



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
PLANT HEALTH
2020

Everyday plant health heroes Protecting plants, protecting life



Sharna Holman

*Development Extension Officer (Cotton),
Queensland Department of Agriculture and
Fisheries and CottonInfo*

How did you choose your job? Or did it choose you?

A bit of both! My role as an extension officer combines things that I love: agriculture, people, communication, research, learning and a sense of purpose. My work experience at university highlighted my interest and the importance of communicating research outcomes to growers and how new and improved practices can lead to more profitable and sustainable farming businesses. When an extension officer role became available working in the Australian cotton industry, an industry full of passionate and welcoming people who value research, I never looked back.

How long have you worked in this industry?

I have been an extension officer in the Australian cotton industry, with a focus on biosecurity and crop protection, since 2016 after finishing university.

What does plant health mean to you?

To me, plant health is a holistic approach that allows plants to produce food and fibre in the face of environmental and pest challenges. We, as farmers, industry members and the broader community, have a responsibility to take steps to minimise these challenges by minimising the risk our actions have in spreading pests, weeds and diseases in our industry and regions – after all, plants are responsible for the air we breathe, the food we eat and our favorite cotton socks!

What are your greatest achievements in this role?

My greatest achievements are promoting biosecurity using more unconventional and creative ways to ensure ongoing awareness of biosecurity risks, concerns and the practices industry can adopt. Over the past few years, different growers, agronomists and researchers have provided their biosecurity top tips in short videos (check out the CottonInfo YouTube channel!) to share with others how easy biosecurity practices are to implement in their day-to-day activities. I'm also excited by the increasing number of farms within the Australian cotton industry with a documented farm biosecurity plans, highlighting the increased awareness of biosecurity risks and measures amongst growers – and growers taking action to protect their farm, business, region and industry.

What does a typical day look like for you?

No day is ever the same, which I love. My day can involve being in the field or lab assessing trials as part of our DAF entomology pest management research projects, organising and attending meetings and talking with growers, agronomists and researchers about crop protection and biosecurity research outcomes and practices.

My days also involve developing a range of communication articles, factsheets and blogs to help extend biosecurity research outcomes and information to the Australian cotton industry. Additionally I get to be creative and use a variety of methods such as short videos and conference promotions to raise awareness and the adoption of farm biosecurity best management practices that prevent the spread and establishment of pests, weeds and diseases on Australian cotton farms.

What advice would you give anybody wanting to get into the industry?

My advice is to talk to as many people as possible to get an understanding of the broad range of opportunities available within agriculture and biosecurity. There are jobs and careers that I did not know existed when studying – and people are more than willing to sit down and chat if you ask!