

THE CRAWFORD FAMILY

"Quondong" Narromine, NSW



Stuart Crawford and his forebears have been farming "Quondong" near Narromine in the Macquarie Valley NSW, since 1908. Together with his wife Fran and children, Lauren, Jock and Harley, the Crawford's farm 5,000 hectares of dryland cereal crops and 720 hectares developed for irrigation.

The variability of water allocations and the high cost of production has driven The Crawford's to invest in well-designed irrigation systems that match the different soil types across their properties. Combined with this is a focus in trying to get all of the individual inputs right each season including; irrigation innovation, good agronomy, water and timeliness.

Soil health nutrition and weed management are all important. Periodically, lime and gypsum are applied where needed. Regularly testing tracks the cotton crop's nutrition throughout the season. Together this approach helps ensure an increase on return per megalitre.

'The rotations tend to be varied, but the main focus is ground cover, particularly where the pivots are concerned. The drip country tends to grow more cotton back to back, with yields remaining steady. The first drip irrigation fields were installed in 1997 on 2 metre centres on beds, however our more recent developments have been on 1 metre centres, on the flat and all future re-development will be this configuration, as this has given them maximum flexibility for planting year in year out.'

Stu believes the irrigation technology, combined with new seed varieties e.g. 746, has enabled the Crawford's to control growth and has resulted in an overall increase in yield. Their seven year farm average sits at 13.64 bales per hectare.



'There have been some highs and lows within that figure, but they are vastly different to what we grew 20 years ago.' explained Stu. This is a credit to the plant breeders and new technology, further complimented by the support we received from the cotton industry representatives within the Macquarie Valley, Stu believes. Like with all growers, keeping ahead of the ever-increasing costs of production are integral to the Crawford's farming operation. They use Agripath software for benchmarking for both their dryland and irrigated farming. By careful tracking, they are able to maintain efficiencies.

With a benchmarking program in place that underpins their success, Stu explains, 'The costs associated with growing cotton just keep on increasing, so we have to keep pushing the boundaries with yield. Our focus is on getting all of the individual inputs right each season from irrigation innovation, good agronomy, water and timeliness.' It's this meticulous approach that saw the Crawfords achieve 16.6 bales per hectare average, and take out the Macquarie Valley Highest Average Yield Award for Large Growers in 2017/18 with their Bollgard 746 and 748 varieties. Stu is an advocate of forward selling when water is available.

The Crawfords are active participants in the Macquarie Cotton Growers Association, are CSD Ambassadors and are currently working on becoming myBMP certified. Stu and his family have a well managed workforce consisting of three permanent staff and seasonal casuals as required, with all new and casual staff being thoroughly inducted. All staff participate in regular training and are well briefed in safe workplace priorities.

The Crawfords host field days and school groups to demonstrate and educate students on the innovations of cotton growing today. Succession planning is well advanced and it is the younger generation coming through and wanting to farm that most excites Stu. 'My sons and my daughter are all farming and this is where the future is. The opportunities for the cotton industry are terrific. This is an industry that shares knowledge and one where everyone is constantly looking to improve. The styles of farming, irrigating and resource management are evolving every year. There's always something new to learn and adopt and this makes farming cotton so interesting.'

'It's very special to have the whole family involved with farming,' Fran said. Today the Macquarie Valley encompasses a great young group of innovative farmers, seeing agriculture as a bright future. The Crawfords are no different to other farming families with Stu and Fran stepping back and the younger generation taking the reins. Both Stu and Fran believe that it's because the Australian cotton industry is so progressive, openly sharing knowledge and constantly looking to improve that sets the industry in good stead to have successful future. Stu says 'Technology is moving at such a rapid pace and it's so important to have young people driving this forward in a productive and sustainable way.'

