



CRDC

# PERFORMANCE REPORT

2024-25





The Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) is a corporate Commonwealth entity established to plan and invest in research, development and extension (RD&E) for the Australian cotton industry.

Our purpose is to grow the sustainable future of cotton through innovation with impact. We achieve this through the allocation and management of investment in cotton RD&E.

## CASE STUDY

### Floating solar panels on farm dams to save water, generate electricity

**An Australian-first research project installing floating solar panels on irrigation dams could revolutionise irrigated agriculture by mitigating evaporation and generating energy.**

In what would help solve some of the cotton industry's biggest challenges – optimising water retention in the face of a hotter, drier climate, and reducing carbon emissions through the generation of clean energy – the groundbreaking research could save Australian cotton growers water and money, boost productivity, and reduce the carbon footprint of Australian cotton.

It is a win-win project. Nearly half of water storage volume is lost each year to evaporation, and relocating just half of the current 16.6 GW grounded solar panels to water storages could save 296 GL of water a year – more than 118,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools – and generate vast quantities of energy in the process.

The research project – spearheaded by Ag Econ with support from CRDC – will test the feasibility of installing floating solar photovoltaic (FPV) panels on irrigation storages to mitigate evaporation and create energy.

The \$13 million project, Novel Energy and Evaporative Storage Technologies for Irrigators (NEESTI), secured \$6 million in funding under the Australian Government's \$5 billion Future Drought Fund's Resilient Landscapes program, which supports Australian farmers and regional communities to build their drought and climate resilience.

The project comes as agricultural supply chains face increasing pressure to lower emissions to meet national and sector-wide targets, which CRDC is prioritising through its Clever Cotton Strategic Plan and cotton's industry-wide PLANET. PEOPLE. Paddock. Sustainability Framework.

While the Australian cotton industry has improved its water-use efficiency by almost 50 per cent from 1997, the most significant loss of on-farm water is the evaporation from on-farm storages.

CRDC Senior Innovation Broker Susan Maas said this research builds on the significant gains Australian cotton had already achieved.

"The Australian cotton industry has made huge gains in water-use efficiency over the past 30 years, driven by research, development and extension. Today, we are one of the most water-efficient cotton-producing countries in the world," Susan said.

"There are still improvements to be made, which is why we continue to invest in this area of research. Mitigating evaporation losses is a huge unrealised opportunity for the industry and the environment. This project could be a game changer for our industry, local domestic storages and other irrigation industries by enhancing our resilience, productivity, and sustainability in a changing climate."



For more: read the full article in the **Winter 2025** edition of CRDC's *Spotlight* magazine at [www.crdc.com.au/spotlight](http://www.crdc.com.au/spotlight).

# About CRDC and the Australian cotton industry

CRDC exists to grow the sustainable future of cotton through innovation with impact. We deliver world-class research, development and extension (RD&E) outcomes for the cotton industry through thought leadership, innovation, adoption and collaboration.

Cotton growers are at the heart of what we do: they determine our RD&E priorities and co-fund our research through a grower levy, matched by Commonwealth contributions.

Our growers, and the cotton they produce, are a major contributor to the nation's environmental, social and economic fabric.

Australian cotton is considered to be one of the most sustainable in the world, thanks in part to the RD&E that underpins it. Compared to 1992, Australian cotton growers use 97 per cent less pesticides, 52 per cent less water, and 34 per cent less land to grow one bale of cotton.

Cotton employs more than 12,000 people across 150 rural and regional communities, many of which rely heavily on cotton for their economic prosperity and viability. Each year, Australia grows enough of this high-quality natural fibre to clothe 500 million people.

According to the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES), the value of cotton exports will be \$3.4 billion from 2025-26.

Innovative and adaptive growers, supported by RD&E and world-leading researchers, have driven Australian cotton's success. CRDC's role is to continue driving this success through RD&E.

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## Our purpose

Grow the sustainable future of cotton through innovation with impact.

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## Our mission

Deliver world-class RD&E outcomes for the cotton industry through thought leadership, innovation and adoption through collaboration and partnership.

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## Our values

Bold, collaborative, future-focused and trusted.

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## Acknowledgement of country

CRDC acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands of Australia's cotton communities, and recognises their enduring connection to the land and waterways that sustain us. We value the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have cared for this country for thousands of years. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all First Nations peoples today.



# Clever Cotton

## Our Strategic R&D Plan 2023–28

### **CRDC's investments are governed by our Strategic RD&E Plan 2023–28: Clever Cotton.**

Clever Cotton sets out CRDC's vision for a sophisticated, prosperous and sustainable Australian cotton industry that is strongly connected to its value chain.

Clever Cotton is unashamedly ambitious. It commits CRDC to invest in RD&E to address and capitalise on challenges and opportunities for the benefit of levy payers, the cotton industry and the wider community.

The strategic RD&E investments that CRDC made in 2023–24 under Clever Cotton are helping the industry increase its productivity and profitability, mitigate and address the impacts of climate change, and improve decision making using data and digital technologies. CRDC's goal is to add \$1 billion in economic value to the Australian cotton industry over the next five to 10 years.

The investments are made via three pillars of investment – Paddock, People, Planet – aligned with the Australian Cotton Industry's Sustainability Framework.

Each of these pillars contains three themes, creating nine key investment areas:

#### **Paddock: our future fields**

- + Data-driven decisions
- + Adaptive systems
- + Connected market intelligence

#### **People: central to our success**

- + Design and innovation
- + Leadership and capacity
- + Adoption and impact

#### **Planet: our shared future**

- + Natural capital
- + Carbon
- + Circular economy

Clever Cotton commits CRDC to investing across these themes to achieve our vision and to deliver the greatest impact and best outcomes for growers (our levy payers), our industry and the wider community.

The three pillars and nine themes are both distinct and interconnected. Each supports the other while directly targeting bold strategic priorities and outcomes to meet the ambitions of the cotton industry and our communities.



# Clever Cotton Snapshot



## Paddock

Our future fields



### Data-driven decisions

#### Objective

Improve productivity, profitability, and sustainability by accurately monitoring and measuring every field on every cotton farm.

#### Impact

In 2028, a transparent and trusted data platform will deliver increased profitability and productivity through better decision-making, facilitating innovative research, and building trusted engagement.



### Adaptive systems

#### Objective

Grow the profitability and resilience of Australian cotton-farming systems through innovative solutions, technologies and practices.

#### Impact

In 2028, Australian cotton-farming systems are resilient, biosecure, and able to thrive in an increasingly variable climate with enhanced resource efficiency.



### Connected market intelligence

#### Objective

Enhance the sustainability, market access and diversity, and value of Australian cotton.

#### Impact

In 2028, Australian cotton growers are preferred suppliers of sustainable cotton.

## People

Central to our success



### Design and innovation

#### Objective

Embed collaboration in RD&E prioritisation, design, development, and adoption.

#### Impact

In 2028, growers can see RD&E addressing their problems and creating practical solutions to be adapted and adopted into their production systems.



### Leadership and capacity

#### Objective

Develop people and skills to support industry RD&E.

#### Impact

In 2028, the development of world-class research capability supports industry goals.



### Adoption and impact

#### Objective

Adopt knowledge and technology through dedicated development and delivery pathways.

#### Impact

In 2028, adoption has increased its rate, reach and effectiveness.

## Planet

Our shared future



### Natural capital

#### Objective

Implement resilient natural capital practices that support productivity, help maintain biodiverse ecosystems, strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, and progressively improve regional water, land and soil quality.

#### Impact

In 2028, cotton farms have maintained and enhanced natural capital and are more resilient to shocks.



### Carbon

#### Objective

Establish a sustainable low-carbon cotton production system for a changing future.

#### Impact

In 2028, the cotton industry meets market, community and government expectations for carbon.



### Circular economy

#### Objective

Develop the circular economy for Australian cotton.

#### Impact

In 2028, the cotton industry can participate in the circular economy, providing lasting end-of-life solutions for cotton textiles.

Progress against the Strategic R&D Plan 2023–28

# Our Annual Performance Statement

In 2024–25, Australian cotton growers and the Australian Government co-invested \$21.8 million through CRDC to deliver year two of Clever Cotton. Of this, \$17 million was invested in 243 RD&E projects in collaboration with our research partners.

This Performance Report is a short summary of CRDC’s 2024–25 Annual Report. It provides an overview of progress against Clever Cotton in the 2024–25 year.

Our progress is measured and performance is analysed through evaluation techniques outlined in the CRDC Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and targets set in Clever Cotton.

The green, blue and red indicators are used to track overall performance.



**The specific measure has been achieved.**



**On target to deliver against the measure.**










**Not on target to deliver against the measure.**








The following table provides a snapshot of CRDC’s performance against Clever Cotton’s measures. Further details about our progress and performance are outlined in the full **CRDC Annual Report 2024–25**, available on the CRDC website.












	Objective	Measure/s	2024-25 target	2024-25 results
<b>PILLAR 1:</b>  <b>Paddock</b> Our future fields	The Paddock pillar focuses on the on-farm cotton system, uniting data and insights to support thriving cotton farms producing a premium product being demanded by the market.	CRDC will measure its success in this pillar by the economic value the three themes add to the industry.	An economic assessment of key drivers of profitability for Australian cotton is undertaken to demonstrate a production increase of \$0.2 billion.	
 <b>Data-driven decisions</b>	Improve productivity, profitability, and sustainability by accurately monitoring and measuring every field on every cotton farm.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Yield per hectare.</li> <li>+ The value of data analysis and insights created from the management and production data captured in the industry database.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Yield improvement is maintained at 3 per cent year on year.</li> <li>+ A digital strategy is developed and endorsed by 75 per cent of industry bodies, ag tech providers and data collectors in the cotton industry.</li> <li>+ The data platform software and interface is delivered.</li> </ul>	
 <b>Adaptive systems</b>	Grow the profitability and resilience of Australian cotton-farming systems through innovative solutions, technologies, and practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ The value of the systems solutions created to address the challenges of disease, sustainable industry expansion, adaptation to climate change, biosecurity threats and reduced availability of inputs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ CRDC's major disease research initiative is launched and commenced.</li> <li>+ Research is commenced to identify innovative solutions to address crop protection and biosecurity challenges.</li> <li>+ Research is commenced to improve resilience and profitability of dryland and limited water systems.</li> </ul>	
 <b>Connected market intelligence</b>	Enhance the sustainability, market access and diversity, and value of Australian cotton.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Percentage of Australian cotton sold as more sustainable (as defined by the market).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ A process for regular review of value chain needs is established and implemented.</li> <li>+ Participation in three partnerships and/or initiatives focused on sustainability through the value chain.</li> <li>+ A life cycle assessment (LCA) methodology review is conducted, and enhanced reporting framework for sustainability cotton production is delivered.</li> </ul>	



	Objective	Measure/s	2024-25 target	2024-25 results
<b>PILLAR 2:</b>  <b>People</b> Central to our success	The People pillar aims to ensure that in developing our world-class research capability, we are providing practical RD&E solutions and increasing the reach and impact of adoption.	CRDC will measure its success in this pillar by the level of satisfaction in CRDC by growers and research partners.	Surveys demonstrate growers and research partners are satisfied with CRDC's performance.	
 <b>Design and innovation</b>	Embed collaboration in RD&E prioritisation, design, development, and adoption.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Growers acknowledge the utility of solutions and technologies developed through CRDC investment.</li> <li>+ Progression of innovations through Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) tracked.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ The process for CRDC Innovation Brokers to develop effective investment plans are in place.</li> <li>+ Innovations are delivered through clear pathways to impact.</li> </ul>	
 <b>Leadership and capacity</b>	Develop people and skills to support industry RD&E.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Research capacity is assessed and integrated into CRDC's new research programs.</li> <li>+ Industry capacity to lead change and contribute to the future of cotton and Australia's rural industries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Capacity audit and leadership program reviews are complete with recommendations for industry action.</li> </ul>	
 <b>Adoption and impact</b>	Adopt knowledge and technology through dedicated development and delivery pathways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Percentage of growers actively contributing to RD&amp;E adaptation through regional trials and data collection.</li> <li>+ Percentage of growers actively engaged with RD&amp;E programs.</li> <li>+ Percentage of growers recognise that CRDC and CottonInfo have contributed to improving their productivity and sustainability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Five per cent of growers are involved in increasing utility and adaptation of research outcomes through trials and data collection.</li> </ul>	



	Objective	Measure/s	2024-25 target	2024-25 results
<b>PILLAR 3:</b>  <b>Planet</b> Our shared future	The Planet pillar aims to ensure that the cotton industry contributes positively to the environment, meeting community, government and market expectations.	CRDC will measure its success in this pillar by the level of trust the industry has from the community, the market and government about how it manages and reports on its environmental and social impacts.	Surveys demonstrate trust from community, the market and government about cotton's management and reporting of environmental and social impacts.	
 <b>Natural capital</b>	Implement resilient natural capital practices that support productivity, help maintain biodiverse ecosystems, strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, and progressively improve regional water, land and soil quality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Condition and value of natural capital on cotton farms as measured by sustainability framework metrics.</li> <li>+ Higher community and stakeholder trust in the cotton industry as a responsible steward of natural capital.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Biodiversity and soils are benchmarked and the cotton industry has consistent supporting metrics and methodologies for reporting.</li> </ul>	
 <b>Carbon</b>	Establish a sustainable low-carbon cotton production system for a changing future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Development of a clear pathway to carbon neutrality available to support industry targets.</li> <li>+ Improvement in nitrogen (N)-use efficiency, with N inputs matching plant demand across the rotation cycle.</li> <li>+ Development of regionally specific guidelines for on-farm carbon sequestration in soils or native vegetation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Cotton industry initiatives are established for low carbon production.</li> <li>+ Two demonstration sites of a low carbon production system are established and an extension plan developed to support the industry initiatives.</li> </ul>	
 <b>Circular economy</b>	Develop the circular economy for Australian cotton.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ The 'added value' developed through interventions to create a circular economy for cotton.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Two new technologies or products developed from the textile waste stream.</li> </ul>	

# 2024–25 investment and impact

## 2024-25 SNAPSHOT



### SECOND YEAR OF Clever Cotton

Working towards the goal of adding \$1 billion in economic value to the Australian cotton industry over the next five to ten years.

**\$21.8 million**

CRDC's expenditure in delivering year two of Clever Cotton on behalf of cotton growers and the Australian Government.

**\$17 million**

of this was directly invested in RD&E projects in collaboration with our research partners.



**243**

RD&E projects



**94**

research partners

**3 pillars:**

Paddock, People, Planet



**5.4 million**

bales of cotton grown by Australia's cotton growers.



## INVESTMENTS, INNOVATIONS, IMPACT



The commencement of the build phase of the **cotton industry data platform** – a core Clever Cotton goal to improve cotton's productivity, profitability, and sustainability.



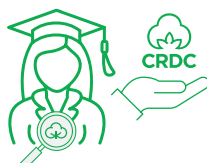
The announcement of CRDC's two major strategic partners in the \$13 million **Australian Cotton Disease Collaboration**, QLD DPI and UniSQ, and the scale-up of the initiative, ready for its first 10 key strategic projects.



The investment of \$18.4 million over the life of Clever Cotton in CRDC research outcomes via government grants, including three led by CRDC. This includes \$6 million invested by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund's Resilient Landscapes program in the **Novel Energy and Evaporative Storage Technologies for Irrigators (NEESTI)** project.



Support for 17 undergraduate and postgraduate students and early-career researchers provided by CRDC in 2024–25 through various programs.



The graduation of 16 future leaders from the **Australian Future Cotton Leaders Program**, run by Cotton Australia with support from CRDC, bringing the alumni to 132.



The commencement of a 10-year impact assessment of CRDC's key investments since 2015.



## INVESTMENTS, INNOVATIONS, IMPACT

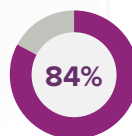
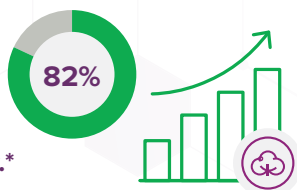
### KEY RECOGNITION

from growers of the impact of CRDC and CottonInfo, and their engagement with us from the 2024 CRDC Grower Survey:

**82 per cent**

of growers recognise that CRDC and CottonInfo have contributed to improving their productivity and sustainability.\*

\* CRDC Grower Survey 2024



**84 per cent**

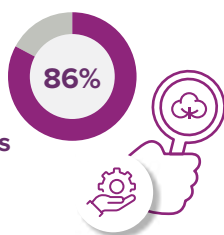
of growers believe that CRDC and CottonInfo regional on-farm trials help them assess technology and management options for their farms.

\* CRDC Grower Survey 2024

**86 per cent**

of growers believe that CRDC has effective strategies in place to address key future pest challenges, like resistance, biosecurity threats and limitations to pesticide access.\*

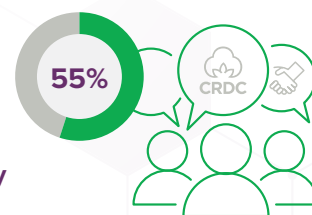
\* CRDC Grower Survey 2024



**55 per cent**

of growers actively contribute to or are engaged with CRDC and CottonInfo RD&E by providing data, hosting trials or research engagement.\*

\* CRDC Grower Survey 2024



### ABARES

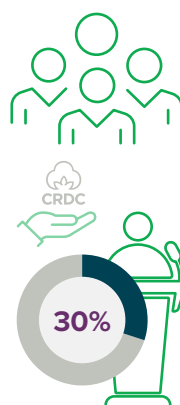
research has found for every \$1 invested in agricultural R&D, there is an almost \$8 return for farmers over 10 years.

**2900**

cotton industry attendees at the 2024 Australian Cotton Conference, supported by CRDC.

**30 per cent**

of speakers at the Conference were CRDC-supported.



The appointment of eight Regional Extension Officers to CRDC with support from Cotton Seed Distributors (CSD) as part of the **CottonInfo** extension program, a partnership between CRDC, CSD and Cotton Australia.



**\$1.72 billion**

the potential scope for change that could be achieved via CRDC's investments between 2025 and 2028 (the remaining timeframe of Clever Cotton) via value created through yield and improvements to management of irrigation, disease, nitrogen and insect pests.

# Year in Review

## RD&E highlights

### Cotton industry data platform: build phase underway

The build phase of the cotton industry data platform has commenced. The platform is a fundamental goal of Clever Cotton, building on nine years of CRDC investment into the digital needs of the cotton industry, commencing with the CRDC-led cross-sectoral Precision to Decision Agriculture project in 2016 (the first project to bring together all 15 Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs)) and its successor, Growing a Digital Future for Australian Agriculture. Based on the recommendations of these projects, a cotton industry group led by CRDC and comprising industry bodies, growers, gins, merchants, classers and researchers developed a digital strategy for the Australian cotton industry, which was finalised in 2023–24. The data platform is the next step following this strategy, designed to aggregate, store, analyse and communicate data to the industry and beyond. CRDC's goal is to create a transparent and trusted data platform to deliver greater profitability and productivity through better decision-making, facilitating innovative research and building trusted engagement.

### Australian Cotton Disease Collaboration: strategic partners and director announced

CRDC's first major initiative under Clever Cotton – the Australian Cotton Disease Collaboration – achieved another milestone in 2024–25 with the announcement of the program's strategic partners, QLD DPI and UniSQ, the appointment of the Director of ACDC, Associate Professor Sambasivam (Sam) Periyannan, and the establishment of the ACDC Virtual National Centre in preparation for the program's first 10 key strategic research projects. ACDC is a comprehensive and collaborative approach to disease research, designed to address disease as a major priority issue for the cotton industry. Through ACDC, the cotton industry's understanding of the impact of disease will be deepened, foundational pathology resources and capability will be enhanced, and tactical management and innovative technical solutions for cotton growers will be delivered. The CRDC and ACDC goal is to reduce the economic impact of current and emerging diseases of cotton to less than five per cent of the cost of production, down from 14 per cent, through RD&E and practice change.

### NEESTI: transformative technology to solve evaporation and generate energy

A landmark \$13 million research initiative is set to revolutionise irrigation dams across Australia by tackling evaporation and enabling renewable energy generation. With significant support from CRDC and the cotton industry and \$6 million in co-investment from the Australian Government, the Novel Energy and Evaporative Storage

Technologies for Irrigators (NEESTI) project will support Australian farmers and regional communities to build their drought and climate resilience. The project will investigate the use of floating solar photovoltaic (FPV) technology to reduce evaporation losses and convert farm irrigation dams into energy-producing assets. Targeting multiple cropping sectors, including cotton, wheat, sugarcane, rice and macadamias, the initiative brings together researchers, industry bodies and growers. It builds on decades of irrigation efficiency RD&E, led by CRDC, and has the potential to mitigate evaporation, offset emissions, diversify farm income, and unlock regional economic benefits – a win-win for sustainable agriculture and resource stewardship.

### CottonInfo: partnership and program enters new era

CottonInfo, the cotton industry's extension program, is now in its 13th year as a collaboration between joint venture partners CRDC, Cotton Australia and CSD. While the purpose and focus of CottonInfo remains the same – providing a crucial conduit between researchers and growers, communicating research results and encouraging their adoption – in the 2024–25 year, CottonInfo underwent a structural change. CSD chose to transition from a member of the CottonInfo Management Committee and employer of the CottonInfo Regional Extension Officers (REOs) to the key investor in the CottonInfo program. Under the revised structure, the CottonInfo Management Committee now comprises representatives of CRDC and Cotton Australia, and leads the CottonInfo program. The CottonInfo strategic plan has stronger alignment with CRDC's Clever Cotton. CRDC manages the program and team, Cotton Australia delivers the industry's best management practices program *myBMP*, and CSD is the key investor in the program, funding the REOs and their activities.

### CRDC Emissions Reduction Research Strategy: towards a low-emissions future

CRDC developed a science-based Emissions Reduction Research Strategy in 2024–25, in conjunction with Cotton Australia, to guide the cotton industry's transition to lower emissions. The strategy maps current practices, future goals and the research investments required to empower growers to reduce emissions. Many of the actions required to address climate-related risks are already underway; the purpose of the strategy is to coalesce and prioritise actions, identify gaps, and outline practical steps with clear timelines. The strategy focuses on three key areas: cutting fossil fuel reliance; reducing emissions from nitrogen fertiliser; and improving soil health. A credible, actionable pathway will ensure cotton's competitiveness, align with market expectations, and provide growers with clear actions.



### Climate-Smart Agriculture grants: driving emissions reductions and irrigation efficiencies

Two CRDC-led cotton-focused research projects are among 12 projects selected nationally from over 100 applications in 2024–25 to receive support from the Australian Government's Climate-Smart Agriculture Program. The projects are delivering new tools and technologies to cotton growers to support emissions reduction and climate resilience. The first project is accelerating the adoption of VARIwise, the autonomous irrigation system, enabling cotton growers and dairy producers to improve water productivity and reduce emissions. VARIwise offers up to 10 per cent water savings and five per cent productivity gains. Through this grant, it will be developed into a commercial-ready package. The second project will evaluate enhanced efficiency nitrogen fertilisers, which represent an immediate pathway to reducing nitrous oxide emissions – the largest contributor to cotton's greenhouse gas (GHG) footprint. It is producing robust emission factors, building predictive algorithms, and supporting more accurate carbon accounting. Together, these two projects are providing practical, farm-ready climate-smart solutions, strengthening cotton's water-use efficiency, and providing new opportunities for sustainable cotton production.

### Strategic Roadmap: determining the path forward for Australian cotton

The development and implementation of a strategic roadmap for the Australian cotton industry continued in 2024–25 via a collaboration between Cotton Australia, CRDC and the Australian Cotton Shippers Association (ACSA). The roadmap is focused on helping Australian cotton remain competitive in changing international fashion and textile markets. Five key topic areas are being addressed: traceability; industry data; sustainably certified cotton/the myBMP program; human rights; and Australian cotton marketing. The need for the strategic roadmap emerged from changes in the global cotton and textile landscape, including new overseas legislation affecting market access, companies being required to report on social and environmental impacts, and global frameworks requiring evidence of social and environmental impact back to farm level. CRDC-supported RD&E is crucial to many of the roadmap elements, and CRDC is leading two programs of work under the roadmap pillars: the cotton industry data platform; and a strategic review of the industry's myBMP program to ensure it is fit for purpose.

### Sustainability progress: annual update showcases progress and performance

In 2024–2025, CRDC and Cotton Australia released the third annual progress update against cotton's key sustainability indicators, outlined in the PLANET. PEOPLE. Paddock. Sustainability Framework. The annual update, which looks at the year ending June 2023, provides a snapshot of cotton's performance against the eight indicators – PLANET: water, GHG, native vegetation, pesticides, and soil health; PEOPLE:

workplace; and Paddock: productivity and profitability. The annual updates are designed to fit between cotton's comprehensive five-yearly sustainability reports, providing important insights into progress, so the industry can keep track of areas performing well, and those that need more emphasis. The Sustainability Update 2023 shows that cotton growers have dramatically improved productivity over time: the five-year average area planted to cotton has increased by just 19 per cent since 1994, yet total production has increased by 94 per cent. It also shows a long-term trend of reducing hazard to bees (from insecticides) and algae (from herbicides), reducing by 91 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively, since 2004.

### 2024 Australian Cotton Conference: research showcased at cotton's major event

The 2024 Australian Cotton Conference – proudly supported by CRDC as a foundation sponsor – provided a platform to showcase CRDC-supported RD&E to the industry in 2024–25. Over 50 CRDC-supported researchers, directors and team members presented across the three-day event. CRDC and Cotton Australia co-chaired two key sessions focused on the future of Australian cotton and the Strategic Roadmap, including updates on the myBMP program review and an overview of the cotton industry data platform. Two major announcements took place at the Conference – the awarding of the CRDC Chris Lehmann Young Cotton Achiever Award to researcher Sharna Holman, and the formalisation of CRDC's partners in ACDC: QLD DPI and UniSQ. The conference broke attendance records, with 2900 delegates the largest number of industry participants since the event began. CRDC has supported the Australian Cotton Conference since its inception, providing discounted registrations for cotton growers and supporting researchers and students to attend to showcase their research.

### Australian Future Cotton Leaders Program: Developing cotton's leadership capacity

A record number of applications were received for the 2024 Australian Future Cotton Leaders Program, conducted by Cotton Australia with support from CRDC. From 46 cotton industry applicants, 16 program participants were selected from across the cotton supply chain: growers, consultants, merchants, researchers and extension officers. Held every two years, the program is designed for emerging leaders within the cotton industry. It has produced 132 graduates since commencing in 2006, with many former graduates now holding leadership positions within cotton industry organisations. CRDC has supported the program since inception. Together, CRDC and Cotton Australia provide support for a number of leadership programs, including the Australian Future Cotton Leaders Program, the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation's TRAIL and Australian Rural Leadership Program, and Nuffield Australia's Farming Scholarships. One of the 2024 graduates, Kate Lumber, has been selected as cotton's 2025 Nuffield Scholar, with support from CRDC and Cotton Australia.

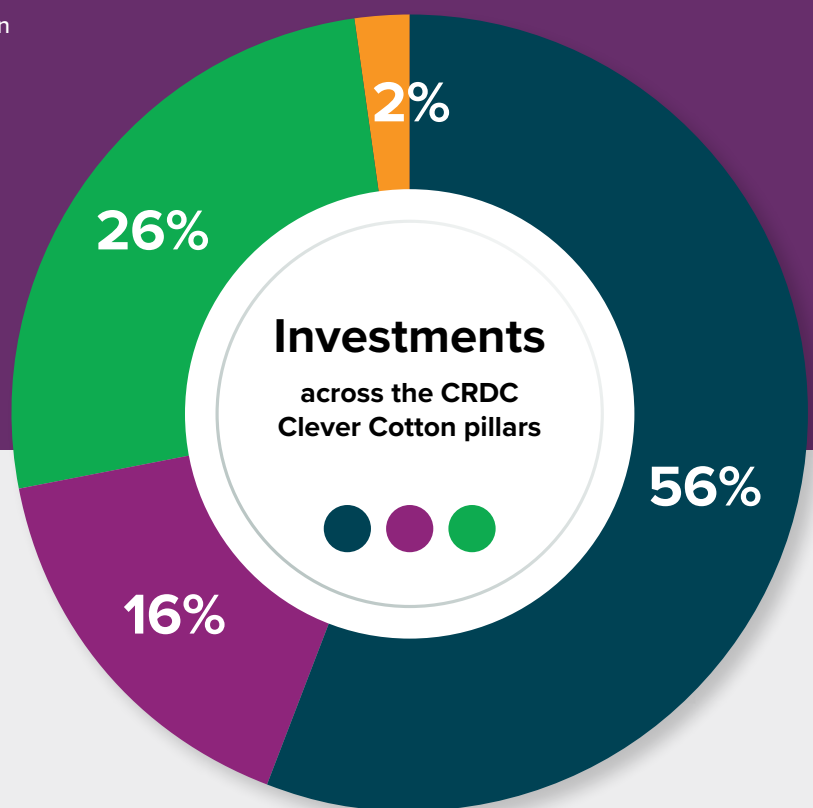
# Our investments in RD&E

In 2024–25, we invested \$17 million directly into 243 RD&E projects in collaboration with our research partners, guided by Clever Cotton.

We achieved a balanced RD&E portfolio that considered the distribution of our investment across:

- the Clever Cotton pillars and themes, and resulting RD&E strategies
- the type of research, including innovation, knowledge creation, knowledge transfer and application, benchmarking, industry capacity, and education
- in-project risks
- researcher experience and capacity
- research providers
- timeframe to outcomes
- the likely return on investment for projects and programs
- expenditure on RD&E management.

Of this investment, \$7.2 million was invested in new research that commenced in 2024–25.



- Pillar 1: Paddock 56%
- Pillar 2: People 16%
- Pillar 3: Planet 26%
- Enabling Strategies 2%

## PROJECTS BY CRDC PILLARS

CRDC pillar	Pillar One: Paddock	Pillar Two: People	Pillar Three: Planet	Enabling Strategies	TOTAL
Number of projects	98	91	45	9	243
Expenditure per pillar (\$m)	\$9.58m	\$2.61m	\$4.45m	\$0.36m	\$17.00m
Percentage of expenditure per pillar	56%	16%	26%	2%	100%







**Cotton Research and Development Corporation**  
2 Lloyd Street (PO Box 282)  
Narrabri NSW 2390  
Phone: 02 6792 4088  
Email: [crdc@crdc.com.au](mailto:crdc@crdc.com.au)  
Website: [www.crdc.com.au](http://www.crdc.com.au)  
ABN: 71 054 238 316

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