

SECTION 4  
AREA ROUNDUP

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# Namoi Valley

By Robert Eveleigh

**S**o much for global warming. The 2007-08 season was the coolest I can remember. In general it was a great season to grow cotton — except in the very coolest extremities of the upper Namoi.

Unfortunately it was the smallest planted area in the Namoi since the early 1980s. Water supply and competition from other crops meant only about 12,000 hectares was planted in the lower Namoi while the upper Namoi planted area remained closer to normal at about 8000 hectares.

Yields were quite variable but generally very good. A few individual fields produced yields close to 15 bales per hectare and some farms averaged well over

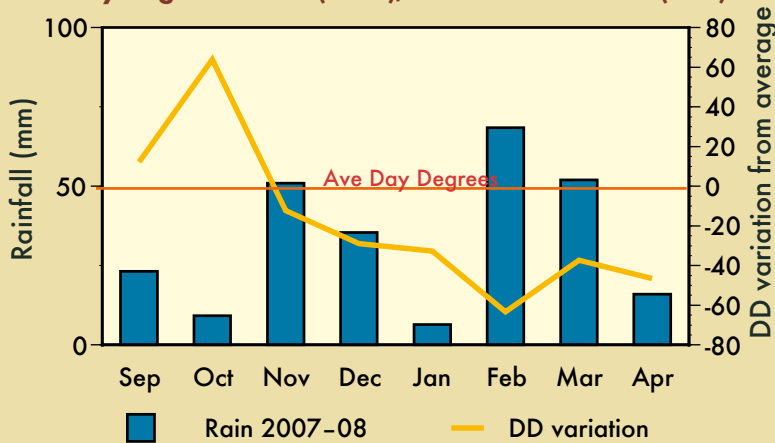
12.5 bales per hectare. But the average yield for the Namoi was around 9.6 bales per hectare.

Fibre quality had been excellent. Grades have generally been base or better and fibre properties very good. Micronaire values in particular have been much lower than in the previous few seasons.

Only a few dryland crops were planted due to the lack of timely planting rains but in general it was a good year to grow dryland crops. More normal summer rainfall combined with cool summer gave the crops very good yield potential. Unfortunately rain in late summer was minimal and most crops failed to finish well. Average yields of 3.5 bales per hectare could have been much higher if 30 to 50 mm of rain fell in February or early March.

### Narrabri 2007-08 seasonal climate

Total Day Degrees: 2476 (-145); Total rain: 401 mm (+90)



	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Total
<b>Cold shock</b>	22	8	1	0	0	0	4	12	47 (-5)
<b>Hot shock</b>	0	1	0	2	4	1	0	0	8 (-21)

\*Average day degrees from 1957 to 2008.  
Source: CSIRO Plant Industry.

### Water supply

At planting only a small amount of water was available from Keepit Dam. This water was made available in a block release during January. Most growers relied on bores for the crop and water would have been very tight except for timely summer rain and lower than normal evaporative demand. Total crop water use was much lower than normal.

In the upper Namoi growers with access to Mooki river water were in a much better position. Heavy rain in the catchment of the Mooki led to significant flows and allowed growers to harvest water for summer crops.

The prospects for the coming season remain bleak. A small amount of water in Keepit is being used to water extensive winter crops and very little will be available for 2008 planted summer crops.

Bore water continues to be the main water supply in the valley and recent increases in diesel costs have made this water very expensive.

### Pre-plant conditions

Winter rainfall was below average for most areas, although parts of the upper Namoi did get reasonable rain. Ground preparation for summer crops continued without much interruption.

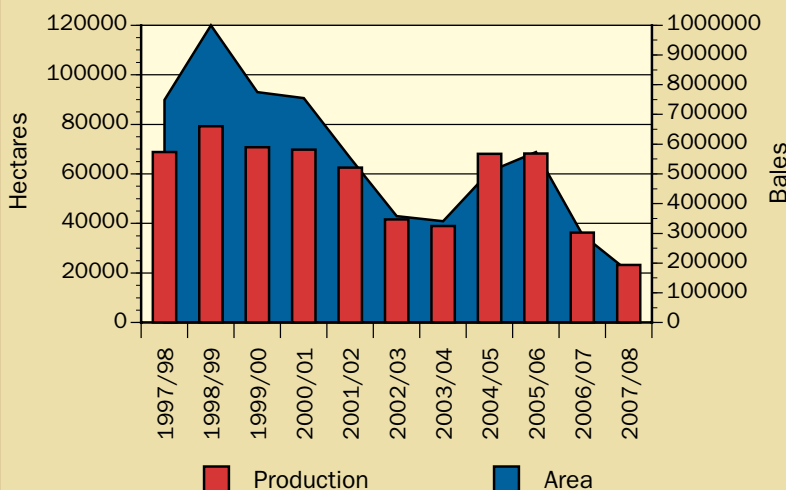
### Planting

It doesn't take long to plant 20,000 hectares of cotton. Spring temperatures were normal and a small percentage of the crop was planted in late September as the soil rapidly warmed. Most of the crop was planted in early October. Crop establishment was generally good with only minor replanting. Most of the crop was watered up or watered soon after emergence to fill profiles.

### Early season

Spring seemed to continue for most of the season. Crop development was much slower than in previous years. Early planted crops were well ahead of the pack and had a few squares by mid November and flowers by mid December. Vegetative growth was generally

### Namoi Valley: Area and production



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good except where disease was a problem. October through to mid November was dry but good falls of rain during December delayed the first irrigation and spurred on vegetative growth.

**Mid season**

Regular rain continued through January but finished abruptly in mid February. Temperatures remained well below average with only a few days over 35°C. This continued to promote good vegetative growth and the mild conditions encouraged the use of growth regulators. Many crops received a couple of Pix applications.

**Late season**

Late season conditions remained mild and mostly dry. The wet pick that we all thought would have to happen didn't materialise.

Defoliation conditions and picking were much later than normal and stretched out over several months. An odd crop in the upper Namoi was still being picked in July but picking effectively finished in June. Defoliation was slow due to the mild temperatures. Earlier crops defoliated well but some late crops received three defoliant applications to remove stubborn leaf and speed up picking.

**Insects**

As in recent seasons heliothis pressure started at moderate levels and finished at low levels. The few non Bollgard II crops planted in the Namoi averaged about nine or 10 sprays for the season. Most Bollgard crops handled the pressure without any problems. Occasional bouts of heavy pressure through February did see surviving larvae in crops but numbers were below threshold.

Thrips were at moderate levels after planting but seed treatments and planting insecticides worked well. Thrips numbers were very high late season. Western flower thrips are present in low numbers in the Namoi valley.

The pest of the year was the pale cotton stainer. Numbers of this insect increased rapidly through

December and January. In some situations it was difficult to control without the use of pyrethroids because it lives in the bottom canopy of the crop. Numbers declined towards the end of the season.

Mirid numbers were generally not as high as the past few seasons but green vegetable bugs were a significant pest this season. One to four sprays were applied for mirids, stainers and green vegetable bugs combined.

**Disease**

Verticillium wilt was a major problem this year. The disease was present from December onwards. Some fields had particularly heavy infections and yields were reduced significantly. The cool season had two effects on the disease. It made the resistant varieties susceptible and it delayed the crop, making the disease even more severe at the end of the season.

Black root rot was also very active early in the season. Fusarium has still not been identified in the lower Namoi.

**Lower Namoi Grower of the Year**

Congratulations to Schwager Farming. Adrian and his team were awarded the title of Lower Namoi Cotton Grower of the Year at the annual awards dinner held in Wee Waa on August 23.

Congratulations also go to Cathcart Partnership for growing the field with the highest ginned yield. It was a crop of Sicala 71BR that averaged a massive 5.39 bales per acre.



**Lower Namoi Valley**

**MAP LEGEND**

Cotton Area .....

Cotton Gin .....



**Upper Namoi Valley**



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