RESEARCHER PROFILE

THE ACDC
The Australian Cotton Disease Collaboration

Associate Professor Linda Smith

Deputy Director, The ACDC

Principal Plant Pathologist
Queensland Department of Primary Industries (QDPI)

RESEARCH AREA

Systems-based disease control packages

Spatial data analytics and modelling

Tell us a bit about yourself?

I was born in Middlesex, a county of Greater London, UK. I travelled from England to Perth, Western Australia on a ship with my family when I was 4 years old; it took 6 weeks and the ship nearly sunk in a terrible storm off the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa! I grew up in a suburb of Perth and completed a Bachelor of Agricultural Science (Hons) at the University of WA. I travelled to Brisbane, Qld in 1988 for employment and have lived there ever since. I completed my Masters (Microbiology/ Nematology) and PhD (Plant Pathology) at the University of Queensland. I have been fortunate to have worked for QDPI for 35 years as a Plant Pathologist.

What research have you previously been involved with?

I have led a team focussed on 1) providing diagnostic capacity for the Australian cotton industry for fungal diseases and reniform nematode; 2) conducting disease surveys to better understand prevalence of cotton diseases and emerging issues; and 3) soil health and management strategies that support the development of disease suppressive soils. The diseases the team have focussed on developing management strategies include Fusarium wilt, Verticillium wilt, Reoccurring wilt and reniform nematode. I have led seven consecutive CRDC funded cotton pathology projects.

What excites you about working in the Australian cotton industry?

Lots of things excite me working in the Australian cotton industry, but the main thing would have to be the growers and consultants. Having spent many years conducting disease surveys, I have got to know many across the valleys really well and they are all so generous with their time to help the pathology team and they are just terrific people to work with. There's also a great willingness of CRDC to listen to and fund new and innovative ideas, which further supports excellent collaboration between researchers. The opportunity to be part of the ACDC working with UniSQ and be part of multidisciplinary teams to address disease management to ensure the profitability of the industry, is truly wonderful.

What do you like to do when you're not researching?

When I am not researching, I love to spend quality time with my family, cycle, travel, read, and try out new recipes. If I can combine a holiday with a cycling trip, even better!

RESEARCHER PROFILE

THE ACDC
The Australian Cotton Disease Collaboration

OVERVIEW

Deputy Director, the ACDC

Domain A: Systems-based disease control packages

Domain C: Spatial data analytics and modelling

Role in the ACDC:

My current role has several areas of responsibility:

- Principal Plant Pathologist with QDPI and Team Leader of the Broadacre Pathology (BAP) team
- Deputy Director of the Australian Cotton Disease Collaboration (the ACDC)
- Overall lead of Domain A: Systems-based disease control packages and Domain C: Spatial data analytics and modelling
- Co-supervisor of the ACDC PhD students

Why is it important?

- As Principal Plant Pathologist and Team Leader of the Broadacre Pathology team within QDPI, and leader of Domains A & C, I oversee essential research programs spanning pathogen diagnostics, systems-based disease management, pathology support for northern Australia, and spatial data analytics.
- As Deputy Director of the ACDC, I provide pathology expertise and industry insight to guide the Virtual Centre team, researchers, and PhD students.
- Active engagement with the cotton industry ensures research priorities remain aligned with real-world disease challenges and industry needs.

What is your aim as the ACDC Deputy Director?

As Deputy Director, I bring together expertise across teams to help reduce cotton disease impacts to below 5% of production costs, ensuring growers have access to reliable diagnostics, practical tools, and effective management strategies.
I also focus on building future capacity by expanding surveillance in new regions and co-supervising PhD students to strengthen expertise in cotton pathology and farming systems.

How will this work benefit Australian cotton growers and industry?

The ACDC is committed to strengthening the Australian cotton industry by:

- Boosting profitability through innovative, practical research that delivers real on-farm outcomes.
- Building capability by developing people with the skills needed for current and future cotton disease challenges.
- Enhancing collaboration through a co-innovation approach with key industry partners to grow research capability and deliver impact.