

cotton *producers*

Western Queensland's St George district grows some of the best cotton around – local producers Hamish and Mary McIntyre share their story.

Cotton. We all wear it and love it for its versatility and natural comfort. The fibre from one 227 kilogram cotton bale can produce 215 pairs of jeans, 250 single bed sheets, 1200 t-shirts, 2100 pairs of boxer shorts, 3000 nappies, 4300 pairs of socks or 680,000 cotton balls. The gross value of production for cotton in Queensland for 2012-13 was reported to be worth \$640 million and some of the highest quality cotton in the state is grown in and around St George and the Balonne district.

Cotton production was introduced to South West Queensland in the mid 1970s and remains an important agricultural enterprise. There has been significant investment and infrastructure in the area which boasts four cotton gins that can handle 600,000 bales in any one year. The cotton growing region extends to include St George, Dirranbandi and Mungindi.

Hamish and Mary McIntyre, together with their three boys, Stirling (11), Finlay (9) and Campbell (7) own Moolabah, a mixed cropping and cattle operation. Cotton remains one of their key crops, with the family growing 2000 hectares of irrigated cotton. Hamish is on the board of Cotton Australia and believes the future is bright for the industry. "There's no doubt about it," says Hamish McIntyre. "Cotton is an important crop here and we really need to congratulate the work of those who have

invested in the technology and research that has resulted in the excellent plant varieties that are available to us as growers," he said. "Our yields in this district have increased by four per cent, year in, year out, since the mid 1970s and that really is an outstanding result."

Hamish and Mary are both hands on in the business which they cite as being the key to their success. They also grow 2800 hectares of grain and fodder cereal crops as well as producing black Angus cattle for sale and backgrounding. A city girl, Mary hails from Brisbane, but she has always maintained strong interest in the rural sector through her family ties. "I trained in design and my career, prior to meeting Hamish, was urban-based," says Mary. "I guess you could say my move to western Queensland was an adjustment at first, however I really enjoy life on the land," she smiles.

The McIntyres have seen a change in the way they run their operation with technology posing new opportunities. "Currently I consult to foreign investment companies and all this can be done right here in St George," says Hamish. "It is an exciting time for the cotton industry and agriculture in general – I hope that we are able to continue on this path to provide careers for our own boys."

■ View more photos at our online magazine – www.highlifemagazine.net

BY KERRYN SUTTOR



1. Cotton is an important crop in the Balonne Shire 2. Hamish and Mary with Finlay, Campbell and Stirling McIntyre. IMAGES BY DANA GLUZDE