

MEET YOUR COTTON RESEARCHER

Chantal Corish, PhD candidate
Central Queensland University

PROFILE

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RESEARCH AREA

Work force, organisational psychology

CRDC Research Project
Understanding the Role of Psychological Safety on Learning and Performance Behaviours among Cotton Farming Leaders and Employees.

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

My husband and I farm cotton and mixed grain at Goondiwindi on the NSW/QLD border. I have been a registered psychologist with a private practice and mental health awareness & education consultancy in Goondiwindi for almost two decades.

HOW DID YOU END UP IN COTTON RESEARCH?

I have been involved in cotton-growing my whole life. My father was an agricultural pilot and farmer so I grew up in cotton communities and always admired the forward-thinking attitude of the pioneering cotton farmers.



I met my husband (the son of a cotton grower) in grade 2 at Goondiwindi State Primary School and took another twenty years to stop thinking he had 'boy germs'. As a psychologist and a former publicist, I was always using my PR skills to advocate for good mental health in the bush and tying this in with my understanding of rural communities and farming families. Dr Nicole McDonald gave me a call one day and said I might have the right credentials to apply for the PhD that was on offer with CRDC and CQU.



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I was beyond excited to get the guernsey – the research was everything that resonates with my deep knowledge of psychology, my beliefs in what good leadership and great workplaces look like, and of course the communities and businesses that make up rural Australia. I couldn't be more grateful to the cotton industry for making it possible for me to scaffold my knowledge and make a significant contribution in the field that I love.

EXPLAIN YOUR CURRENT RESEARCH

The research investigates what factors are currently described and observed as associated with psychological safety among cotton growing teams; and the potential utility of the phenomenon to cotton farming in Australia. Psychological safety is well established as a key ingredient to high performing teams in a wide range of industries but as yet, has not been investigated in on-farm teams. The presence of psychological safety in the workplace determines whether employees feel safe to speak up about errors, challenge the status quo, and contribute their unique set of skills, knowledge and experience to the job. As a positive workplace climate, it is strongly linked in the research to better performing teams through increased learning behaviours, greater employee efficacy, increased innovation, improved wellbeing, and higher retention rates, among a number of other outcomes.

HOW WILL IT BENEFIT GROWERS, AND THE BROADER INDUSTRY?

Ultimately, we will have achieved our research aim if we can assist growers to further integrate psychological safety into their teams and exploit its proven benefits, including meeting the high learning and adaptability needs of employees involved in cotton production; as well as contribute to solving the ongoing issue of attracting and retaining quality, skilled staff to the industry.

To meet the Corporate Social Responsibility requirements around sustainability and human rights of global markets, industries are more and more so needing to show evidence of their decent treatment of employees. This research builds on the existing focus in Australian cotton growing of creating workplaces that ensure employees feel not only that their physical health is a priority, but also their mental health. This will go a long way to show-casing the industry as not only an 'employer of choice' to potential employees, but on the world-stage as one that takes the care and responsibility of its people very seriously. Additionally, this research contributes to underscoring the industry's reputation as one of the most cutting-edge agricultural industries in Australia as we continue to lead the way not only in outstanding environmental practices, and the science of supplying a top-quality product to market, but also in the arena of building superior human capital.

For further information:

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