

SECTION 4  
AREA ROUNDUP

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MAP LEGEND

- Cotton Area .....
- Cotton Gin .....

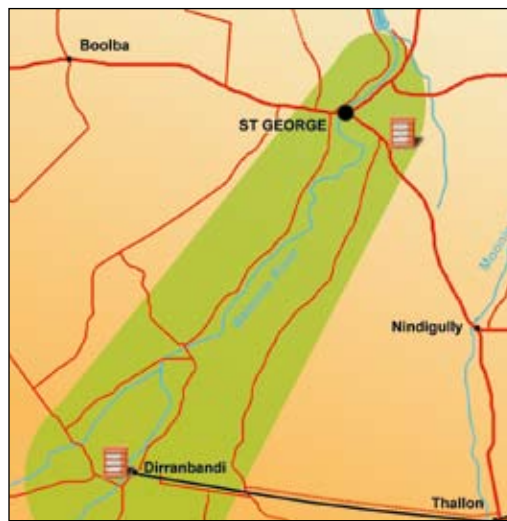
# St George–Dirranbandi

By Dallas King

**W**ell the torrents of nervous sweat during last winter from everybody involved in the local irrigation industries of St George and Dirranbandi were nearly enough to make the river flow.

Fortunately the river did flow with both areas able to flood harvest on a few separate occasions. Unfortunately these events came a little too late (during the last week of November and early December) for the cotton industry though the initial total of 400 hectares was expanded to a total of 3030 hectares by December 1, 2007.

## St George - Dirranbandi area



This acreage of cotton was the smallest planted since the late 1970s and resulted in approximately 26,000 bales being processed in the area.

### Late cotton

As mentioned above, an extra 2600 hectares of cotton was planted in the last week of November as both the Dirranbandi and St George area had agreed to extend the planting window to finish on the November 30. During a “normal” summer and autumn finish these crops may not have given such a bad result. Unfortunately it was not a “normal” season and is possibly one that growers will be keen to forget about very quickly.

Due to a combination of below average heat units throughout the season, phenoxy drift and reasonably high insect pressure, crops did not finish off well at all. Day Degrees (DD) for the 2007–08 season were well behind those of the 2006–07 season and the long term average. Crops planted during the last week of November ended up being a month behind on DD totals by May when compared to the 2006–07 year. So the last of the late planted cotton was picked during the first week of August and is currently being ginned.

### Alternative crops

Because the river flows were a little too late for cotton, the remainder of the irrigation area at Dirranbandi and St George went into alternative crops. These crops included sorghum, sunflowers, corn and soybeans. Although the majority of these crops were new to the area or had not been grown for many years the result was certainly very positive.

Perhaps due to the cooler summer and autumn finish, yields were generally very pleasing, especially in the sunflowers and corn. Sorghum yields ranged from 7.5 to 10 tonnes per hectare while sunflowers generally averaged around 2.5 to 3.2 tonnes per hectare, though quite a few growers received premiums for high oil content.

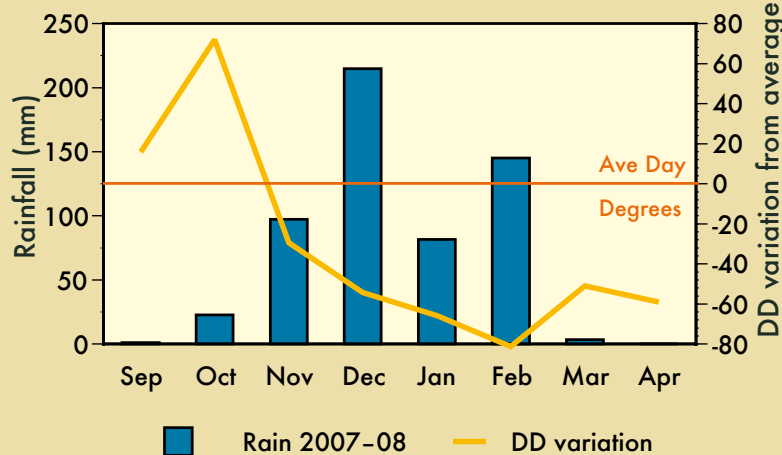
Corn was the surprise with the majority of growers budgeting on nine to 10 tonnes per hectare for yields. Harvested yields have been closer to 11–13 tonnes per hectare. But as with most things in life it has been a somewhat double edged sword — it is hard to find buyers for the excess corn even at substantially lower price levels than most growers had forward sold at. This has in turn meant that quite a number of fields are still being harvested and so will be too late to put back into cotton for the 2008–09 season. Still though, higher than budgeted yields are perhaps not the end of the world.

### Pest pressure

Once again the St George area certainly continued to experience its “normal” early season high helicoverpa pressure. Some conventional fields had averaged up to nine applications by Christmas while

### St George 2007–08 seasonal climate

Total Day Degrees: 2732 (-253); Total rain: 566 mm (+173)



	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Total
<b>Cold shock</b>	17	4	0	0	0	0	4	19	44 (+16)
<b>Hot shock</b>	1	6	0	3	1	1	0	0	12 (-18)

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

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Bollgard II fields also had high mirid pressure for the majority of the season.

Survivors on Bollgard II crops were once again an issue in the St George area with the frequency being quite random across fields and farms. Both early and late planted crops had survivors coming through at the peak flower stage. This *Helicoverpa* pressure combined with mirids and pale cotton stainers meant that quite a few Bollgard II crops averaged up to seven applications for pests. These generally included four to five sprays for mirids and two applications for larvae or combined for the pale cotton stainers.

Sharon Downes' team combined with PhD student Boa (funded by Monsanto) have been extremely active in the area and have done a great job during the season. They will be back in the area again during the upcoming season.

**Yields and quality**

As the Bollgard II planting window had been changed, the earliest of the GM crops were planted on October 15 with some small areas of conventional being planted in late September or early October. Yields and quality on these crops were very pleasing with the average ranging between 4-5 bales per acre.

Yields on the late cotton have not been so pleasing with most averaging from 2.8 to just over three bales per acre. Unfortunately the poor quality of these crops has meant that the growers have received a double hit with discounts of up to \$180 per bale being received for short fibre and low mic.

**Herbicide damage**

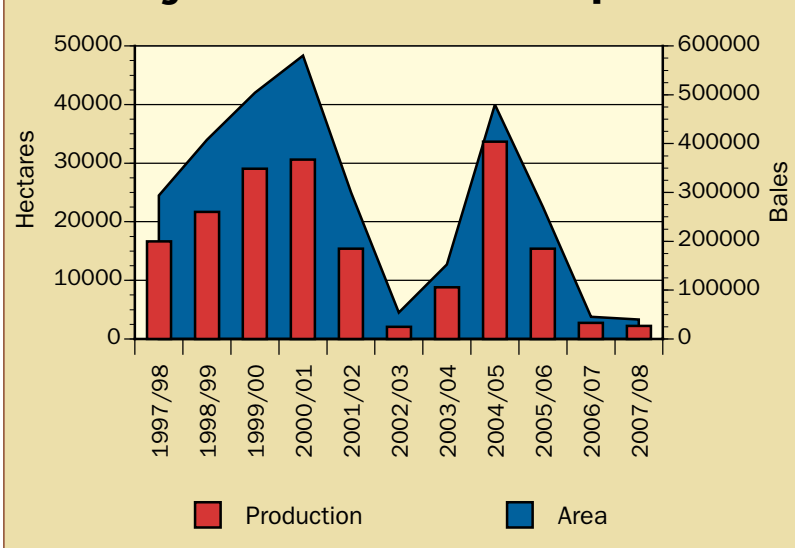
As with all areas that had cotton in this year, damage from phenoxy was present in the majority of cotton fields. The damage levels throughout crops ranged from minor to severe. One crop affected by drift actually had quantifiable amounts of phenoxy herbicide show up in leaf samples. Another farm in the area which had yields of five bales per acre on an unaffected field also had fields a couple of kilometers away on the same farm with an average around two bales per acre. Obviously the cotton industry and more importantly growers cannot sustain these levels of damage to their crops again.



**The future**

Compared to many of the cotton areas in Australia, the 2008-09 season looks reasonably positive — not as positive as Emerald but still not bad. A number of growers have utilised water for wheat during the winter, but it would appear that we should have close to 15,000 hectares in the St George area and around 8,000-10,000 hectares for the Dirranbandi area. These figures may increase should we receive reasonable rainfall before the end of October.

**St George - Dirranbandi: Area and production**



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