

Central Highlands

It's a new financial year and a new water year as everybody starts looking ahead to the 2005-06 cotton season. Recent rainfall events in Central Queensland have produced a total of 200 mm in some areas since the beginning of May.

Believe it or not some of this has actually run off and ended up in Fairbairn Dam. Sunwater has changed the last announced allocation from 25 per cent up to 40 per cent. Carryover estimations are still the same as before, which means most growers will only have 50 per cent of their carryover water left.

This could mean a slight improvement in the area available for irrigated cotton this season from 50 per cent to possibly 70 per cent, especially if some of the water left over from the citrus orchards gets put on the market at a reasonable price.

The rainfall that has fallen this winter is possibly the best start to a winter season in 10 years. Most irrigated wheat or chickpea crops have not been watered at all. Fallow soil profiles should be close to full once planting comes round which is in stark contrast to last season when farmers were using up to 2.5 ML per hectare to fill the soil profile before planting.

There has been a change to the planting date of Bollgard II cotton for the Central Highlands. A general vote was taken at the beginning of June by all growers and a majority has ruled, that for the 2005-06 season, the six week window will start on October 3 and finish on November 13. This effectively moves the planting date forward by two weeks. The CHCG&IA have recommended that December 31 will be the final planting date for all conventional varieties.

Both the CSD and Deltapine information tours came through last month with both meetings being well attended. The new transgenic varieties coming on board this year have shown some promise and will be well tested this season.

General feeling is that the area of Bollgard planted this coming season will be similar to last year with a split of about 70 per cent BGII and 30 per cent conventional. From this year's ginning results it would seem that conventional varieties still have a yield advantage over BGII, but the positive aspects of insect control in BGII have certainly won over a lot of growers.

The CHCG&IA held its annual Cotton Grower Awards Dinner on Saturday, July 23.

Ending on a sad note, the cotton industry

in Central Queensland lost one of its most talented people on June 28 when Ian Mackay of Spackman and Mackay Consulting passed away at the age of 43. Ian's passing will leave an enormous hole in the crop consultant ranks in Central Queensland and he will be sadly missed by his many friends and family.

Doug Sands
July 21, 2005

Dawson Callide

Falls of up to 200 mm across the Dawson and Callide valleys during June have changed the fortunes for most growers within the region with the various storages along the Dawson River being filled to capacity. In-field rainfall will also assist for the first time in many winter seasons with the break down of residual cotton stubble and soil clods. With the continuing cooler conditions and occasional patch of showery weather, growers will be looking for a few dry weeks to enable fields to be worked for the coming season.

People are in the process of selecting varieties for next season with indications that Bollgard II varieties will be strongly favoured in comparison to conventional types. The regional crop percentage grown to Bollgard II varieties is again likely to be well in excess of 85 per cent of area for the coming 05-06 season. Fibre quality and yields are playing a significant part in the decision making process for varietal selection. This was evident by the interest shown at both the recent CSD and Deltapine road shows earlier in June.

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With soil moisture levels nearing capacity in most fields and storages along the Dawson overflowing, it is likely that the full area (about 6000 hectares) will be planted in the coming season. What a difference compared to two months ago.

Paul Grundy
July 25, 2005

Darling Downs

Recent rains across much of the Downs have renewed hope for many of the district's producers for a winter crop this season. Unfortunately our region has not received the high falls recorded in areas to the west and south. Soil moisture levels in last season's sorghum ground is now down to about 30 cm with last winter's fallow ground around twice that depth.

It was also disappointing that our dam catchments missed the rains — rains that would have improved our irrigation supplies for cotton crop prospects next summer.

With much of the Darling Downs region still officially drought declared, further falls of rain will be needed to ensure a cereal harvest come November, and to replenish soil moisture profiles to lift prospects for the summer crop in 2005-06. Some members of the agribusiness community reckon another six inches is needed.

Pastures across the district now exhibit a flush of winter herbage but low soil moisture levels over the summer did not enable the vigorous growth of pasture species for a winter carryover for on-farm feed supplies. With the return of a good seasonal prospect for our western counterparts, available cattle numbers for restockers and feedlotter here on the Downs have now dwindled, with prices now on the rise.

The recent rains have enabled substantial areas of winter crop to be planted. But this past couple of weeks has seen spray rigs operating in many areas controlling

the green flush of fallow and in-crop weeds. Recent frosts have seen the bulk of summer weed species reduced. To date no reports of drift have been reported — a positive start to the season so far, but care and caution is urged by all to ensure drift problems don't eventuate. With the late planting of the district's crop there is concern that either late frosts or hot conditions in October may also have negative impacts on yields.

It has been great to hear of the good falls in other areas since the last Downs report, so surely before we prepare another report for the next issue of the *Cottongrower*, we can expect a change in our region's weather fortunes. Here's hoping!

Greg Salmond
July 19, 2005

Macquarie Valley

Soil moisture levels have improved since the last Macquarie report with good widespread rain received in June and also July. Burrendong Dam is currently at 16 per cent and the catchment areas are primed for some substantial runoff events. Winter crops have been planted in large areas to utilise these good soil moisture levels.

Growers are able to access last season's carryover water, which will allow some to water winter crops or establish cotton in the spring.

There has been ample discussion about the excellent yields and fibre quality grades achieved by many growers and the pressure is now on to continue next season with even better crops. There are many fallow fields available for cotton in the coming year and questions have been raised about possible long fallow disorders. If the Bourke experience of planting cotton on forced long fallow fields of over 36 months is any indication, there should not be any problems in the Macquarie.

When the current low allocation is increased with good inflows into Burrendong Dam there will be many growers who have not grown Bollgard II cotton and the associated new cotton varieties planting it for the first time. There will be a steep learning curve this season with growing this new technology. Indications are that the percentage areas of BGII and Roundup Ready may increase again given the good performance last season.

Weed control in fallows will now be a major activity to try to conserve moisture levels leading up to planting cotton for the 2005-06 season.

Craig McDonald
July 25, 2005

Lower Namoi Valley

What a contrast. We had the driest April-May period on record only to have one of the wettest winters for decades. Over 250 mm of rain fell around Narrabri over



a period of three weeks. We had a minor flood in the lower Namoi that allowed some off allocation pumping and on-farm water harvesting. Planting of winter crops has been delayed due to the dry then overly wet conditions. Several growers have flown wheat onto saturated fields in an attempt to establish winter crops. The weather in late July has stabilised but field conditions are still very wet.

Field preparation for this year's cotton crop is now at a standstill. Some preparation took place before the rain but it will now be well into August before any tillage can be contemplated. On-farm water supplies have improved with many growers holding full storages and full soil profiles. Unfortunately, Keepit and Split Rock dams have received only minor inflows at this stage, but the catchments are now wet and further rain will improve storage levels. Overall the water supply is reasonable and will allow near full planting. But the low prices currently on offer may lead to some shift to alternative crops, particularly corn.

Dryland areas are likely to increase as a result of some winter crop area being abandoned. But this will depend on the relative price of alternative crops. Most growers will keep their options open until planting time but a resurgence of interest in dryland cotton throughout the Namoi is likely over the next few years.

Last year the lower Namoi planted about 75 per cent of the area as BGII. Good yields were obtained from both conventional and BGII crops. So I expect about the same percentage of BGII will be planted in the Namoi this season. The percentage of Roundup Ready may well increase as the result of a better range of RR varieties becoming available.

A drive around most farm workshops makes it clear that planting time is not far away as planters receive a once over. It's certainly not long till planting time now.

Overall prospects for the 2005 season in the lower Namoi are good given the improved water situation. The drought may have waned but will not be completely gone until Keepit and Split Rock are full. Current low prices are the biggest issue for growers — let's hope they improve soon.

Robert Eveleigh
July 18, 2005

Gwydir Valley

A very dry start to the winter cropping season was followed by the wettest June on record. Conditions are still pretty wet in the field which is continuing to hinder winter crop planting. Planting will continue into early August to avoid locking into a summer crop rotation. Overall dryland cropping areas are down including cereals, canola, faba beans and chickpeas.

Winter croppers need to be vigilant with foliar diseases. Growers with faba beans should be looking out

for chocolate spot and rust while chickpea growers need to look out for *Ascochyta*.

Field preparation for the coming cotton season has also been hindered by the wet conditions. Most growers are still waiting for fields to dry out sufficiently to apply nitrogen. Weeds have also obviously been an issue following the rain. Growers have just started trying to get onto fields to control weeds in the past week or so.

Summer cropping prospects are looking good. The wet conditions will mean starting the summer cropping season with a full profile and have also added to on farm water supplies. There has been increased interest in sunflowers with many contracts written and increased interest in dryland cotton depending on what happens with the bale price between now and planting.

Julie O'Halloran
July 26, 2005

Macintyre Valley

Picking finished under clear blue skies in late April, early May, with good solid crops being consistently reported. It is always dangerous to speculate on valley averages, but indications are that the Macintyre looks like averaging in the high three bales per acre, into the low four bales per acre range. Regardless of where it actually finishes, it can only be termed an outstanding result. It too creates the challenge of repeating the effort, one I am sure the growers are up to in the future.

Since picking was finished, it seems as if it has not stopped raining. To date that has resulted in only limited pumping opportunities within the valley, but winter crops are in the ground and, generally speaking, looking good. It is fair to say the catchment soil profile is essentially full, and any decent rainfall events in July to September should run a pretty reasonable river.

Although Bec reported in the last issue that the season was wrapped up with the annual research review meeting, it was in fact finalised on Friday May 8 at the annual awards night for the Macintyre Valley Cotton Growers Association. We also extend our thanks to Bec Moore of Monsanto for her assistance as the guest judge for 2005.

The winner of the irrigated crop competition was the Donovan Family from 'Glentown', Toobeah with an outstanding crop of Sicot 289BR, with a ginned yield of 5.22 bales per acre. Second and third place went to David and Mary Evans, 'Sylvan Plains' and John and Liz Wood, 'Tarraba' respectively.

Winner of the dryland crop was Ben and Prue Coulton, 'Getta Getta', North Star, with a crop of Sicot 80B, with a ginned yield of 1.53 bales per acre. Second and third places went to Hugh and Jill Gloster, 'Rugby' and the Gurner family of 'Booroondo' respectively.

The 2005 Farm of The Year was awarded to 'Yam-

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bocully', managed by Tim and Jodie Napier. Second was 'Mundine', managed by Graeme and Gail Fisher, and third was awarded to 'Riverview' managed by Hamish Johnstone.

The Patricia Coulton Memorial Award for 2005 was awarded to Brian Riddle. This award recognises the 'unsung' heroes of the cotton industry in the MacIntyre Valley. Brian currently works for Chesterfields at Goondiwindi and has been actively involved keeping the wheels turning, literally, of the industry for the past 30 years.

The major award of the night was again the Services to The Industry Award. Last year's winner, Bruce McCollum, presented a very entertaining account of the times and achievements of the 2005 winner, Doug Scott. Doug is the current chairman of the MacIntyre Valley and CGA, and is a most deserved winner.

The real winner of the night was cancer research. Five 'foolish' men presented their heads for shaving via an auction. In total \$4200 was raised and now Alex Sullivan, Simon Corish, Phil Sloan, Michael Beeston and Miles McColl are paying the price in the cooler weather.

Looking forward, about 50-100 mm of rain particularly in the catchment in the next month would be not asking too much, a rally in the prices and then let's get on with the 2005-06 season.

Michael Beeston
July 14, 2005

ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

The tractor is a very rare Oliver Super 44 of 1957 vintage. It is powered by a 4 cylinder Continental petrol engine which is offset to the near side, thus providing the operator with an uninterrupted view of the work in hand.

This particular model of Oliver tractor is one of a handful in Australia and is owned by Darren Puls, who carried out its immaculate restoration. (Photo I.M.J. taken at The 2004 Rusty Iron Rally, Macksville, NSW).



Southern NSW

The big wet did arrive — June 11 to be precise — and the Hillston area received approximately 155 mm up till July 18. All picking was completed with some modules still to be delivered to the gin. Ginning is ongoing with some days lost due to the wet weather. Expect the majority to be completed by the end of August. Grades have maintained at base or better for the majority with some discounts noted for short staple.

Both seed companies have had their winter meetings with mixed attendance due to wet weather and water meetings. A meeting was held to discuss the IRMS, which was well attended and generated some good discussion and recommendations for TIMS to consider.

For those who punted with some dry sown wheat it has paid dividends and is progressing well. Some additional wheat area has gone in between showers and will continue to be planted for the remainder of the month to take advantage of the moisture.

Allocations for the Lachlan River have been set at zero per cent and ground water allocations will be 90 per cent for those irrigators with a high history of use.

Matt Mitchell
July 19, 2005

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