

District Reports

Central Highlands

The 2002–03 season has drawn to a close. There are still a couple of very late crops (planted late November) still to be picked, but most cotton has been picked, ginned, and classed. Ginning will probably be finished by the end of May, so it's a bit hard to get an accurate figure on yield yet. But early indications suggest that the district average will be somewhere around 2.5 bales per acre (6.2 bales per hectare).

Yields have been highly variable. Some farms have averaged well over three bales per acre (7.5 bales per hectare) while others have been closer to two bales per acre (five bales per hectare).

A major contributing factor on these farms was the hail storm in December that impacted on approximately 25 per cent of the district to some extent. Most crops were in mid–late flowering at this time, so did not full recover.

Grades have tended to improve in later crops which were less affected by the cloudy/rainy weather of February. While much of the crop went 41, as time went on 31s started becoming more common. As with the past couple of seasons, high micronaire seems to be looming as a common problem.

Water allocation from Fairbairn dam for next season is now 15 per cent. Although the dam level has not risen, rainfall in regions downstream from the dam has filled up some of the weirs and storages.

A lot of people are not going to make a firm decision until August as to what area to put in to



cotton next season. The area will definitely go down significantly unless there is some improvement in the dam level before this time.

David Kelly
May 15, 2003

Dawson Callide

Picking is finished in the Dawson valley, with the exception of a couple of crops that people started irrigating again after the rain in February. Most picking was done in mid-late March with most fields in the district yielding over two bales per acre (five bales per hectare). The fact that all crops were under-irrigated to some extent meant there were a lot of immature bolls that failed to open properly, and the rain in February caused plenty of grief with fibre colour and regrowth on plants that proved very difficult to control. To salvage some of these crops, strippers were used to get some of the cotton that spindle pickers would miss.

The dry season followed by the February rain obviously provided less than ideal conditions for fibre quality. Downgrades for colour, short staple and spot have been commonplace.

On the upside, the Dawson system is now close to capacity following the rain in February in the lower end of the catchment and in April in the upper end. There is a significant proportion of the irrigation area currently being planted to winter crops, particularly chickpea.

A story worth mentioning this month was something that took place at the dirt bike section at the annual Theodore Show. A scruffy young lad from north of Moura who, on a bike he borrowed from his boss, looked to defy all odds by leading the strong field throughout much of the race. The story was shaping up to something that bush poets dream about. There was no fairytale end however — our hero had peaked too early and finished dead last. Bad luck Brett.

Although it's a bit early to speculate, there may be close to full cotton planting in the area next season.

David Kelly
May 15, 2003

St George

It is fair enough to say that growers in the St George area were glad to see the end of this challenging season. Below average rainfall and no flow in the river for the entire season resulted in between one and five in-crop irrigations and reduced yields.

Picking has drawn to a close and ground preparation is taking place. A welcome flow in the river over Easter saw some water harvesting so growers are busy weighing up their options for the winter and next season. Despite this, secured water for next season is minimal so growers in both St George and Dirranbandi are waiting on a flood!

The yield for the area was generally disappointing and varied. The majority of the cotton picked yielded between 1.5 and 2.5 bales per acre, with yields as low as 0.4 and as high as 4.3 bales per acre reported. The quality of the cotton that was fully irrigated is very good to excellent.

Similarly, the quality of the cotton that missed its last couple of waters was still pleasing. Short, weak fibres are characteristic of the lint from the really thirsty crops. Colour was very good to excellent across the board. Considering the conditions, gin turn out were pleasing, averaged 40 per cent which included the cotton that was stripped.

The season was farewelled with a post-season meeting at the Golf Club on May 13. A number of researchers and industry representatives took the opportunity to present results from work carried out during the season. Presentations included results from resistance monitoring, pheromone traps, whitefly and disease surveys and Bollgard II, variety and defoliation trials.

A ginning summary also provided an overview of the quality and turnout considering the lack of water. Thank you to those who came along to share their findings. Surveys and case studies are being collected for a season review to compare yield and quality results across fields with different numbers of irrigations, variety and

planting configuration.

Rebecca Smith
May 15, 2003

Darling Downs

Rain has fallen over many areas of the Downs during the past few weeks. Some of the reported falls have been substantial, but generally too patchy and too late to benefit this season's cotton crop. Good news for the late sorghum crop with improved yields expected.

Many fields now have a profile of moisture and Downs growers in several districts who missed out on a summer crop now have real prospects for a winter plant. Growers on the southern Downs generally have received less rain than their northern Downs counterparts. Regrettably, there are some areas that again missed the rain.

After a very dry growing season, growers' frustration continues as the rains forced many into interrupted picking schedules.

Gins report approximately 80 per cent of this season's cotton crop has been picked, and ginning is progressing well. Queensland Cotton is operating one shift only at its gins at Dalby and Cecil Plains, due to the size of the crop this season.

Lint quality is reported to be better than expected, but cotton from crops that cut out early has received downgrades from high mic and short staple. Some colour downgrades have also occurred due to the rain, but so far this has been minimal.

Yields have been variable and generally have reflected the irrigation water available to individual growers.

Insect problems in cotton over the past season has been light, but the recent rains brought another problem for many districts. Armyworms have caused substantial damage to pastures and young oat crops, particularly in the northern and western districts of the region. While the immediate threat may have passed, all growers and graziers intent on planting winter crops are urged to monitor their seedling crops and

pastures in the coming weeks.

While there is an air of optimism for the winter crop prospects among growers on the Darling Downs for 2003, real industry concerns remain for the prospects for the 2003–04 cotton crop. Rains again failed to fall in the catchment areas of the water storages. Without substantial inflows to our storages, only a minimal area of cotton will be grown next season.

Greg Salmond
May 19, 2003

Macintyre

With a below average rainfall year, and lower than average on-farm water allocation, crop water management has been challenging for everyone this year. It is estimated that there were 28,000 hectares of irrigated cotton planted in the 2002–03 season.

While the armyworms caused some damage to crop stands early in the season, *Helicoverpa* pressure was generally quite low and *Helicoverpa* eggs were extremely difficult to find for resistance monitoring. Levels of parasitism remained high throughout the season, helped by the use of soft options season long.

The average number of *Helicoverpa* sprays in the conventional cotton this year was six, while in Ingard it ranged from zero to two. There were some high jassid numbers later in the season that required spraying, although most secondary pest sprays were for mirids and aphids (ranging from zero to two sprays).

Yield and quality this season has been directly influenced by moisture. The average number of in-crop irrigations across the valley was five, and these crops yielded 2.8–3.5 bales per acre. Those crops that received only two to four in-crop irrigations averaged 1.5–3.0 bales per acre, while fully watered cotton had a yield range of 3.5 to 4.5 bales per acre.

Ginning is approximately 50 per cent completed in the Macintyre Valley. Much of the cotton this season that was picked before the rain has shown exceptional colour and leaf quality and

has classed good and strict middling, while that picked post rain is still holding up at base grade. There has been some short staple and high micronaire cotton around, and this seems to be directly related to water management and weather conditions. Turnouts have been in the range of 38–42 per cent depending on variety.

Water is obviously a major concern for all growers as storage dam levels are very low as is stored soil moisture. Some oats have gone in and wheat is also being planted but we desperately need widespread rain if we are to get a successful winter crop and to capture some water in the dams for next season.

Anne Sullivan
May 8, 2003

Gwydir

The Gwydir valley cotton season has had a very surprising finish following a very difficult season. Water has been the main determinant of yield but yields have generally been better than expected given the water available. Yields have ranged from 0.5 to over 5.5 bales per acre. Turnouts have varied with variety but have generally been excellent — averaging 40 per cent or better.

Fibre quality has also generally been a bit better than expected with the majority of the Gwydir valley crop achieving base grade or better. There has been some incidence of short staple in water stressed crops and some high micronaire but not as much as previous years. Crops harvested post rain have had some other quality issues. The ginning season will finish up earlier than usual due to a reduced cotton area. The majority of ginning should be completed by the end of June.

The 2002–03 Gwydir valley cotton season commenced with about 50 per cent of the area normally planted due to limited available water. Dry conditions in the months leading up to planting meant that pre-irrigation and watering up required more water than usual, putting more pressure on already tight water supplies and in some cases planted areas were cut back further.

There was very little in-crop rainfall to assist growers but patchy rain events occurred just in

time to interrupt picking. Water is still the major issue for growers in the Gwydir valley as large falls of rain are required to ensure there is a crop next season.

Early season infestations of armyworm caused some damage to plant stand and required control in the majority of cases. Helicoverpa pressure was again low this season and secondary pests more of a problem. Mirid and jassid numbers were also high again this season. There were few problems with aphids and mites this season.

Julie O'Halloran
Mary 16, 2003

Lower Namoi

Picking of the 2003 crop is now complete as we gaze up to sky hoping for significant rain. Although the district has received very useful rain, particularly in the east, major storage dams have only had minor inflows. Some local water has been harvested by irrigators for next season.

The lower Namoi has experienced a season of variable yields. Where water has been restricted, yields are well down on average but fully watered crops have achieved very high yields. The lower Namoi should average about 2.9 bales per acre with some individual fields exceeding five bales per acre. Overall lint percentages have been a surprise. Some very high turnouts have been recorded and all turnouts are well above normal. One gin run of over 31 Sicot 71 modules has exceeded 45 per cent turnout.

Most crops in the Namoi have been graded base or above but high micronaire has been a problem for some growers. Fibre length in general has been shorter this season and some growers have received penalties, even where the crops were fully watered. Later picked crops have experienced some downgrading due to weather damage

Both Ingard, and conventional fields have performed well in terms of yield as a result of the low insect pressure. Trial areas and seed increase of the new Bollgard varieties have in most cases performed well and will be available

for all growers to try in the 2003 planting season.

Water supplies for the coming season are the tightest seen for a long time. A very wet winter will be required to enable anything like a normal planted area. Most growers have prepared country but many have left out nitrogen inputs until water supplies have firmed up. At this stage only about 25–30,000 hectares of irrigated cotton will be planted in the lower Namoi. Dryland production is expected to increase dramatically following drought restricted plantings last year.

A high Aussie dollar is now impacting on the lint price and water uncertainties mean that few growers were able to capitalise in the good prices on offer a few months ago. If anyone knows a good rain dance now is the time to do it!

Robert Eveleigh
May 25, 2003

Macquarie

The season finished up reasonably well this year. Some rain delays caused headaches at picking but generally the moisture was welcomed for the sake of winter crops.

Insect pressure was light at the end of the season. Many growers were lucky enough to need no bug sprays in Stage 3.

Picking started early, especially in the north of the valley. Some people were finished before the end of March.

Soil tilth has been good for winter crop preparation and pupae busting. Good rain has fallen in many areas around the valley although it has been patchy. Recent light falls will have helped winter crop germination.

Unfortunately there have still not been good rains in the Burrendong catchment. At eight per cent full we will need a very wet winter up there to make summer down here look promising.

Although ginning is not yet complete, a yield estimate can be made. Just under 243,000 bales

should be produced from the Macquarie crop. This gives an average yield of 7.96 bales per hectare (3.22 bales per acre).

This is an exceptional result given the limited water this season.

Kirrily Rourke
May 23, 2003

Southern NSW

The season finished with some mild conditions which was a welcome relief from the extremely high temperatures mid season. Day degrees for March totalled 290, which is slightly below the long term average of 326. From October to March the day degree's totalled 2187, compared to an average of 2000. Of interest is the number of hot shock days (52) which is well above the average of 38 for the same period, while cold shock days were similar with 35 compared to 38.

The defoliation process went well on the majority of fields but problems were reported on those fields that had severe water stress during and at the end of the season. Stripping commenced in late March on UNR fields and spindle pickers started in the second week of April. At present picking would be 85 per cent completed and expect completion by the end of the month, depending on the weather.

Yields to date have been variable, ranging from two to 11 bales per hectare. Farm and field performance is dependent on the water situation that growers were under. The biggest impact on performance this season has been water — both total supply and delivery. Where irrigation intervals have been stretched due to delivery issues these fields have prematurely cutout and have not received the normal number of in-crop irrigations. Average yields for the Lachlan valley is difficult to predict given the large variation, but expect it to be between 6–6.5 bales per hectare.

During April a demonstration day on narrow row harvesting was held at Hillston looking at the 15 inch system running on a John Deere picker. Good attendance was reported and plenty of interest from surrounding areas.

Matthew Mitchell
May 19, 2003