

CRDC Priority Setting Workshop: June 2026 feedback report

Purpose

CRDC held its Research Priority Setting Workshop in partnership with Cotton Australia on 3 June 2026. The workshop is an important part of CRDC's investment planning process, providing a structured opportunity to test emerging issues with growers and advisers and to ensure future research, development and extension (RD&E) investment remains grounded in on-farm need. It also directly supports delivery of the CRDC Strategic Plan, *Clever Cotton*, helping connect grower priorities with CRDC's longer-term investment settings and desired industry outcomes.

Process

An important input to the forum was the priority-setting work undertaken through local regions in the lead-up to the meeting. CottonInfo Regional Extension Officers (REOs), supported by Cotton Australia, worked with growers and regional networks to collate issues, observations and ideas from across cotton-growing areas using a new tool, GroupMap. This regional engagement ensured the forum considered a broad range of production, profitability and sustainability challenges already being experienced in paddocks and farming systems. CRDC and CottonInfo will continue to roll out the GroupMap process to enable capture of RD&E needs throughout the year.

The Priority Setting Workshop then provided CRDC staff with the opportunity to work through these issues collectively with growers, compare common themes across regions, and deepen CRDC's understanding of what additional RD&E effort is most needed.

In addition, a specific session on fibre quality was used to inform the CRDC-funded project *Cotton Fibre Quality: Mapping Grower-Driven Opportunities for Impact and Investment*, which aims to inform strategic investment to help protect Australian cotton's premium quality position and improve grower returns. Feedback from this session will form a critical component of this review.

CRDC position

CRDC remains in a strong financial position, but it is closely monitoring the operating environment and managing investment settings carefully in response to higher research costs and reduced capacity commitment from some partners. In this context, CRDC is strengthening partnerships to stretch levy funds, maintain capability and build larger, more strategic collaborations, including with other RDCs such as GRDC. Feedback from the Priority Setting Workshop will directly inform current and upcoming project development (2026-27) as well as future investment planning (2027-28), with a particular focus on managing potential reductions in levy income due to drought.

Priorities

A consistent theme across the feedback from growers and advisers was the need for systems thinking and clear emphasis on practical solutions that improve profitability, reduce risk and support better decision making in-season.

Key priorities identified include:

- Farming systems and crop management:
 - Disease management for Verticillium wilt, black root rot, Fusarium, ramularia and target spot, including clear management recommendations, and farming systems interactions (water/irrigation, canopy management, nutrition and rotations).
 - Irrigated farming systems, with particular focus on limited-water strategies and understanding the interaction between water management, plant growth management (mepiquat chloride and other plant growth regulators), disease and harvest outcomes.
 - Crop establishment, including planter setup, practical strategies to improve establishment under variable conditions and improve low-density seed performance.
 - Crop rotations and farming systems research, including the role of canola, legumes and other rotational crops in disease suppression, soil health and overall system profitability.
- Crop protection:
 - Insect (including mites, soil pests and mirids) and weed management (including residual herbicide impacts), insecticide and herbicide resistance monitoring and maintaining access to effective crop protection options and research capacity.
- End-of-season management:
 - Defoliation, regrowth control and end-of-season management, including impact of management (last irrigation, nitrogen), product choices, timing, wet defoliation challenges, and impacts on fibre quality and harvest efficiency.
- Soil, nutrition, input efficiency:
 - Natural resource management including coordinated and impact-driven feral pig control, generating economic values for natural capital and processes for creating value for growers, and understanding how various inputs (pesticides, fertilisers, water) influence soil function (particularly through altering soil biology & nutrient cycling).
 - Circular economies and fertilisers including utilising gin trash as a nutritional source, regional opportunities for bringing biomass feedstocks onto farm, and opportunity analysis for alternate N sources (including benefits and risks compared with synthetic N).
 - Nutrition including how to make better decisions around biostimulants and biofertilisers, optimising nutrient use efficiency in different farming systems (including for different soils, varieties, application methods (deep placement, pre-planting, with irrigation) and managing micronaire), extension around micronutrient management, and cheaper alternatives for getting nutrition into the plant.
 - Greenhouse gas emissions reduction through better nitrogen management including how to get N right (or how to not get it wrong), optimising agronomic and economic performance for different N products in different systems, recycling N from depth, regional demonstrations/case studies for sunn hemp and cover cropping.
- People, capacity, decision-support:
 - Support for people and skills on farm – building the next generation of managers, improving access to practical training, and helping farm businesses attract and keep good staff.

- Practical, timely advice that improves decisions and profitability, especially around irrigation, crop management and input costs, delivered in ways that reach more growers and fit the season.
- Data, digital and systems integration:
 - Training in data, digital tools and AI, including practical support to build grower capability and help growers get more value from existing and emerging technologies.
 - myBMP usability and participation, including improving ease of use, reducing compliance burden, and better demonstrating the value of participation for growers.
 - Data platform update, interoperability and governance, including reducing duplication, improving integration and automation, and providing clear settings around data needs, use, privacy and grower confidence.
 - How to connect cotton industry data and tech with those from other industries, or map overlaps in reporting to make the most of growers time and effort.

Next steps

The feedback will be reviewed to prioritise CRDC research investment opportunities and help shape future CottonInfo extension activities. As part of this, CRDC will consider whether the feedback points to research gaps or extension needs, and opportunities to engage more broadly with stakeholders across the industry.

More information

- For more about current CRDC investments in RD&E: [Research & Development | CRDC](#)
- For reports from past CRDC research projects: [Home | Inside Cotton](#)
- To discuss RD&E gaps and ideas: contact your local CottonInfo REO or CRDC Innovation Brokers:

CottonInfo Team (re extension):

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CRDC Innovation Team (re R&D)

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