

SECTION 4
AREA ROUNDUP

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MAP LEGEND

Cotton Area

Cotton Gin

Gwydir Valley

By James Quinn

The Gwydir Valley was planted to just under 30,000 hectares of cotton this season. The majority of plantings were fully irrigated, but as a result of lower water availability, more growers are planting skip row cotton with the aim to irrigate a couple of times through the season. The area planted to dryland cotton also increased from the previous season.

The increase in planted area was a result of a combination of inflows into Copeton Dam at the end of the previous summer, good planting rains and follow up events throughout the months of September, October and November which allowed for additional area to be planted towards the end of the Bollgard II planting window.

These conditions coupled with mild temperatures

saw this crop get away to a relatively good start. Due to the rainfall the planting window was spread considerably over this period with some late conventional crops planted into late November and early December.

Climate and environment

It was an average summer in terms of temperature and day degrees, with a continuation of the milder summer conditions which we have experienced over the past couple of seasons. Extremes in temperatures at both ends of the scale were rare. This season we had below average cold shock days which assisted in getting the crop away well. The valley registered only two days above 40°C and one night above 25°C. This resulted in excellent conditions for cotton growth and is reflected in some high yield levels.

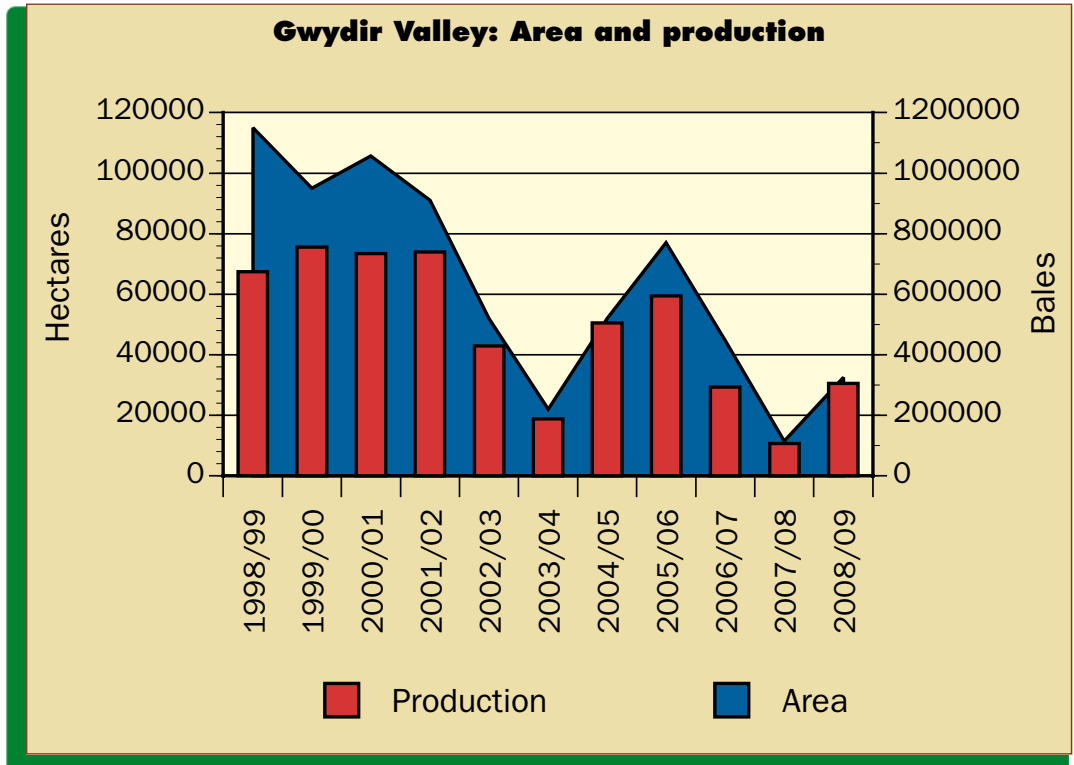
As mentioned, above average rainfall was received over the valley up until the first week of December. A dry spell through the later part of December and till the end of January stretched a lot of crops. But good general falls of between 75–100 mm in late January and then significant falls in mid February enabled growers to finish of crops excellently. Later planted dryland crops also benefited from this late rain and have gone onto yield well above the valley average.

Crop damage to hormone drift is still a major issue, and one which weighs heavily on the minds of those involved in the cotton industry. Although in area and intensity the damage was not as severe as last season, very few fields escaped without some

The Gwydir Valley cotton area



Gwydir Valley: Area and production



symptoms of hormone damage appearing at some stage through the season.

Insects

This season in the Gwydir Valley will be remembered for the large populations of whitefly which infested crops. Whitefly numbers have been present in crops in low levels for many seasons now, but a combination of many seasonal influences led to rapid increase in numbers this season. A mild winter and wet spring was conducive to whitefly build up on weed hosts in cereal crops post harvest.

The removal of this weed host in mid December and a reduction of beneficial insects in some crops led to spiraling numbers of whitefly which were very difficult to contain, let alone control, once established in crops.

Other insect pest of note were thrips which infested cotton crops early season, but crops were able to grow away from this damage. Heliothis pressure was light to moderate throughout the entire season. As we have seen in previous seasons, late season heliothis pressure is very low. Sucking pest pressure was consistent again this season and their control may have impacted on beneficial numbers and the build up of whitefly populations.

Yields and quality


Like planting, picking was a drawn out process, as growers were afforded the luxury to allow crops to fully mature due to favourable climatic conditions. Defoliation became increasingly difficult the further into autumn the crop moved with many applying three applications to try and remove leaf and open up top bolls.

Very good yields were recorded in the valley this season. Many growers have commented that they have achieved their highest average yields across properties. Yields are going to range from eight to nine bales per hectare for the very late planted crops to those which have pushed 15 bales per hectare. Also in the dryland portion of the crop, yields were above average and depending on the crop stage when the relieving rains in January came, yielded between three to six bales per hectare.

Many of the early harvested crops had few if any quality issues, but as the season rolled on, colour and leaf grade declined in almost all later harvested crops. Issues with fibre length and micronaire were not seen this season as in the past, through a combination of the milder season and improved variety characteristics.

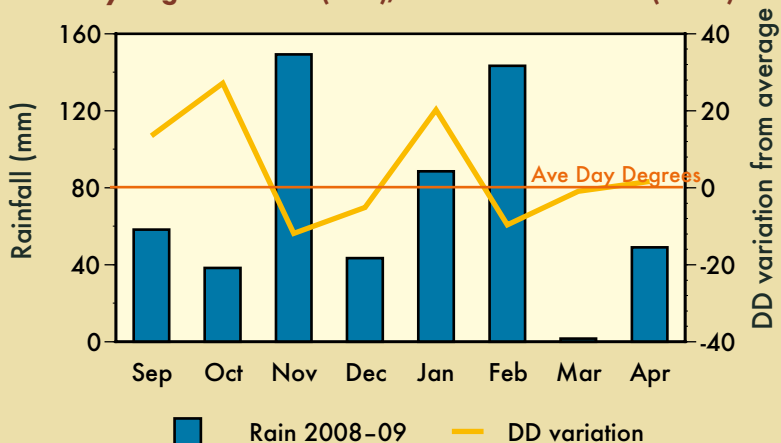
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Moree 2008-09 seasonal climate

Total Day Degrees: 2705 (+35); Total rain: 572 mm (+121)



	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Total
Cold shock	18	7	1	1	0	0	4	9	52 (+6)
Hot shock	0	1	0	4	6	6	0	0	17 (-6)

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

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