

SECTION 4
AREA ROUNDUP

This section brought to you in association with



Dawson-Callide

By Simon Struss

The two valleys grew 5000 hectares of cotton this past season which represents a near maximum plant. A larger than usual area was double cropped with wheat, chickpeas and late summer corn. These paddocks were hurriedly prepared and planted by the end of the Bollgard window.

All crops carried extremely high first position fruit retentions due to the favorable early grow-

ing conditions and lack of insect activity. The heat wave conditions around Christmas followed by a cloudy January did the crop no favours. Fortunately, February was a wet month with excellent weather for top fruit set and maturation.

The bulk of the crop was picked during fine conditions in March. The quality of this pick was all above base. Later picking encountered nuisance rainfall events with resultant leaf and color downgrades.

Planting and varieties

Bollgard varieties, more specifically Sicot 70BRE, accounted for the majority of the area. Only six fields of conventional were planted, one of these dryland.

Planting started in late September and was largely concluded three weeks later. Watering up was the preferred strategy for establishment with excellent plant stands resulting. Seedling mortality was minor.

Some cotton was grown under centre pivots with both solid plant and skip row configurations. The results were very encouraging with more pivots being utilised next year. The skip row (2*1) fields with their license fee savings and reduced water requirements returned well financially.

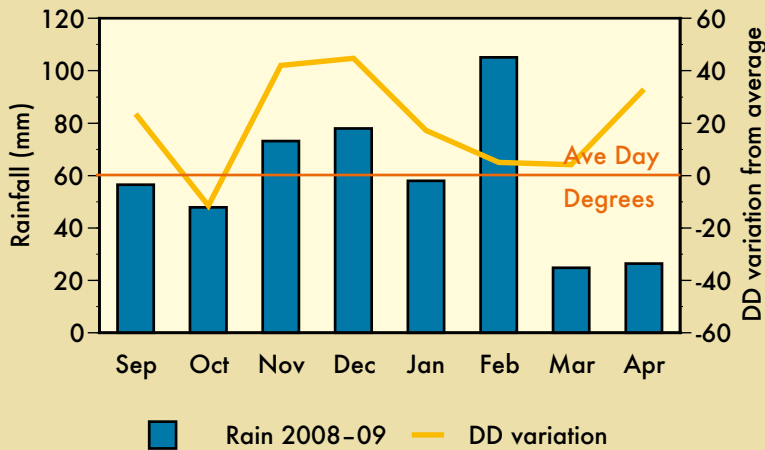
Two fields of dryland were grown. The results achieved were acceptable, and further underline the potential for this system of cotton production in the area.

Diseases

The incidence of seedling diseases was low in

Theodore 2008-09 seasonal climate

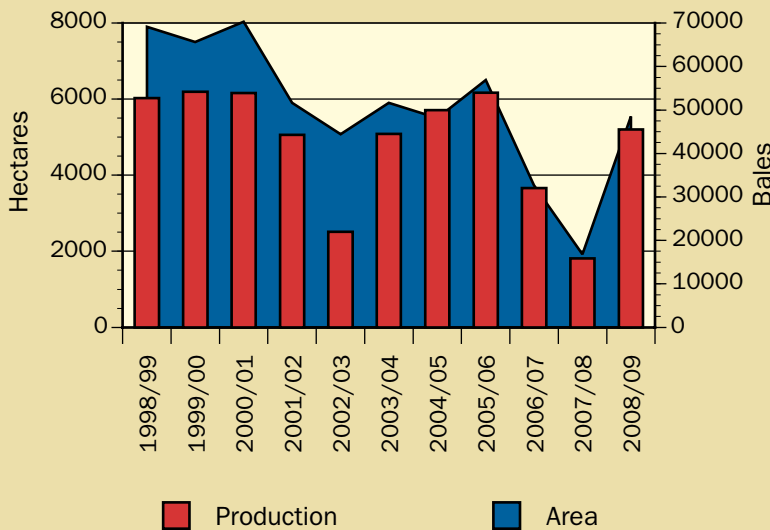
Total Day Degrees: 3118 (+158); Total rain: 470 mm (-56)



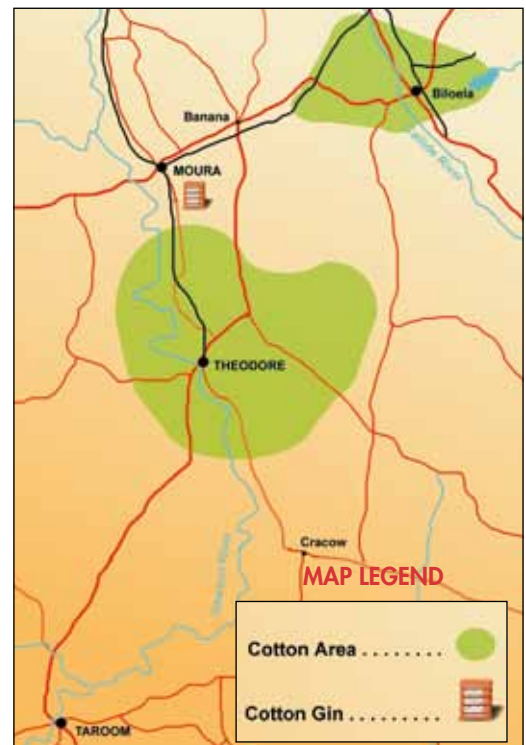
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Total
Cold shock	8	2	1	0	0	0	0	4	15 (-7)
Hot shock	0	0	5	13	4	2	0	0	24 (-)

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

Dawson-Callide: Area and production



Dawson-Callide cotton area



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most fields due to early warm weather and well prepared seed beds. The exception being fields that were double cropped, where soil preparation was rushed and poorer plant stands resulted.

Fusarium wilt, although still present in the area has not been detected in any new fields, and indeed the spread of the disease on known fields appears minimal.

Most fields escaped boll rots, but where they occurred the impact was extreme.

Insects

The conventional fields were successfully treated seven times for heliothis, finishing in mid January.

Green mirids, green vegetable bugs (GVB) and green stink bugs (GSB) all required treating at some stage. On average two sprays were utilised. The above proved difficult to control if applications were made after row closure, particularly GVBs and GSBs.

Occasionally jassids and cotton stainers required control measures.

Whitefly populations threatened to escalate early in the new year before settling down again, presumably as a result of predation. Only a small area was treated for this pest and then only as border treatments. Prohibiting (or restricting) the use of broad spectrum and disruptive chemicals on an area wide basis has contained this pest to an extent where chemical control is seldom warranted.

Four Bollgard farms required heliothis treatments.

Defoliation

Defoliations commenced in late February to early March. Early defoliations were complete after the standard two applications. Later applications, frequently delayed by small rainfall events, proved more troublesome. Slow leaf fall in these crops, causing

leaf to be retained in the canopy, resulted in pepper trash down grading.

Picking

Most of the early fields had a swift trouble free pick. Later paddocks had to dodge rain and wait for the soil to dry out causing a protracted picking operation.

One farm was picked in May/June after an earlier 2,4-D exposure delayed the crop development. Fortunately yield and quality were preserved.

Yields and grades

Most crops yielded between eight and 10 bales per hectare with the official area average of 8.5 bales per hectare

Length, strength and mic were fine throughout, with a third of the crop having four leaf. This leaf deduction was largely confined to later crops. Color was also variable depending on rainfall and once again more prevalent in the later crops.

Conclusions

The season started well but hit a few speed bumps along the way with heat wave conditions, cloud (with associated fruit shed) and rain later in the season. Fortunately late February and March produced ideal weather conditions that allowed crops to finish well and recoup some of their lost potential. As a result, all fields yielded better than expected.

Prospects for next season appear reasonable at this stage. Current water supplies should take the crop through till Christmas where a flow down the Dawson could be expected. Prices, although depressed at present, have ample time to respond (it is estimated that 20 per cent of the crop is forward sold at this stage). More importantly, other cropping options have less favorable outlooks.



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