

Darling Downs

Ideal dry conditions allowed growers to complete picking and follow-up field operations without any delays from the weather.

Gins reported a high proportion of good base grade cotton coming through the system. The excellent dryland yields, especially from the southern Downs area, have been a season highlight. Some good cotton gin reports have been received.

Only a limited area of this region has been planted to winter cereals. Similarly an estimated 20 to 25 per cent of the district's chickpea crop has been planted. With the winter planting window rapidly coming to a close, growers who had been planning cover crops of winter cereals in cotton fields will be forced to consider other options.

Presently vast areas of bare fallow are commonplace across the whole region. Soil moisture profiles in long fallowed country are full, providing optimism for a reasonable summer crop in 2004-05.

District resellers report quiet trading to date with the dry conditions ensuring little requirement for weed control or planting seed. Optimistically, if good falls of rain

are received in the next few weeks, seasonal fortunes of this area will turn around dramatically.

What a change it would be to string together a few good seasons again here on the Darling Downs!

Greg Salmond
July 19, 2004

St George Dirranbandi

St George and Dirranbandi cotton growers are now busy preparing ground to be ready for the season ahead. For those growers with cotton in the 2003-04 season, yields were very good and quality was excellent. Growing conditions were regarded as average with some above average yields being obtained by most growers. The majority of the cotton picked recorded a yield of over 3.5 bales per acre. The quality was very good, with excellent colour and pleasing gin turn outs.

Some winter rotation crops (mainly wheat) have been planted with most crops growing very vigorously in these mild winter conditions. Many growers who planted very

78 ▽

◁ 77...DISTRICT REPORTS

limited areas of cotton in the St George irrigation system took advantage of extra water gained from a midseason run in the Balonne river to plant quick season crops such as soybeans, mungbeans and sunflowers.

Some enquiries have been made about growing field peas as an alternative to chickpeas as a spring trap crop for Helicoverpa. Over the past three years, the industry has been looking at alternative legumes to chickpea for spring trap cropping due to Ascochyta leaf blight.

It is recommended that field peas be substituted for chickpeas in the St George and Dirranbandi region because they are more attractive to Helicoverpa than chickpeas, they contain more beneficial insects and there is no Ascochyta risk. It is recommended that fieldpea seed is treated with an appropriate inoculum group.

Optimum plant density is around 20–30 plants per metre row. When planted on a full profile of moisture, field peas should only require one irrigation before flowering. Fieldpeas should be destroyed at the completion of flowering as the crop is no longer attractive and this will prevent larvae from pupating and escaping.

Expectations are high for the coming season with many river irrigators being able to plant cotton for the first time for a couple of years. Excellent river flows have meant that river irrigators with farm water storages have been able to store water and will plant cotton next season.

Stephen Ginns
July 19, 2004

Gwydir Valley

Activity around the valley is focused on preparation for the coming season. Field preparation is in full swing with fertiliser application — primarily nitrogen and some starter fertilisers — and the hilling up of beds.

Winter cropping around the valley has included the standard cropping options such as wheat, barley, oats, canola and chickpeas but there has been some diversification with other crops such as faba beans, linseed and safflower. Wheat, barley and oat crops have had high populations of blue oat mite, requiring chemical control. But reports of disappointing spray results and the need to re-treat fields have been fairly common.

Ascochyta is starting to show up in some chickpea crops around the valley. Most crops have none or low incidence of Ascochyta and have had between one and two mancozeb sprays depending on crop growth stage. If conditions remain dry, then the disease should not be a problem this year, but wet conditions are likely to increase its incidence. Generally all crops are going well, but more rain is needed. Most crops have good subsoil moisture but rain would top up profiles and allow the cereal crops to grow away from blue oat mite and put down secondary roots.

Cotton plantings for next season are expected to be

about 50–60 per cent of the average. This is based on an allocation of just over 20 per cent and water held in on-farm storages. The area of dryland cotton for the coming season will be dependent on what happens with the cotton price as well as rainfall between now and planting.

Julie O'Halloran
July 16, 2004

Lower Namoi

It has been a very dry winter but we did receive some light rain on July 26. Cereal and other rotation crops were struggling following the severe frosts and dry conditions experienced during June and July. A general fall of 25 mm in late July has helped the situation but a more substantial fall will be required soon.

Field preparation for this year's cotton crop is well underway and water allocations should see a near full summer plant. However the low prices currently on offer may lead to some shift to alternative crops.

Fertiliser applications are almost complete and pre-emergent herbicides are currently being applied. Following the reduced planting last season, most of this year's crop will be on fallow ground and this has made ground prep an easy option. Winter vegetation has not been growing well due to the dry conditions and this is expected to reduce early season insect problems.

Dryland areas are likely to decrease on last year unless a strong price signal is received before October. Most growers will keep their options open until then.

Growers are spending a lot of time considering variety options this season. The removal of the cap on Bollgard cotton will see BT cotton increase to at least 50 per cent of the acreage in the lower Namoi. In fact up to 65 per cent of the area may be Bollgard. Many growers are concerned about chemical supply for their conventional cotton area and will opt for more Bollgard to cover any chemical shortage.

A drive around most farm workshops makes it clear that planting time is not far away as planters receive a once over. It's certainly not long till planting time now. Although I expect most growers will not to rush into early planting this season, particularly with Bollgard varieties.

Overall prospects for the 2004 season in the lower Namoi are good given the return of river water into the equation. The drought may have waned but will not be completely gone until Keepit and Split Rock are full.

Robert Eveleigh
July 26, 2004

Macquarie Valley

For the second July in a row, irrigation allocations for the coming water year are zero. After only 19 per cent allocation from Burrendong last season, plus bore irrigated crops, cotton growers are looking for a big year in

2004–05. This looks unlikely at this stage, although miracles do happen!

So what's happening in the winter crops? The Macquarie has been fortunate to have just received some useful rain (July 25–26). This will revitalise crops which were struggling after a late sowing on little sub soil moisture.

Cereal area is up dramatically again this year. Most cotton growers have substituted winter crops into cotton areas. There have been no major disease or insect problems so far. Frosts have impacted crop growth and development. Yields are expected to be only average at this stage.

Canola and pulse plantings are both down this year. A lack of sowing moisture restricted canola plantings. The major pulse this year is field peas. This replaces chickpeas which performed poorly last season. Field peas also had the advantage this season of being able to be sown late, when adequate rain fell.

The July frosts will impact all winter crops. More big rain, at least 50 mm, will be needed to carry crops through August and September. There is some late planted wheat around that may be sacrificed if sufficient water allocations are received for cotton plantings by October.

As to the coming cotton season, things look grim. With little in the dam, allocations are at zero plus carry-

over is only two per cent. This is one of the worst outlooks for Macquarie Valley cotton crops in history. All we can do is hope more rain is coming, especially in the Burrendong catchment area.

Kirrily Rourke and Leigh Jenkins
July 26, 2004

Southern NSW

All picking has been completed with later fields drawn out due to consistent small showers through most of June. Ginning is continuing with approximately 54,000 bales completed to date out of an estimated 85–90,000. The remainder is expected to be completed around mid August. Grades on the majority are still going base or above.

Bore allocations have been announced at levels similar to last season which has provided growers with confidence to progress their preparation for next year's crop. The drop off in price has produced some discussion for alternative crops but it depends on each individual's market position.

A meeting was held to discuss the insect strategy developed by TMS. This meeting generated plenty of discussion, as their proposal was very different to the rec-

80 ▸

◀ 79...DISTRICT REPORTS

ommendations forwarded by the southern group to TMS. Most issues that were raised with the TMS proposal were taken into account with the revised strategy.

Both seed company meetings have taken place over the past month with plenty of interest, especially in the Bollgard lines. Most growers are looking at planting 50–80 per cent of the BGII technology at this stage.

The awards dinner was also held recently to finalise the crop competition, which was run for the first time down south. It was a great night with approximately 70 guests and the committee has done a terrific job organising the event along with the support of sponsors. Award winners for the night included Paul and Mick Storrier for the best conventional crop, John Archibald the GMO crop, and Lachlan Farming Ltd taking the prize for the narrow row section. Lachlan Farming also took out the overall winning crop.

Matt Mitchell
July 19, 2004

Macintyre Valley

Growers and consultants in the Macintyre Valley are busily finalising fertiliser decisions and forecasting seed and chemical requirements for the upcoming season. It is estimated that around 55,000 acres of irrigated cotton will be planted in the Macintyre valley this season. Significant dryland plantings across the valley will depend on a dramatic increase in price.

A group of growers west of Goondiwindi are currently involved in piloting the Land and Water Module of BMP. Cotton Australia chose the valley as one of three pilot valleys to trial the roll-out of this module. The group, originally an area wide management group, is currently

working through the module to determine if, in any way, it can be made more practical and realistic for 'Grower Land'. Throughout the process, the group is working also through the subcatchment planning process under the guidance of the Border Rivers Catchment Management Association and the Queensland Murray Darling Committee.

The 2003–04 cotton season will be wrapped up at a research review at the beginning of August. At this meeting several researchers will present trial and monitoring data from the Macintyre valley from the 2003–04 season. Presentation will include results from the Macintyre Valley Trial IRMS, heliothis resistance monitoring, whitefly population studies, mirid compensation, disease survey, and variety trial results and will finish with a climate forecast for the next season.

Despite an outstanding start, winter crops throughout the valley are looking for a drink. Most crops are holding on surprisingly well although yield potentials are starting to be compromised. Crops have been subject to sporadic pressure from aphids and sap sucking insects and a spot form of rust has infected some barely crops. Heavy frost has slowed development of crops, which is favourable from a moisture point of view. But if heavy frosts continue, they may have a detrimental affect on some of the more advanced crops.

Rebecca Smith
July 16, 2004

Advertiser's Index

Ag Appointments	2	Hayes Baguley	6
Ag Biotech	11	Incitec Pivot	13
Agco Challenger	61	International Fibre	65
Agrichem	Insert	Iron Lady	69
Agrilink	66	Irrigation Systems	47
Agririsk	51	Irritek	53
ANZ	7, 63	John Deere	37
Apperson	55	MACE	10
Aquatech	20	Macquarie Cotton	16
Central Highlands Aerial	52	Monsanto	25
Classic Autos	28	Moree Engineering	58
CGS	IFC	Moree Spray Equip	8
Cotton Outlook	67	Multifarming	IBC
Countryco	8	NAB	39
CSD	9, 49	Namoi Cotton	43
CW Pacific	36	Nutrilab	31
Deltapine	38	Paul Reinhart	44
Dow	21	Pioneer Hi-Bred	14, 60
Dinner Plain	74	Preston Fishing	79
Dunavant	45	Rhodes Kildea	44
Eastern Engines	29	SMK	2
Ellis	3	Sumitomo	5, 59
Excel	18	Syngenta	OBC
Felco	57	Ultimate Fertilisers	33
Goddard	31	Vanderfield	27
Growth Ag ...	15, 17, 19, 35	Volcot	42

ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

The tractor is a British Wallis made under licence to the J.I. Case Plow Works Co. of Racine, Wisconsin, by Ruston & Hornsby Ltd., of Lincoln, England. They were produced between 1920 and 1929 and featured a 28 hp 4 cylinder petrol/kero overhead valve engine of 4.75 x 5.75 inch bore and stroke.

