

Central Highlands

How quickly things can change. Having started the season with very little water in the Fairbairn, it is amazing to think that it could go from 36 per cent to over the spill way in three days, and reach 15.35 metres at the Nogoia.

The flood damage in some areas is quite devastating. It will be a little while before we have a clear picture of what crops have been lost, but early estimates are that about 20 per cent of the 3300 hectare cotton crop have been completely destroyed, with around another 10 to 20 per cent damaged significantly. As the remaining cotton crop was at cut out when the rain hit, most have avoided large losses due to boll rot. There were also large areas of spring sorghum and maize ready to harvest, and early calculations indicate that losses in yield due to rain and flooding are well into the millions.

Perhaps more devastating is the damage to farm infrastructure, equipment and loss of valuable top soil. One farm alone estimates a loss of 20,000 cubic metres of top soil. For a couple of irrigators, it may be 12 months before they can get their next crop in the ground.

Before the rain, heliothis pressure was quite high, while white fly numbers have generally been low throughout the season. The majority of crops have open cotton now, and for those who are high and dry, the first defoliations will probably start next week.

Tobacco Streak Virus (TSV) has been confirmed in several cotton crops within the irrigation area of Emerald. TSV was identified in 2006 as the cause of severe dieback seen in sunflower crops in the Central Highlands in recent years. Additionally in the 2006-07 summer, many mungbean crops were also affected by TSV with impacts on yield ranging from minor to severe. The potential impact of TSV to cotton in Australia has not been established, but it is currently thought that TSV is unlikely to cause significant disease or losses in CQ. Disease risk most likely increases with proximity to significant parthenium weed populations.

Susan Maas
January 30, 2008

St George Dirranbandi

As they say 'when it rains it pours' or at least it has been for the past two months. In the second week of December St George had just over 200 mm of rain, more rain than we had had for the first nine months of the year.

Since my previous report at the end of November, Beardmore Dam has filled and spilled, allowing for river irrigators between St George and Hebel to start flood harvesting. The flow lasted around two weeks with the majority of growers half filling storages. Since then we have just had another flood harvesting event for the past 10 days, meaning that most irrigators will be 70-100 per cent full while larger corporate farms may be close to 30-40 per cent full. All in all it's great for the growers and communities to be able to focus on a decent production area for the 2008-09 season.

Although there had been a rush to plant more cotton we have only ended up with 3300 hectares in the St George area while growers in the area, along the river and at Dirranbandi have since planted remaining fallow fields to sorghum, sunflowers and corn. Also some growers will be looking to use the full profile for irrigated wheat.

As such we are planning to enlist the help of Dave Murray and Melina Miles as to what pests to expect and the best ways to avoid flaring whitefly on the cotton. Helicoverpa pressure has remained high throughout the season for both conventional and Bollgard II crops.

Currently we have Sharon Downes, Rod McMahon and Bao (a PhD student) in the area collecting survivors off Bollgard II crops for testing. The St George area for some reason appears to have a higher percentage of survivors from Bollgard II crops. Mirids have also stretched the friendship with continual high numbers and reinfestations from surrounding fallow fields covered with weeds due to constant rain.

The constant rain has certainly been great and welcomed by all but has caused issues with 2,4-D drift onto cotton. At this stage it would be safe to say that all cotton fields in the St George area have experienced some form of 2,4-D damage. Damage ranges from light to severe with some fields having been 'hit' two to three times with one field most likely to be ploughed in due to the severity. Whether people have gained a false sense of security in using 'low drift nozzles', believing that they can apply in marginal conditions, is uncertain but the damage in the region is extreme.

Although the recent rain and river flows has buoyed everyone's spirits for better times ahead, it is with great sadness that not just the local cotton growing region but the industry as a whole marks the passing of Ian Thomas. Ian was one of the original pioneers of cotton growing in the St George area and was steadfastly committed to the Australian cotton industry. Ian was on numerous grower, research and industry boards and received numerous awards for his achievements and service to the industry. Ian's property 'Bloomfield' may have the record for the

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longest continual CSIRO plant production trials having started in the early 1970s.

One particular memory I have, is of Ian making Bloody Marys for a group of us who had crashed their home at 6.30am after a Queensland Cotton Christmas party while Gill began cooking us bacon and eggs. Such was their hospitality. Ian had a flair for creating good times with great people.

Ian was a true gentleman whose good humour, grace and dignity will be sorely missed from the local community as will his wonderful stories. We wish the Thomas family our very best for the future.

Dallas King
January 27, 2008

Border Rivers

Cotton growing conditions have been quite mild thus far this season in the Border Rivers. Day Degrees taken from a planting date of October 15–January 24 for Goondiwindi recorded one cold day and five hot days. Day Degree Units have been recorded as 1261 units. Crop growth stages are variable with a range of flowering crops to early boll fill.

Insect pressure has come in the form of mirids. Control has been necessary and spray numbers are adding up to an average of two-three. A fairly heavy pressure season is upon us when it comes to mirids.

The early hormone damage sustained in the early part of the season has now subsided for the majority of the cotton area and the cotton is growing quite well. Many fields have required slowing rates of growth regulator to steady vegetative growth end excessive length in the internodes. But the more severe hormone damage suffered has resulted in some early fruit loss and yield compensation by these fields will be difficult.

The late planting in combination with variable storm rain and mild conditions have resulted in most cotton crops receiving two to three in-crop irrigations. Temperatures are rising and this will increase the daily water use of the crop and bring in the irrigation interval to 10–12 days.

Consultants have highlighted that the cloudy weather of late may have implications to some of the cotton area resulting in white flowers moving up the plant, which leads to premature cut out.

In terms of flooding rains around the state of Queensland the phrase 'drought and flooding rains' is synonymous with Australian agriculture. Goondiwindi for the month of December had 89 mm and for the best part of January 44 mm (Bureau of Meteorology) has been received. But recent rains surrounding the Border Rivers has brought a flow in the river and a slight increment increase in water allocation has been recorded and received with open arms.

As we look towards the increased prospects of cotton and grains acreage for next season with optimism, the immediate focus is brightening. Cotton price has been rising and is continuing to look respectable.

Rod Gordon
January 25, 2008

Darling Downs

When you drive through the Darling Downs you may be forgiven for thinking that there is no cotton grown in this area. Most of the land is taken up by sorghum although some 12,000 hectares have been planted to cotton.

While western and central Queensland is flooding and coastal areas have received good rainfall, the Darling Downs is again approaching very dry conditions. Apart from some sporadic storm activity, there has not been effective rainfall on the Downs for nearly six weeks. The area has also experienced continued cloudy conditions which have reduced crop water demand. But the overcast conditions have resulted in some dryland crops showing white flowers on top which may indicate an approaching cut-out.

Maximum daytime temperatures for Dalby Airport (Silo site) during December and January have been two degrees cooler than average with minimum temperatures at or near average. Cooler temperatures resulted in 1248 day degrees from October 1 to January 23 compared to 1300 day degrees which is the average (for Dalby Airport) for the same period. This area had nine cold shock days since October 1 but no hot days (above 36°C) to date.

Good early growing conditions kept seedling diseases to a minimum except for Fusarium which has been widespread on the eastern Downs. Mirid numbers have also been high this year and many crops have received three to four sprays for mirids. Whitefly has been observed in several crops on the Downs but these were identified as the greenhouse whitefly which is generally not a significant pest of cotton.

Sorghum has also had its share of problems on the Downs. This season we have seen large infestations of Rutherglen bug which may have resulted from storm activity and many weed hosts on which they breed. This pest can significantly impact on seed set during flowering and early seed development. If bugs infest the crop after grain is set, they will feed on the seed which also provides an entry point for fungal infections.

Some sorghum crops on the Downs have been infested with the Ergot fungus. This disease reduces yield through poor seed set and causes harvesting difficulties due to sticky honeydew on seed heads. Sorghum contaminated with ergot is toxic to livestock. Surveys indicate that the fungus has come in on prevailing winds and most crops are generally only affected on the edge of the fields.

With no fungicide registered to control the fungus, good management is needed to reduce grain contamination and prevent further spread. Management options include; spraying out badly infected crops with glyphosate, slash infected rows on the edge of the field or harvest these last.

Kate Charleston
January 25, 2008

Namoi Valley

Crops in the lower Namoi are progressing well. In contrast to the past few years we have had a wet summer. Most crops have had only one or two irrigations up until the end of January and temperatures have been very mild with only a few days over 35°C. We have also had quite a few cloudy wet days through December and January. This has led to some fruit shedding and crop water-logging.

Crops generally have good fruit numbers although crop development is a little delayed as a result of the cool season. Crops have good yield potential but will require warm dry conditions from now on to achieve above average yields. Early planted crops are approaching cut out but picking is not likely to begin until early April.

Heliothis activity was relatively light early in the season but has been moderate to high through December and January. The large area of corn and sorghum planted should ensure that heliothis pressure remains high throughout the rest of the season. Mirids and other insects have been relatively scarce but are increasing. Green vegetable bug have also been more active in some crops.

Unfortunately 2,4-D drift has been a major problem this year. Virtually all the crops in the valley have experienced some damage and several crops have been severely damaged. The wet summer combined with abundant hard to kill weeds and increases in the cost of Roundup has boosted the amount of 2,4-D used in spray programs.

There are only a few dryland crops planted in the Namoi with many growers unable to plant due to lack of planting rain. So far it has been the best dryland season I can remember. Regular rain has produced near irrigated conditions and the crops look great. With a bit of follow up rain in February very good yields should be achieved.

There has been quite a bit of Verticillium evident in crops this season. Low temperatures around December helped the disease get going in fields with high levels of inoculum. I expect quite a few crops will be showing severe symptoms later in the season.

Prices for this year's crop have improved from the lows of last season but still remain unattractive. Some growers have sold crop and seed for returns equal to about \$500 per bale. The high aussie dollar seems to

have damped any prospect for higher prices despite good futures. Although we have had a lot of rain, the dams remain almost empty. Keepit has risen to over 20 per cent but Split Rock is yet to receive any inflow. We all hope this will change during February and not during picking!

Robert Eveleigh
January 27, 2008

Macquarie Valley

The long awaited La Niña has finally brought some relief in the way of substantial rainfall to many parts of the Macquarie Valley. There has also been some inflow into both Windamere and Burrendong dams. Burrendong is now at 20 per cent.

There was a recent announcement from State Water of a two per cent allocation for general security water. This is in addition to 100 per cent access to carryover water, 100 per cent for high security and stock and domestic holders. It is good news but there is still along way to go.

Cotton in the region is progressing well. Recent rain and cloudy weather has slowed growth but overall the

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prospects from a record small crop are good. Day Degrees for the season at Trangie so far since early October are 6.9 per cent up on the long-term average but eight per cent down on 2006 and 6.2 per cent down on 2005 for the corresponding periods.

Many crops have now had a 'cut out' rate of mepiquat chloride to help capitalise on good early fruit retention.

There has been increased Helicoverpa pressure but this has not caused too many issues. Bollgard II is holding up well. There has been extensive 2,4-D damage to many crops with repeated hits in some fields. This has been a widespread industry issue and it needs dramatic action to prevent it happening again.

The Cotton Catchment Communities CRC recently held a board meeting and strategic review in Narromine. The group had a tour of Buddah Station and several local growers attended a BBQ with the board and consultants and had the chance to speak with the decision makers.

The Macquarie Valley field day will be held on Tuesday March 18 and the focus will be on water use efficiency and innovative ways to maximise returns per megalitre.

Craig McDonald
February 11, 2008

Southern NSW

Finally there has been some rainfall – mostly storms and quite variable across the region, yet it has given the area confidence that it can still rain. There has been small water allocations announced on the Murrumbidgee this month, but we still have a long way to go before any reasonable allocations can be announced on the Lachlan and the Murrumbidgee.

The weather has been great from a cotton growing perspective in regards to temperature and the storm rains have taken some of the pressure off the bores. There was some water logging when the storm event fell shortly after an irrigation event finished yet generally the rain has been welcomed.

Mirids have been present and numbers have spiked with crops being treated in the past couple of weeks. Mites are present and numbers are building with some control taking place. Helicoverpa pressure has been low yet control is occurring in the conventional crops.

The crop is quite advanced and is between about 21 and 24 nodes and some crops in the area have been cut out as early as January 15 and most will be cut out in the next week.

During December we held an IPM workshop with Mark Hickman aimed at the new growers and agronomist new to cotton which was well attended.

On January 9 we had a cut out workshop aimed at the new and potential growers in the region. The aim of the day was to reinforce that earliness in the Riverina is very

important and to emphasise that it is important to have enough heat units to finish the top fruit and be picking prior to the autumn rains.

Coming events

Defoliation field day – date to be confirmed.
Field day planned March 12, Whitton.

James Hill
January 25, 2008

ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

The Mystery tractor is a magnificent unrestored example of an International W 30. During the years preceeding and immediately following World War 2, these reliable American machines were the top selling broadacre tractors throughout the Australian wheat fields. This particular example was discovered by the author in the Gunnedah district of NSW and very smartly became part of his collection. (Photo IMU)



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