



*2009 Finalist
AgriRisk Innovative Grower of the Year*

Robert & Penny Blatchford - "Innesfail" Gurley, NSW

Robert and Penny Blatchford have played an important role in developing and improving the cotton growing process by helping to pioneer the no-till systems for dryland cotton. The Blatchfords first experimented with a no-till system in 1991, and since then have continued to modify the system by integrating tram tracking (before the advent of GPS), experimenting with row width configurations, using water injection for seedling establishment, introducing liquid fertilisers, and experimenting with chemical weed control. To their knowledge, they were the first to apply no-till in a cotton system, and since introducing the no-till method they have worked closely with a number of their peers, including the Bellata Benchmarking Group, to refine and test their ideas.

The Blatchford's latest enhancement of the no-till system is the inclusion of a millet phase in their standard rotation. They first trialled the use of millet three years ago, although 2009 was their first large-scale planting. The Border Rivers - Gwydir Catchment Management Authority is currently measuring the positive outcomes that occur when millet is used.

The Blatchfords estimate that the adoption of their no-till system has accounted for an average 30 per cent increase in their crop yields, and has also resulted in significant reductions in the cost of labour, fuel and machinery costs. In addition, as a result of using the no-till system, their soil health has greatly improved, and the increased water retention in their soil has allowed the Blatchfords to plant a crop when they normally would not have been able to. They have also been able to minimise soil compaction, and the impact of erosion caused by storms and sloping topography.