

District Reports

Emerald

Picking of the Central Highlands' crop was all but finished by the end of March. A few late-planted and hail-affected crops dragged on into April, but finished relatively quickly. People finishing off crops earlier than desirable to reduce their exposure to whitefly exacerbated the early finish to some degree. Yields were generally disappointing on lighter soils, not suited to the particularly hot season. At this stage a district average of about 6.9 bales per hectare (2.8 bales per acre) should be feasible.



Fibre quality issues have been similar to last season with worrying levels of high micronaire and to a lesser degree, short staple and low strength. At this stage, no cotton has been classed as sticky from whitefly or aphid honeydew, which is a huge relief to all concerned.

The Central Highlands Cotton Growers' Research & Technical Group has been very active this season in developing feedback for the Insecticide Resistance Management Strategy for 2002-03. The advent of whitefly and worrying levels of heliothis resistance in some of the newer products has added weight behind compliance to an effective resistance management strategy.



Craig Barsby and Duane Evans, in particular, deserve commendation for their work in formulating ideas to a point where the group developed their own strategy, based on four crop stages, and presented it to the TIMS road show.

On May 23, the Cotton Research & Development Corporation hosted a meeting in Emerald to draft up a management plan for silverleaf whitefly for the 2002-03 cotton season. The meeting addressed issues such as control options and preventative measures, and involved local growers, consultants, industry researchers, chemical companies and other industries. A management strategy will need to incorporate all cropping industries, highlighting cultural, biological and crop management options in addition to insecticidal control.



We are lucky to some degree that whitefly have been a pest in other parts of the world longer than Australia. This has allowed us to view various management strategies that have been tried to see what might work here. The CRDC, Cotton Seed Distributors (CSD) and the Central

Highlands Cotton Growers' Association have provided funds to send a group of people to the US to view management strategies currently being used against this pest. The group will include three local growers Hamish Millar, Wayne Reeves and Greg Jensen; consultants David Parlato and Duane Evans; research entomologist Richard Sequiera and me.

All of the area has been pulled/root cut and been worked to some degree at this point in time. Lack of rain has meant that most country is pretty dry and cloddy, needing some rain before too much more cultivation can take place.

A significant part of the irrigation area (approximately 4500 hectares) has been planted to chickpea. Some people intend to try and turn this country around into cotton again next season, but past experience has shown that this is very difficult to do without delaying cotton planting. If cotton prices don't improve a bit in the next few months, it seems feasible that the cotton area will be reduced significantly next season, despite indications that there will be 100 per cent water allocation.

David Kelly
May 28, 2002

Dawson Valley

Picking in the Dawson Callide began in early March, and a majority was completed in a four-week period ending in mid April. Conventional varieties tended to be the first picked, as Ingard was reported to have taken a bit longer to finish off some of its late bolls.

The best guess at this stage in regards to yields is about 7.5 bales per hectare (3.0 bales per acre) across the area. For many people this has been a pleasant surprise after what was a very difficult season from insects and heat.

A significant amount of early-picked cotton was being classed as having high micronaire, a worrying sign given current prices and yields. As picking progressed this trend diminished. High micronaire was a major problem in all Central Queensland districts last season.

Most country around the district has been stalk pulled and worked once. It has not rained since picking so the soil is very dry and needs some moisture to break down the large clods.

Theodore growers turned out in mass to the annual TIMS road-show meeting to discuss the Insecticide Resistance Management Strategy for the 2002-03 season. There was a lot of support for the idea of a four stage strategy suited to Central Queensland being developed by the Central Highlands growers.

The Theodore and Biloela Cotton grower

associations have been proactive in aiming to learn about the management of silverleaf whitefly. Both organisations have financially supported three people from the district to undertake a study tour of Arizona and Texas to view successful management strategies at work. Those being supported are consultant Simon Struss, DPI entomologist Paul Grundy and grower association president Brett Austin (if they'll let him in the country).

The water situation in the Dawson Valley is in the best shape for this time of year than it has been for a number of seasons. Most of the system is reasonably full, meaning plantings for next season will not be restricted by water.

David Kelly
May 28, 2002

St George

The St George region has all but wrapped up the 2001–02 season, with surprisingly good results for most growers. Only several late season crops are now still in the ground. With an initially tricky start to the season that included water issues and also some initial concern with the strike of Sicot 189 (traditionally the region's favourite variety) the ball finally got rolling. Growers were pleasantly surprised with the relative lack of insect pressure, and SP sprays were minimal.

Beneficial numbers appear to have increased slightly, which has encouraged locals to continue to stick closely together and combine their efforts with Area Wide Management. Defoliation was smooth sailing, with most growers having a clean pick and minimal cotton being left on the bush. All in all, it was a season that the region was mostly happy with in the end.

With Queensland Cotton's Beardmore gin now running at full capacity, classing results and quality of the cotton are tending towards good to very good. This has largely been attributed to the lack of incrop rainfall.

But the unspoken word right now throughout the region is water — or more to the point, the serious lack of it. During the season just gone some farmers were forced to forward-draw allocation meant for their 2002–03 crop, which has left them in a serious situation. Both river harvesters and channel irrigators are looking to the skies anxiously, for without serious rainfall or flooding, many will not have sufficient water to plant full acreage, and some may not plant at all. For those that do plant, the decision they face will then become whether to plant full acreage and pray for rain or to cut back crops significantly according to guaranteed water. This is the first time in the past several years that there hasn't been the usual heavy late rainfalls. It will be a difficult gamble for some.

Bourke

This season's results can best be described as disastrous. As a result of new government water extraction guidelines coupled with a low rainfall year, growers in the Bourke district were unable to fully irrigate their crops.

Most growers had sufficient stored water to apply between two and five irrigations, leaving the majority of crops short between three and six irrigations. As a consequence yields for the district were in the range of 1.8 to 7.4 bales per hectare. Lint quality of the crop was below average, with low micronaire and short staple length penalties reducing growers' returns even further.

As a consequence of such a season, the local and farm economy has been estimated to suffer losses in the order of \$30–40 million.

At present most growers have empty onfarm storages, and unless sufficient rainfall occurs in the Darling River catchment, the prospects for next season's cotton crop are very bleak.

Craig Dunn
June 1, 2002

Dirranbandi

This season saw Dirranbandi finish picking in record time. This was due to the extreme lack of water with only around 30 to 40 per cent of the previous year's cotton growing area being picked, which equates to around 8075 hectares (19,950 acres). Dirranbandi's lack of water for irrigation was a result of below average rainfall for the season and a lack of water flows in the river.

A major flow in the river over the next few months is still required in order for growers to plant a crop next season. Dry weather experienced during defoliation and picking also helped with the quick progress.

Well above average cold shock days were experienced this season with 21 cold shock days being reported during September through to mid November compared to only eight during the previous season and the long-term average of nine. After this temperatures warmed up and went the other way with temperatures of above 35°C being recorded for much of the December–January period. February and March also continued to be warm which assisted with crop finishing and defoliation.

The overall low pressure experienced during the season would have contributed to the yield with low damage levels being reported. The only upset was some heavy heliothis pressure

experienced in Stage two. Another unusual occurrence was the presence of *Helicoverpa punctigera* well into Stage two. Average sprays ranged from six to 12 on conventional fields while Ingard crops received between one to five sprays. Mirid pressure was high this season with many crops receiving treatment. The lack of spraying also saw aphid numbers at a level that required control.

In some cases, considering the lack of irrigations that some crops received, yields were better than expected. Overall yields ranged from 5.4 to 9.6 bales per hectare (2.2 to 3.9 bales per acre) with the average at 7.8 bales per hectare (3.15 bales per acre). Overall quality was good with growers receiving base grade and above. Turnouts were in the range of 38 per cent. In the benchmarking studies this season, work will be done to compare some of the yield results with the numbers of irrigations received in more detail.

Sarah Kerlin
June 1, 2002

Mungindi

With a dry summer and very dry winter so far there is not a whole lot of activity. Dryland winter crops are basically non-existent and minimal areas of irrigated wheat and chickpea crops.

Since June last year Mungindi has received 313 mm (12.5 inches) of rainfall, well below the average of 525 mm (21 inches). Since January we have received just under 50 mm (two inches) of rainfall.

On a much better note this seasons' cotton yields have been excellent with some crops yielding well over four bales per acre (10 bales per hectare) and some nearly making the five bale per acre mark (12.4 bales per hectare). This added to the bonus of being a low input year due to lower insect pressure.

Most growers have completed field preparation — largely due to lack of significant rainfall events over the past two months. A lot of people have finished applying Big N, though some people going. Now it is a matter of waiting for more rain to be able to plant more area.

At this stage there will be significant reductions in area of cotton planted next season. On average most growers would have about 40 per cent of water required for full planting come next September.

The CSD roadshow was held on June 6, with good attendance from growers and agronomists around the area. This now will give everybody an idea of which varieties are suitable for next season, especially in terms of reduced water

conditions.

Hopefully most growers would have or soon will receive some information about Deltapine varieties also.

The Cotton Growers Association is holding a 'Christmas' Dinner Dance on June 22, 2002 beginning at 7.00 pm. Tickets are \$25 per head and are available from Wesfarmers Landmark, Mungindi — a good opportunity for growers to come together and relax for an evening.

Bernadette Kelly
June 1, 2002

Darling Downs

As the dry weather tightens its grip on the Darling Downs, the odds of substantial widespread winter rain falling across the region continue to lengthen.

Picking of this season's cotton crop progressed without interruption. At the time of writing, only a few fields are yet to be picked. Gins report that the turnouts so far have been good with irrigated yields and quality generally slightly above average. The dryland crop has not fared as well. Very hot, dry conditions that were experienced in January–February have resulted in quality downgrades — short staple length being the main problem.

Insect pressure during season 2001–02 has been mixed. Mirids caused extensive damage to crops early season. Aphid numbers increased late season with difficulties in control reported from many districts. Concerns that OP resistance was increasing in the aphid populations were expressed by many of the district's CCA members. Green vegetable bugs also caused problems from February to late in the season, in some districts only.

Unlike other cropping regions the Downs was hit with one of the highest heliothis pressure seasons for several years. Rains received in early October enabled strong weed growth in and around cotton fields. High numbers of *Heliothis* built up on weed infestations, moving into cotton crops, particularly Ingard cotton, after a dry weather break in late November early December enabled control programs to be understood by growers.

Wet weather around Christmas then delayed heliothis control opportunities, resulting in major egg laying pressures being experienced in January. Egg counts of over 100 eggs per metre were common. High egg laying pressure continued to be experienced in many districts through to late season, causing a continued concern and headaches for many growers and their consultants.

The wet start and the dry finish to the season have seen the incidence of Fusarium wilt and black root rot both increase. Of great concern are reports of increased incidence of Fusarium in Downs dryland cotton crops this season.

With many on-farm water storages empty and soil moisture reserves already very low, the next few months will be critical for the prospects of next season's cotton crop.

Greg Salmond
June 7, 2002

Macintyre

The Macintyre Valley cotton industry has had an excellent finish to what could be easily referred to as a very ordinary growing season. In general both yields and quality from the 2002 crop were well above grower expectations.

Ginning is approximately 50 per cent completed in the valley as I write this report and at this stage farm average yields of between 8.2 to 8.6 bales per hectare (3.3 to 3.5 bales per acre) seem very realistic. There are numerous reports of yields well above this range but in most cases they refer to individual fields rather than whole farms. The quality of the crop is also very good. The 2002 harvest was completed without interruption from any rain events.

The majority of the cotton I have seen this season has classed middling plus or better and apart from a little high micronaire and short staple, growers are very happy with the result.

The late dryland crops are still being harvested and given the extreme seasonal conditions this year the yield has been a little disappointing for most.

Numerous hail storms were reported throughout the valley this season with varying levels of damage. Unfortunately several growers on the eastern side of Goondiwindi received two and three hail events in November almost totally destroying their crops. But given the seasonal conditions some of these fields grew back exceptionally well and yielded well over three bales to the acre (7.4 bales per hectare).

The valley has not experienced any rain since the completion of picking and ground preparation is well advanced for the 2003 crop.

Water and price are still a major concern for most growers in the MacIntyre with regard to next season's plantings. Storage dam levels are low and soil moisture is very low. Widespread falls of rain are desperately needed if we are to plant a winter crop and have sufficient water for the 2003 irrigated summer crops.

Peter Graham
June 1, 2002

Gwydir

As the ginning season in the Gwydir Valley draws to a close, growers have been able to reflect on some fantastic yield achievements in the year just gone, but have significant challenges in the year ahead. Final yield figures are not available yet, but it is likely the valley has exceeded its previous record for average irrigated yields.

It has been rare to find fields yielding below 7.5 bales per hectare and the vast majority of the Gwydir crop has made base grade with respect to all quality parameters. While there was some heavy rain early in the harvest period, this affected mainly crops in the eastern Gwydir and Macintyre valleys, and any crops that were further west or later in the harvest program escaped the worst effects of this rain.

The challenges facing growers this coming season have to do with two things that we can have little effect upon — namely cotton prices and drought — and a third that we hope to be able to have some effect upon, namely the NSW Government Water Reform process. Water sharing plans for most NSW river valleys and aquifers were released in May–June and in the main irrigators have been frustrated with the outcomes of a number of years of hard work and ‘so-called’ community consultation.

The Carr Government has done little to disguise its policy to direct water away from irrigators and towards the environment, and has certainly shown no willingness to share the cost burden of such changes throughout the wider community. With no clear performance targets for environmental flows, and the prospect of the same process being applied to native vegetation, biodiversity and greenhouse emissions, irrigators are justified in feeling threatened and abused.

With the SOI turning into a negative phase and forecasts of a possible El Niño, Gwydir Irrigators have begun to review their cropping strategy for the coming season. There are growers in a wide range of positions ranging from very little water “in the bank” to very well off for the coming season. Many growers are in the middle with about 40–60 per cent of their crop requirements in storage at present. Some significant wet periods are required before planting to allow a full crop to go in the ground.

On a positive note the Gwydir Valley was once again pleased to host the Australian Cotton Trade Show in May, where the displays continue to improve and the enquiries from growers were by many reports quite genuine. The Gwydir Valley Cotton Grower of the Year was awarded to Rob Johnson of Unibale Pty Ltd, and our industry service award went to a very humble and deserving recipient Chris Humphries. Congratulations also go to Anousha Victoire of

Newcastle University who was awarded the 2002 Cotton Industry Undergraduate Scholarship.

Harvey Gaynor
June 12, 2002

Lower Namoi

Picking is complete and yields have generally been well above average. As ginning runs are completed for each field there have been several fields yielding in excess of five bales to the acre (12.4 bales per hectare). In fact some growers will average in excess of 4.4 bales per acre (10.9 bales per hectare).

Quality has also been good. Grades have generally been base or above but micronaire has tended to be higher than normal and in some cases in the penalty range.

Yields in dryland crops have been below average — although a few crops have recorded yields in excess of 1.6 bales per acre (3.9 bales per hectare). Quality has also been affected by the dry summer, with short staple and high micronaire a common problem.

Insects were generally fairly quiet for most of the season. Heliothis control costs were down and few secondary pests were a major problem. The new insecticides available this season generally worked well and were used extensively. Most growers adopted a soft control program and in general it worked very well throughout the whole season.

Ideal condition from mid December allowed the crop to make up for the poor start. In fact it was nearly a perfect end of season. Very little rain and very warm right through to picking.

In general all varieties performed well this season. Apart from early seedling disease there were few problems with Verticillium but surveys indicate the incidence of Verticillium is on the increase in the Namoi.

Ingard fields have performed well again this season with many crops receiving no insecticides for heliothis. Roundup Ready cotton has also performed well in its first commercial season. Bigger areas are expected to be planted this season in the lower Namoi.

Defoliation of early-irrigated and dryland crops was a relatively easy process as most standard defoliant worked quickly and effectively but late crops were very slow to defoliate.

Ground preparation for this season is progressing well as a result of the very dry conditions. Area prospects are down for irrigated crops as result of the low prices and water supply. I expect the area planted to be down by 15 to 20 per cent.

Robert Eveleigh

June 12, 2002