

## Central Queensland

Following a couple of unusually wet winters in Central Queensland, the lack of rain this winter, while probably more typical for the area, has certainly been a shock. June to August rainfall totals for Emerald and Theodore were 10 mm and 12 mm respectively. There was limited irrigated winter cropping. Above average temperatures in September have seen these crops finish quickly allowing for a quick turnaround back into cotton.

Cotton planting is well underway with the planting window in Central Queensland September 22 through to November 2. Fairbairn Dam is at 78 per cent and this has resulted in a large Central Highlands planting with around 17,000 hectares estimated. The Callide Dawson area is expected to be somewhere between 4000 hectares and 5300 hectares with most of the definite hectares planted and the remainder waiting on rain. This area is up despite security of water being an issue in the Dawson system with the water year having finished at the end of September and issues around carryover. The Lower Dawson weirs are approaching record lows, similar to those of 2006.

The dry winter has certainly made field preparations for the season challenging. In particular watering up has used a lot of water with as much as three ML per hectare being reported. Cooler than average night temperatures have slowed emergence slightly. Some early planted cotton, that was planted dry and flushed up struggled with the cold nights and hot windy days with some replants required.

The dryland winter harvest in CQ is about 75 per cent complete. Dryland wheat crops are averaging about one tonne per hectare, but the range is very wide from 0.5–3 tonnes per hectare, with the top end yields reflecting some areas receiving low but timely rainfall.

Chickpea yields varied widely across CQ from 0.2–2.5 tonnes per hectare with good crops averaging 1–1.2 tonnes per hectare.

**Susan Maas**  
October 5, 2009

## St George Dirranbandi

Well you know another cotton season is upon us when you see the growers clearing the snow off the planters and moving into the fields. Well maybe its not that bad but it has certainly been cool.

Unfortunately the St George and Dirranbandi area will be close to half the acres of last season. Expectations are that there will be close to 2500 hectares at Dirran and approximately 8000 at St George. Although the outlook was positive at the beginning of the year an

extremely dry winter has meant more water being used for pre irrigation and water-up than expected. Generally rainfall was limited to the 50 mm at the end of May and very little since. This is certainly evident in the potential dryland wheat yields.

As has become the norm we will need a flow in the next month to see any real increase in the planted area, even some decent rain would be gladly welcomed.

The majority of the area will once again be Bollgard II with perhaps nearly all of this being Sicot 71/70BRF. Conventional cotton may be close to 10 per cent of the area.

A cold change during the last week of September may result in a few fields having to be replanted though the majority of growers watering-up have held off until the minimum temperatures reached the late teens. Seed bed tilth has overall been quite good considering the lack of rainfall throughout winter. Although a couple of fields were planted early, most fields are only just beginning to emerge now.

Bring on the heat and rain or floods, either would be fine at the moment.

**Dallas King**  
October 9, 2009

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## Border Rivers

Following a great start to the winter with 70 mm and 35 mm in May and June, the tap turned off with both July and August registering less than 10 mm each. The result has been capping the potential of the winter crop and sapping some of the enthusiasm about the upcoming summer crop.

A general rainfall event in early September delivered between 20–30 mm across the area and helped to alleviate this to some degree. From the middle of September, temperatures began to increase, and the prospect of planting on rain moisture became very real for many growers. Temperatures stayed warm until September 23 when they plummeted. At the time of writing they remain low and the development of the young crops that went in during this period is very slow.

Many growers have decided to plant in mid-late October, and so will miss this run of cooler weather.

At the time of planting, Pindari dam remains at 44 per cent, a level it has been at since receiving good inflows in May. Glenlyon Dam's level is 24 per cent while Lake Coolmunda is 34 per cent.

Estimates on projected planted area for this season are between 35,000 and 45,000 hectares – the largest crop in four years. For many growers it will be their first cotton crop in four years, with most looking forward to it after stints with winter and summer cereals.

Early estimates on technology suggest about three-quarters of the area will be planted to Bollgard II/ Roundup Ready Flex varieties, mostly Sicot 71BRF, with the remainder reasonably evenly distributed between conventional, Roundup Ready Flex and Bollgard II varieties.

With sorghum prices at low levels, there has been a lot of interest in dryland cotton in the area, particularly given the ease of management now with the Bollgard II and Roundup Ready Flex and the good results achieved in 2008–09. A good rainfall event sometime in the next six weeks will see a flurry of planting.

**David Kelly**  
September 30, 2009

## Darling Downs

In stark contrast to last season, it has been an extremely tough start to the 2010 season. Early heat waves followed by cold periods, dust storms, dry winds and a few patchy rainfall events have all added to a very uncertain start to the planting period.

A few dryland crops were planted following rainfall in early September. A cold period immediately after planting, followed by hot, dry windy conditions resulted in very poor establishment and crop losses.

Some growers have started to pre irrigate their fields

while others have planted dry and are watering up. There have been problems with watering, with growers having difficulty wetting their fields. Although they are not using a lot of water (approximately 0.7–0.8 megs per hectare) they are having difficulty in getting uniformity across the fields.

The hard start to the season has significantly reduced the possible area to be planted this season. Estimates vary, but the total area expected to be planted should range between 27,000 and 32,000 hectares.

There is still a lot of optimism despite the poor early weather conditions and cotton remains a very attractive option for many growers. A lot of growers have good soil moisture profiles even though they are losing moisture from the top. If the Downs could receive between 35–50 mm in the last three weeks of October, the total area planted could still be significantly larger than last year.

### DDCG Inc Grower of the Year Awards

Darling Downs Grower Awards were presented at the 2009 DDCG Inc dinner in Dalby on September 4 with some 230 growers and guests acknowledging and celebrating the achievements of growers and consultants at a very successful function.

All seven growers nominated for the awards have demonstrated high levels of achievement and successful cotton crop production in very challenging seasonal conditions. A highlight has been the successful management of limited water supplies based on very well designed irrigation systems, variable row configurations and strategic irrigation scheduling ensuring optimised water use efficiency.

Following the nomination of four young growers, the Young Grower of the Year Award was established this year to recognise the achievements of growers under the age of 35 and their consultants. They are in the developmental phases of their properties and their cotton-grain farming enterprises and are highly commended for their achievements.

The successful growers and their consultants in the 2009 awards were:

#### Yield Awards

Irrigated – Pat Hilliar, “Wongara”, Jimbour. 15.31 bales per hectare.

Dryland – James and Daniel Hayllor, “Karinya”, Kupunn 6.88 bales per hectare.

#### Young Grower of the Year

James and Daniel Hayllor, “Karinya”, Kupunn  
Consultant – Murray Boshammer, Total AG Services, Dalby

#### Highly Commended Grower of the Year Award

Neil and Sonya McVeigh, “Maclands”, Macalister  
Consultant – Bernie Caffery, Crop Management Services, Dalby

#### Grower of the Year Award

Glenn and Julie Bischoff, “Arrawatta”, Macalister  
Consultant – Geoff Rudd, CofTec Consulting, Dalby

**The DDCG Inc Service to Industry Award**

Bernie Caffery, Crop Management Services, Dalby  
Bernie established his Crop Management Services business at Dalby in 1979 and has conducted 30 years of successful crop consulting practice in the region - he is highly regarded and a stalwart of the industry.

Darling Downs growers also celebrated the achievement of Jamie and Susie Grant, "Kiella", Jimbour, winners of the AgriRisk Innovative Grower of the Year in the Australian Cotton Industry Awards for 2009.

**DDCG Inc AGM**

DDCG Inc executive officers for 2009 elected at the October AGM are:

- President – Stuart Armitage
- Vice President – Greg Bender
- Secretary – Meg Kummerow
- Treasurer – Johnathon Mengel.

**Duncan Weir**  
October 9, 2009

**Namoi Valley**

Continued dry and cold weather has been of little use for establishing cotton or finishing winter crops. A few early crops were planted in late September and established quickly given the very warm conditions. Crops planted in early October have struggled with the cold weather. By mid October general plantings were well underway, with the majority of crops watered up in less than ideal conditions. Harvest of winter crops has begun up to two weeks earlier than normal due to the very dry winter. Irrigated winter crops were generally only watered once as growers hold back water for summer crops. Winter crop yield will be well back on average.

I expect about 11,000 hectares of cotton to be planted in the Upper Namoi and about 32,000 hectares in the Lower Namoi provided we get a planting rain for dryland crops. It is currently very dry and we will need at least 50 mm of rain before mid November to plant. It could be the largest dryland area for several years. Most growers have stored good profiles of moisture from last summer. About 6000 hectares of dryland are planned for the Namoi.

The area planted to BRF has increased on last season with virtually 100 per cent in both the upper and lower Namoi. The new Sicot 71BRF makes up most of the area with smaller areas of Siokra V-18BRF and Sicot 70BRF. It's too early to make any predictions on insect numbers. My only hope is that we don't get a repeat of the whitefly problem that occurred last season. But I have noticed a lot of the garden plants in Narrabri already have the pest in high numbers.

The water supply situation remains ordinary but better than last season, with Keepit at 35 per cent and Split Rock dam virtually empty. On a positive note Chaffey dam near Tamworth is still full and any heavy rain in the catchment will lead to significant run off.

Cotton prices on offer this season are not the best, but

better than many of the alternative such as sorghum and corn. It will take very good yields to make a few dollars. Although it has been a less than ideal start to the season we all know it's the end of the season that counts.

**Robert Eveleigh**  
October 11, 2009

**Macquarie Valley**

The dry spring continues and it follows a dry end to winter. The outlook for spring and summer is mixed with varying forecasts for below average, average and above average rainfall. Weather forecasters like to hedge their bets!

Early planted cotton has emerged and has struggled with cool night temperatures. Recent warm weather has helped to improve soil temperatures for those crops. Some windy days and a dust storm have really dried out any remaining soil moisture.

It is yet another small crop with around 6200 hectares forecast to be planted in the Macquarie which is actually up on the past few seasons. The general security water allocation remains at zero per cent with access to carryover.

Burrendong Dam is just below 16 per cent and falling. The probability of receiving an allocation is reducing as we head towards summer with little or no inflows. There have been some substantial water releases for the Macquarie Marshes during the winter.

Winter crop prospects are mixed with some areas receiving some useful rain in September but other areas all but missing out. All areas would benefit from a good soaking with rain as crops approach maturity. The higher Australian dollar has in part reduced the price outlook for this harvest and many growers are looking

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to store grain on farm with a view to selling when prices improve.

Planting of the bulk of the crop will occur in early October as temperatures increase. Moisture will be at a premium and all steps will be taken to utilise what is in the bed and stopping it from drying out too quickly.

All fingers are crossed for massive inflows into Burdondong Dam so that there can be a huge revival in the irrigated cropping industry in this area.

**Craig McDonald**  
October 1, 2009

## Southern NSW

The start to the 2009–10 season has been one of the toughest experienced for a long time. In Hay there have been only three days over 25°C between September 20 and October 8 and only two nights over 12°C. In addition there have been five nights under 5°C in the past 10 days.

Area for the 2009–10 crop is going to be approximately 3500 hectares for the Lachlan/Murrumbidgee. Planting started as early as September 10 with a grower sowing into moisture and taking advantage of a couple of days of early heat (see photo below taken on September 23).

The majority of growers have planted a proportion of crop between September 20 and October 8. Growers are now playing the waiting game to determine the effects of the latest cold snap.



The challenge is we are now running out of season length as historically it has been beneficial to have all crops planted and watered by October 15. There are quite a few fields sown dry with growers studying weather forecasts closely in anticipation of an increase in temperature.

The Lachlan is still without a river allocation yet the Murrumbidgee has received three per cent general security. This has resulted in temporary water prices falling to approximately \$200 per meg. Unfortunately the announcement was a little late for a significant increase in cotton area.

**James Hill**  
October 8, 2009

## ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

The tractor is a genuine Aussie. It is a 1935 Ronaldson-Tippett 18-30 Super Drive, manufactured in Ballarat, Victoria. The only non-Australian content was the American Wisconsin engine. The photo shows Ian at the controls of a magnificently restored example on display at the Pioneer Settlement Village, Swan Hill, Victoria.



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