CottonInfo Annual Operating Plan 2015-16

Context
The CottonInfo Annual Operating Plan (AOP) documents the alignment of strategy, annual planning frameworks and activities that will be implemented on behalf of the joint venture partners Cotton Australia (CA), Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) and Cotton Seed Distributors (CSD) for the Australian cotton industry.

The 2012-2017 CottonInfo Strategic Plan identifies the principal outcome of the program as being an efficient and effective pathway for the delivery of the results of industry research and development (R&D) and innovation more broadly. The CottonInfo program is designed to meet commercially unmet information needs of growers, and to support efforts to improve practices, productivity, competitiveness and environmental performance.

The CottonInfo Strategic Plan also integrates elements of the CA strategic plan (Stewardship & Research Direction), the CRDC strategic plan (Farmers, Industry, Customers, People and Performance) and the CRDC communication strategy.

The three key goals identified in the Strategic Plan are:
1. Improve industry practice through promoting R&D knowledge and encouraging its adoption, including delivery of R&D through the myBMP system and its ongoing improvement.
2. Improving R&D communication by making R&D information, trusted advice and specialist technical knowledge readily available, in part through the provision of regionally facilitated support and by enhancing communication between researchers, growers, consultants, agribusiness, NRM and industry organisations.
3. Improving industry responsiveness by building the capacity of the CottonInfo team, researchers, growers, consultants, agribusiness, NRM and industry organisations to respond to emerging or emergency issues.

In the 2015-16 CottonInfo AOP we provide an overview of the areas of focus for the CottonInfo team (water use efficiency; nutrition and soil health; carbon; energy efficiency; managing climate risk; integrated pest, weed and disease management; resistance management; biosecurity; pesticide input efficiency; and sustainable cotton landscapes) and the delivery mechanisms (regional and industry wide extension activities, supported by communications activities) by which these areas of focus are communicated to the target audiences.

In the context of the strategic goals, the functionality of CottonInfo and myBMP are integrated, recognising the linkage between R&D, industry performance and social licence. Within the AOP, CottonInfo is the central delivery channel for R&D information, and myBMP program the central delivery channel for best practice information - underpinning the strategic goals of improving communication and improving industry practice.

The success of myBMP as a key pathway for R&D adoption is dependent upon the CottonInfo team’s support for users, updates of BMP module content and ongoing improvements to the system. myBMP certification is not a role undertaken by CottonInfo, but by a separate group of trained auditors who report to the audit office.

The previous cotton season was characterised by a reduced planting area and high production per hectare. Based on current water storage and climate forecasts, a smaller or similar irrigated crop is likely for the 2015-16 season. As such, this AOP aims to support irrigated cotton production as well as promote and support raingrown cotton as the opportunity presents.
Role of the CottonInfo team
The CottonInfo team of regional development officers, technical specialists and myBMP team members will implement the AOP ensuring CottonInfo is the principal pathway by which the outcomes of industry R&D are packaged, promoted and adoption evaluated. The CottonInfo team will act as a network to facilitate industry R&D communication between researchers, growers, consultants, agribusiness, NRM bodies as well as cotton and other industry organisations.

This communication addresses both immediate and longer term or over the horizon issues. It provides an important feedback loop on needs, priorities and the usefulness of R&D outputs. The CottonInfo team is also a key resource for industry’s capacity to respond to emerging or emergency issues at either a regional or national level. The CottonInfo team will continue to focus its extension practice through the existing planning framework. This framework is summarised in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key steps</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Define the problem and opportunity</td>
<td>This establishes the significance of the domain and identifies the indicators that will demonstrate progress.</td>
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<td>Practice gap analysis</td>
<td>Describes the nature and extent of the gap between poor and good practice. This starts to generate discussion around the scope for change and the current barriers to ideal management.</td>
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<td>Benefits and Indicators</td>
<td>Requires listing and estimating the per farm benefit from bridging the practice gap. It also starts the discussion of how to measure benefit if it not already a common industry metric. Benefits are not only economic; they can be biophysical, environmental or social.</td>
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Scope and Focus
What do we know about the diversity of the target audience and the existing service provision? It answers the question of our role and with whom.

Project strategy and deliverables
Delivery strategy needs to take into account the change sort and the target audience. It identifies timeframes and role allocation.

Understanding the target audience
The CottonInfo team has sort to refine and deepen our understanding of the target audience for practice change and communication. The myBMP program articulates target best practice. To define the scale of need for change we also need to identify poor practice and know where the population sits in relation to the two ends of the spectrum.

Specifically, CottonInfo will work with partners to address the needs of different production areas. This will require a combination of making existing applicable research available and incorporating regional specific questions into on farm trials and demonstration sites.

Through our monitoring and evaluation, we have been identifying the involvement of farm owners and managers and farm employees. The breakdown varies on the topic, but a 70 percent grower, 30 percent employee mix is common. Our program needs to consider the potential differences in skills and knowledge needs of different members of the on-farm team.
Benefits of change
Benefits are broadly classified in the areas of economic, social and environmental. Establishing a defined benefit involves identifying the indicators of the benefit and the capacity to measure the indicators. In the coming year, CottonInfo will increase the focus on profitability as a driver of practice change. While the PLUS $500 program will have growers and consultants as the primary audience, it will also provide a valuable mechanism for researchers to consider the benefit their research results contribute to profitability.

In the area of sustainability, CottonInfo will continue to promote the eco-system services provided by well managed native vegetation. We will continue to develop the relationships with regional NRM bodies and government agencies.

Service scan
The cotton industry is very well serviced and networked compared to other agricultural industries. The CottonInfo program is funded to be proactive in areas of market failure. Where commercial drivers or existing industry programs, such as the CSD Extension and Delivery (E&D) team, are operating, we seek to complement and support rather than compete.

With the likelihood of another reduced planting season in some valleys, pressure is building on some service providers. CottonInfo will proactively manage the impact this could have on the number of on farm trials run by agronomists in partnership with the CottonInfo team.

Campaign delivery
Extension highlights from the previous season included the 2015 Cotton Irrigation Technology Tour, the energy-efficiency focused Big Day Outs, and the Grower of the Year field days. The Cotton Irrigation Technology Tour demonstrated the value of connecting researchers with growers in a format that not only promoted the awareness and application of irrigation technology, but that also provided feedback on grower interest in further research and the likelihood of adoption of those technologies. CottonInfo will continue to work closely with CRDC to improve the connections between research and growers.

The Grower of the Year field days were excellent examples of industry collaboration with CottonInfo supporting Cotton Australia and CSD to deliver events that were well attended.

To sharpen the focus on productivity, the PLUS $500 project is being developed to roll out in 2015-16. With the key objective of providing a process for identifying where the next $500 profit per hectare could come from, this project strongly complements the CSD E&D Ambassador program and provides a mechanism for researchers to provide input into the drivers of profitability.

Based on the existing work in Central Queensland on soils and irrigation, the CottonInfo program will strengthen the association of myBMP with practice change options. Key level two and three best management practices associated with extension events will be identified and growers encouraged to assess their current practice against these. Growers not registered with myBMP will be encouraged to register.
Communications strategy
Led by the Communications Manager, the communication strategy is designed to support the work of the CottonInfo team in making R&D information, trusted advice and specialist technical information readily available.

Communications is a whole of team effort - Technical Specialists have a key role in working with researchers to package findings into resources and myBMP, while the Regional Development Officers (RDO’s) provide direction for regional specific information needs. Based around the cotton calendar, the CottonInfo communications strategy delivers through tactics including the CottonInfo e-newsletter, the CottonInfo website, major publications (such as the Cotton Production Manual and Cotton Pest Management Guide), development of fact sheets and case studies and delivery of video content.

It is also focused on building the CottonInfo brand through the implementation of the style guide and development of new promotional materials. Additional opportunities are used to leverage CottonInfo communication through other industry sources such as Wincott, the CRDC Spotlight magazine and by working with the communications managers of CSD and CA.

Monitoring and evaluation
The aim of the CottonInfo monitoring and evaluation strategy is to demonstrate the extent to which the joint venture investment has contributed towards specific targets. It also includes a formative component intended to guide activities and provide timely feedback to understand barriers and unintended consequences.

Our monitoring and evaluation tool, YourDATA, will continue to provide the main metrics of performance. The CottonInfo team have been successfully using the tool to record activities and participation. In the coming year our challenge is to increase the recording of impact, as demonstrated by the 2015 Cotton Irrigation Technology Tour evaluation, which also captured intention to adopt technologies and case studies of adoption.
Primary audience
Cotton Growers
Cotton Consultants and Agronomists

Secondary audience
Cotton Australia
Cotton Seed Distributors
Cotton Research and Development Corporation
R&D providers
NRM Organisations and government agencies
Agribusiness and private advisor networks

Objectives
The objectives of the Annual Operating Plan are to:
1. Improve Practices
2. Improve Communications
3. Improve Responsiveness

Strategies
The following strategies will be used to achieve the objectives:
1. Under direction of the Joint Venture Committee (JVC), define the focus area of problem and opportunity that provides the boundaries of activity for the CottonInfo program.
2. Through engagement with researchers, define the technology and management practices that impact on these focus areas.
3. Understand the target audience for each focus area
4. Coordinate with existing service providers
5. Design communication and delivery based on the target audience and their needs.
6. Build the capacity within the CottonInfo team to respond to emerging or emergency issues
7. Monitoring and evaluation of achievements.

Key messages
The key messages to be communicated are:
1. CottonInfo is an industry joint venture in R&D extension between CA, CRDC and CSD.
2. CottonInfo delivers information and R&D findings to growers, when and where they need it.
3. RD&E is essential to ensuring the ongoing sustainability and profitability of the cotton industry.
4. It is simple to access cotton research information and using research results will improve cotton growers productivity and sustainability.
5. The guidelines for responsible cotton production are provided in the myBMP program, along with the industry’s definition of best management practice.
6. The CottonInfo program is making a positive difference to cotton growers.
Measures of success

The success of this strategy in meeting the CottonInfo objectives will be measured each year and by 2018 the strategy will have achieved the following:

Objective 1: Improve practices
1. Farmers increase productivity by three percent per hectare per year.
2. Survey and M&E results indicate that greater than 65 percent of growers are utilising CottonInfo products and resources to source information.
3. Industry is able to define and assess best practice adoption, and the myBMP program is the primary resource for farmers accessing best practice knowledge and tools.

Objective 2: Improve communication
1. Growers receive timely information appropriate for their farming enterprise to enable the production of best practice cotton.
2. The CottonInfo team make R&D information, best practices (myBMP), trusted advice and specialist technical R&D knowledge readily available.
3. 100 percent of growers know of the CottonInfo team and greater than 60 percent agree that the CottonInfo team assisted them to improve practices.
4. Surveys indicate that growers and consultants are committed to and supportive of the CottonInfo program.
5. Local issues are reflected in R&D investments.

Objective 3: Improve responsiveness
1. Industry are able to respond effectively to a biosecurity incursion.
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<tr>
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<th>Tactic</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Working with</th>
<th>Responsible</th>
<th>Measure</th>
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<tr>
<td>Improve practices.</td>
<td>Define the focus area of problem and opportunity that provides the boundaries of activity for the CottonInfo program.</td>
<td>Review completed research to identify new best practice emerging from research findings.</td>
<td>Review R&amp;D final reports.</td>
<td>May and September.</td>
<td>CRDC R&amp;D managers, CottonInfo technical specialists.</td>
<td>CottonInfo program manager and CRDC R&amp;D managers.</td>
<td>Report by CRDC to CottonInfo team meeting; update of action plan.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>CottonInfo team to define the problems and opportunities in the key focus areas.</td>
<td>CottonInfo team meets to update.</td>
<td>November and May.</td>
<td>CottonInfo team working with researchers, the CSD E&amp;D team, CA RMs and consultants.</td>
<td>CottonInfo program manager.</td>
<td>Delivery action plan reviewed and updated.</td>
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<td>Through engagement with researchers, define the technology and management practices that impact on these focus areas.</td>
<td>Tech Specialists and myBMP module leads are familiar with current and potential research that can impact focus areas.</td>
<td>CottonInfo meets with CRDC research managers to update on current and potential projects.</td>
<td>September and February.</td>
<td>R&amp;D managers.</td>
<td>CottonInfo program manager, CottonInfo communications manager and CRDC R&amp;D managers.</td>
<td>Focus areas defined and timing of key messages in communications calendar. Schedule for myBMP module updates defined.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Researchers are involved in communication and extension activities to enable context specific interaction.</td>
<td>Researchers contribute to communications and extension activities.</td>
<td>As required.</td>
<td>CottonInfo communications manager and RDOs.</td>
<td>CottonInfo communications manager, CottonInfo communications manager.</td>
<td>Communications program delivers important R&amp;D information to audience.</td>
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<td>Understand the target audience for each focus area.</td>
<td>Monitor through M&amp;E participation and respond to diversity between regions (valleys).</td>
<td>Information needs and delivery preferences are identified at a regional level through observation, grower feedback and survey results.</td>
<td>Ongoing.</td>
<td>Consultants, CSD E&amp;D team.</td>
<td>CottonInfo program manager and RDOs.</td>
<td>Delivery varies by region based on target audience needs.</td>
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<td>Identify the diversity in person goals and aspirations of growers.</td>
<td>Coordinate with existing service providers.</td>
<td>For each focus area, identify existing stakeholders and intended delivery.</td>
<td>Coordinate with existing service providers and complement delivery.</td>
<td>Ongoing.</td>
<td>CSD E&amp;D team, CA RMs, CRDC R&amp;D managers, CCA, NRM bodies and government agencies.</td>
<td>CottonInfo program manager and myBMP manager.</td>
<td>M&amp;E of delivery identifies stakeholder coordination, myBMP supported by service providers.</td>
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<td>Discuss profit and sustainability goals at season reviews and PLUS $500 workshops. Delivery includes a mix of on-farm trials, group and individual engagement.</td>
<td>Design communication and delivery based on the target audience and their context.</td>
<td>Recognise the difference in experience, skill and knowledge level of the target audience.</td>
<td>Consider the delivery form required and tailor accordingly.</td>
<td>Ongoing.</td>
<td>CottonInfo technical specialists, RDO’s, myBMP manager and communications manager.</td>
<td>CottonInfo program manager.</td>
<td>Delivery of communication to target audiences.</td>
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<td>Adoption strategy defined and implemented, including a forum held to review and update myBMP modules.</td>
<td>Develop and promote adoption of myBMP as the industry mechanism for assessing responsible cotton production.</td>
<td>myBMP maintained as the industry tool for defining regulatory compliance, market access and best management definition.</td>
<td>October.</td>
<td>CA RMs, myBMP module leads, CottonInfo program manager, CottonInfo RDOs.</td>
<td>CottonInfo program manager and myBMP manager.</td>
<td>60 percent of farms registered with myBMP and progressing through assessment, with 20 growers registered by CottonInfo RDOs.</td>
<td>Delivery varied within regions to meet diverse needs.</td>
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<td>Improve communications.</td>
<td>Make R&amp;D information, trusted advice and specialist technical knowledge readily available.</td>
<td>Develop a calendar of priority topics throughout the year, and a range of communication tools as mechanisms to deliver this information.</td>
<td>Develop and implement the CottonInfo website, e-news, major publications, fact sheets, case studies, video content, webinars, social media &amp; joint industry database.</td>
<td>Ongoing.</td>
<td>CottonInfo program manager, technical specialists, RDOs.</td>
<td>CottonInfo communications manager.</td>
<td>Development and delivery of communication.</td>
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<td>Improve responsiveness.</td>
<td>Build capacity within CottonInfo to assist industry response to emerging or emergency issues.</td>
<td>Help the cotton industry prepare to effectively respond to biosecurity incursions.</td>
<td>RDO’s trained to assist the cotton industry meet its biosecurity obligations.</td>
<td>Annually.</td>
<td>Cotton Australia, RDOs.</td>
<td>Cotton Australia policy manager.</td>
<td>Industry responds effectively to a biosecurity incursion.</td>
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