

## **The Role of Local Growers in Community Groups and Industry Activities**

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The future of agriculture in Australia depends on the type of people who are in the cotton industry. The future depends on a professional & aggressive approach to the business of farming, prepared for change, looking to the future with a positive attitude.

The political landscape has changed dramatically in the last couple of months so that Rural Australia has been put back on the agenda. The Queensland election has cleared the way for politicians to respond to the requirements of agriculture and that is an opportunity for cotton farmers to show the way. We must take that opportunity and get involved.

This opportunity is so important that we cannot leave it to the few who always do the work. It must be that we all pull our weight. Every one must get involved from the smallest farmer to the biggest marketing organisation. We must all contribute, men and women.

The way to do that is through the many organisations that already exist. These groups are all well established and keen for assistance and new strategies. They are:

- \* Cotton Grower's Associations - currently 15
- \* Food & Fibre Groups - currently 5
- \* Water Groups - Users, River Management Boards, TCM's, etc.
- \* General groups - Farmers Associations, Landcare, Shire Councils, etc.

The role of these organisations is pivotal to get the support of the grassroots of our cotton communities. Unless we have the support of the local communities we are doomed to extinction. If they don't want us to grow cotton in those regions, they will eventually agitate to have us legislated out of business by reducing our access to water, chemicals and biotechnology. These organisations all give growers the opportunity to;

- \* explain ourselves face to face,
- \* be real members of a community,
- \* and get our local house in order before we address any problems in the cities.

Cotton Australia, based in Sydney cannot be effective in little towns like Biloela or Narromine. This is because Cotton Australia cannot be in all those places at once and cannot know the local knowledge that only the local groups will know. As far as the people in the towns are concerned, if the Cotton Australia staff fly in from Sydney and tell them how to run their towns, there will be hell to pay. This needs to be done by local people who have the local common sense and can work with the decision makers and media of the area.

The local groups have had some remarkable successes to date. Some of these are:

- \* Moree Aboriginal Strategy,
- \* Macquarie Food & Fibre and its impact on the public perception (Stollznow),
- \* Dalby Cotton Week,
- \* Gunnedah Chemical Liaison Committee,
- \* Emerald Spray Monitor,
- \* Biloela Silo and many more

If growers and industry members can improve their participation rates in these various groups there will be several rewards. The rewards are divided into two categories.

1. The working together reward. This is where we get the benefit of forming a collective view on whichever issue is important to that area at that time. The information sharing and participation that happens within the CGA's is usually very worthwhile.
2. Access. The community decides, through the political process, how much water, chemicals and biotechnology we can use. If the community don't trust us to use these products and services properly, then we will get limited access to them. By explaining ourselves, our practices and participating in the community as "normal" people we will develop that trust. The trust is then converted into access.

In the end, it is up to us an industry to work together. Every man, woman and child must contribute to our local communities and the various groups that are available. If you are not contributing, then you should ask yourself why.

It is up to us in the cotton industry to take the opportunity that has been presented to us and demonstrate that we can show the way in agriculture. We should do this by communicating effectively with our communities and being the professional and successful industry that we are.