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# Ord cotton makes return with GM

GENETICALLY modified cotton capable of coping with northern Australia's massive insect populations has enabled Cotton Seed Distributors Ltd (CSD) to pick its first replicated cotton variety trial in Western Australia's Ord River Irrigation Area (ORIA) for many years.

The lifting of a moratorium banning genetically modified (GM) crops in WA – and thereby allowing the cultivation of GM cotton – was a key driver behind the trial.

Previous efforts at cotton production in the ORIA struggled to cope with the *Helicoverpa* or heliothis caterpillar in crops and subsequent issues of resistance to synthetic insecticides.

"In this regard CSD acknowledges the support and assistance of Monsanto in trialling varieties containing Bollgard II stacked with the Roundup Ready Flex technology",

said CSD product development manager, Phil Steel.

Mr Steel said CSD had accepted an invitation to attend an industry meeting in the Ord earlier this year where local growers and organisations expressed interest in the potential re-establishment of a cotton industry.

"In response to this, and given that it had been some time since the CSIRO germplasm had been tested in the ORIA, we set up a replicated trial similar to those run in eastern Australia," Mr Steel said.

"The trial showed the varieties Siokra V18BRE, Sicot 71BRE, and Sicala 60BRF all performed very well – they're relatively compact plant types with inherently good fibre quality and obviously well suited to the north.

"We're pleased with this trial and the yields are comparable with those achieved in eastern Australia.

"Yields were impacted by a late-ish plant and possibly by heavy sucking insect pressure in season, but CSIRO has indicated that these results are in line with their expectations given the growing conditions this season.

"We are particularly satisfied with the performance of the GM technology and associated refuges that reflected the stringent stewardship requirements in using the technology successfully and sustainably."

This trial was grown at the same time as a small plot trial in the ORIA conducted in association with the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia of CSIRO genotypes, also containing the Bollgard II and Roundup Ready Flex traits, which Mr Steel said was also successful.

He said the trial demonstrated the potential of cotton in the ORIA was equal to that in eastern Australia.



**LEFT:** CSD product development manager, Phil Steel, inspects the replicated cotton variety trial conducted in the Ord River Irrigation Area this season.