals. However, soon after the turn of the century variety trial work was done at the Hermitage Research Station near Warwick and around Biloela. It was felt that cotton could have a potential in new farming areas in Queensland which were being developed. This variety testing, followed by increasing research has continued till the present in Queensland.

In 1959, the Narrabri Agricultural Research Station was

established to evaluate various crops that might best utilize the water being stored behind Keepit Dam, which had just recently been completed. We all know now, that cotton eventually was the crop which had the best overall and long term prospects under irrigation in the Narrabri area.

Similarly, CSIRO undertook a brief from the West Australian Government to establish how best Ord river water could be used. Until insect resistance won the day, again cotton was the principal crop.

Work also was carried out in the MIA at Griffith, in the 1960's-70's for short season varieties, but these didn't come up to the standards for spinners requirements or for yield.

In 1972, the CSIRO team from the Ord's Kimberly research station was relocated to Narrabri, and this joint venture at Narrabri with close collaboration with the NSW Department of Agriculture and the Queensland research groups has developed over 17 years into the highly sophisticated large unit we have today at Narrabri, with collaborative work continuing to be done in Queensland and other locations in NSW.

So far I have set out the historical background in respect

of the researcher involvement in cotton research: I will now describe industries input into research.

In 1972, the Australian Cotton Growers Research Association was formed partly to encourage the CSIRO team to transfer to Narrabri as a unit, and partly to promote more research into cotton. Had the team of cotton research workers not been relocated at Narrabri, they would have been dispersed throughout various CSIRO divisions. A major catalyst in this exercise of relocation was an offer by Cotton Seed Distributors of forty-thousand dollars to build a glasshouse at Narrabri.

In 1973, the cotton industry agreed to impose a voluntary levy of 25¢ per bale on production and use these funds towards specific research projects as put forward by researchers, thus supplementing government funding. From 1973 until 1982 the ACGRA was the organization providing outside research funding for cotton research via this special grower levy. As this pool of money grew, due to greater production levels, and higher levies per bale, it was agreed to approach the Federal Government for matching dollar for dollar research monies. This was successful and the Cotton Research Committee was established

in 1983. This Committee was a statutory committee and functioned until 1986 when, due to further government legislation, a Cotton Research Council was set up with major changes in the representation base of council members.

I now arrive at the title of my paper, "The New Research and Development Corporation for Cotton".

In 1989, the government decided to again make changes in rural research, and form research and development corporations. We, in the cotton industry felt there was no need to impose so many structural changes on us in such a short time, but government policy was that all rural industry research funds be restructured under common guidelines and regulations, and no exclusion was possible.

Once it was a certainty that the change was inevitable, discussions took place within the industry, and through the ACGRA with the government, as to what direction the cotton industry wanted to take. Firstly, the organizations involved in the deliberations agreed a Cotton R & D Corporation should operate on its own. It was also thought logical by both the Cotton Research Council and the ACGRA (now Incorporated) that

the ACGRA be the industry body that the Cotton R & D Corporation report to. This was in effect, merely continuing the role that ACGRA had played, with respect to the accountability of the Cotton Research Council. Following several meetings with all interested parties, and with the full support of the Australian Cotton Foundation, the Minister ruled that ACGRA could continue in the role of industry body accountable to by the corporation, but no executive member of the ACGRA committee would be eligible to be on the R & D board but other members would be eligible. This, I feel, was a most satisfactory solution to what was becoming a "Catch 22" situation.

The mechanics of the setting up of the new corporation may be difficult to follow, but I will explain it as best I can.

SELECTION COMMITTEE

The ACGRA will nominate to the Minister, six persons to a selection committee, two of whom will be ACGRA members. The other four members will cover a wide range of business and academic expertise so that this committee will have a broad base. To these six selection committee members, the Minister

will add a presiding member and a government member making a total of eight. This committee will be responsible for appointing six directors to the R & D board and will be using the following guidelines in determining their selection.

"The appointed Research and Development Board should have members who have one or more areas of expertise in the fields of:

- Cotton production, processing or marketing
- Science and technology
- Technology transfer
- Environmental and ecology matters
- Administration of research and development
- Economics
- Finance and business management

An appropriate balance of the above is to be achieved as much as possible".

At the time of writing, applications for R & D board members have been nationally advertised and will close on 20 July 1990.

This is the sole function of the selection committee,

ie. to appoint six member to the R & D board.

A further two members of the R & D board will be appointed by the Minister; a presiding member and a government nominee member, making a total of eight. These eight directors will then appoint an executive director who may or may not be one of the six other directors; thus the Cotton R & D board may have either eight or nine directors. This whole process is anticipated to be finalized by 1 October 1990, and if this occurs the Cotton Research Council will be functional till midnight 30 September 1990 and the new R & D corporation will be operating from 1 October 1990.

The transition should be smooth as the new corporation is expected to accept as ongoing the current business and direction of the council.

The new corporation will have more freedom in some areas than the old council, and will be seen by many as a more commercially orientated organization, albeit still under review by the Minister. The corporation will set up its own offices, and operate from these offices, with the executive director and or administration manager, technical officer and one office person.

It is envisaged that there will be a total staff of three covering these areas of responsibility.

The physical location of the offices at the time of writing has not been determined, but should be, before or at the cotton conference.

Members of ACGRA unanimously support an area in a cotton growing area, and logically this would be at Narrabri, as the Narrabri research station is where the major portion of our funds are spent. However, there is valid argument that the offices of the R & D corporation be located in Canberra so that the corporation can maintain more direct contact with government and the DPIE.

The new corporation must provide to the Minister an ongoing five year plan, as did the council. The corporation will also be reporting to the ACGRA annually and it will be expected to adhere to the plan and directions of change, as did the council. The corporation will not have any more real power than the council, but will be much more autonomous and flexible, and will be able to make quicker decisions away from the bureaucracy.

Once the R & D corporation is in place all facets of the industry should see the corporation as a conduit for better communications. The corporation will need more feed-back from growers as to perceived needs in research areas. We must improve the communications gap between growers, researchers, and the R & D corporation. We must increase our research base and explore areas beyond the farm gate which could benefit the industry.

We must not dwell on differences in the past, but concentrate on the benefits that can flow forward from the changes which have taken place in our dynamic industry.

