

Wincott Inc – Women's Industry Network - Cotton
Kate Schwager, Jon-Maree Baker and Helen Dugdale
Wincott Inc., Manderley, 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 for all levels of knowledge and confidence, from women who wish to increase their knowledge of 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 150 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 Wincott committee was elected at the Annual General Meeting held in Goondiwindi in 2003 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
- And distribute a bi-monthly newsletter
- Support for local area activities
- Information about all industry activities
- Coverage in all cotton growing regions

Wincott has also promoted the cotton industry in the broader Australian community through articles in the RM Williams magazine, Queensland Department of Primary Industries' Women's Industry Trade Fair and NSW Agriculture's Rural Women's Network Country Web. 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, local community sources into an organised and accessible format that many network members have used to pursue learning opportunities.

The Wincott Starter Kit gives an excellent overview of the industry structure, research and production information and links to existing industry resources and is being used by a number of industry personnel as a resource for new growers entering the cotton industry.

Ongoing Aims of Wincott

1. Continue coordination of communication and network activities through the Publicity Officer position.
2. Continue facilitation of learning and upskilling activities through meetings, field days, newsletters and other courses relevant to the members.
3. 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.
4. Continue to be an information source for the wider cotton industry.

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 the introduction of membership fees and income generated by other activities and via sponsored meetings. Macarthur Consulting is assisting in the development of a strategic plan, which will enable the committee to develop a business plan for implementation and management of the network as we work towards 2006 and self funding. The Institute for Rural Futures is assisting in the analysis and reporting of the member survey, which will ensure the continued relevance of the network and the role it plays within the industry. Both of these businesses have donated their expertise as support for Wincott.

The Wincott coordinator is employed for 1 to 1.5 days per week and is the linchpin 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 their impact on the industry as a whole and 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 value, research, key industry issues and other sustainability issues to cotton communities.

Wincott Activities

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

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 predator 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 CRDC led a discussion on the Best Management Practices Program.

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 insectory's and the process for making "Vivus". Melina Miles from the DPI provided an overview of how IPM works and 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

Classing Tours have been held in Wee Waa and Emerald Australian Classing Services in Wee Waa and Dunavent 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.

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 understand the cotton industry a lot better.

Wincott Skills Course 2003-04

The first session of the Wincott Skills Courses 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 this year. The topics covered included: Introduction Skills, Mentoring – Receiving and Providing, Myers Briggs personality styles, Communication Skills and Effective Representation on Management Boards. Women were also given an opportunity to use the skills learned at the course during dinner to meet with industry leaders.

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, and opportunities provided by the RWN. 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 in regards 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 women a first hand look at the website giving them a chance to understand the forum and introduced women to the basics of the web and email. Helen Zilm, Liz Alexander and Jon-Maree Baker shared their personal experiences regarding their trip to the III World Rural Women's Conference in Spain. Cotton Research and Development Corporation sponsored two bursaries for Wincott Women to attend the Spain Conference, with Jon-Maree sponsored by NSW Agriculture.

General Meetings

At Cotton Conference 2002 Wincott held a general meeting and had guest speakers on water-related topics. Michelle Ward, Executive Officer, Macquarie River Food and Fibre updated the women on NSW water reforms its future and

that women have something valuable to contribute and are needed in the water reform process. Brianna Casey, Executive Director of Queensland Farmers Federation, spoke sustainable farming practices, and the need for protection of environmental values through the sustainable use of natural resources.

Central Highlands have also held some general meetings with a lunch meeting 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 Office, Fitzroy Basin Food and Fibre, gave the meeting 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 for the industry and the Central Highlands community.

Objectives, Milestones, 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 the services wincott provides including newsletters (8 per year), field days (2 in alternative growing areas), workshops (on needs basis regionally), meetings (1 two day meeting) and starter kit.

Review of funding structure and business plan October 2005

Ongoing – increase services Wincott provides as membership increases; including newsletters (12 per year), field days (1 in each area annually – depending on focus ie: agronomy, biotechnology, classing), workshops (skills course biannually), meetings (1 two day meeting) and starter kit.

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.