

## Central Highlands

For most Central Queensland cotton, the start of the season has been almost perfect. Early planted crops are well into flowering and even the later planted crops are starting to flower. It is estimated that about 12,000 hectares was planted in Central Highlands and almost 5000 hectares planted in the Callide Dawson. Generally, establishment has been good, especially for crops that were planted dry and flushed up. Some crops that were planted into moisture were patchy early on, but are now looking good. There have been a small number of fields with stunted, slow to develop patches and investigations as to the causes of these patches are continuing.

There has been little in the way of early season disease issues, although Tobacco Streak Virus has been detected throughout the Central Highlands and testing has found weeds and a volunteer plant in the Dawson with the pathogen.

Insect pressure has been very low. Early on, thrips were causing some damage, but the crops quickly out grew them. Conventional crops have had three to four sprays and are also looking quite good. Mirid numbers have been exceptionally low. The low insect numbers and perfect growing conditions have seen many crops loaded up with very high fruit retention. With the hot weather really only just beginning, growers are very aware of the need to keep the water up to see this crop through. Silverleaf whitefly numbers are starting to build and growers and consultants are encouraged to use the new SLW threshold available on the cotton CRC website.

There have been some issues with weeds this season and there has been an increased reliance on a Roundup Flex system for weed control. Weeds typically difficult to control with glyphosate such as fleabane, feathertop Rhodes grass and sesbania have become in-crop issues for some fields.

**Susan Maas**  
December 2, 2008

## St George Dirranbandi

The joys of being busy. Due to the flows in the catchment last December and January the area has a certain hum about it again which has been great not just for growers or industry personnel but for the wider community of St George, Dirranbandi and Thallon. A great (in comparison to the previous two years) dryland wheat season has helped to create this feeling of optimism within the area. Another major factor is the fact that

Beardmore Dam should fill in early December and will hopefully spill with some flood harvesting water for the Dirranbandi growers.

The current season is looking like its going to be a long one as a field I was checking this morning was at four true leaves whilst another field was at 16 nodes with first flowers which is perhaps a week earlier than expected. So the area has certainly had a wide range of planting dates across the window. Unfortunately due to the cold snap during mid October (temperatures were as low as 6°C) some fields which were watered up were extremely slow to get going and some fields on back to back country suffered from Black Root Rot and then Rhizoc. In the extreme cases this lead to areas or whole fields being replanted.

Due to storms in late September the bulk of the areas at Dirranbandi and St George were planted from October 10 through to October 25. A few growers punted on a couple of extra fields which have now paid off with Beardmore Dam to fill and hopefully spill. All in all the area planted in the Lower Balonne region is around 20,000 hectares with a split of approximately 11,000 at St George/Thallon and 9000 at Dirranbandi. This has been a welcomed increase on last year's paltry 3200 hectares.

Insect pressure on the Bollgard II cotton has been very light with the majority of fields yet to be sprayed for sucking pests, so fruit retention remains high with a large number of fields averaging better than 85 per cent. Currently the first irrigation is being applied to most of the fields at both Dirranbandi and St George with some of the fields planted into moisture receiving their second irrigation. Conventional fields have had reasonable egg lays to date with some having been treated two to three times. At least growers now know that they will have the water to finish off the crop.

Well until the next thrilling and exciting installment I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone reading this a very safe and joyous Christmas and may the rains and river flows continue into the New Year.

**Dallas King**  
December 2, 2008

## Border Rivers

While no one will ever begrudge a 50–110 mm rainfall event in November, occurring after the November 15 close of the Bollgard II window meant it didn't result in any additional planted area but it has gone a long way to ensuring full water to the current crop.

As there was no useful follow-up rain after the early September event, the planted area in the Macintyre re-  
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mains fairly close to that reported in the last edition – approximately 6000 hectares around Goondiwindi and 10,000 hectares around Talwood and Mungindi.

Looking at the weather data, it looks to have been a fairly normal start – in the period from late September to late November there has been approximately 730 day degrees – eight per cent higher than average, and 15 cold shock days – just under the long term average. What this data masks is three intense cool changes during the planting period, surrounded by generally warm conditions. The events, occurring in the last week of September, the end of the first week of October, and the end of October saw several consecutive days of single digit minimums. Surprisingly, it didn't result in too much stand loss or replant – the only exception being crops that were being watered up during these periods.

Thrips pressure, and the resulting damage, has been more intense than recent seasons due to the large areas of cereals and vegetation that had flourished from the September rainfall. While it meant all crops looked very 'tatty', damage was mostly cosmetic and very few crops were treated. Insect pressure otherwise has been generally moderate.

The late November rainfall provided the whole area with at least 50 mm of rain, and patches with much more. Unfortunately, this also included widespread hail – although this was mostly very light, some areas were heavily damaged. There would be very few crops in the Macintyre without some evidence of hail damage although none of the damage will warrant a write-off.

The event triggered a flow in the Macintyre that allowed a small amount of high-flow pumping. As a result, the Macintyre Valley Cotton Growers Association unsuccessfully applied for a re-opening of the Bollgard II planting window and a few growers took the opportunity to plant some late conventional.

At the time of writing, they're forecasting a further 50–100 mm of rainfall for most areas of the Macintyre for the next four days – this season is shaping up very differently than the past few.

**David Kelly**  
November 27, 2008

## Darling Downs

Cotton plantings on the Darling Downs have exceeded early indications of around 30,000 hectares with estimated plantings of 22,000 hectares irrigated and 12,000 hectares dryland. With improved seasonal conditions in September, the Bollgard planting window was advanced by 10 days to take advantage of good rainfall for dryland crop plantings and earlier planting of irrigated crops avoiding a preplant irrigation in some instances.

Many crops have made good progress and are well

advanced whilst growth in some of the more recent plantings in November has been slowed by wet and cool conditions following further good rainfall and some local flooding particularly on the northern downs around Oakey Creek and Dalby. This rain has been very beneficial resulting in good flows in the Condamine River and Ashall, Oakey, Myall, Jimbour and Cooranga Creeks.

Irrigators have harvested significant irrigation water supplies from streams and overland flows with three to four days of pumping. Localised flooding in the Oakey Creek has resulted in some seedling crop losses and weather damage in wheat and barley which could not be harvested quickly enough before the rain.

The much improved irrigation and soil moisture situation however has been countered with deteriorating markets for cotton and grain despite the falling dollar. Fortunately, substantial forward sales by many growers in October with up to 60 per cent of the crop sold has provided for better grower returns in this and the next two seasons.

As in most districts, 2008–09 crop prospects are dependent on many variables including:

- Current and potential irrigation water supplies;
- Irrigation water committed for winter crop to generate cash flow and take advantage of high cereal prices;
- Likewise, a reduction in dryland fallow land with winter crop plantings;
- Competition from summer grain and legumes, notably soybean, given the high grain prices; and,
- Moderate but slowly improving cotton prices.

**Geoff McIntyre**  
November 28, 2008

## Gwydir Valley

Cotton crops within the Gwydir Valley are variable to say the least. The recent weather throughout October and November has had a big effect on cotton, not to mention the grain harvest. Staggered falls throughout October and November have delayed headers and heavy falls in late November have spelt disaster for many growers. For those able to get wheat and barley off early, yields were high with good quality. Some early crops made APH2 and malt grade for wheat and barley respectively, and received strong prices for forward sold contracts. Prolonged wet weather and lower temperatures in late November have held up headers, and many crops are now only going feed grade, if harvested at all.

Early planted cotton sown in mid September was able to get up and away before the wet weather set in, but crops sown in October have been subjected to a cold and wet start with many suffering seedling diseases.

Dryland cotton is progressing well, but has been affected by strong winds and sand blasting lately. Insects have not been an issue to date in the majority Bollgard II dryland planting, with weed control difficult during the wet period.

Irrigated cotton ranges from eight to 15 nodes and is at the squaring stage. Heliothis pressure has been moderate to date with up to three insecticide sprays going on conventional cotton on some farms, and thrips did cause some early damage. The first irrigation has been applied on some farms, but crops are suffering the effects of waterlogging after the rain. The recent heavy storms have caused hail damage to some cotton crops over the past few weeks to varying degrees.

Moree has recorded 180 mm of rain over October and November, with large falls forecast in the immediate future. There have been higher falls and severe storms in some areas.

**Lauryn Hanna**  
November 28, 2008

## Namoi Valley

After a final rush to complete planting, just over 15,000 hectares of irrigated cotton was planted in the lower Namoi and around 4000 hectares of dryland. The upper Namoi planted 8500. Severe hail storms and some flooding has since reduced the total Namoi area by about 500 hectares.

Regular falls of rain have been a disaster for harvesting winter cereals and have led to some waterlogging in young cotton crops. Temperatures during October and November have been relatively mild and have slowed early crop development. But the past few weeks have been very humid and ideal for vegetative growth.

Water supply in the Namoi has improved significantly. We had a minor flood in the Namoi down stream from Keepit in December. Several days of supplementary pumping was available along the river and this combined with heavy rain has allowed many growers to store enough water for summer crops.

Early season insect activity has been dominated by relatively high thrips numbers. Heliothis pressure was low on young cotton crops up until December. A series of moderate egg lays occurred through early December. Very few mirids or other pests have appeared so far.

Weeds have been difficult to manage in everything except Flex crops. Constant rain germinated a lot of weeds and has made control difficult. The first signs of hormone damage have appeared in crops.



Prices on offer for lint and seed have declined but much of the crop is locked into contracts and pools.

A few weeks of dry weather to complete harvest and finish fertiliser and weed control operations would be appreciated. I must say it was great to see the large volume of water flowing down the Namoi. The first for several years. I hope the next falls of rain make it into Keepit's catchment.

**Robert Eveleigh**  
December 8, 2008

## Macquarie Valley

Recent rain in the region has failed to provide substantial inflows into Burrendong Dam. It is now at 23 per cent of capacity and the general security allocation is still only one per cent.

Winter crop harvesting has been very stop-start with around 35–40 per cent of the region harvested so far. It has been difficult to secure headers and trucks when needed.

Yields and quality before the rain were good with reports of up to six tonnes per hectare being harvested from some rain grown crops.

Rain has affected grain quality in many areas and the rush is now on to salvage what remains. Isolated hail has been reported in recent storms. Some cotton crops had been irrigated prior to the rain. Many were not and recent rain will delay the need for irrigation.

The small cotton crop is progressing well. Some fields had to be replanted due to cool conditions at germination through to emergence and seed depth issues. There has been some thrips activity which has needed spraying where the pressure and damage was high enough. Other insect pressures including Helicoverpa have generally been low.

Early canola crops did not fare as well as later planted ones due to frost damage.

Daily temperatures are tracking slightly above the long term average. From October 1 until November 28 there have been around 550 day degrees. The gap is narrowing as this year edges closer to the long term average. There has been extremes of weather with cooler than usual nights, cold weather fronts, high humidity and storms.

A very successful Cotton Cup was held at Warren in early November with a large crowd of over 3000 attending.

**Craig McDonald**  
November 28, 2008

## Southern NSW

Cotton area for the 2008-09 season is approximately 3100 hectares for the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee (Lachlan 1900 and the Murrumbidgee 1200). Most of the crop is being grown using bores. River allocations ...56▷

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are nine per cent on the Murrumbidgee and zero per cent on the Lachlan (again).

Weather has been favourable yet as always there have been a number of cold fronts that have slowed growth at times. Time taken for emergence varied depending on the timing of the irrigations and the passing of the cold fronts. Majority of crops were watered up and due to the lack of moisture in the profile in some areas took a reasonable time to sub.

Wire worm have been a problem in some paddocks yet there seems to be less losses than last season due to better control methods. The numbers of wire worm or false wire worm seem to be increasing as more stubble is retained and, as suggested by one of the local consultants, there are a lot more adult beetles around due to the lower use of insecticide.

On the positive side there has been little or no other insect pressure. Recently Chris Anderson and Peter Lonagan carried out the annual disease survey in both valleys with very little to report on in terms of seedling disease which is great news.

November's temperatures have been generally good plus there have been patchy storms which have delayed the first irrigation for some crops. Some crops have received the first irrigation due to the large number of windy days yet most growers will most likely start irrigating during the first week of December. The stage of the crop ranges between six nodes and the earliest crops at 10 node.

### ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

The Mystery Tractor is a Model L Case – which was the forerunner of the popular Model LA. Powered by a 40 hp 4 cylinder petrol/kero engine the big tractor retained a chain drive transmission – a carryover from the early part of the twentieth century. This particular early 1930 example is on display at the Warracknabeal Wheatland's Museum. (Photo IMJ)



Day degrees at November 28, 2008				
Met site	2008-09	2007-08	Average DD	Cold shock 2008-09 (ave)
Benerembah	512	569	439	31 (38)
Hay	515	571	466	28 (35.1)
Hillston	556	596	490	25 (31.5)
Whitton	514	567	435	31 (38.1)

Again this season crops are being grown utilising various irrigation systems including lateral moves, drip, bank less channels and syphons.

At this early stage the crops are set up for what is hoped to be another great season in terms of both yield and quality. Winter cereal crops are continuing to come off yet some growers are still awaiting the arrival of contractors who have been rain delayed.



Dr Robert Mensah talking at a recent crop walk near Griffith where both Dr Mensah and Graham Charles made presentations relating to IPM and weed control in RR Flex crops.

James Hill  
December 1, 2008

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