

SECTION 4
AREA ROUNDUP

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MAP LEGEND

Cotton Area

Cotton Gin

St George–Dirranbandi

By Dallas King

Already the volunteer cotton is emerging around the area indicating that another season is almost upon us. Unfortunately we are going to need a lot more moisture in the fields to germinate the ‘real’ cotton plants we require to grow a crop.

The 2008–09 cotton season will in the majority of cases be remembered as a reasonably kind season. Although Dirranbandi and St George were by no means back to full production it was the most amount of cotton grown since the 2004–05 cotton season with yields of a similar nature to that year as well.

St George - Dirranbandi area



The area planted was close to 20,235 hectares (50,000 acres) with nearly an even split of this between St George and Dirranbandi. It was the first time in quite a few seasons that growers were able to start confidently with the knowledge of reasonable water to take the crop through to fruition.

Planting

Planting was a mixed bag this season with a reasonable mix of grower’s pre-irrigating, watering up and planting into rain moisture. Due to decent but patchy falls on September 10 the earliest fields were planted on September 18 and benefited from very warm conditions. Although temperatures were warm at the end of September things turned bitterly cold around the second week of October just as a number of fields were being watered up. These cold shock days certainly slowed the vigour of the crop and emergence was patchy and slow. Crops planted into moisture generally had a better start. Due to the cooler weather, a number of growers ended replanting some fields.

Insects

With quite a large area planted to wheat, both irrigated and dryland, thrips certainly made their presence felt on young seedlings. Aphids were also common in the first few weeks of the season but disappeared almost as quickly as they arrived.

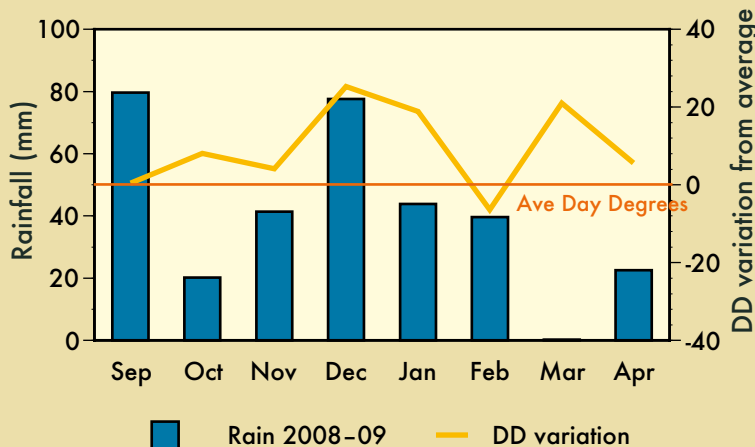
Compared to the previous season, insect pressure was low. As an agronomist trying to show new scouts what type of pests to look for it was quite difficult to find any mirids in crops till mid December. It was indeed a nice problem to have. But the lack of early season mirids did require vigilant monitoring and scheduling of irrigations so as to encourage good crop vigour. Throughout November and December most fields had first position fruit retention above 90 per cent which certainly put some pressure on agronomists and growers alike to avoid an early or premature cutout.

Once again due to the fantastic work conducted by the research team at Narrabri there was a move towards higher thresholds for mirids. By working on three mirids per metre the need to treat didn’t arrive until mid to late January. This also resulted in the majority of fields only being treated one or two times for this pest. Due to the lack of treatment for other pests, beneficials remained high and active throughout the season. Shield was used in both areas this season with very pleasing results and didn’t appear to be any more disruptive on beneficials than Regent and appeared to have some other benefits.

It is now accepted in the St George area that whitefly will be an ongoing pest that we are going to have deal with on an on going basis with most growers allowing for at least one application in their budgets.

St George 2008–09 seasonal climate

Total Day Degrees: 3089 (+77); Total rain: 325 mm (-71)



	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Total
Cold shock	17	9	0	0	0	0	0	5	31 (+1)
Hot shock	0	1	5	17	10	8	5	0	46 (+6)

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

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But Dirranbandi has not generally experienced that same pressure, though numbers and prevalence this season have certainly increased. Depending on the results from the threshold matrix developed by Richard Sequeria, a mix of Admiral and Pegasus were used.

As with mirid pressure, Helicoverpa were also quieter this season. Conventional fields averaged between nine and 11 applications. But pressure did increase around January 10 with egg numbers around 150–200 per metre, this pressure remained constant for the next week. The Bollgard II crops in both St George and Dirranbandi handled this pressure extremely well with survivors less than what would have been expected due to previous season issues. Some fields were treated for Helicoverpa survivors but this was minimal compared to the previous year when crops required a number of treatments.

Yields

Due to the combination of the above factors and very favourable weather throughout the season as well as river flows, yields were pleasing. Quite a number of fields throughout both areas yielded above five bales per acre while the average would likely be closer to 4.3–4.5 bales per acre. Quality has also been excellent with only limited numbers of bales receiving discounts due to rain before picking.

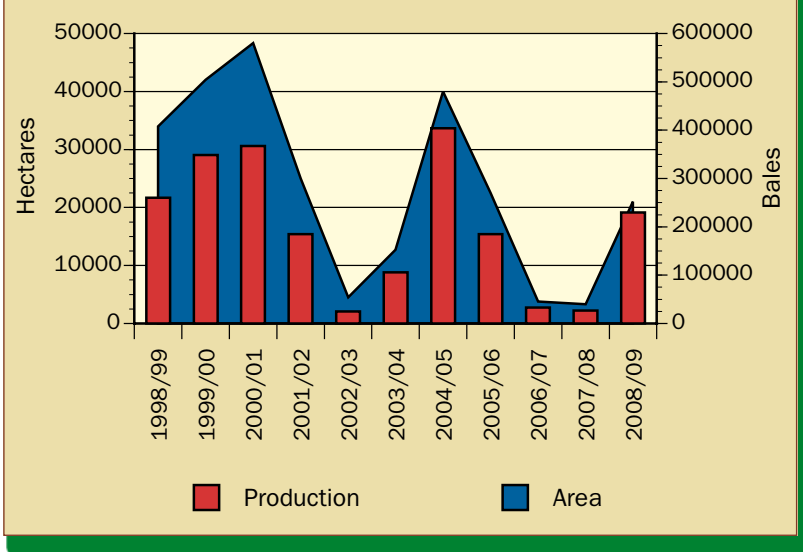
Future

Unfortunately both Dirranbandi and St George are going into the next season with limited water.

Obviously both communities are watching closely and with interest the federal government’s potential actions in relation to ‘Cubbie Station’ and their water licenses. The impact that the wrong decision will have for this area will be irreversible. Hopefully common sense will prevail and the whole of the Murray Darling receives flooding rains.



St George - Dirranbandi: Area and production



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