
Australia's Cotton Grower of the Year and High Achiever of the Year announced

The Australian cotton industry's top performers for 2021 have been announced in front of industry peers at one of the best attended field days in northern New South Wales.

The Bayer Cotton Grower of the Year for 2021 is Quigley Farms at Trangie in the Macquarie Valley. The winner of the AgriRisk High Achiever of the year is Ashley Geldard from Columboola Cotton near Miles in the Western Downs of Queensland.

Cotton Australia CEO Adam Kay joined sponsors Bayer and AgriRisk in congratulating both winners for their achievements. "Tony Quigley and Ashley Geldard are both outstanding cotton farmers at different stages of their cotton journey, yet they are united in their commitment to sustainability, in particular efficient water use and soil health. They are exceptionally worthy award winners."

Tony Quigley is a 4th generation farmer, and with the help of wife Sally, sons Tom, George and Richie and staff they run Quigley Farms, a diversified and integrated family farming operation in the Trangie/Nevertire districts of the Macquarie Valley.

During the judging process Tony said: "The 20/21 crop will produce spectacular WUE results, with the furrow fields yielding 15.25 bales/ha for 5.7 ML applied (2.67 bales/ML), and the linear move around 14.4 bales/ha for 4.43 ML applied (3.25 bales/ML). The result has been achieved with the guidance of Chris McCormack of Agronomic Business Solutions who has been with us for 28 years."

Sally and Tony's sons have centred their tertiary studies around agriculture with Tom qualified in agribusiness while George and Richie have completed agricultural science degrees. Both Tom and Richie have been Nuffield Scholars and all three have a financial stake in the farms with associated debt. Sally and Tony have stepped back from operational duties to transition to retirement with management transferring to the boys, who are taking the farm to the next level.

Bayer's Mark Dawson said the Quigleys are an outstanding example of a family cotton farm. "All aspects of current production are being closely managed, and all aspects of future needs and direction have been considered. They have a great concern for sustainability of the industry, as well as improving the understanding of cotton growing in the wider community. The Quigleys are a wonderful representation of the dedicated, multi-generational farming families that comprise the backbone of the cotton industry."

AgriRisk's Deidre McCallum said the judges were impressed with how well the family members collaborated across all aspects of the business. "The Quigleys have great structure and management highlighted by regular meetings and benchmarking to improve business profitability. They have a strict weed management strategy across all farms and excellent community involvement across sports, local community and specifically the cotton industry."

Tony has been a pioneer of water efficiency measures. As Director of the Trangie Nevertire Co-operative Ltd Irrigation Scheme Tony and the other Board members succeeded in getting federal government funding of \$119m for modernisation in return for half the water savings. The result was the rebuilding of 108 km of delivery channel with synthetic lining, new remote-control gates, metering systems and a separate stock and domestic water pipeline as well as on-farm works. The objective was to increase both water delivery system efficiency and on-farm water use efficiency for all users and the results have been spectacular with transmission losses reduced dramatically from 27% to 5%, and crop water use efficiency has improved by 20% under the overhead irrigation at Quigley Farms.

Ashley Geldard farms 750 hectares at Miles including 300 hectares of irrigated cotton in rectangular paddocks with circular centre pivots. Every field has a combination of overhead irrigation under the pivots and the areas outside are flood irrigation or furrow irrigation. The farm sources treated water from a CSG development which is supplied under pressure into storage on farm.

During the judging process Ashley said efficiency is key. "We try to keep it as efficient as possible including our energy use. We are feeding the water under pressure to the suction side of our pumps which are all variable ramping diesels so they will ramp up only as much as required to add the additional pressure they need for our system. We changed our row configuration to 75 cm from 150 cm which has been more efficient and this year we have had our best farm yield to date."

Deidre said the focus on innovation was evident to judges. "The judges were impressed with Ashley's innovative approach to irrigation turning around a dryland farm to irrigation in a short period of time and also found the hybrid use of a centre pivot with flood irrigation both unusual and effective."

Mr Kay congratulated all five nominees for the awards for their commitment to improving not just cotton but environmental outcomes.

“In the 50th year of Cotton Australia we are experiencing one of the best seasons in history and our people are behind that. From our current leaders highlighted here to our future leaders who this year will take part in our Future Cotton Leaders Program, there is a wealth of knowledge, enthusiasm and dedication. The focus remains on improving Australian cotton while attracting global buyers, brands and retailers who demand the best, while consumers are increasingly demanding ethically grown cotton which has excellent environmental qualities,” Mr Kay said.

The winners of the ADAMA Chris Lehmann Trust Young Cotton Achiever of the Year Award, the Cotton Seed Distributors Researcher of the Year Award and the Service to Industry Award will be announced ahead of the Cotton Conference being held in August on the Gold Coast.

Cotton Australia is the peak representative body for Australia's cotton growing industry.

Cotton Australia media contact:

Darrin Davies
Communications Manager, Media and Engagement
Cotton Australia
0428 770 237