

Local steel harvests work from record cotton crops

Cotton gin, Whitton NSW



The pressure to boost NSW's cotton processing facilities fast in time to handle bumper crops meant choosing local produced steel to meet tough development deadlines.

Record cotton harvests from the rains returning to NSW brought home the urgent need to upgrade the region's cotton gin facilities and to build a new one at Whitton in the State's south.

With 100 percent surface water allocation, the Murrumbidgee Valley has seen an exponential growth in the amount of cotton planted. Forecast production (based on orders to seed distributors) for cotton in the Murrumbidgee and Lachlan valleys for financial year 2011-12 is 50,000ha.

Cotton Australia anticipates NSW cotton production increased nationally by about 27 percent with exports forecast to increase by 94 percent due to continued strong demand – a lift in only a few years from some of the lowest volumes to the largest volume ever in 2011.

Cotton gins that gathered cobwebs during recent drought years are being dusted off and the industry is in a race to secure suitably skilled people as back-to-back bumper cotton seasons put pressure on logistics across NSW. Some existing gins have undergone upgrades, others are back in production after being "mothballed" and a new gin is being built at Whitton in southern NSW.

In previous years, local growers could transport their cotton to Hillston or Macquarie gins, but this season they are already full with cotton from their own region.

With the cost of freight also becoming a severely limiting factor. Southern Cotton (SC) Board of Directors of successful irrigation farmers and business owners decided the time right to have a totally new processing facility constructed.

Being built on a greenfields site and worth \$20 million, the project entails construction of the 4500sqm cotton gin including office and

amenities, three bale storage buildings (each 2500sqm) and three 4500sqm seed storage buildings.

The project is also a win for local content with Australian made and fabricated steel used throughout consuming almost 700 tonnes of structural steelwork alone, as well as local product for sheeting and purlins.

Suspended floors over the basement area required additional supports and steelwork to cater for the machinery loads.

SC director, **Roger Commins** said they consciously decided to support Australian manufacturing companies for this job due to the quality and reliability of the local product, and expedience of support.



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“We needed to access the steel immediately due to the very short time frame with the first round steel package to be complete by this month (March) for the 2012 harvest,” Mr Commins said.

“We also needed to ensure quality of the product, as if there were any issues we needed to fix them fast.

“Flexibility in design is also crucial as modifications or variations can be handled with greater ease at the local level if required.”

He said that ASI steel fabricator and Environmental Sustainability Charter member, Hutchins Bros was contacted to quote on the sheds for this project along with other shed manufacturers, and they came back with a competitive quote and after some due diligence on previous work were readily engaged.

“We have been extremely impressed with their professionalism, quality of the job and the expediency of delivery,” he said

“They were extremely accommodating for any variations we required and it has been an overall pleasant experience to deal with them. We would not consider using anybody else for any future developments.”

Bill Hutchins is upbeat about the work.

“Unlike the majority of projects we undertake, we were able to work closely with the client and their design team to achieve cost and time efficiencies for this project,” Mr Hutchins said.

“In project infancy at tender stage, our pricing was being compared to lower quality imported raw product processed domestically (from hot/cold rolled sections to sheet and coil) but quality and the ability to deliver and guarantee our work locally helped to seal the deal.

“And the recent introduction of our HD plasma beamline has enabled us to process the steel a lot more efficiently.”

Project Team:

Client: Southern Cotton

Structural Engineer: Acme Enterprises

Steel Fabricator: Hutchins Bros

Steel Detailer: Multicad

Protective Coatings: Dulux

ASI Steel Distributor(s): OneSteel, Southern Steel (Milperra)

ASI Steel Manufacturer: OneSteel

