

Central Queensland

It has not been an ideal start for cotton in Central Queensland. Hot, dry conditions have prevailed, with higher than average hot days recorded for this period. The few spring storms have failed to yield significant rain. There was however hail which effected about 500 hectares of cotton east of Emerald.

There were some establishment issues due to seedling disease and some cotton struggled through the cold nights and hot windy days. In general the 17,000 hectare crop in Central Highlands is doing quite well, as growers have been able to keep the water up during the hot weather. There was one incidence of phenoxy hormone spray drift early on which has held that particular crop back.

The approximate 5000 hectares planted in the Dawson/Callide has not faired so well. The flow in the Dawson is yet to eventuate, and many crops are suffering due to lack of water. Up to a third of the crop is at risk of being ploughed out.

Insect pressure has been very low. Early on, thrips were causing some damage, but the crops quickly out grew them. Mirid numbers have been low although a few fields have been sprayed in recent days.

Control of Roundup Ready Flex volunteers in back to back paddocks has been a big challenge this year. In addition weeds that are challenging to control with glyphosate such as fleabane, feathertop rhodes grass and vines have been problematic.

Susan Maas
December 1, 2009

St George Dirranbandi

Having left it to the last minute to write this report I have realised how desparate our current situation has become. The reason for leaving it to the last minute was not due to a lack of time but rather in the hope that I would be able to report that St George and Dirranbandi have received flooding rains. Unfortunately this is not true and as such growers and agronomists are having to make the hard decisions of which fields to drop out.

At this stage, fields planted in early October have received their first irrigation which was bought in a little earlier due to a week of temperatures of 43°C and higher. Already fields have been dropped out for the first irrigation so as to ensure enough water to take crops through to at least the end of January. Unless rain and a flow are received soon it appears that only 2830 to 3240 hectares of the approximately 9700 planted will make it through the season with a percentage of this

maybe short one or two irrigations. Weather forecasts certainly don't appear to be on our side with a hot, dry summer predicted.

Overall the crops have not had the best start with what can only be described as a difficult beginning to the season. A mixture of cold temperatures, scalding winds and extreme heat are taking their toll. Insect pressure has been quiet with mirids once again at low numbers. Helicoverpa have been moderately active with the conventional cotton having received three to four applications so far.

Unfortunately the heat and lack of rain has tended to put most people on edge. We certainly look forward to the 'Flooding Rains' part of Dorothea Mackellar's My Country poem.

Dallas King
December 9, 2009

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Border Rivers

Isn't this a season to keep everyone on their toes?

The challenging planting conditions of cool, dry, windy days ended on October 20 when temperatures rose and people found crops came out of the ground in six days rather than 14 or more.

Hot conditions throughout November have not only increased the vigour of the crops that were struggling early, but have necessitated an early first irrigation. While most people were hoping to get through to early December before a water, a week of 40 plus degrees ensured many crops were watered in the last week of November.

Generally, those crops look very good now and have made up most of their lost ground maturity-wise after the slow start. First flowers should be reasonably common in the first week of December for September planted crops.

The area has still not received any beneficial, widespread rainfall since early September which limited any additional area – both dryland and irrigated. While the extension of the Bollgard II planting window to November 25 offered some hope, minimal area was planted during this time.

Indications at this stage suggest about 40,000 hectares planted in the Macintyre – about 27,000 at the Goondiwindi end and 13,000 at Mungindi. This area will undoubtedly decrease if there are no rain or stream-flow events in the next month as people will start to sacrifice fields.

Despite the cool conditions early, the seedling disease and Fusarium wilt prevalence was not much more than normal – possibly due to a lack of moisture.

Insect pressure has been generally low with conventional cotton receiving nil or only one insecticide application to date. With crops now looking much more

attractive, starting to quickly accumulate squares, and a few mirids starting to poke around, there will probably be a bit more activity as we move into December.

What's noticeable about the crops that have made it through this tough start is they have good, strong root systems. There has been no moisture at the top so the only way to go is down. This should put them in good stead for whatever the season throws at us – which hopefully includes some moisture of some sort sooner rather than later.

David Kelly
November 27, 2009

Darling Downs

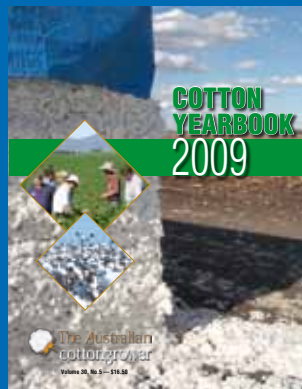
Now that the Bollgard planting window has finally closed, it is interesting to reflect on what can be described as a long, difficult and relatively disappointing plant. At the beginning of the season there had been considerable optimism and an expectation that plantings could be significantly greater than the past few seasons. With relatively good soil moisture profiles in much of the dry land areas, and acceptable volumes of water in on farm storages, the Downs was positioned well to take advantage of any reasonable planting rain.

A few areas received a marginal planting rain in early September on which a few crops were planted. Unfavourable weather conditions followed and most of the early dry land planting failed. Irrigated crops struggled, some were replanted while others required a flush to help with establishment.

It wasn't until late October–early November before weather condition improved, temperatures increased and some areas received planting rain. The planting window was adjusted to reflect the difficult planting conditions, but even with this adjustment, it was obvious that the expected plantings were not going to be reached.

Rainfall was uneven and patchy and in a lot of areas very marginal for planting. Rain was mainly concen-

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trated in the northern areas around Dalby but other areas did receive isolated storms providing sufficient water for planting. At this stage it is estimated that there will be between 24,000 to 28,000 green hectares of cotton, of which 1400 hectares is planted to conventional cotton varieties.

The earlier crops are starting to respond to the warmer, more favourable weather conditions. On the other hand many of the later planted crops, particularly in the southern and central areas, are struggling and will require rain to consolidate the plantings, especially those which were planted on more marginal moisture. The next few weeks will be critical, some crops have already been ploughed out and many others are in trouble.

Hail storms have impacted on a number of crops, resulting in varying levels of damage. Some crops were replanted while others were abandoned totally. There have been very few insect pest problems at this stage other than thrips which have been slightly higher than in previous seasons.

Duncan Weir
December 3, 2009

Namoi Valley

Planting is now complete with about 9000 hectares of cotton established in the upper Namoi and 29,000 in the lower Namoi. This includes about 6000 hectares of dryland cotton and some limited irrigation cotton, mostly in the lower Namoi. Difficult conditions during establishment may see some of the dryland area removed because of patchy plant stands.

It has been a variable start. Temperatures after planting were well below average but in mid November we had an early heat wave that lasted almost a week. We experienced temperatures up to 43°C and even hotter in the Walgett area. It came as a shock to plants and humans alike. I can't remember it being so hot for an extended period in November before. Since then temperatures have been mild and the crops are progressing well. We have had almost no rainfall in the past month. Water supply is getting tighter by the day.

Early crops are now well into squaring and we should see flowers by mid December. Vegetative growth has been spurred on by the higher temperatures, as has water use. Crops are now receiving their first irrigation, and without further rain soon crops will have used much more water than normal.

Water supply in the Namoi remains only fair at this stage. Keepit is at about 34 per cent but with high demand expected over the summer most growers will use all their allocation. Some growers west of Wee Waa have on farm water harvested from runoff that occurred following heavy storms in early November. Ground water irrigators are well into this year's entitlement.

Early season insect activity has been sporadic, but generally light. Thrip numbers were quite high on some

farms but relatively light on adjacent fields. Mirids are just starting to make their presence felt. Unfortunately you don't have to look hard in local gardens to find white fly. Although cotton fields appear to be relatively free of the pest we will need to be very careful with product selection for early insect control. Heliothis pressure has been very low in most areas, with almost no damage on the few non Bollgard crops.

Weeds pressure has been much lower this season. Most flex crops have had only one application so far. Unfortunately the first signs of hormone damage have appeared in a few crops.

Prices on offer for lint and seed have continued to firm in spite of a very high Australian dollar.

All we want for Christmas is six inches of rain!

Robert Eveleigh
November 30, 2009

Macquarie Valley

The 2009–10 season is shaping up as one of extreme contrasts so far. Planting time was accompanied by cool weather and difficult crop establishment conditions. Recently there has been extreme heat which has broken November temperature records in the region. Dubbo recorded eight consecutive days over 36°C with a peak of 43°C. Severe winds in addition to the heat have made it very challenging. Areas further west experienced even hotter conditions.

There has been a lot of thrip activity noticed as winter crops matured and were harvested. Seed treatments had begun to run out which led to some cotton crops being potentially sprayed to prevent further damage.

Some early season wireworm activity was also noticed. Day degrees at November 18 were 497 versus 467 for the same time last year.

Despite the difficult weather conditions there was very little replanting of cotton. The water situation has not improved at all and Burrendong Dam is at 13 per cent and falling. Summer crop planting areas have reduced accordingly.

The harvesting of winter crops is drawing to a rapid close in the region as the harvest moves further south. There were variable yields and quality across the region with many growers lamenting on the season that could have been. Some crops were not harvested due to low yields.

Recent storm activity has brought some rain to the region and relief from the heat. With the forecast El Niño supposedly upon us, storm activity would appear to be the best chance of receiving any rain.

Good growing conditions for cotton production should prevail into summer and hopefully prices will continue to improve.

Craig McDonald
November 26, 2009

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Southern NSW

Cotton area for the 2009–10 season in southern NSW is approximately 3550 hectares (Lachlan 2500 and the Murrumbidgee 1050). The crop was planted with the intention of using bores yet there have been subsequent allocations announced on the Murrumbidgee with the general security allocation reaching 14 per cent. The situation on the Lachlan (Hillston) is dire with yet again a zero per cent allocation. As widely reported the Lachlan will not flow beyond Condobolin this summer unless Wyangala dam receives significant inflows.

Planting this season proved extremely challenging with a significant number of cold fronts occurring with little heat in between. Time taken for emergence varied depending on planting date. Generally the earlier crops took at least three weeks for emergence to occur and up to four weeks. Late crops planted outside the usual recommended planting date have shot out of the ground and have in most cases caught up to the earlier crops. There have been a few fields replanted yet this was a difficult decision as the cold weather continued through into late October.

The table below is a little misleading in terms of cold shock days as it identifies nights under 12°C yet does not describe how cool the days were. The past two weeks were extreme in terms of heat including night tempera-

tures as high as 31°C and day temperatures as high as 44.5°C. Hillston accumulated 241 DD between October 1 and 31 yet between November 1 and 27 390 DD were calculated.

November's temperatures have been generally very hot resulting in all crops receiving a first in-crop irrigation. The stage of the crop ranges between four nodes and the earliest crops at nine nodes.

DAY DEGREES AT NOVEMBER 27

Met site	09–10	08–09	Ave DD	Hot Shock 09–10 (Ave)	Cold Shock 08–09 (Ave)
Benerembah	587	476	414	14 (3.4)	21 (33)
Hay	591	478	438	15 (4.2)	22 (30)
Hillston	631	516	461	15 (4.6)	19 (27)
Whitton	587	478	411	15 (3.4)	22 (33)

Majority of crops were watered up and due to the lack of moisture in the profile in some areas took a reasonable time to sub. There has been no insect pressure. Recently Chris Anderson and Peter Lonagan carried out the annual disease survey in both valleys with surprisingly little to report on in terms of seedling disease which is great news.

This season crops are being grown utilising various irrigation systems including lateral moves, pivots, drip, bankless channels and syphons.

At this early stage the crops are catching up to where they would have been this time last year. Winter cereal harvest has only just started yet rain is delaying this start. This season on the Murrumbidgee there has been a large increase in rice area with late water announcements providing an increase in the allocation.

James Hill
November 30, 2009

ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

The curse of early steel rear tractor wheels was – they clogged up with mud and became like 'slicks' and grew in circumference. The patented wheels used on Vickers tractors were self cleaning.

The Vickers (earlier models were known euphemistically as Vickers Aussie) were powered by a 6240 cc petrol engine equipped with water injection. The water served to reduce combustion temperatures, particularly in the area of the exhaust valves. The tractor pictured is on display at Tracmach Museum, W.A. and was part of the original Lou Whiteman Collection. (PHOTO: IMJ)



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