

SECTION 4
AREA ROUNDUP

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Burdekin

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Commercial scale plantings of cotton were conducted in the Burdekin for the second time in 2009. This season five participating growers planted 950 hectares of cotton in late December. The early onset of what turned out to be an extraordinary wet season resulted in poor establishment on 230 hectares that was subsequently abandoned due to an inability to replant within the window.

The remaining crop endured around 1800 mm of rainfall which started within a week of planting and continued through until March. After a period of continuous cloud cover for five weeks, the sun was almost becoming a distant memory, and crops responded to these conditions with reduced vigour and shedding of squares and flowers.

When sunny conditions finally returned, many crops were suffering from poor vigour and premature cutting out which would severely limit yield potential. The resultant valley average this season (ginning is not expected to be complete until September) is expected to be lower than 2008 at about 6.8 bales per hectare with individual fields ranging from three to 10 bales per hectare. Some high yields (12 bales per hectare) were recorded in climate interaction yield potential experiments on the Ayr research station.

These experiments along with several higher yielding commercial fields suggest that despite severe wet conditions, reasonable yields are still possible. While the past two wetter than average years have proven extremely challenging and unprofitable for



growers attempting cotton in the Burdekin, these seasons have very quickly demonstrated the key issues for cotton in the region and have been ideal for the generation of data revealing how cotton plants respond and how these responses might be better managed to avert wet season risk. To best sum up the past two years would be to say that despite the identification of various problems, none so far have presented without potential solutions.

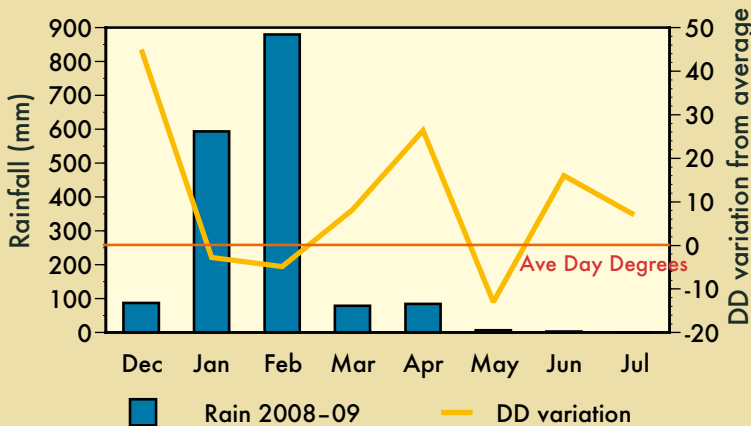
While 2009 has provided a very tough learning curve for new growers, most growers are looking at the bigger picture in that 2009 was one of the wettest years on record and that cotton production is still very much in a developmental phase. The current R&D program is suggesting that even in the most difficult of seasons that one could expect to encounter in the Burdekin, reasonable yields are still attainable with skilled agronomic management. Importantly the past two seasons have provided a lot of data needed to develop these agronomic strategies which will go a long way to managing the impact of wet years.

It's important to remember that at least 70 per cent of seasons are significantly drier than the past two seasons and in particular 2009 was the third wettest season recorded for the region since records began during the late 1800s.

For 2010 the area of cotton is likely to remain around the 750 hectares mark with a small core of pioneering growers remaining committed to the Burdekin. Recent Bureau of Meteorology predictions based on current SOI values are beginning to point towards the start of a drier cycle for north Queensland which would be a welcome change compared to the previous three seasons and would allow growers to see the potential of cotton grown in the region in a more typical season.

Ayr 2008-09 seasonal climate

Total Day Degrees: 2998 (+82); Total rain: 1736 mm (+899)



| | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Total |
|------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| Cold shock | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 8 | 11 | 22 (+1) |
| Hot shock | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 (-2) |

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