

Central Queensland

While most cotton in the Central Highlands was finished being picked over a month ago, a couple of the very late planted cotton have now been defoliated and picking has commenced. Estimated yields vary between 2.5 to 3.5 bales per acre, with some quality downgrades.

Despite the poor season, cotton in the Dawson has fared a little better, with many crop yields enhanced by a good top crop. Many growers are estimating yields of 3.5 to 4.0 bales per acre.

It is anticipated that there will be a large planting of chickpeas and wheat over the winter, with some chickpeas already planted. Given recent dramatic increases in fertiliser costs and the drop in wheat prices, chickpeas are likely to be the more popular option. CQ growers will have the opportunity to look more closely at sampling and analysis of soil for nutrition at Healthy Soils workshops scheduled for the end of May.

Susan Maas
May 16, 2008

St George Dirranbandi

As with most other valleys, the rain that wouldn't seem to stop during December and January came to a very abrupt halt in mid February and it hasn't rained since.

In regards to cotton crops this was perhaps welcomed and needed due to the reduction in solar and heat units throughout December and January. This also allowed for a good finish to sorghum, corn and sunflower crops in the area.

Currently the majority of the earlier planted cotton has been picked with yields ranging from 8.6 to 11 bales per hectare. The remaining area — approximately 2800 hectares — is still some way off yet, with quite a lot of this having only just received its first defoliation. Unfortunately the area experienced a few light frosts around April 30 with the tops of late cotton and corn crops being burnt off. Some of the late planted crops which were hampered by 2,4-D issues were reliant on the top

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crop and as such may have lost some of these bolls due to the frosts.

Insect pressure in cotton crops over the season was high and constant. A number of Bollgard II crops required 1–2 applications for surviving *Helicoverpa*. This, combined with 3–4 applications for mirids and cotton stainers made for an expensive insect season. As an area we must thank Sharon Downes and her team for their high level of research commitment into the Bollgard II survivors. Sharon and her team would be up in the area within a day of notification regardless of whether this was a weekend or public holiday. More trials are to be conducted next season.

Whilst the insect pressure was high in the cotton it was a different story in the summer planted sorghum, sunflower and corn crops. As far as I am aware all of the sorghum crops in the Dirranbandi and St George area escaped the need for any control of *Helicoverpa* with only one application for rutherghlen bug needed on the sunflower crops.

Currently growers are harvesting the sorghum and sunflowers with sorghum yields ranging from 8–10.3 tonnes per hectare while the sunflowers tend to be around the two tonnes per hectare mark. Although the cooler temperatures have certainly helped with the yields it has also given growers in both areas the confidence and now experience to plant alternative crops to cotton in the event of late flows.

Watering up of irrigated wheat crops has started in Dirranbandi and St George over the past fortnight with approximately 16,000 hectares planted in the Dirranbandi area. More may be planted depending on how quickly fields can be worked into shape after the current sorghum and sunflower crops. In the St George area irrigated wheat will probably account for 10,000 hectares. Dryland acres are still an unknown quantity due to the lack of rain with many growers in the region having deep sown some area to wheat, chickpeas and fabas.

At this stage it is somewhat difficult to predict cotton acres for the 2008–09 season though it will certainly be up on the previous year. A combination of factors such as the 2,4-D issue and price has certainly caused growers to become more wary with plantings to cotton.

As with all valleys, further river flows during the next few months will be needed to give the area greater certainty for the upcoming season.

Dallas King
May 18, 2008

Border Rivers

Picking is all but finished with a few late crops yet to be picked in June. Except for some earlier cool conditions causing some difficulty, the small crop has experienced mild conditions throughout the season with

the number of hot days above 36°C substantially below average.

High yields exceeding 10 bales per hectare have been recorded with the better crops producing 12 to 14 bales per hectare. Total production for the Macintyre Valley region could be around 60,000 to 70,000 bales.

Gin turnout has been lower than normal whilst quality has been base grade and better with some exceptional length and most micronaire in the 3.8 to 4.5 range.

Growers are dependent on significant planting rain for winter crops and more flooding rainfall to accumulate greater irrigation water supplies for summer.

Geoff McIntyre
June 03, 2008

Darling Downs

Picking conducted under near perfect conditions is nearing completion on the Darling Downs. One of the smallest crops in 20 to 30 years has experienced excellent growing conditions with lower maximum temperatures than the long term average. Cool cloudy conditions associated with rain mid season appears to have had little impact on the crop. Darling Downs production should be of the order of 100,000 bales.

Many yields could exceed 11 bales per hectare in irrigated crops and six bales per hectare from dryland crops with some very high yielding crops from those districts which received the very good rainfall in February. Some of those irrigated crops have yielded up to 13 bales per hectare on properties with reasonably good water supplies and rainfall and some dryland crops on the Jimbour Plain were approaching 10 to 12 bales per hectare.

Ginning commenced in early May with gin turnout lower than normal but extremely good quality cotton — base grade and better to date.

Winter crop prospects are dependent on planting rainfalls in the 50 to 70 mm range. While irrigation water supplies have improved, very substantial rainfall will be essential for larger summer crop plantings

Geoff McIntyre
June 03, 2008

Gwydir Valley

At the time of writing, most growers in the region have finished picking, with the exception of a few dryland and late crops. For those farmers with cotton still in the paddock, the cooler temperatures have delayed maturity and some have had to apply a third defoliation spray. There have been scattered showers around the district so growers are deciding whether to wait until late bolls are matured or to pick before the weather becomes too unfavourable.

Yields have reached five bales per acre in some irrigated crops. The season has delivered high yielding dryland crop with top yields ranging between 1.6 and

2.0 bales per acre. Most of these reports are from the pickers, with many modules yet to be ginned and final yield and quality yet to be determined.

Preliminary results from ginners have indicated that quality is good, and most should make base grade or better. It has been a clean pick so far with good colour and quality characteristics and high turnout. Gins are in operation, some ginning for another two to three weeks while others have ceased for a period of about two weeks, until the later crops are delivered to gin yards.

Summer rains have provided most farmers with good soil moisture and many are currently sowing. Large areas of irrigated wheat are expected along with considerable areas of chickpeas, dryland wheat and barley.

Lauryn Hanna
May 16, 2008

Namoi Valley

As of late May, picking is 90 per cent finished. A few late crops should be harvested in the next week or so as long as the weather holds. After one of the coolest seasons for many years, the yields have ranged from good to exceptional. We have had quite a few fields exceed five bales per acre and an odd one has even crossed the six bales per acre barrier. I expect the lower Namoi will have an overall average yield of about 10 bales per hectare.

Ginning is progressing slowly as most gins started late and are running restricted hours. Fibre quality has been excellent. We have had virtually no rain after defoliation and the season has produced very long fine fibres. Strength is a little down on normal but still well above discount values. The few dryland crops planted are yielding well above the long term average but picking is likely to continue into June as the crops are very late.

Fields that suffered significant levels of Verticillium have produced lower yields, particularly where the disease established itself early in the growing season. Growers will need to manage this disease carefully next season if they are growing cotton in the same field again. Growing varieties with the highest V-rank available is a good start in managing Verticillium. Cereal rotations are also worth considering.

As picking winds up, most growers are looking skyward for planting rain to begin the winter cropping season. A few crops of faba beans have been planted and watered up and wheat is also being planted and watered up where irrigation supplies are adequate.

Without significant winter rain, next seasons cotton crop will struggle to make 17,000 hectares in the lower Namoi. Keepit dam is only 24 per cent capacity but many growers have under-utilised ground water allocation because of the good rainfall during summer.

I hope we get the wet winter that we were promised last year!

Robert Eveleigh
May 21, 2008

Macquarie Valley

Picking is all but complete with only a few late planted and/or phenoxy affected fields to go. Ginning is progressing well in what will be a very short ginning season. There were only 3000 hectares grown in the region this season.

Most yields have been good but the overall average could be slightly down compared to the past few years. Given the coolness of the season, this is not a bad result. A warm March certainly helped to mature the later fruit on many crops.

Fibre quality has generally been excellent with very small amounts of low micronaire samples being classed. Fibre length has kept up well. Another dry pick has helped keep grades and quality very good.

Some winter crops have been planted using moisture seeking equipment or have gone in dry. The prediction of a wet April was a complete fuphy and May is shaping up as a dry month also.

Burrendong Dam is at 19 per cent which is actually better than this time last year. There have been no significant inflows since January and February. High security water allocation is guaranteed for this year and next and

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there is still access allowed to carry over water. The general security water allocation remains at five per cent.

With wheat prices holding up, much of the available water from both the river and bores will be used to irrigate winter crops to benefit from historically high prices. With diesel, fertiliser and herbicide prices at record highs, viable crops are desperately needed.

As the cotton season draws to a close, growers are looking to the sky for the overdue rain to capitalise on good winter crop prices and a wet winter leading into more cotton next season.

Craig McDonald
May 20, 2008

Southern NSW

Picking is progressing quite well with reasonably favourable weather so far. Picking started in the last week of April and was then rain-interrupted in early May. This fall varied between 13 and 20 mm so it did not cause too many problems. There is rain forecast for this coming weekend so this may slow picking progress. The yields

ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

The Mystery Tractor is one of the few remaining examples of the original model of Lanz Bulldog, introduced in 1921. The brilliance of the little 12 HP Bulldog was its simplicity. The engine consisted of one cylinder, one piston, one connecting rod and a crank shaft. That was it! There were no valves, push rods, carburettor or magneto. It could be fuelled on virtually any low octane slow combustion fuel, ranging from melted tar to peanut oil. To start the engine, it was literally fired up with a blowlamp, until the hot bulb portion of the cylinder head became red hot, then a swing of the flywheel and off it went! The tractor may be inspected at The Wheatland Museum at Warracknabeal, Victoria.



have been quite good but it is too early to determine the average yield for the region. The range is probably between nine bales per hectare and 14 bales per hectare. Turnout had been down slightly as there have been cases of higher trash levels, yet the seed yield is up slightly.

At this stage things are not looking great in terms of cotton area for the southern area for next season. The Lachlan valley is supplied by the Wyangala storage which is at 11 per cent, so once again there needs to be a massive turn around for there to be an increase in area.

On paper the Murrumbidgee catchment looks quite healthy compared to last year. Burrinjuck storage is at 41 per cent (compared to 24 per cent last year) and Blowering is at 36 per cent (compared to 14 per cent last year).

The issue is that the inflow into Blowering is a result of an early 2008-09 Snowy hydro release. So while there is more water in storage, much of it is held in individual accounts as carryover, undelivered inter-valley transfers and the pre season Hydro water. Another issue is the critical state of the Murray system which would be a consideration for the management of the Murrumbidgee.

The new growers in the area are quite happy with how the cotton has gone, yet until ginning is complete, yields are not known. There is still quite a bit of interest shown by potential growers yet there needs to be a large increase in water supply for this expansion to be realised. Another issue is that many of the potential growers owe water to Snowy Hydro which was borrowed previously to grow a rice crop. This water now has to be paid back before they are able to access their allocation.

Most growers are currently planting winter crops yet most of the crops on the irrigation farms will be irrigated due to the combination of heavier soils and unpredictable low rainfall. There are large areas of dryland wheat being sown to the east of Hillston and north of Griffith in the traditional dryland areas. Many of these areas received good rainfall back in December and with the recent 20 mm some have a full profile to plant into.

James Hill
May 16, 2008

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