

MEDIA RELEASE

COTTON TO ATTRACT SCIENCE DEVOTEES

The cotton industry, via the Cotton Catchment Communities CRC, has moved to revive interest in scientific careers in the industry, by sponsoring a unique Science & Engineering Challenge in Narrabri next week, which is being organised by Narrabri Rotary Club.

Aim of the Challenge, for which the Cotton CRC has contributed \$3400, is to attract students to scientific subjects at both school and university, to trigger a greater flow of graduates.

To be held from June 6-8, the Challenge aims to put fun back into science via a series of intriguing practical experiments conducted by teams of enthusiastic students from Narrabri, Wee Waa, Moree, Gunnedah, Warialda and other areas.

Chief Scientist with the Cotton CRC, Dr Peter Gregg, said recent research had shown that biology, chemistry and physics had waned in popularity as HSC subjects, with a concurrent decline in science enrolments at universities, hence fewer graduates.

“The pool of scientific talent available to agriculture in general and the cotton industry in particular, has shrunk significantly over the past 25 years, and unless we take action now, the industry will be in dire straits in future years.

“Part of the reason for the demise of science and engineering students and graduates is a general focus on economics, finance, accounting and business studies, which are viewed and marketed as fast-tracks to instant careers and fortunes.

“Contrary to common perceptions, science and engineering are not boring, backroom, laboratory-driven occupations, and can be equally career-building in agriculture and many related business and management fields,” Dr Gregg said.

He said modern farming practices are now science-based, with a high demand for research and engineering skills, with this trend likely to continue well into the future.

“Our experience in the cotton industry shows demand for skills in plant breeding, molecular genetics, agricultural and irrigation engineering; agronomy, plant pathology, product innovation, biodiversity, ecology and climatology; the environment, sustainability, and natural resource, vegetation, water, land, pest, disease and weed management.

“The cotton industry offers interesting and fruitful careers in these and many other scientific disciplines at regional, state, national and international levels. Summer and Honours scholarships, and post-graduate projects leading to a PhD, together with opportunities to become Fulbright Scholars or Churchill Fellows, are some of the options offered by the Cotton CRC.

“These are just a few of the many important take-home messages the Cotton CRC and its industry partners will be parading to prospective guardians of our scientific future at the upcoming Science and Engineering Challenge in Narrabri,” Dr Gregg said.

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Caption: Prof Peter Gregg, Chief Scientist, UNE & Cotton CRC, presents sponsorship cheque to Mick Foster, President Narrabri Rotary Club.

