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# Cotton tops as summer crop option

DRYLAND sorghum and cotton have emerged as two of the top summer cropping options in northern NSW and southern Queensland.

Cotton Seed Distributors extension and agronomy team maintain that both crops offer benefits to the cropping rotation and are relatively interchangeable.

Despite the current price for cotton not being at trigger point (\$500/bale) for many to entertain growing dryland cotton, it is a sound option compared to sorghum, hence CSD's analysis of the differential in returns for dryland cotton and sorghum deserve serious study.

At current prices, and given average yields for the set agronomic conditions, dryland cotton has a gross margin return significantly better than sorghum in the Gwydir region.

Many soil profiles are wet to depth — and dryland cotton is able to resurrect deeper nitrogen that is out of reach of other crops. Also, using Roundup Ready Flex® allows excellent control of grass weed problems in long-term sorghum country.

CSD says cotton does not have the handling issues of grain — cotton is very stable and weather tolerant in a well-constructed module.

Therefore it is not reliant on storage space or transport options directly at time of harvest.

Ease of management also favours growing dryland Bollgard II/ Roundup Ready Flex cotton, which presently requires no more field operations than sorghum.

Bollgard II growing costs are more predictable, with cost blow-outs on insect control rarely seen in the current environment.

Roundup Ready Flex allows for season-long over the top weed control.

Different skip row configurations in dryland cotton provide risk management for yield and fibre quality as well as allowing for significant variable cost savings.

The longer crop maturity of cotton also provides for a wide window to make use of late summer rainfall through January and February.

Combined with the use of skip row, this allows the plants to hold on for longer during dry periods.

An additional benefit is that Monsanto's End Point Royalty (EPR) payment and late crop removal schemes for Bollgard II/ Roundup Ready Flex significantly reduce the cost and financial risk of growing dryland cotton.

CSD has developed a Dryland Cotton Gross Margin Tool that allows growers to prepare a budget by entering data about their operations and comparing likely cotton and sorghum gross margins. For further information contact the CSD E&D team.