

## Central Highlands

We are near the middle of our Bollgard planting window (September 15 to October 31) and most of the crop is already planted. Current estimates are still putting this year's crop at about 3000 hectares which is about 12–15 per cent of a normal planting.

A number of growers have decided to plant spring sorghum into their fallow fields rather than cotton as they have limited water resources and forward contracts for sorghum are approaching \$300 per tonne on farm. These prices for sorghum are record makers and have never been seen in CQ before. Although the cotton price has also improved remarkably, the production risk is just too great when water is so short. Another deciding factor is that from an overall farm perspective you can grow double the area of sorghum to cotton for the same amount of water.

A large number of irrigated paddocks have chickpeas and wheat in them and these crops will start being harvested within the next seven to 10 days. Astronomical wheat prices should give growers a good return on the water they used on the winter crop.

The Fairbairn dam has moved down to 17 per cent which is almost the same as this time last year. If there are no inflows by Christmas, then channel irrigators will find it difficult to get any water actually delivered. By the end of January most of the irrigating out of the dam will come to a grinding halt.

This season will prove once again to be very difficult for those businesses depending on cotton production such as ginners, consultants and picker contractors. Hopefully we will have some rain to talk about by the time the next issue comes around.

**Doug Sands**  
October 4, 2007

## Dawson Callide

At the time of writing many growers have one eye to the sky and the other on finishing chickpea crops. With the high price of chickpeas and the large amount of fallow land available after what was one of the Dawson's smallest cotton crops, many growers took advantage of the water that was left after a late inflow during February to grow a winter crop.

At this point in time the crops are variable with some looking excellent whilst others have been affected by some heavy frosts during July. Many are hoping for high yields which will go some way to offsetting some of the cotton that was abandoned in January. Others are now wishing that they had sown wheat with the way prices have headed north over the last month.

As we approach spring, there is significant uncertainty facing the prospects for the 200–08 Dawson crop. The area at this stage is likely to be well down from previous years due to water limitations. Best guesses at this stage suggest that there may only be a couple of thousand hectares of cotton in total. But the region is a unique catchment compared to most in the industry and it will only take several inches in the right place over the next month for fortunes to change considerably. The recent improvement in bale price has been welcomed by growers, all we need now is some runoff.

This will be my last report for the Dawson as my family and I have just related to the Burdekin region to commence an R&D project that aims to determine the sustainability of cotton production in this new area. I will take this opportunity to thank all of the Dawson and Callide growers that have accommodated our research program over the past seven years and made us feel so welcome within the local community.

**Paul Grundy**  
September 27, 2007

## St George Dirranbandi

Well as with every situation there is the good news and then there is the bad news. The good news is it would appear that the number of acres to be grown in St George has increased, in fact one could say doubled since my last report. That is, hectares have increased from 140 to approximately 300. The bad news is this will be the smallest planting since cotton was first grown in the area in 1970. Also unfortunately the Dirranbandi area is still looking at zero hectares for this season.

The small inflow mentioned in the previous report has resulted in the small increase in area being planted to cotton, though most growers have used the water to finish off wheat, chickpeas and hay crops. Currently there are some fields being planted to sorghum which will have varying numbers of in crop irrigations.

So as to allow for the maximum time possible for planting, both the Dirranbandi and St George Grower Associations have applied and had approved a change to the dates of the Bollgard II planting window. The beginning date for the window has now been changed to October 15 finishing on November 26 for both areas. In this way leaving as much time as possible for a late flow in the system.

Otherwise as with a lot of valleys very little is occurring in the area with everybody looking towards the sky for some sort of relief. But I did hear that a couple of local agronomists may be trying to work out a roster so that each of them may be able to get to the coast during the summer

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which would be a nice first for any cotton agronomist.

Another positive to come out of the tight water situation is that with possibly only three growers planting cotton at least all of them should be assured a place in the local Cotton Growers Awards next year. Righto, I now realise that I am really scraping the bottom of the barrel for positives and should probably wind the report up.

Once again all the best till the next report and here's still hoping for those huge floods!

**Dallas King**  
**September 27, 2007**

## **Border Rivers**

Generally, agricultural commodity prices are looking very respectable for the farming sector. A good rainfall event will see growers put in a diversified range of summer crops depending on the timing of the ever anticipated big fall.

Growers have prepared fields in anticipation of a limited water year. Some growers have adapted two metre beds in conjunction with pulling up lower hills, with a slight dish in the centre of the hill. This idea has been implemented to improve infiltration and to increase the soil moisture in the plant line. The two metre bed system also enables the adaptation of the planting configuration ready for what the season presents aiming to give the seedling every opportunity to establish a successful plant in limited water conditions. In dry years like this one, it is important to have good soil tilth and well prepared seedbed which growers have achieved utilising equipment such as the culti-packer.

The estimated cotton area to be planted in the Macintyre Valley this season will vary and is largely dependent on the timing of the planting rain. Early predictions are in the vicinity of 5000–8000 hectares. Minimal cotton acreage is allocated in the Mungindi area unless substantial rain falls soon. Some growers with enough water for one or two irrigations have planted early sorghum to take advantage of record high prices.

In the presence of a slowly improving climatic background with ocean temperatures rising as we move into what are historically relatively dry months, the improved climatic background will most likely not have an immediate effect. A possible break in the weather may be seen towards mid-end of October to November. Weather forecasters are also predicting above average temperatures this summer season.

“Just add water” — this catch phrase couldn't be better suited to the scenario that the cotton industry is presented with today. Commodity pricing prospects are promising as growers eagerly wait with optimism for the opportunity to kick start the season with a solid planting rain.

**Rod Gordon**  
**September 26, 2007**

## **Darling Downs**

The Darling Downs Cotton Awards Dinner was held on September 7 at the Jondaryan Woolshed. The night was a huge success with an impressive attendance despite the tough times. Congratulations to all the award winners and a big thank you to the crop judges and the organising committee who made the awards night such a success.

The Darling Downs Cotton Grower of the Year was awarded to Ian and Dan Hayllor. The Hayllor family run a very productive enterprise and were early pioneers in implementing the cotton industry BMP program. Their contribution to the industry through innovation and assistance with field trials and field days make them worthy winners of this award.

The Highly Commended Cotton Grower of the year was awarded to Philip and Mitchell Clapham. The Clapham family run a successful mixed cropping farm near Brookstead where they grow irrigated cotton under lateral move irrigators with up to 30 per cent savings in water.

The Service to Industry award was won by Glenn Fresser. Glenn is truly an unsung hero of the cotton industry on the Darling Downs with his active involvement with many organisations including CRDC of which he is the only grower board member.

Young Achiever of the Year was awarded to Daniel Skerman for his great commitment to the young farmers group on the Downs and his involvement with water use efficiency.

The crop yield competition was again hotly contested with the prize for the highest irrigated crop yield awarded to Stuart Armitage with a yield of 13.48 bales per hectare. The highest yield for dryland cotton was awarded to Graham Butler with a yield of 3.29 bales per hectare.

The Darling Downs Cotton Growers Inc. held their Annual General Meeting on September 19. After two years of hard work, John Cameron has stepped down as president but remains on the board as vice president. John is also taking on the role of ACGRA representative for the Darling Downs following the resignation of Harley Bligh. The new president of the Darling Downs Cotton Growers Inc is Greg Bender.

The Downs has experienced an unusually wet winter which has resulted in a significant weed population. Many of these weeds are good hosts for insect pests as well as some diseases and the removal of these hosts will be an important aspect in pest control for cotton crops. The planting window for the Darling Downs is from October 15 to November 26.

Despite the reasonable winter rains, storages remain dry. New water restrictions for the Condamine Catchment come into effect from October 1, 2007 with groundwater in most areas restricted between 50–80 per cent of normal entitlements. Surface water restric-

tions are also in place with a number of creeks subject to a total ban. The current moratorium prevents the construction of new works. There is no limitation on overland flow but, then again, no rain to produce overland flow.

**Kate Charleston**  
September 27, 2007

## Namoi Valley

The wet conditions of early spring have dried up and without rain in the next few days many of the winter crops that looked so good in August will not make harvest. Prospects for this year's cotton crop have also declined further. As scarce water is used to finish winter crops and grow other high value summer grains such as sorghum, less water is available for cotton. At this stage I expect only about 10,000 hectares of irrigated cotton will be planted in the Lower Namoi. Only a very significant rainfall event will increase the planted area and although we have until mid November the prospects are grim.

While the majority of cotton crops will be planted during early mid October several farms have completed planting and I know of at least one crop that had emerged by late September. Some fields that have been pre-irrigated in the western half of the valley have used staggering amounts of precious irrigation water. This will limit the amount of water available in crop and high yields will depend on good in crop rainfall.

Moderate early season heliothis pressure has been experienced on winter legume crops but the continued very dry conditions should see lower heliothis numbers again this season.

Moths appear to be mostly native budworm and have been readily controlled with SPs. As the majority of the cotton crop will be planted to Bollgard, heliothis should not be a concern for cotton growers in the Lower Namoi.

Dryland fallows have only half full profiles and dryland cotton prospects are the worst for many years. At least 150 mm of rain is required before growers can plant with confidence. High prices for other summer crops such as sorghum, sunflowers and mung beans will limit the amount of dryland cotton planted even if it does rain.

The water supply situation remains terrible, with Keepit and Split Rock dams virtually empty. All irrigated crops in the Namoi are being grown with ground water supplies that continue to be cut back each season. High diesel prices make ground water extraction very expensive.

Cotton prices on offer this season have improved despite the very high Aussie dollar. Cotton seed prices are also very good but returns from other crops continue to surge. Until the fundamental difference in cotton profit-

ability compared to grains returns, irrigators and dryland farmers will grow more grain.

Another summer without heavy rainfall will be a disaster for the Lower Namoi.

**Robert Eveleigh**  
September 30, 2007

## Macquarie Valley

The forecast rain did not arrive for late winter and early spring, which has been devastating for winter crop production. Many crops have been grazed or cut for hay and some will go through to harvest with dramatic reductions in potential compared to only a month ago.

Irrigators with bore water are busily irrigating winter crops to try to capitalise on record high prices for commodities. These high grain prices are impacting on the planned cotton areas with the area being reduced due to demand on available water for finishing winter crops and planting of summer grain crops.

September had one of the lowest ever rainfall recordings with most areas receiving nothing. Burrendong dam hovers around 13 per cent of capacity. It will need to go to at least 20 per cent+ to even trigger increases in high security and stock and domestic allowances. We need rain in "biblical proportions" as has been quoted in recent media reports. As a consequence of no general security water and winter crop watering we could see the cotton area in the Macquarie less than 5000 hectares, barely 10 per cent of potential.

There was very good attendance of the book launch at 'Burrima' in the Macquarie Marshes recently. The book by Gillian Hogendyk called *Macquarie Marshes* – an ecological history, was launched by Don Burke,

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**Chris Hogendyk leading a group through 'Burrima' in the Macquarie Marshes north of Warren.**

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(Burkes Backyard) Chairman of the Australian Environment Foundation in front of more than 120 people.

We still have time for rain in order to get cotton planted. This will need to be soon and over a large area to be of any benefit to farmers and in fact the whole community.

**Craig McDonald**  
October 4, 2007

## Southern NSW

The area for the 2007–08 cotton crop is going to be approximately 3300 hectares for the Lachlan and the Murrumbidgee. The exact area will not be known until mid October as water that was destined for cotton is now being used on thirsty wheat crops. This year the high value of the wheat has made it a priority to irrigate. In addition the wheat is taking longer to irrigate than normal therefore the cotton has to be watered when it suits the cereal rotation. Cotton is also competing directly with high valued maize and vegetable crops.

All of the water will be supplied by bores as there is no river allocation on either river system. The Lachlan growers in terms of river water only have 10 per cent of the previous season's carry over. The Murrumbidgee growers received five per cent as carry over for water

that was taken away from them last season yet most of this water will be sold to permanent planting operations. The Lachlan growers bore allocation will be similar to last year when they were reduced under the drought contingency plan.

Cotton planting started as early as September 21 and most crops will be planted by the end of the first week in October. Planting conditions have been quite good yet it is still far too early to comment. The majority of the crops in the area have been watered up yet some area has been pre irrigated with crops being sown into moisture. Whilst area is down there is still a lot of enthusiasm from potential new growers for when there is water back in the system.

**James Hill**  
September 27, 2007

## ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

The tractor is a Moline Universal (in the days prior to the advent of Minneapolis Moline). Quite remarkably, for a 1919 tractor, it had a key ignition electric starter, electric lights and an electric governor. This excellent example is owned by classic tractor collector Mal Cameron. (Photo IMU)



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