

Central Queensland

Cotton ginning is all but finished which signals the end of one season and the start of the next. The 2008–09 season saw Central Queensland production at 150,630 bales picked off 16,830 hectares. Quality from Central Highlands has been generally good to excellent despite late rainfall, with only a small percentage downgraded for colour and leaf. Dawson/Callide did not fare quite so well in the quality stakes with a lot of the later cotton downgraded for colour.

The Central Highlands CGA took the opportunity to celebrate with their annual dinner held in late June. The dinner committee pulled together a wonderful event with Rupert McCall as the MC. Yield award went to Hamish Millar for Tandanawanna's yield of 11.18 bales per hectare.

Charlie Wilson received the Grower Service to Industry Award, and the three long term Sunwater Irrigation officers, Ian Davidson, Robyn Boon and Ian Grayson received the Ian Mackay Service to Industry Award. The Farming Excellence Award went to 2PH farms.

Following a number of unusually wet winters, Central Queensland has had a particularly dry winter. The last substantial rain in Central Queensland fell during picking. The Central Highlands experienced variable but generally good rainfall in April but were dry in May whereas the Dawson and Callide Valleys were generally dry in April but wetter in May. Except for light rain (20–35 mm) across the southern highlands (Springsure to Rolleston) Central Queensland grain growing areas received little effective rain during June and July.

For all of Central Queensland dryland and irrigated cropping there is about 240,000 hectares of wheat and 40,000 of chickpeas. Compared with the past few years, there is certainly less irrigated winter cropping. While the lack of rain has seen most crops struggle, chickpeas in

particular have been challenging this year with a number of disease and plant establishment issues reported.

The big focus this winter has been preparation for a big planting of cotton. With Fairbairn at 85 per cent, it is anticipated that Central Highlands will have approximately 16,000 hectares of cotton planted. Planting in the Dawson Callide will be around 5000 hectares, which is similar to last year. Central Highlands and Dawson Callide will have the same Bollgard II planting window this year, from September 22 through to November 2.

Susan Maas
July 31, 2009

Border Rivers

With all ginning and classing complete, the result for the 2008–09 crop ended on a good note.

Yields around Goondiwindi averaged around the nine to 10 bales per hectare range with quite a few crops suffering yield drags as a result of hail damage early in the season – mainly due to stand loss.

Further west, yields around Talwood and Mungindi were excellent with many farm averages getting close to and above 12.5 bales per hectare.

Quality was all good with the exception of colour, mainly impacted by the Easter rain and some showers after that. Pre and post rain picked cotton often saw a drop from 21s to 41s. Most micronaire was around 4.2, strength about 30.5 grams/tex and length at 38 32nds.

Optimism for cotton in the area is at its highest for several seasons. Many irrigators will be growing cotton for the first time for two or three seasons, and there is a good amount of interest in dryland.

This is a result of good rainfall in late May that replenished soil moisture profiles, provided some flood harvesting along the Macintyre, and put about 14 per cent into Pindari Dam – its best inflow in the past two years. Pindari is currently at 44 per cent capacity while neither Coolmunda Dam (39 per cent) or Glenlyon Dam (24 per cent) benefited from the May rainfall.

While Bollgard II Roundup Ready Flex technology will fill a majority of the area this season, some growers are still opting for some area of conventional.

Close to 200 people attended the annual Macintyre Valley Cotton Growers Association annual awards night in July.

- Winner of the Irrigated Crop of the Year, based on yield and agronomic management was Bruce and Dell Bailey, 'Hazeldene', Boomi, with a crop of Sicot 71BRF that yielded 12.95 bales per hectare.
- Taking the Dryland Crop of the Year, also based on yield and agronomic management was Boardman Agriculture, 'Backspear', Tulloona with a crop of Sicot 70BRF yielding 6.3 bales per hectare.

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- Local agronomist Jim O'Connor was presented with the service of the industry award following more than 20 years of involvement in cotton in the Macintyre.
- The Patricia Coultan Memorial Award that recognise the unsung heroes of the industry – those who play very important roles in 'keeping the wheels' turning but are rarely recognised – was presented to local trucking identity Steve Ellis.

David Kelly
July 27, 2009

Darling Downs

Harvesting and ginning of the Darling Downs crop has almost been completed with very pleasing results which have been better than expected. It is predicted that the Darling Downs crop will be around 200,000 bales. Irrigated crop yields have been in the 10 to 12 bales per hectare range with some crops significantly higher.

Dryland yields have ranged from 4.0 to 7.0 bales per hectare. The quality of crops harvested before the Easter rain was very good, but many crops suffered downgrading due to colour after that rain event. Fibre length and strength were both consistently very good across a majority of the crop and reflect the relatively soft season that was experienced on the Downs.

The 2009–10 season it is looking very promising with most growers having relatively good soil moisture and there is some water in storages. Couple this with low grain prices and the agronomic and management advantages of Bollgard Roundup Ready Flex varieties – cotton is regarded as a very attractive cropping opportunity this season.

If a reasonably good rainfall event is received early in the season there is every indication that there will be a very significant increase in cotton plantings this year – especially dryland crops. Early indications suggest that there could be around 23,000 hectares of irrigated cotton and as much as 24,000 paddock hectares of dry land cotton. This area could increase even further given a good break to the season.

Geoff McIntyre
August 4, 2009

Namoi Valley

We had a good start to the winter cropping season but July and early August have been very dry. Winter crops need a good soaking to ensure at least average yields. But the dry conditions have been great for cotton field preparation.

While surface water supplies are still limited in the Namoi, planting intentions are well up on the past few seasons due to inflows into Keepit Dam. With the dam at almost 38 per cent most river irrigators will have

enough water to grow a significant area. About 9500 hectares of cotton are expected in the Upper Namoi and about 37,000 hectares should be planted in the Lower Namoi.

After last year's large wheat planting several growers are attempting to plant cotton directly into wheat stubble, but the wet harvest last year has made this difficult or impossible for many growers. As in the past few seasons, most of the crop will be planted using BRF technology. The addition of a new variety – Sicot 71BRF – will make the technology more adaptable than ever before.

The impact of last year's whitefly explosion is etched firmly in everybody's memory. While the pest was a major problem in the Wee Waa and Myall Vale areas it has the potential to spread further and needs to be managed carefully. Growers are urged to take care when selecting early season sucking pest sprays.

Cash prices for this year's crop are certainly not brilliant. We can only hope the Aussie dollar returns to more reasonable levels soon and the price improves. But we all know that good yields can reduce the impact of lower prices and growers have some control over yields. As planting time fast approaches lets hope the heavens open soon for winter crops and that cotton yields are excellent.

Robert Eveleigh
August 7, 2009

Macquarie Valley

In the dead of winter, it is hard to believe that cotton planting is less than two months away. Rainfall in June was very good and helped get most crops off to a good start. Rain delayed planting of some winter crops, with showers making it too wet to get machinery going. Winter crops in the region are now looking very good and a solid soaking in a few weeks would benefit these crops considerably.

Most irrigable fields now have winter crops planted in them along with extensive dryland cropping areas.

There have been no significant inflows into Burrendong or Windamere dams – Burrendong remains at 17.9 per cent capacity. The region is again facing a zero general security water allocation with the only access to carryover water allowed. This situation is becoming all too common and is forcing growers not to rely on having any available river irrigation water. Ground water users will still be able to irrigate some crops.

Based on the current non-availability of water the cotton area will again be very low. A forecast of another El Niño event with associated reductions in rainfall is the last thing growers need at this point in time.

The Macquarie Cotton Grower awards dinner was held on August 6 and it is good that these awards have continued despite the reduction in cotton areas over the past several years. The following winners were announced:

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- Auscott at Warren were the crop competition winners with a yield of 13.2 bales per hectare grown using subsurface drip irrigation. The crop grew 2.5 bales of cotton per megalitre of irrigation water.
- Mal Carpenter, manager of Agriland at Narromine, won the Jim Beale Memorial service to the industry award for many years of service to Macquarie valley's cotton industry.

With cotton planting time fast approaching, the probability of receiving substantial flows into the dams and river could be described as low – but stranger things have happened. Our fingers are crossed for good late winter and early spring rain.

Craig McDonald
August 6, 2009

Southern NSW

Picking was completed by mid July with most growers generally happy with their results. The average yield for the area was 9.1 bales per hectare. Table 1 details the area and yield split. Defoliation was challenging due to cold weather and rain showers.

Later crops harvest was slowed considerably due to rain. It is the first time for quite a period that rain has affected picking. Rain also delayed ginning as module pick up was affected on farms that had harvested prior to the rain. This year's June break has served as a reminder for why it is important to aim for earliness. Unfortunately



there were more late crops this season due to the cooler weather at the start and at the finish of the season.

Quality was generally good with the only issue being a small quantity of bales with high leaf (leaf 4) in some of the crops yet this was most likely due to rain prior to harvest.

TABLE 1: 2008-09 southern cotton yields

	Area (ha)	Yield (bales/ha)
Lachlan (Hillston)	2034	9.71
Murrumbidgee (Griffith/Whitton & Hay)	1010	7.56

Despite the good rains received locally during June there has been very little catchment filling rain. At this stage there will be no change to the outlook reported in the last season summary. That is, both the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee valleys are facing another zero general allocation.

This means that the outlook at this stage will be for a small area of cotton again. There will be additional competition from other summer crops for the valued ground water allocations.

James Hill
August 3, 2009

ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

The tractor is a Hanomag R40, manufactured in Germany. The twin fuel filters indicate that it is diesel powered. The steering wheel is a proprietary line used by numerous German tractor manufacturers and the seat, also a proprietary line, is the same as that fitted to Deutz and Orenstein & Koppel tractors. The unit pictured is on display at the Warracknabeal Wheatland Museum, Victoria.



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