

Beating the dry... and preparing for the wet

In challenging times like these, we recognise that it's important to remain positive. We recommend using this time to your advantage so that you're ready for when the season turns around. An essential component of any business is the people. Take the opportunity during such years to take a break, spend time with family, upskill and maintain connections with your peers and local community.

Below are some additional tips to consider to beat the dry times and to be ready for the big wet:

- **Make on-farm improvements:**

- Make a list of what needs to be done on-farm. Prioritise those things that do not cost a lot of money. Grants are available in NSW for on-farm works via the Farm Innovation Fund: www.business.gov.au/assistance/farm-innovation-fund-nsw.
- 'Eat the frog': Get in and do those tasks you keep putting off, be it in the office, in the field or around the house. You'll feel better once you do: guaranteed!
- Difficult decisions may need to be made about retaining staff. Consider the cost of wages during extended low production periods versus the challenge of replacing when the season improves.

- **Prep your paddocks for when it does rain:**

- Assess the soil health of individual paddocks and have a plan for them: rotations, cover crops, fallow fields, level fields, soil amendments. Concentrate on weed control on channels and banks. Be ready to spray that seed bank after the next lot of rain. See the latest practical advice from CottonInfo: <https://bit.ly/2zpAUmo>
- Get your seedbeds in a condition where the cropping program can be ramped up quickly but minimise costs now. Control fallow weeds

and conserve moisture where possible. Be ready to plant an opportunity crop if seasons allow. Brown manure crops are a great way of maintaining and enhancing organic matter and controlling weeds.

- **Keep learning:**

- This time could be used to upskill: do a course that interests you, your staff or a group of neighbours. Fully funded courses are available for cotton and grain growers through Agskilled (in NSW): www.agskilled.org.au
- Organise an exchange – get a group together and go visit some innovative growers in another region.

- **Keep in the loop:**

- Attend field days/catch ups/workshops even just for the social benefits – your industry organisations are active through this period. Contact your local CottonInfo REO for details on local events: www.cottoninfo.com.au/contact-us.

- **Access financial drought relief:**

- There are many drought relief assistance initiatives in place for both NSW and Qld: see www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/climate-and-emergencies/droughthub/drought-assistance and

- www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/agriculture/disaster-recovery/drought/assistance-programs.
- Should you require assistance with financial considerations, the local Rural Financial Counselling service can help: www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/drought/assistance/rural-financial-counselling-service/nsw; www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/drought/assistance/rural-financial-counselling-service/qld
 - Negotiate with suppliers about extended terms of trade (check for low interest loan options: www.ric.gov.au).
- **Tick off your myBMP requirements::**
 - Use this time to catch up on myBMP. Organise a myBMP express workshop peak with your local Cotton Australia regional manager. This could include implementing a biosecurity plan for the farm; and reviewing all your WHS in the workshop: do your signs need replacing? etc.
 - **Take a break:**
 - Have a break with family and/or friends to recharge. See this website for low-cost holidays: www.discoveraustralia.com.au/holiday-packages. Sport and Rec camps and caravan parks offer cheaper accommodation, or go and see those relatives you have been meaning to for a while.
 - There is also a great website that helps you to find farm sitters so that you can have break: <https://farmsitters.com.au>. It offers retired farmers who are happy to help out while you have a break.
 - **Look after your physical health:**
 - Being active, eating well and keeping fit will help in decision-making.
 - **And your mental health:**
 - Be open and talk about your mental health, and look out for your family, friends and neighbours. Seek out professional support if you are unable to resolve problems yourself or with support of your family and friends;
- Rural and remote support is available for online counselling, financial assistance and emergency assistance: www.qld.gov.au/health/mental-health/rural
 - Additional resources that may assist: www.facebook.com/ABCTV/videos/man-up-mate-helping-mate-meeting/1254242521265057; and www.areyouboggedmate.com.au
 - *Need help right now?* If you or someone you know needs immediate help, contact:
Lifeline Australia - 13 11 14
beyondblue - 1300 22 46 36
Mensline Australia - 1300 78 99 78
Kids Help Line - 1800 55 18 00
Suicide Callback Service - 1300 659 467
- **Remember, we're all in this together:**
 - Remain united as a rural community. All industries and communities are suffering during the dry.
 - Encourage your urban contacts to support our rural areas through such initiatives as [#buyfromthebush](https://twitter.com/buyfromthebush).
- For more information, visit the 'one stop shop' for all national drought initiatives: www.farmhub.org.au.**
- A wise person once said 'learn to appreciate the quiet times,' as no doubt you will be busy when the season improves.**
- Acknowledgements: Michael Ryan, Riverina Consultants (www.rivagri.com.au); Janet Dampney (for cover photo).*