

Central Highlands

The early planted crops are being picked as this article is being written. It is a little early to tell how yields and quality are going to average out at this stage but first reports are confirming that yields are not going to be what they were last year — but they may not be as bad as first thought. Bale averages of high eight to low nine per hectare seem to be what the early crops are doing with module weights being quite heavy.

This is heartening news after a very inhospitable summer, but the early crop is only about 35 per cent of the area so the real test will be when the harvest starts of the early November plant. Initial results from the Dawson Callide would suggest that there may be some high micronaire issues for this year's crop.

Most growers will be trying to make the most of marketing this year's crop as Fairbairn Dam levels sink lower and lower. Currently the Dam is at 17 per cent and at this stage there is a zero announced allocation. Most growers would have used all their carry-over water for this year's crop so prospects for next year look to be limited.

A week of overcast weather and sporadic rain events has certainly caused some weather damage to this season's crop. Early crops that were already defoliated may not be affected as badly as the later planted crops that have open bolls lower down in the crop canopy. Boll rot is clearly evident and may cause losses of up to 15 per cent in these later crops. Some of this later cotton is still 10 days to two weeks off first defoliation.

Whitefly numbers have been hitting thresholds in most paddocks around the district. Control has been good to excellent with most of the area being sprayed with Admiral until supplies ran out. Thankfully there was only about 1000 hectares left to do when this happened. Applications of Pegasus and/or Intruder seemed to have been successful in cleaning up these later areas. A big thank-you to the CRDC and Bruce Pyke for being so quick to react to the situation and get an emergency permit for the use of Intruder from the APVMA.

Hopefully picking will be finished by the time the next issue comes out and we will have some positive yield and quality results to report.

Doug Sands
March 21, 2006

Dawson Callide

The majority of crops have already been picked with a mostly dry finish to the season. Whilst ginning has only recently gotten well underway, reports suggest

that yields have been good with many crops ranging between eight to 11 bales per hectare — a potential improvement on last season which also saw reasonable yields.

But early indications suggest that a proportion of this season's crop will fall outside of base grades for staple and micronaire. This is perhaps not all that surprising given that Theodore recorded its hottest season in the past 50 years with 73 days above 36°C. The resultant stress would have certainly impacted some crops more than others depending on variety, irrigation and soil type constraints.

The Integrated Area-Wide Management project that kicked off in the Central Highlands a few years ago has been expanded to the Dawson Valley this season. The project is lead by Ian Rankine and Bill Wilkinson, while Jeanie Conachan has been appointed as the Lower Dawson technical officer. The project aims to assist growers in measuring and improving water quality and on farm biodiversity. It has been long observed (but poorly recorded) that many on-farm storages play a significant role in providing alternative habitats for various bird species and macro-invertebrates. It is hoped that this project will better ascertain the contribution that these areas make in terms of providing habitat and that this value might be increased.

The Dawson Valley cotton growers association also held their annual community dinner at the Theodore Hotel on February 17. Mike Van Acker, a comedian from Brisbane and local musician Joe Maloney provided the entertainment for the evening. It was a great night and well supported by all organisations that are involved with the Dawson Valley cotton industry.

With picking soon drawing to a close, the entire area is in need of significant rainfall in the coming months to secure any sort of winter crop. Interestingly, storages throughout the Dawson River are currently filled to capacity thanks to rainfall in the upper catchments between Taroom and Miles, so the outlook for next season is reasonably positive.

Paul Grundy
March 20, 2006

St George Dirranbandi

Picking began in the Lower Balonne in the first week of March. The bulk of the picking will commence next week (early April). To date yields have been pleasing, ranging between 3.5–4.8 bales per acre.

A few crops have been ginned and a small set of quality results indicated that micronaire is high and fibre

is short. Although the length would have made base last season, the micronaire would not have. Therefore, as expected, the heat stress of this season may have been detrimental to quality.

The heat this season can be best demonstrated by the fact that the number of hot days (where temperatures exceeded 36°C) recorded at the St George Post Office reached 84, a new record, on February 24. So watering has been solid with some crops receiving up to 10 irrigations.

Heliopsis pressure has dropped away over the past month which is a welcome relief for those who have sprayed their conventional crops numerous times. This seems to be a pattern across the industry as the number of eggs being presented for resistance testing has dropped away dramatically since the middle of February. St George results have indicated that the heliopsis species composition has remained around the 50 per cent mark throughout the middle and late stages of the season. Consistent with the wider industry, resistance did not exceed two per cent which is no higher than that recorded in the previous season.

Secondary pests have been of concern reaching threshold at various stages in the season starting with mirids/beetles early season and mites through the middle stages. Aphids and whitefly have been of some concern currently with sprays being applied for both.

Low levels of Fusarium have been observed on fields which have experienced previous incidence. Steve Allen, Joe Kochman, Greg McNamara and Linda Swan conducted the late season disease survey in the last week of February and found Fusarium in every field sampled to some degree. Steve noted that incidence of Fusarium (1.5 per cent) and boll rot (11.5 per cent) on individual fields reached the highest levels ever recorded since the surveys began four seasons ago. Incidentally the first record of Phytophthora boll rot in the Australian cotton industry was at St George in 1985 with an incidence of 29 per cent.

Sarah Hood
March 21, 2006

districts that have missed those storms, sorghum crops have struggled and will fail to return costs or will not be harvested. Reported yields so far have indicated a wide range of results with common reports of three to five tonnes per hectare from the central and northern Downs areas. Some exceptional dryland sorghum crops have yielded better than 6.7 tonnes per hectare.

Early dryland cotton crops in northern Downs districts have been defoliated and picking has commenced. The area treated with defoliant will increase rapidly from now on as crops reach maturity.

The silverleaf whitefly threat has been a major concern since the last report, with DPI&F Biloela based Entomologist, Dr Paul Grundy, visiting the district to conduct training sessions with consultants and growers on the northern Downs. Samples sent to Dr Robin Gunning (NSW DPI Tamworth) have confirmed the presence of the pest. The situation is being closely monitored.

During the past two weeks over 70 growers, consultants and agribusiness personnel have inspected the 'Cowan' Fusarium wilt research trials site at Norwin. The extensive trials showcase the efforts into the development of resistant varieties, rotation options and disease management strategies. Picking of the trials is planned to commence after the Easter break.

DPI&F Cotton Catchment Communities CRC staff hosted officers from the Israel cotton industry on an official visit to this region in early March. Mr Igal Flash, Head of Field Crops Division, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development Extension Service, and Mr Gadi Forer, Chief Entomologist with the Israel Cotton Production and Marketing Board stated that they had been impressed with what they have seen of the Australian cotton industry, and the quality of product produced.

As another picking season starts many of this region's producers have expressed concerns regarding the lack of stored moisture in fallow soil profiles. Produce merchants report that seed stocks of winter cereals and forage have already sold quickly despite the present lack of on-farm soil moisture. With another winter season fast

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Darling Downs

Sorghum harvest on the Downs is in full swing with average to well above yields being reported. Irrigated yields of eight to 8.6 tonnes per hectare have been reported across a wide area of the region with some exceptional crops yet to be harvested.

Dryland growers have had to contend with mixed seasonal conditions with best results coming from growers lucky enough to have been under beneficial storm rains. Unfortunately in

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approaching, and our cotton picking yet to crank up to full steam again, we find the Darling Downs in a familiar dilemma — we need rain, lots of it, but not just yet!

Greg Salmond
March 21, 2006

Macintyre Valley

At the time of writing, picking in the west of the McIntyre Valley had just started. It is anticipated that by the end next week, most of the earlier crop will be defoliated. Later crops that have grown a top crop are in the process of receiving, or have just received their last irrigation. Crop development has been steady over the past couple of weeks and although defoliation is generally going well, boll opening has been quite slow. Following a fairly torrid season, late season insect pressure has been relatively light.

Generally speaking, crops vary from being “as good as last year” to pretty ordinary. Although comments have been made in regards to the small boll size, seeds per lock appear to be pretty good. Early picking results have confirmed the high micronaire concerns following the extreme and prolonged heat during the season.

The Macintyre Valley Field Day Committee had another very successful field day at the end of February. Approximately 180 people made it to the day which revolved around a trip to Mundine. With precision ag the topic, field day goers went ‘Mac to the Future’ with guest speakers talking about precision irrigation, spray application and the practicalities of precision ag. The committee thanks the Corish Family for hosting us and the speakers for making the day interesting and informative.

Rebecca Smith
March 22, 2006



Gwydir Valley

Insect pressure has been low during the later part of the season. There is a wide range in the maturity of crops. Picking of early crops commenced in early March. Others are underway with defoliation. There are still some crops that are a couple of weeks or more from the first application of defoliation, having just finished the last irrigation. Defoliation has been a bit slow over the past couple of weeks with leaf not coming off as fast as would be expected. Cloudy weather over the past few days will not have helped.

The Gwydir Valley Cotton Field Day was held in early March. There were a number of speakers on the day. Mike Murray from the Gwydir Valley Irrigators Association provided an update on groundwater entitlements, general security regulated water and supplementary flow events. Dr Mike Bange from CSIRO discussed the impacts of heat stress on cotton. Stuart Addison from Monsanto Australia discussed Bollgard II and the high temperatures and insect pressure of the season. Will Kirkby, Gwydir valley cotton grower, discussed the management of his pima field this season.

Judging for the Gwydir Valley Cotton Crop Competition was completed in mid March. There was both an irrigated and dryland crop competition and final results will be announced once ginned yields have been received.

Julie O'Halloran
March 24, 2006

Namoi Valley

Late season conditions have been excellent with temperatures near perfect to finish off crops. Some rain and high humidity was experienced during February and this did cause some boll rot. Conditions are now very dry and hot and are great for defoliation and picking.

Defoliation is well under way with the majority of crops expected to be ready for picking in early to mid April. Many crops have put on a good top crop and growers are letting this mature to boost yields. Some crops have up to 50 large green bolls per metre sitting on the terminal. This has caused crops to lean or partially lodge but has certainly improved yield prospects.

Yields from a few early picked crops have been a little disappointing but overall irrigated yields should be above average. I don't think the five bale crops are out there this year. A few later planted fields might get close but a valley average in the high three bale range is more likely.

Dryland crops are a mixed bag. Some crops that missed out on substantial summer rain have been picked with very low yields — 0.4 to 0.8 bales per acre are common. Other crops have grown on following the

rain in February and should now make very good yields. Picking for these crops will not be until late April. Defoliation of dryland crops has been difficult. In some cases three applications have been required.

Late season heliothis pressure has been light but difficult to control. A few aphid and mites have required control in isolated areas. Green vegetable bug numbers have continued to increase late season.

Bollgard worked well but in some cases was sprayed for heliothis when high pressure was experienced in January. Conventional crops were difficult and expensive to manage during this period. Most conventional crops will be among the last to pick as a result of heliothis damage.

Verticillium is evident in continuous cotton fields but there are still no confirmed Fusarium cases in the lower Namoi.

Water supplies for next season are only fair at this stage with both Keepit dam and Split rock at low levels. Surface allocations are likely to be in less than 30 per cent without significant winter rainfall.

As picking gets into full swing lets hope for fine weather for the next few months and more improvements in the price before ginning.

**Robert Eveleigh
March 21, 2006**

Macquarie Valley

As at March 20, picking has commenced in the lower Macquarie but it is too early to determine yields or fibre quality. Some earlier crops have already been picked but they are not indicative of the bulk of the area planted. This is around seven to 10 days ahead of average. Continuing warm and dry weather has been ideal for defoliation and to allow later planted crops to finish well. Given continuing warm weather, picking will be in full swing over the next few weeks.

It has been a very warm and dry summer for the Macquarie Valley and at one stage, day degrees were

almost four weeks ahead of average. The intense heat appeared to have had a reverse effect by delaying maturity due to high stress levels and shedding of fruit in many crops.

Watering of crops continued right up to the commencement of defoliation in order to finish off later fruit. The availability of water to be able to do this made the last watering decision easier. Many crops have had a record number of irrigations. There was a lot of pressure on irrigation systems and staff to get water onto crops quickly during the heat waves.

Auscott Ltd Warren and Cotton Seed Distributors Ltd held a very successful grower field day in late February. Many agronomic areas were covered including: row spacing trials, plant population, new varieties, nitrogen rates and managing the Sicot 71 family. A barbeque dinner followed at Chris and Gill Hogendyk's and a good time was had by all.

With a dry and early pick underway, planning has commenced for next season. Burrendong Dam is holding above 30 per cent of capacity. With carryover water and some reasonable winter inflows, there may be a reasonable allocation going into planting later this year. Many growers who have not planted cotton over the past three to four years will hopefully come on line again. A lot has changed over the past few seasons with new varieties, Bollgard II and now Roundup Ready Flex approved for release.

There was some 'Super Single' cotton grown in the Trangie region. Early indications are that it has shown acceptable yields in a non-traditional dryland area. The record low water allocations have forced growers and advisers to look outside the square and try new methods.

Fingers are now crossed for a dry cotton pick followed by good rains to allow winter crop planting followed by a wet winter with plenty of runoff in the catchment areas. We live in hope!

**Craig McDonald
March 20, 2006**

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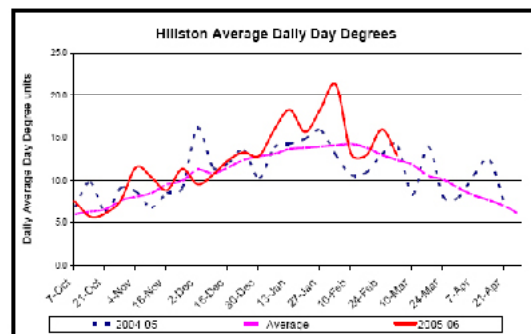
The extremely warm summer has continued well into February with a rapid accumulation of day degrees. This is well illustrated in the graph (Figure 1) which shows the peak in January. This season tracked well in front of last year and the long-term average. What is interesting to note, though, is the number of hot shock days (55), compared to the average of 35 for the same time period.

The persistent hot weather during January produced excessive shedding and boll cavitation, with the extent of this depending on soil moisture and soil type. The net result has produced fruit numbers similar or even slightly better than last season though as crops were carrying a large fruit load beforehand. Boll weight may be the next issue for those fruit that developed during the hot period.

Final crop irrigations have been completed and a few growers have commenced defoliation with the majority to start at the end of the month. Will have some pickers rolling in the first week of April, depending on the weather!

Water-use has been higher than normal as a result of the high evaporation rates and very low rainfall. Insect pressure has been very low in the second half of the

FIGURE 1: Hillston average day degrees



season for both Bollgard and conventional. Some mite control was required and aphid numbers are increasing at present.

This year's field day was held last week with a focus on the Murrumbidgee region and new growers. It was a very successful day with over 70 people attending. Well done to those on the committee for organising the day. Also, the judging of the crop competition has been completed with final yield and quality information to be added to complete the process.

Matt Mitchell
March, 2006

ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

It is a 1937 Co-Op manufactured in Battle Creek, Michigan, by the Duplex Co, for the Farmer's Union Central Exchange Co-Operative of St Pauls, Minnesota. This excellent tractor was powered by a Chrysler 201 cubic inches six cylinder petrol engine. The tractor pictured is owned by Jack Cochran of Indiana, USA. (Photo IMJ).



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