

MEDIA RELEASE

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Cotton farmers producing more from every megalitre

It hardly needs to be said that water use efficiency is a major focus for the cotton industry with growers constantly looking for ways to make their production systems more efficient.

To support these efforts, the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee Inc. (QMDC) recently undertook a project to help improve irrigation systems on farm, through financial incentives and free technical advice.

Project coordinator, Michelle Prendergast, said with dwindling water supplies and increasing costs, many growers were looking for ways to make their production system more efficient and to produce more from each megalitre of water.

“These projects include installing moisture monitoring probes, undertaking EM surveys of paddocks to identify variation in infiltration and converting irrigation systems from furrow to overhead systems such as centre pivots,” Ms Prendergast said.

Cotton farmer John Norman, who already uses a number of precision farming technologies to improve water use efficiency across the farm, has been granted funding to conduct electromagnetic (EM) surveys and collect data from neutron probes to reduce the properties water usage.

Mr Norman said the EM data would be useful in providing information on the variation in soil types and assists in identifying deep drainage risks across the paddock.

“We have used field EM surveys to help place c-probes, Neutron Probes, variable rate gypsum, plant mapping and scouting areas. This information has explained some of the variation in yields that was previously unexplainable by visual referencing,” Mr Norman said.

Mr Norman said that while the neutron probes are not as trendy, technologically speaking, they are still the best method for finite soil moisture measuring, with the information helping to determine when irrigations will be required.

“I believe, in certain circumstances, it may help us make better water use efficiency decisions. On days of sub optimal plant growth close to an irrigation with scattered storms about, it would not be difficult to save the irrigation and still increase yield,” Mr Norman said.

Mr Norman said he values these incentive schemes as a way to negate some of the costs associated with on-farm improvements and said the funding will help fast track some of their improvements.

The project, with support from the National Landcare Program and the Rural Water Use Efficiency Initiative (RWUEI), has provided almost \$300,000 to help irrigators improve water use efficiency on-farm and reduce the effects of deep drainage.

A total of 59 projects on 28 irrigation properties have received funding through QMDC's Rural Water Use Efficiency project, with funding covering up to 40% of individual project costs.

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Caption

John Norman winning the Macintyre Valley Cotton Growers' Association award for Highest Yielding Average Crop

