

# Doing more with less

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Our people resource in Australia's Agricultural industries is continuing to decline. We need to recognise that we are going to have to do more with less. Whether we are talking about farmers, agronomists, researchers, teachers or marketers for example; we need to attract and retain the best people and allow for them to fulfil their potential on the land and in rural industries. We cannot de-motivate people from Australian Agriculture. We need to be proactive by creating an industry that is attractive and can provide endless career opportunities.

Australia's cotton industry is just one contributor to the Australian Agricultural Industry and today it can be said as being at the forefront in achieving best outcomes both economically and environmentally. Our vision for this industry is to go from strength to strength and be regarded as benchmark leaders. In order to do this we need to start by recognising there is a lot to do in getting the right people and retaining them. Policies should be put in place to change this through innovation and change, community development, education, acceptance and investment into the future.

We are currently going through a time of change and this should be recognised. "In Australia we have a dynamic modern economy and have seen an increase in the service sector and other primary industries which has resulted in the decline in the relative contribution Australia's Agriculture and Cotton industry is making to the economy" ("*Corish*" 2005). This has resulted in job loss and de-motivation to embark in a career in this industry. However a sustainable Agricultural industry in Australia is critical to our nation's economy. We need to create a business environment that allows farmers to invest long term to enhance risk management capabilities in declining terms of trade. "Innovative niche markets need to be identified and we need to develop a model to overcome the competitiveness pressures as new developing nations such as china, India and South America emerge in our key price driven market". ("*Corish*" 2005) Consistency will enable us to set a branding standard as premium. This will drive demand for Australia's cotton which will not only be economically beneficial but will allow further job opportunities and advancements in technology and innovation for the future.

In the media we are constantly being reminded that Rural Australia is facing a "talent Drought" ("*Oakeshoff*" 2007). There is no dispute that people are now being drawn to the higher salary careers in mining and service sectors. Over 85% of Australia's population live within 50km's of our coastline. Jobs in mining and services can accommodate for the drive to live closer to big centres and the coast. This does not mean though that we are missing out on the talent. Suitable

people may seem harder to find but they are out there. We just need to be more proactive about attracting them to the industry. It seems that the Australian Agricultural Industry does not portray a very positive image of itself. Those that are in the industry currently need to become ambassadors for the industry and start generating positive awareness of it. A skilled workforce in the Australia's Cotton Industry is critical to its economic sustainability in the future. For those working in the industry they understand the opportunities that are available and the wonderful lifestyle you can have in Australian rural communities. However we may need to work harder to attract new graduates leaving university, school or traineeships into a career in agriculture. Running an awareness campaign about the opportunities people have in a career in the Australian Cotton industry and Agriculture as well as the positives about living in a rural community could increase positive awareness about the industry.

Building awareness about agriculture to city dwellers and breaking the perception that agriculture and industries like cotton in Australia is harming the environment is also a key to building positive awareness. To do this we need to partake in training and education by starting at a young age. Every school child in years eight and nine across all states are introduced to a term in basic Chemistry, Biology, Physics and Geology. If we could have a term of Basic Agricultural Science and its importance to our nation and its economy; this may start breaking down some of the negative perceptions some school children and their parents have. Seeking help from the government to focus on rural industries and skills training to hold on to the people we have and have the ability to source new people from a wider employment pool and may also help in building positive awareness.

“Ag Force” in Queensland is currently running their second phase of an awareness campaign “Every Family needs a Farmer”. This campaign has been created to break the barrier in understanding between metropolitan and rural Queensland. It is great to see Ag Force leading this campaign with help from several rural businesses and the Queensland government. Depending on the measure of success for this campaign there may be opportunities to create similar ads throughout other states in Australia. (*Agforce.com.au 2008*).

Investment is another key element in shaping our vision for the Australian cotton industry. Investment in time and financially for people, the environment, research and development will be critical for future success in our cotton industry. Keeping employees motivated and enabling them to develop through training will help keep them in their roles and the industry. Spending time doing goal documents every six months or even yearly will also allow employees to have a clear direction. Building succession plans also will give employees a clear understanding of their potential and career opportunities for the future. Businesses in the Agricultural Industry may also need to look at flexible working options for their employees depending on their individual situations. Flexible work choices may mean working from home sometimes or at unconventional hours. Some employers feel that as long as the job is done right and on time it doesn't matter how and it what hours of the day it is done.

We need to be in a position where we can tackle challenges before they arise and create a problem by developing a strong commitment to strategic research to overcome short term threats and create long term viability. Investing, promoting a creating a work environment that is fulfilling and rewarding will help to keep staff. We need to also acknowledge in greater depth the environmental benefits which have been brought about as a combined result of Best Management Practice (BMP); Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Biotechnology. They have marked the dawn of a new era in the Australian cotton industry and will continue to work towards becoming even more efficient in water use efficiency and yield enhancing research. On going investment in these areas will also not only generate new employment but also put the Australian Cotton industry in better light now and for the future.

The Australian Cotton Industry needs to acknowledge that times are changing and the whole dynamics of Australia's economy is now driven by new industries. This does not mean that there isn't still a large place for Australian Cotton. We may have fewer people willing to work in the industry however this does not mean we have to have less talent. There is so much opportunity out there we just need to capture it and a work with it. Through awareness and innovation we will be able to grow by adopting best strategies from a National, State and Local level to take us foreword to sustain Australia's Agricultural and it's Cotton Industry for a prosperous future.

**References:**

Ag Force Queensland "Advancing rural Queensland"; Sited June 17<sup>th</sup> 2008; [www.agforce.com.au](http://www.agforce.com.au).

Peter Corish; "*National Farmers federation*", Rural Research and developments contribution to an informed, innovative and Australian agricultural Future. September 6<sup>th</sup> 2005.

Georgie Oakeshoff; "*The Talent drought*" June 2007, Page 3. Sited June 15<sup>th</sup> 2008.