



PEOPLE WORKPLACE

| safe, skilled and inclusive workplaces



OUR GOAL is to make cotton an employer of choice, with injury-free cotton farms, skills for innovative and modern agriculture, and a diverse workforce that is treated ethically. This aligns to UN Sustainable Development Goal 8.8: ...promote safe and secure working environments for all workers.

Why is this a priority?

Safety: Agriculture contributes disproportionately to workplace health and safety incidents across Australia. Addressing the rate of farm accidents that cause injury and death remains an ongoing priority.

Skills: The Australian cotton industry is in an era of significant change. It is essential we maximise the opportunities afforded by the agricultural technology revolution while minimising the disruptions posed by climate variability and natural capital constraints.

The industry's growth in northern Australia also means training is needed for new cotton growers to quickly adopt the best practices the industry expects and is known for.

Diversity: Attracting employees is a challenge throughout regional Australia. Actively seeking to increase the participation of people from all backgrounds will help the cotton industry meet this challenge. A more diverse industry is also more likely to stimulate innovation and ideas.



What is the context?

Cotton is grown on up to 1,500 farms depending on the season, mainly in New South Wales and Queensland. Some cotton is grown in northern Victoria and areas for cotton production are being developed in northern Australia. In total, these farms employ an average of 10,740 full-time, part-time and casual employees per year. This does not include extensive use of on-farm contractors. Post-farm gate, the industry directly employs a further estimated 1,700 people in marketing and export, cotton classing and in regional gins. The industry also supports jobs for agronomists, rural suppliers and other input providers.

Safety: From 2014 to 2019, the agricultural sector had one of the highest rates of fatalities and serious injury in Australia. During this period, 399 people lost their lives on an Australian farm, including six on cotton farms. On average, 38 people per year also had a serious injury in the same period on a cotton farm. Much work is underway to make cotton farms safer but clearly more needs to be done.

Skills and diversity: Measures for skills and diversity are currently sourced from the Census. The most recent Census data, from 2016, shows 43 per cent of cotton farming and ginning employees have tertiary qualifications. The data also gives insights into the age, gender, Indigenous and non-English speaking diversity of the industry.

Census data is limited however: it is conducted only every five years, it is done in August when seasonal employment in cotton is low, and it doesn't capture the full picture such as capturing on-farm and industry training. The industry is working with other agriculture sectors to improve data collection.

Safety indicators	2014	2019
Fatalities (total in five year period)	5	6
Serious injuries (mean annual serious injuries in five year period)	44	38
Skills indicators		
% post-school qualifications	39	43
Diversity indicators		
% age <29	27.6	22.1
% age 30-49	42.0	40.6
% age 50+	30.2	37.3
% female	21.4	23.0
% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin	5.2	5.5
% Culturally & Linguistically Diverse background	6.7	4.3

OUR TARGET for safety is zero fatalities, and a 30 per cent reduction in serious injuries, every five years.

The Australian Cotton Workforce Strategy is currently being updated, including for northern Australia.

When complete, this strategy will inform targets for diversity and skills, and pathways for reaching them.