

SECTION 4
AREA ROUNDUP

This section brought to you in association with



Central Highlands

By Susan Maas

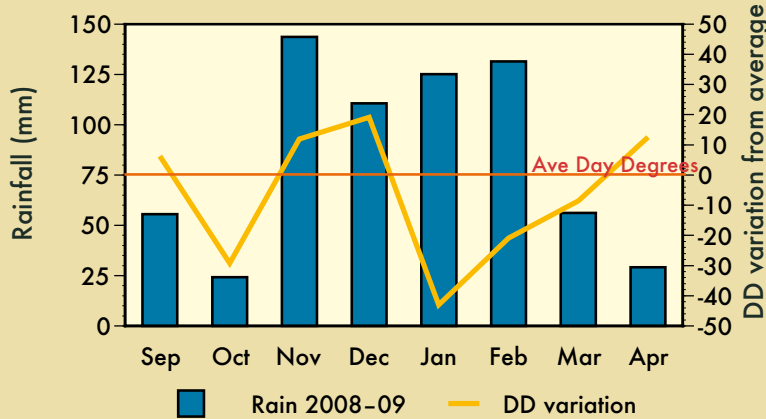
The start of the 2008–09 cotton season was quite hectic, with clean up from the January flooding, and quick turnaround from a sizable area of winter cropping. Planting in Central Highlands commenced on September 15, and 11,547 hectares were planted. Some growers took advantage of the rain in early September and were able to plant into moisture.

Growing conditions throughout the season were unusually mild, with a below average number of hot

shock days. In fact the highest maximum for the season was only 38.3°C. Accumulated day degrees were slightly below average for most of the season. These mild temperatures were accompanied by long periods of cloudy humid weather, particularly during January and February and the extent of fruit loss during the cloudy periods depended on planting date. Monthly rainfalls from November to February exceeded the monthly long term averages, with water logging a problem for a number of crops. Heavy rainfall on open cotton was also an issue late in the season.

Emerald 2008–09 seasonal climate

Total Day Degrees: 3228 (-52); Total rain: 676 mm (+187)



	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Total
Cold shock	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	6 (-5)
Hot shock	0	0	7	13	1	0	0	0	21 (-20)

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

Establishment

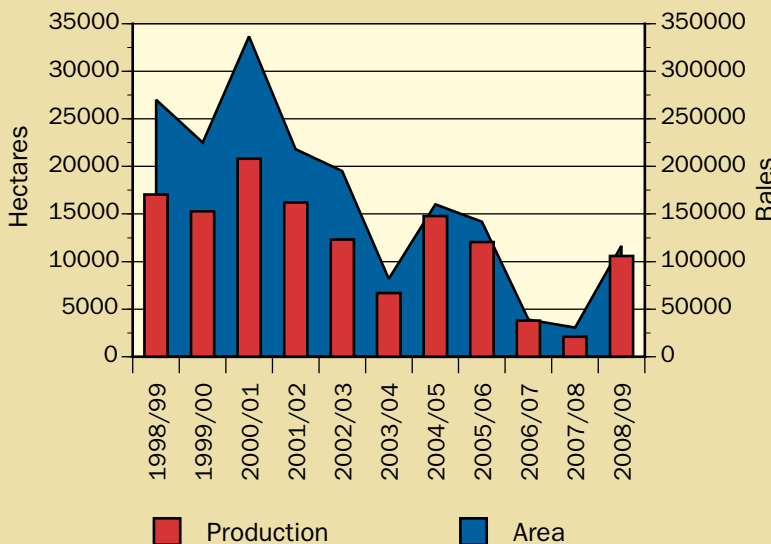
Generally establishment was good, especially for crops that were planted dry and flushed up. Some crops that were planted into moisture were patchy early on.

Insects

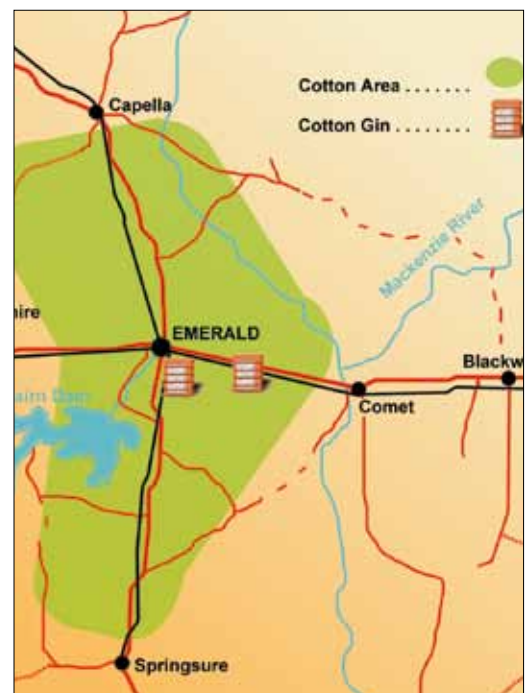
Insect pressure was generally low throughout the season and there were a number of Bollgard II crops that were not sprayed at all. The few conventional crops in the area were able to keep the number of sprays to less than 10. The low insect numbers, particularly low mirids, and good early season growing conditions saw many crops loaded up with very high fruit retention through to flowering.

There were reports from late-December of up to 1.5 medium-large larvae per metre surviving in Bollgard II fields on some properties in Central Queensland. All affected fields were at mid-flowering to late-flowering. In total, 2654 hectares was sprayed, although not all fields were necessarily at threshold.

Emerald: Area and production



Central Highlands cotton area



Silverleaf whitefly (SLW) populations were somewhat suppressed during the cloudy weather. Reduced mirid sprays early on ensured beneficial numbers remained high throughout the season and small sample collections of SLW nymphs showed high levels of parasitism (up to 75 per cent in Emerald). For those fields requiring control, SLW treatment was timely and effective.

Disease

There was little in the way of early season disease issues, although tobacco streak virus has been detected throughout the Central Highlands. Boll rot was a problem particularly in fields which had open cotton during the late season rain.

Irrigation

The mild conditions and above average rainfall reduced the reliance on irrigation water, but made scheduling of irrigations challenging. Most of the November rainfall (144 mm) fell in two short events causing considerable water logging for some crops at early squaring.

Yield and quality

Despite the extended periods of cloudy weather throughout January and February and the large amounts of rain on open cotton, yields and quality were not too badly impacted. 105,626 bales were picked from 11,547 hectares to give a district average of about 9.1 bales per hectare. Yields varied widely across the district, with planting date greatly affecting the stage of the crop during heavy periods of



rain and cloudy weather. The majority (under 90 per cent) of cotton quality was base grade or better, with surprisingly good colour and leaf results given the average wet season.

Next season

This winter has been extremely dry with no rainfall at all in July and the last meaningful rainfall recorded while cotton was still being picked. A smaller irrigated winter cropping area was planted, with the majority of irrigated area ready to be planted to cotton for 2009–10. With Fairbairn at 84 per cent, it is estimated that as much as 16,000 hectares of cotton will be planted in the Central Highlands.

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