

**Project GSA1401 – Survey Report to CRDC**  
**Cotton Professional Personnel Program**  
**Gauging the Extent of Buy-In for a Trial of the Program**

**Executive Summary**

A pilot project has been suggested as a way of ground truthing the extent to which the cotton agribusiness sector will embrace the proposed Cotton Professional Personnel Program. This pilot project is proposed to include 5-7 agribusiness collaborators and commence late 2014 or early 2015. A survey of key cotton agribusiness respondents was undertaken to gauge the level of interest and buy-in to the pilot project.

As a result of this survey 9-12 respondents could reasonably become collaborators in the pilot project. All respondents were prepared to engage in all aspects of the Program subject to further workshopping of the finer details. This also means that the draft of the Program will need to be developed beforehand, so it can be reviewed with the invited collaborators, prior to trialling.

As there was agreement to the core elements of the proposed Program, this is best finetuned operationally through a structured project management process. This will involve creating systems and processes that can be refined in an initial workshop with the collaborators, and then managed into a truly operational and functional system to be trialled on-ground.

The ultimate outcome of the pilot is then expected to be a Cotton Professional Personnel Program which has stronger fit with the needs of cotton agribusiness sector, the Cotton Workforce Development Strategy and ultimately provide a more stable cotton industry through an assured supply of key professional personnel.

The survey Key findings are:

- All respondents believe that the proposed Cotton Professional Personnel Program would be valuable both for their own organisation and for the wider cotton industry, resulting in a positive impact.
- All saw value in the Program supporting engagement between employers and students (school and universities) to seek future employees and in engaging with key universities notably CSU, UNE, USQ and UQ.
- It was noted that there are strong synergies with the CCA Young Member Network – and that administrative and operational factors would need to be addressed, ideally in a common manner, across the whole industry using the Program as some form of catalyst.
- All respondents were prepared to host a school or university student placement at their organisation, on the basis that finer detail would be determined on project commencement.
- A range of specific placements with details regarding operations were identified.
- All respondents were willing to participate in a mentoring program.
- They saw it being valuable in its own right, while assisting in / informing the better structuring / planning of an industry program could also inform their own programs.

- Such planning would need to recognise a range of legal and operational issues that could support the internal programs of businesses while linking to school and university programs.
- Currently some organisations do offer scholarships / cadetships; some being on an ‘as needed basis’.
- Those that don’t, regard the financial commitment as a key difficulty. However should industry funded scholarships / cadetships exist, the responses to some ‘hosting’ may well be different.
- Based on an average response rating of 6.5 across all respondents, it appears that the issue of expanding the student search function into non-traditional locations including remote and urban sites is of moderate importance.
- Accordingly it is proposed that this search function is excluded from the pilot project and implemented should the Program and its associated Network continue.
- A specific cotton industry wide graduate program, while useful, would be resource intensive. Accordingly it was proposed to defer implementation until the Program is more mature.

### **Recommendations**

*That the proposed Cotton Professional Personnel Program pilot project is approved to proceed and that planning commences in mid-2014 with a view to be operational no later than early 2015.*

*That the operationalisation of the Program be based on a group of 5-7 collaborators representing corporate farmers, processors, resellers, input suppliers and consultants.*

*That the Project Management for the Program is divided into two components – strategic and operational – to meet the needs of the industry, students and employers.*

## **1. Background**

Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) has undertaken research, within its Cotton Industry Workforce Development Project, into defining cotton agribusiness sector (resellers, suppliers of goods and services and service providers’ particularly private agronomists / consultants) needs for professional cotton industry personnel. These have been defined as primarily to assure the sector of the availability and retention of skilled and engaged staff; followed by continued professional development, to support both their retention and increased skill levels.

A potential strategy to assist in responding to this challenge has been identified, and is termed the Cotton Professional Personnel Program. The Program revolves around a central concept of establishing a ‘Network’, which connects cotton agribusinesses directly with potential employees, in this case school and university aged students. This is proposed to be through a range of strategies including:

- Internship programs
- Graduate programs
- Mentoring programs, and
- Scholarship programs.

Previous work indicates willingness for key cotton agribusinesses to support such a Program. Most respondents from a core representative group stated their intention to directly engage with the Program. As a result the concept of a pilot project to trial the Program was developed from the previous work in a bid to assure the industry that such a Program would be valued and would work in practice. Such a pilot project was envisaged to encompass 5-7 representative cotton agribusinesses.

Accordingly this project focussed on a survey of key agribusinesses to broadly ascertain their specific level of support for the Program and specifically to identify agribusinesses that would be willing to participate in a trial pilot project of the first component of the program; a Network based around an Internship process. Their involvement and response would guide the potential for expansion / wider rollout of the Network and its associated processes after 'ground truthing'.

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings of the survey, identify key potential program collaborators, and propose a way forward for the trial pilot project.

## **2. Methodology**

The methods were based around a phone survey of a representative sample of the 32 respondents that have formed the base group for this project since 2011. They encompass larger cotton farms; larger national resellers and input suppliers; processors and private consultants. Out of a smaller representative group of 17 respondents, data was gathered from 12. The process was:

- A briefing paper was developed – to provide background to the Program, more information as to how it may work, and provide context to the questionnaire (refer Attachment 1 for a copy of the briefing paper)
- A questionnaire was developed (refer Attachment 2) – which broadly sought the extent of support for each aspect of the program, with the end goal being to identify whether the survey participant was willing to become a collaborator for the program, specifically the internship element noted above.
- The briefing paper and questionnaire (PDF and word versions) were forwarded via email – to the respondents, and either a time was established for a phone survey to be conducted, or the word version of the survey was filled out and returned via email. In some instances, a general discussion was undertaken, without filling out the survey, as either the survey questions were not relevant to the organisation, or there was more value in the open ended discussion.
- Results were collated and are reported then interpreted in this document.

The respondents were: AUSCOTT, AQUATEC, Elders, Landmark, Cotton Grower Services, Cotton Seed Distributors, Crop Consultants of Australia, Delta Agribusiness, Qld Cotton, Agronomic Business Solutions, NSW DPI and Horcott. It was agreed that their specific views would remain commercial in confidence, although the identity of those available to be collaborators would be known.

### 3. Project Outcomes

Overall, there was an overwhelming support for the proposed program and for each of the proposed elements. Similarly all respondents, apart from Crop Consultants Australia, Delta Agribusiness and NSW DPI were willing to agree to act as collaborators and participate in the trial pilot project (with both CCA and NSW DPI indicating interest subject to organisational approval.) In all, 10 organisations agreed to participate as collaborators. (It was noted that, should this pilot project proceed, then a subset will be chosen from these positive respondents, with an ideal spread across the broader industry sectors noted above).

#### 3.1 Cotton Professional Personnel Program

All respondents were supportive of the proposed program as making a useful contribution to business and wider industry. All saw personal benefit for their organisations and benefit for the wider cotton industry.

The need to attract skilled staff, and the current difficulties (apart from two organisations who in 2014 had sufficient personnel) associated with this was a common theme emerging from the responses. Comment was frequently made on the amount of money spent and the lead time associated with professional recruitment services, generally with limited result, or unsatisfactory personnel being recruited.

It was noted that informal networks, such as personal relationships with lecturers at universities, were currently being used, however the chance to formalise these networks and partnerships was welcomed. Universities mentioned as being ideal partners were CSU, UNE, USQ and UQ.

It was generally noted by respondents that the Network, in particular the internships, provided both the employers and the students with the chance to 'try before you buy'. Therefore this would assist in finding the passionate employees who had the right 'fit' for organisations, while also giving students exposure to various sectors of the cotton industry.

A number of respondents noted that whilst it was considered time intensive to host students for placements, particularly as not all placement will result in successful employment, that the process was worth the time, money and energy invested in it. Engagement with students at both school and university level was reported as being important.

It was noted that strong synergies exist between the proposed program, and an existing Crop Consultants Australia (CCA) Young Member Network. The CCA network's purpose is to bring together CCA's young members to connect and network and to identify opportunities to add value, as well as demonstrate the benefits of being a member of the association. More detail on the CCA Young Member Network is available in Attachment 3.

A number of operational issues concerning legalities, payments, training plans, placement plans, time of year, etc were discussed as needing consideration

### *Key findings*

All respondents believe that the proposed Cotton Professional Personnel Program would be valuable both for their own organisation and for the wider cotton industry resulting in a positive impact.

All saw value in this supporting engagement between employers and students (school and universities) to seek future employees; in engaging with key universities notably CSU, UNE, USQ and UQ.

It was noted that there are strong synergies with the CCA Young Member Network and that administrative and operational factors would need to be addressed, ideally in a common manner across the whole industry via the Program.

### *3.2 The Internship Process*

On-ground placements:

All respondents were 'prepared to host a school or university student' at their organisation.

A range of specific placements were identified from some (not all) respondents, including:

- Water Use Efficiency / Irrigation Project
- Agronomist – Cotton
- Agronomist – Cotton/Grain
- Bug checking
- Precision Agriculture
- Extension
- Farm Management
- Seed production
- Whole of supply chain experiences.

Several organisations already offer on-ground placements, which ranged from 1 week to 13 weeks. Such organisations were prepared to determine how to integrate the process or leverage the process in ways yet to be determined (during interviews it was noted that 'the detail' of how this process would work would be determined on project commencement).

A number of respondents noted that the distinction between school and university students was a key consideration in terms of outcomes for students / employers; the expectations of both parties, management and administrative issues and the relative value of 1-4 week 'overview' placements vs. 12-13 week 'immersion' placements.

### *Key findings*

All respondents were prepared to host a school or university student at their organisation, on the basis that finer detail would be determined on project commencement.

A range of specific placements with details regarding operations were identified.

### 3.3 Mentoring roles

All respondents were 'willing to participate in a mentoring program.' Several organisations are already undertaking mentoring, either formally or informally. All welcomed a more structured / planned approach that might contribute to greater efficiencies / formality of process from their own perspective.

Varying responses were received as to the desired structure of the mentoring arrangement:

- one respondent noting that only experienced professionals of >30 years' of age with suitable experience were considered appropriate for mentoring young professionals
- another commented on the importance of matching mentor and mentoree experiences and ages so both get 'value'
- Another advised that their existing program took a tiered approach, with a senior professional mentoring a young professional, who in turn mentored / could mentor a graduate / student.

Comments included:

- stressing the importance of the difference between mentoring and networking in program design
- consideration of liability issues associated with 'advice' given by a mentor as well as confidentiality issues
- the program could also be valuable to 'bounce ideas around'
- It could support current university related programs and employers programs.

#### *Key findings*

All respondents were willing to participate in a mentoring program.

They saw it being valuable in its own right, while assisting in / informing the better structuring / planning of an industry program could also inform their own programs.

Such planning would need to recognise a range of legal and operational issues that could support the internal programs of businesses while linking to school and university programs.

### 3.4 Scholarships / cadetships

Three respondents participate in current offerings of scholarships / cadetships.

These organisations (generally larger agribusinesses but also smaller firms) are already offering scholarships for students (school leavers and those in final years at universities such as UNE and CSU in the areas of Ag Science, Agri Business and animal production), with the resultant commitment to working for several years at the organisation, or participation in an internship program.

Other organisations that did not currently offer scholarships, and were generally less supportive of being involved in this aspect of the program. This resistance is mostly related to scholarships having

to be funded by the (smaller) organisation themselves. However should industry bodies such as CRDC fund them and those businesses were 'hosts', the results could be different. Several commented that they offer scholarships on an 'as needed basis'.

*Key findings*

Currently some organisations do offer scholarships / cadetships; some being on an 'as needed basis'.

Those that don't regard the financial commitment as a key difficulty. However should industry funded scholarships / cadetships exist the responses to some 'hosting' may well be different.

### 3.5 Student search function

Input was sought regarding the role of the Network in expanding its catchment of future personnel from primarily the industry programs, including those run by PICSE, Cotton Australia and Horizon Scholarships, into seeking more students in a structured way from more non traditional remote or urban settings.

Using a scale of 1 (unimportant) to 10 (critical importance), all respondents generally answered in the ranges of moderate importance (lowest: 4) to very important (highest: 8). The context of the thinking was related to assuring the long term success of the program, once initial more traditional employee / student acquisition networks were exhausted.

The average response rating of 6.5 across all respondents indicates that the issue of expanding the student search function was of moderate importance. Accordingly it is proposed that this search function is excluded from the pilot project and implemented should the Network continue.

*Key findings*

Based on an average response rating of 6.5 across all respondents, it appears that the issue of expanding the student search function into non-traditional locations including remote and urban sites is of moderate importance.

Accordingly it is proposed that this search function is excluded from the pilot project and implemented should the Network continue.

### 3.6 Graduate program

A number of agribusinesses already offer graduate programs which are generally specific to their business or sector of the industry. It was identified that graduate programs were valuable to fast track learning, particularly if an accreditation / certification was the end result of the graduate program, as well as meeting internal business needs.

To ensure relevance of a cotton industry wide program, it was acknowledged that:

- with the range of different sectors, providing common training / information as part of the program would be challenging

- however the development of ‘specific cotton industry’ modules which were applicable industry wide would assist in facilitating greater exposure to and broader knowledge of the cotton industry
- this would assist in addressing perceived problems with the current cotton “sector” focussed approach that is problematic to some businesses.

It was noted that the proposed Program would assist in providing a more structured supply of graduates, while identifying those areas for which finding graduates was critical (i.e. more agronomic consultants). However this would need to be appropriately structured with longer term outcomes in mind and may be more appropriate in future than within the pilot project.

#### *Key findings*

A specific cotton industry wide graduate program, while useful would be resource intensive. Accordingly it was proposed to defer implementation until the Program is more mature.

### *3.7 Pilot Project collaborators*

All respondents were willing to participate as collaborators in the proposed trial pilot program, with the exception of one organisation for whom cotton did not feature strongly in their portfolio at present (Delta Agribusiness) with both CCA and NSW DPI indicating interest subject to organisational approval.

Considerations were:

- For those aware of it, the Primary Industry Centre for Science and Education (PICSE) was a good model to base collaboration around
- The PICSE model was considered to provide information on the legalities and logistics that this program would need to address
- It was noted that CSU requires 4<sup>th</sup> year students to complete a practical – it could be beneficial to link into this program when developing and commencing the trial project
- A range of responses in terms of remuneration for students undertaking internships was received, with some organisations noting that students could not be remunerated based on university requirements or their own employment terms and conditions. Others were amenable to the ~\$300/wk that formed the basis of the PICSE program
- A common theme revolved around the type of management required to make this project operate effectively, particularly regarding the coordination and administrative functions.

## **4. Proposed direction**

### *4.1 Collaborators*

Based on the outcomes of the survey, there is close to 100% support for the proposed Cotton Professional Personnel Program pilot project. All respondents are prepared to collaborate, meaning the proposed collaboration with 5-7 agribusinesses for this venture would be oversubscribed.



Accordingly, it is proposed that detailed planning commences for the project, with the view to it becoming active / operational in late 2014. It is further proposed that that an appropriate mix from all cotton agribusiness sectors is chosen, with 1 or 2 of each of the following invited to participate:

- Cotton corporate farmers
- Cotton processors
- Large resellers / suppliers
- Medium resellers
- Private consultancies (including consultancy representative organisation such as CCA).

#### 4.2 Next steps

It is proposed that using the results of this survey, the pilot project for the proposed Cotton Professional Personnel Program is developed and approved by CRDC. Subsequently detailed planning is proposed to occur around these actions:

- Develop finer logistical details during July-August 2014 of how the Cotton Professional Personnel Program would work in practice
- Determine a project management process
- Identify suitable cotton agribusiness collaborators from this group of respondents
- Obtain their formal agreement to participate in the pilot project
- Conduct a workshop with key staff from each of the chosen collaborators including key partners and stakeholders of the PICSE program, Cotton Australia, CRDC, universities, etc.
- Determine a time and action based rollout strategy for commencement 1 January 2015 – or sooner if possible.

#### **Recommendations**

*That the proposed Cotton Professional Personnel Program pilot project is approved to proceed and that planning commences in mid-2014 with a view to be operational no later than early 2015.*

*That the operationalisation of the Program be based on a group of 5-7 collaborators representing corporate farmers, processors, resellers, input suppliers and consultants.*

#### 4.3 Project management

There appear to be two key areas of project management – continued strategic communication with key collaborators and coordination of on-ground operations. These functions / responsibilities can be described as:

<b>Strategic management</b>	<b>On-ground operations</b>
Continued communication with pilot study collaborators	Develop an implementation plan managed through a 'central clearing house' for the Program
Continued communication with wider agribusiness respondents to this work since 2011	Set up the draft procedures and systems that are required to make the Program work
Engagement with key stakeholders at a senior level, e.g. Cotton Australia; Horizon Scholarships, universities at Dean / Head of School level	Address the legalities, financial side of this Program, quality management issues
Maintain links with Cotton Workforce Development Strategy	Coordination of all arrangements for the program operations, payments of any costs /

	placements, risk management, etc
Ensure scholarships are known more widely in industry and amongst students involved in the Program so they are aware of it	Coordination of 'employer-students' arrangements for the full immersion of the students in the program and / or short term placements
Canvass graduate program and student involvement in it	Development of placement strategies – e.g. training plans or similar plans – to support appropriate management
Interact and collaborate on operational issues	Ensure strong operational connections with PICSE, Cotton Australia and Horizon Scholarships including collaborators
Engage with the CCA Young Member Network	Manage the operations of the elements of the program – placements, internships, mentoring, etc

### **Recommendations**

*That the Project Management for the Program is divided into two components – strategic and operational – to meet the needs of the industry, students and employers.*

## **5. Summary**

A pilot project for the proposed Cotton Professional Personnel Program has been suggested as a way of ground truthing the extent to which the cotton agribusiness sector will embrace the Program. This pilot project is proposed to include 5-7 agribusiness collaborators and commence late 2014 or early 2015.

As a result of this survey 9-12 respondents could reasonably become collaborators. All respondents were prepared to engage in all aspects of the Program subject to further workshopping of the finer details. This also means that the draft of the Program will need to be developed beforehand so it can be reviewed with the invited collaborators into a cohesive program for trialling.

As there was agreement to the core elements of the Program that has been proposed, then there is an opportunity to fine tune the operations via a structured project management process. This will involve creating systems and processes that can be defined in an initial workshop with the collaborators then fine tuned into a truly operational and functional system to be trialled on-ground.

Gordon Stone  
11 June 2014

## ATTACHMENT 1: BACKGROUND BRIEF

### Proposed Direction of a Cotton Professional Personnel Program

#### Overview

Over the last 2-years Gordon Stone has been undertaking work for the cotton industry, funded by Cotton R&D Corporation (CRDC) to consider whether or not an industry focussed Cotton Professional Personnel Program would support the cotton agribusiness sector in acquiring and managing more professional personnel to support future industry growth. The response has been very positive.

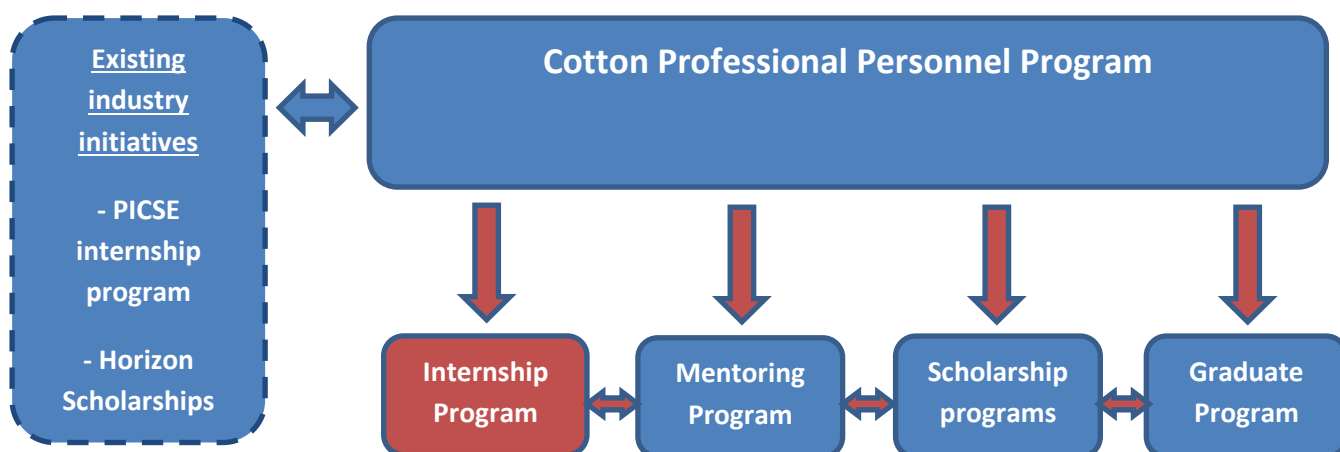
The key element now is the extent to which the cotton agribusiness sector would be prepared to assist in the development and implementation of the program. There are two remaining steps in the planning. First a quick survey to test the real level of engagement and buy-in. The second is, if the response is positive, to commence a small pilot project to test the concept on-ground.

#### How the Cotton Professional Personnel Program could work

1. The central concept is to set up a cotton industry **Network** of students and agribusinesses – to facilitate and support their connection and engagement. CRDC may support the Network, particularly if the small pilot is successful.
2. This Network is to initially connect with and maximise key **current industry initiatives**:
  - CRDC supports several programs including The Primary Industry Centre for Science Education (PICSE) and Horizon Scholarships (run by the Rural Industries R&D Corporation).
  - Cotton Australia and the Primary Industries Education Foundation also run programs.
  - Several cotton agri-businesses currently offer holiday work, scholarships and other initiatives.

Integration with, and leveraging of, these current industry initiatives will ensure minimal double up and wasted resources, and maximised benefit and efficiencies.

3. The students exposed to the cotton industry through the existing industry initiatives / programs would be offered engagement with industry partners and individual agribusinesses around a **coordinated Internship process**. It is envisaged that ultimately, in addition to the internship program, a range of options for formal and informal engagement between students and cotton agribusinesses will be available, i.e. graduate programs, mentoring roles, longer term recruitment options (refer Figure 1).
4. This engagement would assist in **cementing students' connection** to the cotton industry by supporting their direct engagement with industry organisations, employers and initiatives. In particular it would facilitate direct connections between students looking for jobs and agribusinesses looking for personnel. It would also expose students to key **industry events** like the Cotton Conference.
5. The Network would **search out and engage** with an increasing variety of students, through a structured communication and engagement process via its partner organisations and universities to increase the exposure of a wider student cohort to the cotton industry.
6. The Network would maintain a **coordinated database**, with up to date information on type and timing of available internships, placements and associated student requirements / availability.
7. The aim is to commence **test driving the program in 2014**.



**Figure 1 Cotton Professional Development Program**

The Network would use the current PICSE project and Horizon Scholarship recipients, plus relevant agribusiness scholarships if the suppliers are agreeable, as the basis for commencing operations. It would look for stronger connections with universities like Uni of New England, Uni of Southern Qld, etc too. The real benefit lies in ensuring any students exposed to the cotton industry during their school or university years can be retained in the industry – and there is a system for attracting more students into the industry and making it attractive for them to stay.

### **The Internship process**

The operations function covers:

- On-ground **tailored placements** of students with handpicked employers – at a mutually beneficial time in the annual school / university / business cycle
- Students to be identified from **current initiatives** (e.g. PICSE / Horizon), then more widely across **urban and rural settings** and who are studying in diverse yet relevant disciplines
- Process will provide for a **financial stipend to students**, which will contribute to a favourable outlook on the industry (based on the PICSE stipend of \$300 for a 1-week placement; noting that some in the cotton agribusiness sector have current stipend practices). This stipend to be discussed.
- A **best practice process covering logistics** such as student accommodation, travel, legalities, insurances, and other logistics (based on PICSE experience; i.e. certain protocols to be followed to ensure legal and insurance compliance; always an important issue for education and industry programs)
- The work from this project will assist in **identifying emerging cotton employer job needs**, and will act as a short term guide to initial industry needs (to be updated over time) for internships.
- A **mentoring program**, which may be either a formal or informal arrangement, will also be encouraged either as part of or separate to the internship, where students develop relationships with key cotton industry personnel, so both parties can act as sounding boards for the other over time. This likewise continues to build student-business-employer-employee relationships. The mentoring might be short or long-term – the terms of reference to be considered in more detail as the program evolves.

Added to this is an important function of ‘telling sound cotton industry careers story’. Its purpose is to ensure the student – and their peers – are aware that pay rates are reasonable, current and expected career prospects are sound with potential; careers in the cotton industry are portable to

other agricultural industries and elsewhere in the food and fibre value chain – and that there are a range of pathways for these careers to expand elsewhere.

### **Internship Trial**

A survey of key cotton agribusiness industry members is planned to determine the extent to which the program would be supported by industry members, and to gauge interest in participating in a trial pilot project.

Should the survey indicate a willingness to participate, a trial pilot project with 5-7 collaborators is proposed to be undertaken in the second half of 2014, which would trial how such a program works in practice and provide data on which to base a wider roll-out if appropriate. Key details such as program design, student resourcing, logistics, and reporting will be further defined with the collaborators during the internship planning process.

The role of the Collaborator will include:

- Input to program design
- Plan and undertake active engagement prior to and during the internship
- Internship to include a placement of the student/s at that workplace
- Act in a mentoring capacity –to give students feedback over time on real cotton industry career prospects and emerging issues of importance to their career planning
- Provide feedback on the suitability / success or otherwise of the process – to provide input to a wider industry roll-out if deemed appropriate / worthwhile.

Following the trial, key findings will be reported back to CRDC, and an evaluation undertaken of the trial's success, particularly as a basis for longer term and wider industry roll-out with industry buy-in increasing over time.

Gordon Stone

April 2014

## ATTACHMENT 2: QUESTIONNAIRE

### Proposed Direction of a Cotton Professional Personnel Program Seeking feedback from cotton agri-businesses involved in the project to-date

#### What's this all about?

We are gauging the extent of buy-in across the cotton agribusiness sector for a proposed, structured, integrated program to attract more skilled professional personnel into the industry. It is based on creating a Network in which students already connecting with the cotton industry, through a series of industry funded programs, are offered an Internship which could potentially lead to their employment.

The aim is to start a small trial project later in 2014, prior to wider rollout if successful. An outline of the plan is attached in the paper – Proposed Direction of a Cotton Professional Personnel Program.

Your input is sought to determine likely extent of buy-in from the cotton agribusiness sector.

You will receive a phone call from either Gordon Stone, David Stone or Suzanne Davis to assist in completing this input – or you may prefer to self-complete and e-mail back to [gordon@cdi.net.au](mailto:gordon@cdi.net.au) by Friday 23 May 2014.

#### The Questions

##### 1. Your details

*Please note that neither names nor organisations of respondents will be attributed in the report:*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Role: \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation Category options are (please tick or place an X if completing it electronically):

- National merchandise resellers with advisers
- Regional merchandise resellers with advisers
- Global input suppliers – fertiliser, chemical
- National input suppliers
- National banking and finance
- Commodity marketers
- Specialist private consultancies – non-agronomic
- Agronomic consultancies
- Machinery suppliers
- Corporate / larger family cotton growers

- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. The Cotton Professional Personnel Program

*After understanding how the Cotton Professional Personnel Program might work, do you feel that:*

It will make a useful contribution to obtaining more personnel for **your business**? (Please tick or place an **X** if completing it electronically)

Yes  No  Maybe

It will make a useful contribution to obtaining more personnel for **the wider cotton industry**? (Please tick or place an **X** if completing it electronically)

Yes  No  Maybe

Overall comments on its likely overall impact; positive and negative, on your business / the cotton industry:

Have you any **overall comments** on the proposed Cotton Professional Personnel Program?

Please comment as appropriate:

## 3. The Internship Process

*As some cotton agribusinesses already undertake one or more of these roles, please note accordingly in your response whether this is duplicating your effort – and / or whether your current activities could be integrated into the process if appropriate.*

The aim is to undertake a small pilot process later in 2014 to:

- test the concept for value for money / effort
- ensure it meets wider industry needs
- obtain feedback from those agri-businesses who supported the concept
- review whether it achieved its aims
- improve the process, should longer term rollout be planned.

### 3.1 On-ground placements

Would you be prepared to host a school or university student in your business, at a mutually convenient time / length of time, for an on-ground placement?

Yes  No  Maybe

If Yes or Maybe, what type/s of placements might your business be able to offer, e.g. agronomy, irrigation management, sales and marketing, bug checking, advisory services, etc?

<i>Type of placement</i>	<i>Comment on relevant issues – timing, numbers of placements available, etc</i>

### 3.2 Mentoring role

Would key personnel in your business be available / prepared to mentor a student at a mutually convenient time / length of time – initially during a 6-month trial?

Yes  No  Maybe

If Yes or Maybe, please comment as appropriate:

### 3.3 Scholarships / cadetships

*It is proposed to offer industry scholarships, cadetships, stipends, etc to high performing students to support their university study and stipends to support any industry placements. Both industry funded and company specific programs already exist.*

Does your business offer industry scholarships, cadetships, stipends, etc to students to support their school study / university study / further education?

Yes  No

If Yes, please comment on the type / amount / caveats / other details as appropriate:

If No, please comment on whether you would be prepared to consider involvement in such a process to engage with suitable student candidates?

Other comments:

### 3.4 Student search function



*A longer term task is to seek out additional regional and urban students who are not yet engaged in cotton industry programs. The purpose is to expand the cohort of accessible students.*

How important to do you consider this function to be on a scale of 0-10 (where 0 = unimportant and 10 = critical importance)?

Unimportant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Critical importance

### **3.5 Graduate programs**

*Some companies conduct graduate programs to manage young personnel who have come into the business – including professional development programs – and may be prepared to make their availability more widely known.*

If appropriate, please comment on any in-house or other programs known to you – regarding availability, suitability or potential to undertake such programs in the cotton industry:

Alternatively it may be possible for the proposed Network / Internship process to consider some form of cotton industry wide graduate program.

Please comment as appropriate on the relevance of a cotton industry wide graduate program:

### **3.6 Seeking collaborators**

*If the proposed small pilot project later in 2014 to implement these ideas on-ground in the cotton industry, was to proceed:*

Based on further negotiation, would your business be interesting in collaborating on this project in one of the ways outlined above or in some other way that might be unique to your business?

Yes  No  Maybe

If Yes or Maybe, please comment as appropriate:

### **3.7 Other comments**

As the Network / Internship process is at an early stage; with low level defined outcomes, please comment on other issues that might assist our thinking about implementing this program, particularly the proposed trial project.

Comments in general:

Specific comments on **key elements of what is proposed**:

*Many thanks for your time and input. We expect to be able to give you an update of the project findings during mid-2014.*

### **ATTACHMENT 3: CCA YOUNG MEMBERS NETWORK BRIEF**

**From:** Fiona Anderson CCA (<mailto:fiona@cropconsultants.com.au>)

**Sent:** Thursday, 29 May 2014 2:13 PM

**To:** Gordon Stone

**Cc:** [d.l.stone@hotmail.com](mailto:d.l.stone@hotmail.com); [projects@cropconsultants.com.au](mailto:projects@cropconsultants.com.au); Fiona Anderson CCA; Jamie Iker; [dallas.king.bac@bigpond.com](mailto:dallas.king.bac@bigpond.com)

**Subject:** Re: cotton agribusiness personnel strategy

Hi Gordon.

Further to our conversation today .....

1. CCA is looking at ways to support the interests of young consultants/agronomists and those with an interest in agronomy. This matter has been discussed extensively at the Board level and indications are that the concept is strongly supported by experienced consultants that have been long time CCA members.
2. In 2014, CCA created a new director portfolio on the Board called 'Young Member Director'. CCA is fortunate to have three young people (2 from independent consulting businesses and 1 from a corporate) elected to the Board for 2014/15.
3. In 2014, CCA kicked off the Young Member Network. The purpose of the Young Member Network is to bring together CCA's young members to connect and network and to identify opportunities to add value and benefits to being a member of the association. The first gathering was held on 15 May 2014 in Moree with nine young members attending. Key outcomes and ideas from this meeting were:
  - To hold Network gatherings in conjunction with existing events (ie CCA Cropping Solutions Seminars) with a preference being for late afternoon/evening gatherings rather than breakfast.
  - To hold a concurrent session at CCA Seminars that provide young members with a safe and comfortable environment in which they can ask any range of 'silly' questions with an experienced agronomist &/or researcher to clarify things heard during the presentations and to discuss matters they are not sure about.
  - Interested in a mentoring program that is focused on improving knowledge and things that should be considered in particular situations, it is not about giving advice. The role of mentors would need to be clear, there may need to be guidelines about the intent of the information provided by mentors and how the information is used to avoid liability issues. Mentoring provides a safe place to exchange information and bounce around ideas. The young members were clear about making a distinction between mentoring versus networking.
  - Interested in a networking program that is about having other young members to connect with, share experiences and ask questions. Any opportunities to build relationships with researchers would be appreciated. The CCA member directory is another means of young members being able to gain access to contact details of other members.
  - A need was identified to connect with undergraduate students while they are at university and start building their networks. Would be good to link with existing programs such as Farming Future, Cotton Production course, Cotton Australia. It was felt to be important to identify opportunities to involve students and help them gain practical experience. For students to have early exposure to a young network it highlights career opportunities and will hopefully lead them to becoming members of CCA later on and is a mechanism of providing ongoing support as they grow their professional experience. It's about breaking down the barriers.

4. The next CCA Young Member Network event will be the afternoon/evening of 15 July in Goondiwindi. Plans are underway for the event to involve an activity (such as lawn bowls), drinks and a meal. It will also include a semi-formal discussion. The CCA Board has approved that the costs of the Young Member events are to be covered by CCA's own cash reserves at this stage. However a budget, seeking a sponsor and the development of a mentoring program and coordinating the young network and resources to support these activities has been flagged as requiring future discussions at a Board level.

5. CCA is including a question in the Cotton Consultants Survey 2014 to gain additional feedback from young members about what activities they feel would assist them in the course of their work, to progress their career and identify if they have specific professional development needs.

6. In 2014, CCA started a closed group site on Facebook for members. This aims to provide additional networking opportunities and is a means of getting information out to members quickly. Both experienced and young members have already joined this Facebook group.

7. CCA is often approached by university students with requests to be involved with the organisation and spend time with members in the field. Presently core business is focused on delivering services to members and coordinating contracted projects so it is difficult to justify the allocation of resources to coordinate university or student placements across the regions. It is recognised that a need for this exists but it falls through the cracks.

Next week I will forward any feedback that comes from the Board after they have had a chance to review the background paper that you provided today.

There does seem to be a common thread between the CRDC project and CCA's Young Member Network activities, please keep us posted. I believe the Board would be open to considering opportunities.

My co-worker, Liz Todd ([projects@cropconsultants.com.au](mailto:projects@cropconsultants.com.au)), will be taking the lead with CCA's Young Member activities so please also keep her in the loop.

Fiona

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