

District Reports

Emerald

The Central Highlands is almost drawing the curtains on a season best remembered for being “challenging” rather than for too many good points. The two main factors of this season have been the heat and whitefly.

During the season Emerald had over 80 days that exceeded 38°C, close to the hottest on record. Assuming that crops are under stress in temperatures greater than 38°C, that’s a lot of time for them to be under performing. The result of the heat was crops finishing one to two weeks earlier than in previous seasons. At this stage it’s too early to speculate on impacts on yield and quality.

At the time of writing, about 20 per cent of the Central Highlands had been picked. Picking has been marred slightly by storm rains that have not been to the extent of causing quality problems.

Whitefly numbers increased through January and February, and appeared particularly bad as they moved off defoliated crops and looked for alternative hosts. Almost all crops in the district were treated specifically for whitefly on a number of occasions. A large effort is currently underway to further research this pest so we are better prepared next season. (More detail on whitefly in Emerald appears elsewhere in this publication)

After generally a moderate season, heliothis pressure increased through January and February. Aphid numbers, although much lower than previous seasons, started to increase by late December and a few fields required treatment.



David Kelly
March 6, 2002

Dawson Valley

Due to an urgent need to spend time improving his golf swing, Brett Austin has asked me to write this issue's report. Having seen his golf swing, I suspect I'll be writing this report every issue!

Similar with other areas in Central Queensland, the Dawson valley has had a fairly difficult year due to water shortages, hot weather and heliothis.

There were about 70 days greater than 38°C during the growing season, closest to the hottest on record. The most severe of this heat wave was around Christmas time, when the crop was under its highest fruit demand.

This caused widespread shedding in most crops and resulted in some 'stopping', or cutting out prematurely, particularly those with high fruit retentions. These crops eventually started fruiting again but this shock has resulted in some delay in maturity. Given some extra time, and in some cases an extra watering, these crops were able to produce a good top crop.

Following a dismal start to the season in regards to water availability, the Dawson River received a number of flows during the season to allow some flood harvesting and full irrigation on all crops.

Heliothis have been savage all season with constant, very high pressure from day one till the middle of February when it abated. During peak season, constant egg lays of 100 per metre for extended periods of time were commonplace, and were getting as high as 300 per metre.

Aphid numbers have been lower than previous seasons. There have been low numbers of whitefly in most crops but not to a level of causing any problems.

This season has seen the reappearance of pink spotted bollworm in the Dawson Valley for the



first time in over 15 years. This is possibly as a result of the move towards more specific chemistry early season. They were most prevalent in a crop adjacent to some ratoon cotton from last season, highlighting once again the importance of farm hygiene in an IPM program.

This pest could cause serious problems if it appeared in major numbers.

There was a discovery of Fusarium wilt on another property in the Dawson Valley this season, taking the total number of properties infected to four. It has been encouraging that, through management, including variety selection, the existing sites are still producing good cotton, although plants are noticeably smaller.

Excellent weather conditions for defoliation throughout February and March have allowed for a generally trouble-free operation. Picking began on the earliest crops in the first week of March but won't get into full swing until mid to late march. Early indications are that yields will be better than first expected, given the difficult season.

David Kelly
March 19, 2002

St George

What has been a tough and challenging season for many in south west Queensland is finally drawing to a close, with defoliation at least two thirds complete throughout the region. Since the last report in January, there has only been light to medium insect pressure. In accordance with area wide management there has been reduced and controlled use of pyrethroids which has, thanks to the co-operation of most growers, been a very successful program. Mites and aphids have been persistent late season, but good control has been achieved with the application of either OPs, Pirimor or Pegasus.

Unfortunately rainfall continues to be minimal, with the region only receiving the occasional scattered summer storm, but no decent falls. Even so, some growers have still been fortunate

enough to get their crop irrigated right through — thanks to allocations.

The St George Annual Field Day and Cotton Dinner was held on February 22, with approximately 300 people attending. The night was a huge success and enjoyed by all, with local growers, industry people and regional representatives attendance. Awards were given for the following achievements:

Cotton Grower of the Year

First — Gillebri Cotton Co
Second — Brookglen Farms
Third — JD & MM Benn

Rural Water Use Efficiency Award

Gillebri Cotton Co

P&A Farm Management Awards

First — Thomas Cotton Company
Second — NC & ML Bligh
Third — Rhea Farming

Service to the Industry Award

Ian Thomas — Thomas Cotton Company

And finally, ginning commenced at the Queensland Cotton Beardmore and Dirranbandi Gins in mid March, with modules now being moved daily from paddock to pads.

Now we are all crossing our fingers for a dry and successful pick, and hope that growers reap the rewards of their hard work throughout the season.

Shanna Rowlands & Annabel Twine
March 27, 2002

Dirranbandi

Rain has finally come to Dirranbandi with falls upwards to three inches being recorded around the district. While welcome by all, for some the timeliness of the falls wasn't quite right. Crops in the district are reaching defoliation with some already receiving their first application with more

fields to be defoliated in the coming week. Overall fields that have received adequate water look good while as expected those that have struggled for water or have been sacrificed for other fields are not as good.

Insect pressure in the area has generally been very quiet — even aphids at this time of the season have been quiet compared to other areas. The odd whitefly has been seen but has not caused any concern.

An informal grower field day was held in February with growers visiting several of the local farms. Even with the reduced plantings across the district there was still plenty to look at. Sites included a local early season tipping out trial, a look at Roundup Ready cotton and its management program, a herbicide trial, an unsprayed cotton refuge, and to finish a look at a CSD Ingard variety trial. Due to the short supply of water this was the only variety trial that will reach maturity for the Dirranbandi district this season.

Later this month Dirranbandi growers and Cotton Australia will host an education day for some of the local primary school children, where they will look at farm management, agronomy, pest management, watering, picking, and processing.

Sarah Kerlin
March 16, 2002

Mungindi

Despite this summer being one of the hotter, drier ones on record the Mungindi area has produced some excellent fields of cotton.

Within the next week there will be some modules made and hopefully growers made happy. The timing of the last irrigation proved difficult on the majority of farms with variable storm rain of 15–50 mm falling in the last week of February. But this rain was welcomed by most, as it was the first since early December.

Insect pressure has generally been light for the whole season. Secondary pests such as mirids and aphids have been the only pest needing control in most Ingard crops. In the past few

weeks whitefly have been noticed in small numbers, with isolated fields needing control measure where honeydew was appearing and there were open bolls. Conventional fields that were tipped out early seem to be carrying more fruit than the Ingard crops but it will be interesting to see if this is reflected in yield.

The annual cotton competition and grower tour was held this year on March 7. Thanks to CSD, Deltapine, Incitec and Monsanto for their support of this event. The judges for the day were Mike Beeston, Tony May and Dugald Spenceley, who all did a terrific job — their time and effort was much appreciated.

The winning crop was a DeltaSAPPHIRE crop (that had just been irrigated!) at South Bunarba belonging to B&J Longworth and managed by Gary Lees; in second place was a DeltaEMERALD crop at Carnarvon grown by Carnarvon Partnership (Glen Price) and in third place was a crop of Sicot 2891 at Terriadi grown by Tercott (Gary Houston).

Everyone who came on the bus seemed to enjoy themselves and must have been happy with the judges decision as there were no protests lodged at the golf club afterwards.

No doubt the next report will be more conclusive in terms of yields from the district. With Easter being early this year some growers will have a break and then start picking in early April. From there the cycle begins again, although a lot of water down the river would improve the somewhat bleak outlook for the 2002–03 season.

Julie Scriven
March 12, 2002

Lower Namoi

High temperatures, combined with very dry conditions during the past few months, have helped mature the crop and bring picking forward to a more normal time. Picking has begun on a few early crops and yields appear to be a bit better than expected. No ginning data is available, but the lint looks an excellent colour. Defoliation has worked well with good leaf drop

after only a few days.

Picking will not get into full swing until mid April, but given good weather, picking should be completed earlier than normal because there are very few late crops this year. Dryland crops are very early and expected to be low yielding.

Heliothis pressure has been low to moderate all season. Control using a range of new insecticides was very good, but also expensive. Total numbers of sprays on conventional and Ingard crops were well down on normal.

Other insects have not been a major problem. A few roughies and a few aphids late season on some crops. Control of aphids using conventional aphicides has been OK. Mirids and green vegetable bugs have also been active — particularly on Ingard crops. Generally mites not been a major problem this season — building up on some crops late in the season and requiring one or less sprays.

Ingard performance has generally been good this season with crops handling the light to moderate pressure well. But even lightly-sprayed conventional crops look good in some areas. Ingard fields were generally sprayed zero to three times for heliothis while conventional crops range from two to 12 times.

Late season disease has not been an issue this year except for some boll rots. There are still no confirmed cases of Fusarium in the Lower Namoi, but the clock is ticking.

Water supplies for next season are only OK at this stage with Keepit Dam only 20 per cent of capacity, but Split Rock Dam is close to full.

As picking gets into full swing lets hope for fine weather for the next month or so.

Late Press — unfortunately the rain has started. Narrabri and Wee Waa received 30–50 mm last night and more is forecast today. We don't want any more for a while!

Upper Namoi

Recently the Upper Namoi Valley experienced a warm spell resulting in crops opening at a faster rate than expected. This has meant that some early-planted Ingard crops are now ready for defoliation. The majority of the crops are expected to receive their first defoliation over the last two weeks of March and early April.

Insect pressure at the end of the season has been very erratic and remarkably quiet with only small patches of mites and aphids. Green vegetable bugs and late season mirids have been unusually high, which has caused concern to growers.

The full impact of these infestations will not be known until after picking. Whitefly samples have been collected in the valley with one result to date recording the presence of silverleaf B-biotype. Monitoring of this situation is continuing.

Numerous crops within the valley have experienced premature senescence due to the exceptionally high boll retention and small plant structure. This disorder was observed in both transgenic and conventional varieties.

Overall the finish to the season is fast approaching and with the continuous warm weather, yield potential is looking favourable for growers.

Mark Hickman
March 11, 2002

Gwydir

What a fantastic finish for irrigated crops in the Gwydir. February and March provided a continuation of January's warm weather and low insect pressure, leading to crops that looked as good as any at

defoliation time. Unfortunately the party was spoilt for some by around 100 mm of rain just as picking was getting underway.

The crops that were off before the rain showed a lot of promise, with yields between 3.3–4.5 bales

per acre, and excellent length, strength and leaf grades. Boll retention and size has been excellent and many growers have had their lowest insecticide bill for a number of years. Late season weeds have been a bit of a problem, especially in some Roundup Ready crops that had less residual herbicides underneath.

This season has seen a significant increase in the number of farms infested with Fusarium wilt in the Gwydir Valley and growers are looking towards increased research efforts into this disease both Australia-wide and locally.

Moree growers are looking forward to once again hosting the Australian industry at the Cotton Trade Show at the end of May. The annual dinner will be an opportunity to catch up with friends and colleagues, to congratulate the Gwydir Valley and Australian Cotton Grower of the Year winners and to raise money for the Cotton Industry Medical Scholarships and the Westpac Rescue Helicopter.

While the rain was welcome for winter crops, it came too late for the reduced amount of dryland cotton in the Gwydir this year, which has generally been of below average yields. It was also a source of frustration for irrigators that the intense rain produced no water in the river or in Copeton Dam. Hopefully it will now stay clear until harvest is complete.

Harvey Gaynor
March 25, 2002

Macquarie

Day degree accumulation is slightly up on average, although slightly down on the same period last year. Some warm weather in mid March helped to boost crop maturation. Unfortunately storms in late March brought unwelcome hail to some areas and between 5-40 mm of rain at the time of writing.

Defoliation has been progressing well with many people set to start picking just before or after Easter. This has been delayed due to the rain in some places.

March was a very busy month in terms of cotton

grower activities out of the field. Crop judging bus tours were held early in the month. This was followed by the awards presentation night on March 8, the Macquarie Cotton Field Day on March 14 and the MCGA AGM on March 21.

The Macquarie Valley Plant to Bale Protocols were launched at the AGM. These are based on guidelines first developed in Queensland and cover module building and transport and farm hygiene.

As usual weather over April will be critical to a good pick. If it fines up and stays relatively warm the Macquarie should be able to produce some handy yields and complete picking in May.

Kirrily Rourke
March 25, 2002

Southern NSW

No improvement in the weather since last report with year-to-date day degrees at 1655. This is almost 200 DD's behind the average and 400 day degrees behind last season. Cold shock days have still accumulated through our traditional warm months with current numbers at 46. This consistent cool weather has resulted in maturity delays of 3–4 weeks and raises concerns with quality issues.

All crops in the region are well into boll fill with early sown, quick maturing varieties 20–30 per cent open. Most crops will be defoliated towards the end of this month and well into April as crops have been pushed out further and long season varieties such as Pima progress steadily through boll maturity. The Condobolin area has fared slightly better with the weather and reports on crop maturity is supporting this.

Insect pressure remains low, which is a present surprise given the diverse range of summer crops this year. Even though we experienced very heavy insect pressure early on, growers should be able to make some savings in insect control.

Some aphid pressure was experience early in Stage 3 but numbers have declined after OP use. Mite numbers have been extremely high in maize

crops around the district and adjacent cotton crops have been affected. Not all situations have required control as thrips numbers have been very high

Fruit numbers appear to be reasonable given light insect pressure. The biggest concern is whether we have the season length to mature all these bolls. UNR crops are finishing well and appear to be holding higher fruit numbers than in previous years, but at the expense of some earliness. Pima crops are generally disease free although there are reports of crops with some alternaria. Growers still having some problems cutting out pima fields.

The Hillston area still remains very dry but the catchment area has received some good rains recently producing some inflows.

Matthew Mitchell
March 25, 2002