UNITED STATES EXTENSION COTTON TOUR

1. Background

In America, the total production area of UNR cotton is small. It consist of less than 1% of the total area planted to cotton in the USA (100,000 acres) for the 1999 season. Commercial production of this system is focused in the states of Arizona, Alabama, Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, California and Louisiana. These states also have large areas planted to conventional cotton.

UNR cotton is grown in both the traditional Cotton Belt and marginal fringes. The migration of cotton into these marginal areas is a direct result of non-traditional cotton growers expanding their farming systems. These non- traditional cotton growers were forced to investigate alternative crops due to a constant decline in their farms' income from non-cotton (traditional) sources. A negative impact of this expansion has been the development of cotton in areas where soil and environmental conditions limited yield potential. Resulting in a need for producers to grow cotton using existing farm equipment and above all maintain a very low input costs, ensuring their viability. This has lead to the development of UNR cotton that is planted using grain drill machinery.

UNR cotton in America is classified as cotton grown under row spacings of 20 inches or less. These crops exist with the bulk of the cotton planted between the range of 7 to 15 inches. The availability of planters within the farming system is a significant factor in determining these plant spacings.

Australia and the United States researched the UNR production systems during the 1960-70's with mixed results. The development of growth regulators and their strategic use has facilitated in UNR being re-visited as a production system. Without this tool, crops grew into large plants that caused both trash and harvesting problems. Today in Australia there still appears to be areas that require research before the cotton industry could fully endorse UNR cotton as a main stream production alternative. The two major areas that require improvements, are the harvesting of the crop and subsequent processing of the seed cotton. The actual planting of the crop and associated agronomics of the crop still requires some research.

In summary, despite the major set backs of the 1960-70's, there continues to be a loyal group of growers in the USA that are persevering with the system, and adapting newly developed technologies. As time has evolved these core growers are jointed by new growers attracted to the system, simply because of the possibility of "earliness", improved yield potential and economical viability. Especially in an environment where production costs associated with traditional cotton production are constantly increasing, with returns remaining stagnant. It is for these reasons, also that Australian producers are interested.

2. Objectives of the Study Tour

For the duration of the study tour, I travelled with three other Australian Cotton Extension Officers. Each officer was investigating their own topic of interest with topics ranging from What are the components of an American farming system? To programs that promoted best management practice techniques on farms.

My study tour focused on the current performance and available technology growers access to in their quest to produce UNR cotton. On the tour I was able to consult with

researchers and conduct meetings with growers and consultants to discuss their experience of UNR cotton.

In conjunction to collating this valuable information I was able to establish communication links with industry personal within America who are associated with UNR cotton. These links will facilitate in information transfer between Australia and the United States on various research topics.

3. Travel Itinerary

July 1999

Day	Date	Location	Activities and Highlights
Mon	5	San Francisco CA	Arrive in the USA, travel to Santa Cruz on route to the San Jouqinn Valley
Tue	6	Merced CA	Dr Bill Weir, Farm Adviser, Uni of California Daniel Burns, Cotton Grower, 'San Jaun Ranching' Dos Palos
Wed	7	Visalia CA	Steve Wright, Farm Adviser, Uni of California
Thu	8	Corcoran CA	Bruce Roberts, Farm Adviser, Uni of California JG Boswell Company, Jim Razor, Nathan Heeringa, Tim Sherrill,
Fri	9	Shafter CA	Bob Hutmacher, Extension Officer Cotton, Uni of California Dr Glen Fitzgerald, Remote Sensing & GIS Researcher USDA
Sat	10	Los Angeles CA	Domestics Flight
Sun	11	LA to Memphis TE	Travel to Memphis, Tennessee
Mon	12	Jackson TE Milan TE	Dr Owen Gwathmey, Crop Physiologist, Uni of Tennessee Dr Blake Brown, Superintendent, Milan Experiment Station Dr Melvin Newman, Extension Plant Pathologist, , Uni of Tennessee
Tue	13	Benoit MI Stoneville MI	Charles Coglan, Cotton Grower Gordon Andrews, Extension Entomologist, Mississippi State Uni. James Robbins, Entomologist, Mississippi State Uni. Dr Will McCarty, Cotton Specialist, Mississippi State Uni. Dr Jane Dever, Agrevo Dr Alan Blaine, Soybean Extension Specialist, Mississippi State Uni. Dr Jim Thomas, Irrigation Engineer, Mississippi State Uni.
Wed	14	Stoneville MI	Fibremax Variety Experimental Plots: Brad Lewis, Jeff Gwynn , Agrevo Attend Delta Farm Fest, Agricultural Field Day Trey Cook, Executive Director, Delta Farm