

SECTION 4
AREA ROUNDUP

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Namoi Valley

By Robert Eveleigh

The past season should have been another great year for yields and for some growers it was very good. But the valley on the whole did not achieve the excellent results that it achieved in 2007-08. Although we only had two days above 40°C it was quite a hot season with most of January and February over 35°C. Where growers were able to keep tight watering intervals, yields were generally very good.

Total planted areas in the Upper Namoi was about 8300 hectares and 23,000 hectares in the

Lower Namoi including Walgett. Restricted water supply has been a major issue for two seasons now, particularly in the lower Namoi. Prospects for the 2009-10 season are better but Keepit dam is still only about 35 per cent full and we urgently need rain in the catchment. Split Rock remains a mere puddle at four per cent capacity.

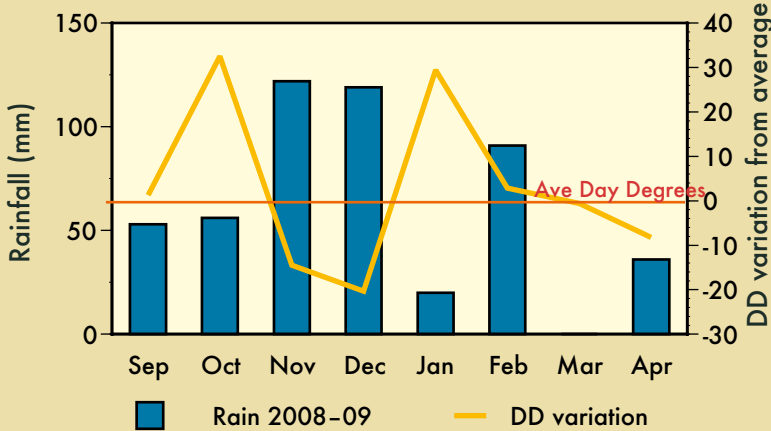
We had lots of challenges during the season. Hail was very widespread and although only a small portion of the crop was written off, a large area was affected and maturity was delayed. Many of these hail damaged crops were very late and did not achieve average yields. Hormone drift was also widespread again this season, but overall damage was less severe, except for a few western crops.

For the first time whitefly emerged as a major pest and cost growers in the Wee Waa area a lot of money to control. Whitefly were not a problem in the upper Namoi. In the end rain before harvest caused some grade loss and discounts for quite a few growers, the first for many years. A few individual fields produced yields just over five bales per acre but overall yields in the Upper Namoi averaged about 3.6 bales per acre and 3.7 in the lower Namoi.

Dryland crops were a mixed bag but generally performed better than average. Later crops achieved excellent yields as a result of timely rainfall and some growers had their best year ever. Yields ranged from 1.2 to 2.5 bales per acre.

Narrabri 2008-09 seasonal climate

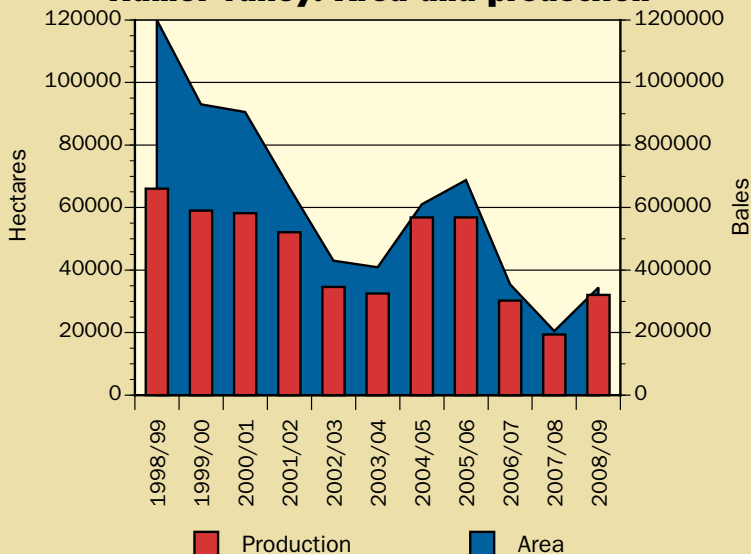
Total Day Degrees: 2666 (+22); Total rain: 497 mm (+2)



	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Total
Cold shock	17	10	1	1	0	0	2	7	38 (-17)
Hot shock	0	1	0	2	13	10	0	0	26 (-3)

*Average day degrees from 1957 to 2009.
Source: CSIRO Plant Industry.

Namoi Valley: Area and production



Pre-plant conditions

Early winter rainfall was patchy and well below average for most areas, but good rain in July was followed by further rain in August and a relatively dry September. Ground preparation for summer crops continued without much interruption. A very large area of irrigated wheat was planted in the Namoi to capitalise on high grain prices.

Planting

Planting began in late September but most of the crop was planted in mid October. Spring temperatures were normal, but we had a few cold days in October and some heavy rain post planting led to about five per cent of the crop being replanted. Crop establishment was generally good with rapid emergence. Timely rain established most of the crop with only a few crops needing to be watered up.

Early season

Murphy's law dictates that if wheat is worth a lot and irrigators grow a significant acreage of wheat then something will cause problems. Last season that something was rain at harvest and plenty of it. Many wheat crops were downgraded last year due to persistent rain in November. Some crops were not harvested until Christmas. It was a disaster for some

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growers who had not spared any expense to grow full input crops only to receive feed wheat prices. The positive side of this equation was the extra water harvested on farm for cotton. Cotton progressed well through November and December as a result of warm temperatures and regular falls of rain. 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 good except where disease was a problem.

Mid season

Regular rain continued through December. January was quite dry but early February was much wetter than normal. Solid temperatures were recorded through December and January without the extremely hot periods. Despite this January water use was quite challenging and tested groundwater pumpers. Temperatures continued to promote good vegetative growth and the mild conditions encouraged the use of growth regulators particularly on hail damaged or later planted crops.

Late season

Well above average rain in late March continued into April. Early picked crops were fine and escaped down grading but some late crops were affected by the wet weather. Although the volume of rain was not significant the number of wet days caused the problem.

Defoliation conditions and picking were much later than normal and stretched out over several months. Some late crops were not picked until July. 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 regrowth. Regrowth was a significant problem.

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 eight or nine sprays for the season. Most Bollgard crops handled the pressure without any problems. Occasional bouts of heavy pressure through February did see surviving larva in crops but it was generally 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 seem to be present in low to moderate numbers in the Namoi valley although they don't appear till late in the season.

Although mirids numbers were no worse than normal, green veggie bugs continue to increase in severity each season. Selective control is difficult and treatment certainly aggravated the white fly problem.

Whitefly were the major pest of the season. Although whitefly have been present in crops for several years their numbers never become a problem. 2009 was different. Whitefly numbers increased dramatically in January and the problem continued to spread throughout the valley. However whitefly did not become a problem that required control in the upper Namoi.

Disease

Verticillium wilt was present but not a major problem this year. Black root rot was present but crops recovered quickly once temperatures increased in late November.

Fusarium has still not been identified in the Lower Namoi and its presence in the upper Namoi appears to be stable.

Boll rots and hard lock were common problems throughout the valley as a result of the rain.

Finally the growers association recently had its awards dinner.

Congratulations go to Cathcart Partnership for growing the field with the highest ginned yield. It was a crop of Sicot 70BRF that averaged a massive 5.16 bales per acre.

Congratulations also to Auscott Narrabri – Lower Namoi Cotton Grower of the Year.

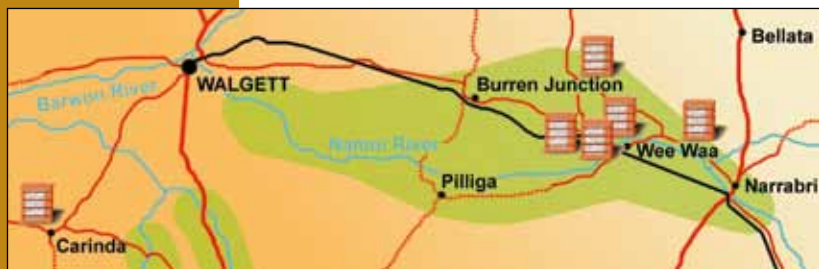


MAP LEGEND

Cotton Area

Cotton Gin

Lower Namoi Valley



Upper Namoi Valley

