

# district reports

## Central Queensland

After a season filled with rain, hail, cloudy weather and floods, it is good to see cotton pickers at work in Central Queensland.

Picking in the Dawson has commenced, but some crops are still a while off, having not yet been defoliated. It is anticipated yields will be down, with all crops impacted in some way by the January wet weather. The early planted crops were probably worst affected, with some having up to 20 per cent tight lock. The later crops lost fruiting positions during the extended cloudy weather. The cooler conditions have also affected boll size, with early bolls appearing to be smaller than usual. Late season insect pressure has been an issue for Dawson growers – in particular aphids, whitefly and green vegie bugs.

The Central Highlands is pretty much finished picking, with only a handful of fields left to go. The majority of the crop was picked in about three weeks, and for the first time this year, the weather was favourable, with little rain and mostly sunny days. Ginning is set to commence after Easter, so yields are still not confirmed. Estimated yields vary between two and a half to three and a half bales per acre. There were significant losses to boll rot and tight lock.

Clean up from the floods is well and truly underway. In some of the flooded fields, the cotton died and wasn't able to be picked, although a number of crops were salvageable. Following the recent flooding, there have been increased reports of new infestations of weeds, especially in riparian areas. Weeds of particular concern that were known to be in the upper catchment include giant rats tail, rubber vine, parkinsonia, hymenachne, harissia cactus and prickly acacia.

With Fairbairn Dam still at 100 per cent, next year is expected to see a significant cotton crop. There is also expected to be a substantial winter cropping, with chickpeas and some wheat planned on a lot of farms. At this stage it is thought that there will also be a reasonable cotton crop in the Dawson for next season.

**Susan Maas**  
March 20, 2008

## Border Rivers

The cotton in the Macintyre Valley is starting to open up reasonably well with some of the early planted fields getting their first hit of defoliant. The later planted fields are still a few weeks away. In general the cotton crops are looking reasonable around the region with some great crops amongst them.

This Valley has seen some late insect pressure come



**John Stewart, CEO of PrimeAg addresses the 2008 Macintyre Valley Field Day participants.**

in the form of the cotton stainer. This insect is found deep in the canopy, making it difficult to control. The challenge is in directing the insecticide to target the insect.

The annual Macintyre Valley cotton field day was held last week. Participants of a 110–115 strong crowd visited 'Parkdale' at Boggabilla for an insight into relevant topics of interest to address current challenges the cotton industry faces today. These include:

### Diesel

- The challenge – managing costs.
- Improving diesel motor efficiencies.

### Dirt

- Nitrogen into dollars not dust.
- More bang for your bug buck.
- Legislation impacting on spray drift.

### Dollars

- Quantifying and mitigating storage losses.
- Quantifying deep drainage losses.
- Storage surveys – before and after – is this costing you money?
- Future water efficiency funding and projects.

### Prime Ag

- What is it?
- Their goals and business direction.

The Cargill Cotton Crop Consistency Award for 2006–07 was presented to winner David Coulton for an impressive average yield on 'Neilo' of 11.67 bales per hectare.

With a reasonably low cotton crop planted, producers are looking towards winter cropping options and with commodity prices for wheat looking promising an increased area may be planted.

**Rod Gordon**  
March 25, 2008

## Darling Downs

Rainfall in early February has been of major benefit to many crops on the Darling Downs. Falls of up to 200 mm in some areas have enabled growers to stretch irrigation intervals and collect runoff from fields for future use. With a number of storages now full, the prospects for winter crops on the Downs looks promising. In addition to the welcome rain, the Darling Downs has experienced a mild summer with a lot of cloud cover and fewer extremes in temperature compared to previous seasons.

Most cotton crops on the Downs are now at 'cut out' stage with some very good crops in both dryland and irrigated fields. While many crops have a good boll load, there is some concern among growers and consultants about reduced boll size due to the mild cloudy conditions.

There has been a significant amount of Fusarium in some regions of the eastern Downs due to the cooler weather. The presence of Fusarium, while evident in spring, became more pronounced after the second irrigation and at boll fill stage. Crops with a lot of Fusarium will most certainly have yield penalties.

It has been an interesting year in terms of insect pests. Mirids were widespread in most crops with many crops receiving at least three insecticides applications to control mirid numbers.

Whitefly has been widespread in crops but these are generally below threshold levels and do not present a serious problem. Larger populations of whitefly have been found in the warmer areas of the Downs (west of Dalby) and these may still warrant treatment.

Pale stainer bugs have emerged this season as a more serious pest than previous seasons. Damage assessment trials near Dalby have indicated a lot of bug damage on bolls though results could not distinguish between damage from stainers, green vegetable bugs or mirids. Consultants on the Downs have reported a minimum of five per cent stainer bug damage on the lower bolls.

Considering a relatively high pressure from disease and insects this year on the Darling Downs, crops looks good but the real results will remain to be seen at harvest.

**Kate Charleston**  
March 20, 2008

## Namoi Valley

As of late March a small number of cotton crops in the lower Namoi have received their first pass of defoliant and should be ready for picking some time in early-mid April. But the majority of crops will not be ready for picking until late April-May. Late season conditions have been very good and have helped crops mature bolls.

It's always difficult to predict yields but most crops look good. Boll numbers are generally higher than the past few years but boll size may be a little smaller than average. I expect the valley average yield will be over

3.6 bales per acre and fibre quality should be very good given the mild temperatures during boll filling. The few dryland crops grown this year have good yield potential but have suffered severe late season moisture stress. This may impact on fibre quality.

The insect of the year appears to be pale cotton stainers. Numbers of this insect increased rapidly through February-March and many crops required spraying. As far as I can remember this insect has never required a specific spray program in Australia. A combination of cool humid conditions and the widespread use of Bollgard has favoured stainers.

Heliothis pressure was very high through January and February. Some heliothis survival in Bollgard II crops was evident but generally did not require supplementary spraying. Other pests like mirids and green vegetable bug were also present during the late season and required control measures in most crops. Some mites and aphids were active late season. The valley has experienced high numbers of whitefly during the late season but number have since declined and spraying was not necessary.

Verticillium has been present for most of the season and has become particularly obvious over the past month or so. Cool wet conditions have favoured the disease and where inoculum levels in the soil are high its impact on cotton yield will be significant.

The lower Namoi has the worst Verticillium problem in Australia. Growers should take an integrated approach to manage this disease. Rotations, weed control and always growing the most resistant varieties available are the keys to minimising the impact of verticillium.

Water supplies for next season are still very low. Keepit is at 25 per cent capacity and a small allocation will be made available in the coming season. Many growers have not fully utilised ground water this season due to the wet conditions so some carry over water will be available. We need significant rainfall over the winter and spring to support a large winter crop planting and encourage cotton planting. An area of 20,000 hectares is likely for next season.

As pickers begin to be wheeled out of the shed we are all hoping for six weeks of dry weather followed by the wet winter that was promised last year but failed to materialise.

**Robert Eveleigh**  
March 26, 2008

## Macquarie Valley

2008 started off as a year of contrasts and this has continued well into autumn. Recent warm and dry weather has speeded up crop maturation. Defoliation has commenced on some early crops and there are many crops due before the end of the month.

The Macquarie Valley has received a total of five per cent as general security water allocation. Burrendong

...56▷

## <55...DISTRICT REPORTS



**Andrew Gill 'Waterloo' Narromine and Jim Bible 'Agriland' Narromine in a crop of Sicot 70BRF.**

Dam is around 20 per cent of capacity. This allocation was in addition to access to all carryover water. Many growers are planning for large winter cropping programs which will focus mainly on wheat. Canola planting will start in early April.

Cotton yield expectations are not quite as high as the past few very warm years. Many crops have shed some later fruit during periods of cool and cloudy weather in February. Day degrees from early October 2007 to now are around 13 per cent down on the last two seasons but are still two per cent up on the long term average. The numbers of both hot and cold days are down on the long term averages.

Some crops have had to be sprayed for pale cotton stainers which have caused damage to both green and open bolls. Pressure from other insects has generally been light to moderate.

A very successful Macquarie Cotton Filed Day was held recently with a predominance of local cotton growers which was very encouraging. The focus was on water use and maximising returns per megalitre. Other areas such as soil health, cotton fibre quality and new varieties were also covered.

With cotton prices generally improving the prospects for an increased cotton area are looking better. This will be helped by a wet winter with good inflows from the catchment areas.

**Craig McDonald  
March 19, 2007**

## Southern NSW

Since the last report the season has been quite variable, with a cooler February and an extremely hot March. There were only two days in February over 35°C compared to March where there were 11 days over 35°C

Met site	07/08	06/07	Average DD	C/Shock 07/08	H/Shock 07/08
Benerambah	2021.5	2074.2	1768	24 (47.8)	44 (29.8)
Hay	2035.8	2020.5	1830	27 (43.1)	42 (35.2)
Hillston	2094.2	2124.2	1927	21 (33.9)	56 (38.9)
Whitton	2013.5	2092.5	1764	23 (47.7)	41 (29.4)

Climate date calculated October 5 to March 25.

and an additional four days over 40°C. The heat has helped finish a lot of late fruit yet the extreme heat at the end of March has meant a lot of moisture has been lost from the profile leaving crops very dry at defoliation. The result of irrigating too late in the season is that the crop will not use the soil moisture and therefore may effect defoliation and cause regrowth. Overall the crops are looking great with high fruit retention and fantastic boll numbers. The earlier fields will receive their first defoliation pass this week.



The Lachlan and Murrumbidgee Cotton Grower Association Field day was held on March 12 at the Commin's farm at Whitton, SE of Griffith. The Commin's farm was an ideal location as we were able to look at their diverse operations including stainless steel fabrication, wine storage, tanker truck wash, native tree plantation, liquid fertiliser plant and a variety of irrigation crops including cotton. The day was well attended with approximately 55 people attending. The main theme for field talks was water efficiency – topics included Mace meters, soil moisture probes and a trial looking at irrigation efficiency in relation to the bankless channel system. Other topics discussed on the day included spray application, marketing, new bale cotton pickers and future industry courses.

Judging for the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee Cotton competition was completed early in March. Once again the standard of the crops entered was extremely high with nearly all of the growers in the region entering a field. The winner will be announced at the Annual Cotton Dinner which will be on August 1.

**James Hill  
March 25, 2008**

## Advertiser's Index

Agline.....	26	Incitec Pivot.....	7
Agricultural Appointments.....	2	John Deere.....	25
Aquaspy.....	27	Leica Geosystems.....	17
Aquatech.....	40, 43	Mace.....	24
Cargill Cotton.....	30	Moree Real Estate.....	43
Case IH.....	21	Namoi Cotton.....	31
Charlton.....	42	Neils Parts.....	10
Cotton Grower Services.....	IFC	Paul Reinhart.....	30
Cotton Outlook.....	IBC	Pivot Irrigation.....	37
CSD.....	5	Queensland Cotton.....	33
Countryco.....	10	SMK Consultants.....	2
Deltapine.....	45	Study Tours.....	32
Dinner Plain.....	1	Sumitomo.....	0BC
drumMUSTER.....	3	Teejet.....	18
Ergon.....	13	Tilco.....	53
Excel Ag.....	11	Ultimate Agri-Products.....	16
Gessner.....	15	Valmont.....	35
Gps-Ag.....	19	Volvo Penta Oceania.....	39
		Westfield Augers.....	41