



Case Study

2013 Monsanto
Grower of the Year
RECIPIENT

John and Ros Cameron "Kintyre" Bongeen, QLD

The Cameron's started farming on the cracking clay soils of the inner Darling Downs flood plain nearly 25 years ago, with very little financial backing and not much experience. Since that first crop, the Cameron's have been committed to cotton and have expanded their original block to include three neighbouring properties.

"Kintyre", located 20km North-west of Pittsworth on Queensland's Darling Downs is an immaculate dryland family farm run by John Cameron, a first generation farmer. Agronomy is provided by Jamie Innes. Every square inch of the property has been poked, prodded and tested to get the most out of the production system. John applies a strict and aggressive year in year out, wheat and cotton rotation that works from both a financial and soil health perspective.

Soil health is paramount at "Kintyre" and has been since a light bulb moment in the early 90s when John was running out of cash after a few lean years. He decided to spend \$150 on a soil test rather than \$30,000 on fertilisers that he wasn't sure the soils needed. What followed was five years of no fertiliser costs and a practice that has held, and been improved upon to this day. Soil tests are conducted at regular intervals across the farm, and nutrients added only when and if they're needed. The farm is set up with 12 metre permanent wheel beds to avoid the soil compaction problems common on these heavy soils. This set up works across all the properties, and the gear was engineered in-house to save costs.

"Our soils are the most important asset in our dryland system. We've got one metre below the soil to work with and we need to know exactly what's going on at any point in time. Everything above the soil goes out the gate," John said.

Standing stubble is another main feature of the system, for both soil health and water management reasons. Being located on a flood plain means that soils can be easily lost, even after just one serious storm event and John's not keen on gifting them to his neighbours. "The stubble has proven time and again that it can keep our soils in place - without them, we'd have gullies up to four metres deep snaking all over the paddocks," John said.

In the dryland system, John points out that his paddocks are also his ring tanks. An incredible amount of planning goes in to each cotton crop in order to reach the ultimate goal - plants that are growing happily and get a drink before they become water stressed. Cotton crops are planned up to two years in advance and this season went exactly to plan. According to John "you couldn't have written a better script" and a 10.0 bales/hectare crop is testament to that (some nearby irrigated cotton crops didn't yield as well last season!).

Aside from being an exemplary farmer, John Cameron is also a major industry supporter and collaborator. For years he's committed to local, state and national cotton industry forums including ACGRA, CRDC, CSD and currently the Chair of Cotton Australia's Farming Systems Panel, where he's contributed 80 unpaid hours already this year alone.

It's a tightly run ship, with two full time and 1.5 part-time staff and efficiencies found in every area of the farm business. John also runs a picking contracting business, and manages a number of other local properties to supplement the farm's income and allow further investments in capital and infrastructure.

