



Media Release

9/5/2019

Australian cotton industry's 2019 top achievers announced

The finalists for the 2019 Australian Cotton Industry Awards have been announced.

The awards recognise the industry's best and brightest and includes growers, researchers and industry members from across the country.

Cotton Australia CEO Adam Kay says each finalist has been recognised for the significant contribution they have made to a wide range of areas, including best practice farming, research and development, innovation and industry advocacy.

The finalists include:

Category	Finalists
Bayer Grower of the Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tim Leifels and Kate Ledingham, Alice Downs Farms P/L, "Alice Downs" Moree, NSW• Tom and Charm Arnott, Fairfield Farming Co P/L "Fairfield" and "Tambalaka" Boggabilla NSW• Ben and Kim Witham, Mundoora Farming, "Mundoora", Coleambally, NSW
AgriRisk High Achiever of the Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• James Traill and Ashley Tunks, One Tree Agriculture - Jandowae Aggregation, "Arrawatta", Warra, QLD• Craig and Clint Charters, Gabo Pastoral Co, "Gabo" and "Craiglea", "Quirindi, NSW• Stu and Fran Crawford, Crawford Ag, "Quondong" Narromine, NSW
ADAMA Chris Lehmann Trust Young Cotton Achiever of the Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nick Beer, "Merrilong", Spring Ridge, NSW• Billy Browning, "Narramine Station", Narromine, NSW• Murray Connor, Australian Food & Fibre - Moree, NSW
Cotton Seed Distributors Researcher of the Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr Jamie Hopkinson - QLD Dept Agriculture & Fisheries, Toowoomba, QLD• Kieran O'Keeffe - CottonInfo, Griffith, NSW• Dr Linda Smith - QLD Dept Agriculture & Fisheries, Brisbane, QLD

Mr Kay says the Australian cotton industry has demonstrated how resilient it is during what has been a tough season.

“The cotton industry is not immune to this devastating drought. Despite this season’s challenges, our industry continues to operate at a very high standard,” Mr Kay says.

“The 2019 finalists are excellent role models and advocates for our world-leading agricultural industry. They continue to work for a brighter future for all in our sector through leadership, education, and research and development.”

“The annual awards program is an important opportunity to recognise the hardworking, innovative and dedicated members of our cotton industry.”

The awards judging panel has travelled to the finalists’ originating regions to meet and assess each of the candidates.

Cash prizes are on offer for the winners across all categories, with an additional research bursary for Researcher of the Year.

The recipients for the 2019 Australian Cotton Industry Awards will be announced at a gala event to be held at Griffith on 24th July 2019 in conjunction with the Cotton Collective.

For more information on the awards visit: <http://www.australiancottonawards.com/>

Please note:

- Short biographies of the finalists follow
- Images of the finalists can be downloaded [here](#).

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

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2019 Australian Cotton Industry Awards finalists

Bayer Grower of the Year

Tim Leifels and Kate Ledingham, Alice Downs Farms Pty Ltd, "Alice Downs" Moree NSW

Tim Leifels has been farming cotton for the Ledinghams of "Alice Downs" east of Moree, for 13 years. Tim is an accomplished Farm Manager with an eye on the future. Driving sustainable farming practices to optimise moisture conservation, soil health and fertility, Tim and Kate have achieved consistent success with all three dry land properties comprising 7,956ha, with 1,803ha under dryland cotton this year. "Alice Downs" is a Cotton Seed Distributor Ambassador and Tim is an enthusiastic long-term trial participant, regularly hosting field days and other industry events on farm. With a rich Ledingham family history going back three generations, Tim Leifels and Kate Ledingham are committed to continually protecting and enhancing soil health and sustainable farming practices to ensure the success of the farms for generations to come.

Tom and Charm Arnott, Fairfield Farming Co Pty Ltd, "Fairfield" and "Tambalaka" Boggabilla, NSW

Tom and Charm run Fairfield Farming Co Pty Ltd comprising of two properties just out of Boggabilla, NSW with total farm irrigation area of 1,429.9ha and 382ha dryland. Together they are highly disciplined and committed to a program of continual improvement by measuring and benchmarking every aspect of their farming and business operations. Ensuring their farming practices are efficient and sustainable while achieving an increasingly consistent yield year after year are Tom and Charm's key goals. Enthusiastic proponents of myBMP, Tom and Charm operate with a clear five year plan in which integrated technology and other systems play a key role in measuring performance and planning for the future. Both are committed participants in field trials, host field days on farm and are active members of their local area-wide management group.

Ben and Kim Withams, Mundoora Farming, "Mundoora", Coleambally NSW

Mundoora Farming is a family partnership operated by Ben and Kim Witham in conjunction with Mike and Pauline Witham. "Mundoora", Coleambally, was purchased in 1984 with Ben and Kim running the cropping enterprises, while Mike and Pauline run an Angus cattle operation. Following the acquisition of a neighbouring property in 2006, Ben and Kim extended their irrigated and dry land cropping operations to include cotton, a move that has proved highly successful for them. After significant development in the farm irrigation design, careful rotation of crops and continual commitment to soil health, in 2011 and 2012 Kim and Ben received the Southern Valley Cotton Grower Association Highest Farm Average Award for the valley and have been nominated again for the award in 2019. An active Apexian, Ben was awarded the 2017 Apexian of the Year. Ben is also dedicated to the club crop at the Murrumbidgee Community Demonstration Farm and in 2016 he was recognised for 20 years of service to the Royal Fire Service.

AgriRisk High Achiever of the Year Finalists

James Traill and Ashley Tunks, One Tree Agriculture, Jandowee Aggregation "Arrawatta" Warra QLD

James Traill and Ashley Tunks manage a large-scale corporate farming operation consisting of 9,700ha across 13 properties, spread from Warra to Jandowae in the Darling Downs, Queensland. The cropping system is comprised of a mixed crop rotation of sorghum, wheat, barley, chickpeas and a predominantly dryland cotton program, with some developed overland flow supplementary irrigation. Their variable soil types encouraged the adoption of variable rate and precision planting technologies with strong results. Keen trial collaborators with Cotton Seed Distributors and Pioneer, as well as active members of the Darling Downs Cotton Growers Association, James and Ashley recently hosted the 2019 Grower of the Year field day. Passionate about social license, One Tree Agriculture is myBMP accredited and participates in the Better Cotton Initiative program with an extremely thorough work health and safety and fatigue policy in place. Staff use individual

iPads in what is a virtually paperless workplace, logging purchase orders, agronomic reports/recommendations, chemical records, timesheets and fuel. Another standout area of performance is their petrochemical and pesticide storage solutions.

Craig and Clint Charters, Gabo Pastoral Co, "Gabo" and "Craiglea", Quirindi, NSW

Father and son, Craig and Clint Charters, are sixth and seventh generation farmers. They are passionate about the challenge of growing high yielding irrigated and dryland crops. Multi award winning corn and soybean growers, seven years ago Craig and Clint changed their cropping enterprise to be predominantly cotton with the aid of water injection. This approach has resulted in year-on-year yield increases on both properties, achieving an average of 13.5 bales per hectare across farm in 2017/2018, with a similar outlook for this year. Craig and Clint have a shared passion and talent for building bespoke machinery that suits the unique needs of their farming operations. Their work has achieved impressive results, including improved germination, yield, operational and water efficiencies on farm. Together they consistently seek to improve production efficiency while employing environmentally practices like sustainable water use and prevention of soil degradation. Off farm, Craig's passion is flying and he is the president of the Quirindi Aero Club.

Stu and Fran Crawford, Crawford Ag "Quondong", Narromine NSW

Stuart Crawford and his forebears have been farming "Quondong" near Narromine, NSW, since 1908. Together with his wife Fran and sons Jock and Harley, the Crawfords farm 5,000 ha of dry land cereal crops and 800ha of irrigated cotton grown on a rotational basis. Drawing from the Narromine Irrigation Scheme to water their three properties and bore water for one, they use a mix of furrow, pivot and drip irrigation methods. The Crawfords regularly host field days and school groups on their properties to demonstrate their varied irrigation techniques, particularly drip irrigation. In addition, Jock and Harley are active members of the Macquarie Cotton Growers Association. Stu is an advocate of forward selling, something their consistent yield has allowed them to do.

ADAMA Chris Lehmann Trust Young Cotton Achiever of the Year Finalists

Nick Beer, Spring Ridge NSW

Nick Beer is the current president of the Upper Namoi Cotton Growers Association (CGA) and a former Australian Future Cotton Leaders program participant. Nick has built a reputation amongst his peers for his enthusiasm and commitment to knowledge transfer and implementation, as well as identifying and forging synergistic partnerships and networks across the cotton industry and the greater community. As Farm Manager at "Merrilong", Spring Ridge NSW, Nick strongly focuses on developing young people's interest in the industry by encouraging their involvement in the broader cotton industry and facilitating their participation in the local CGA. Nick is also a committee member for the bi-annual Australian Cotton Conference.

Billy Browning, Narromine NSW

A Horizon scholar recipient, Billy Browning graduated from the University of Sydney with a Bachelor of Agricultural Economics and the determination to champion broader community interest in agriculture and the cotton industry. Farming on the Browning family property "Narromine Station", Billy has been a passionate advocate of the cotton industry's best practice programs and initiatives and participates in bench marking and research projects aimed at delivering 'whole of industry' improvements. Billy was recently elected to the Macquarie Valley Cotton Grower Association and is also an active committee member of Macquarie River Food and Fibre. Dedicated to enhancing awareness and reducing the stigma around mental health on a national scale, Billy spearheads the charity, Beat the Breakdown.

Murray Connor, Moree NSW

Murray Connor graduated from the University of New England with a double degree in Agriculture and Business. Murray spent university breaks working for Australian Food and Fibre (AFF) and

now works at AFF fulltime, managing their 2,000ha irrigation farm west of Moree. Murray has been instrumental in the delivery of the trainee management pathways program that develops AFF's next generation of farm managers. Murray has also become a leader in strategic farm management, driving the highest levels of production and efficiencies across the business. Murray recently undertook the Australian Cotton Leaders course and the Rabobank Executive Development program, both of which further fueled his interest in agronomical resistance, public perception and social license. Last year Murray was awarded the 2018 Gwydir Valley Young Achiever award by his local Cotton Grower Association.

Cotton Seed Distributors Researcher of the Year Award Finalists

Dr Jamie Hopkinson, Toowoomba QLD

Jamie Hopkinson has been making a significant contribution to the Australian cotton industry through his research into entomological issues for over 15 years. Jamie completed his PhD in 2011 which focused on the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) of cotton aphids, particularly the use of biological control. Since then, Jamie has worked for the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in a number of areas, including most recently on the management of Silverleaf Whitefly (SLW), with a specific focus on the insecticide resistance of this pest. Research outcomes have been significant within the cotton industry, with major impacts for the management of the SLW. Jamie's research and extension has been widely shared across the cotton sectors and the collaborative research links that he has forged.

Kieran O'Keefe, Griffith NSW

Based in Griffith, NSW, Kieran has forged an impressive career in agronomy development and extension for almost 30 years. Kieran started his career in irrigation agronomy with the NSW Department of Primary Industries, then worked as the district agronomist at Coleambally, before joining CottonInfo six years ago as the Southern NSW Regional Extension Officer. In this role Kieran covers 90,000 square kilometers and 219 growers, 64 of whom were first time growers in the 2018/2019 season. Kieran has played an integral part in the transformation of Southern NSW into a major cotton region where he employed a variety of extension techniques to guide growers into the cotton industry. Intrinsically interested in long-term soil health, Kieran is the Vice Chair and cotton representative of the Irrigation Research and Extension Committee. He is passionate about the testing and adoption of new technologies that are proven, practical and profitable for long term sustainable cotton production.

Dr Linda Smith, Brisbane QLD

Dr Linda Smith works at the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. The research work Linda has led over the last 15 years has had a significant impact on how diseases are managed within the cotton industry. Linda's cotton pathology research work has covered disease causing organisms such as Fusarium and Verticillium wilts and Reniform nematode. Known for her professionalism and leadership, Linda currently leads a national cotton industry pathology project with participants from a number of public and private organisations. This project is focused on protecting the cotton industry from the spread of new and existing diseases and developing management tactics to better deal with existing pathogen issues. Linda's disease diagnostic work has been critical in detecting emerging disease threats, as well as allowing growers to identify issues on farm and enact vital local management strategies.

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