

District Reports...

Central Queensland

Finally, some welcome rain arrived in February and ideally a change in the weather pattern. The rain resulted in a new lease of life for later cotton planted in September/October, enabling the crop to be grown on. Growers in the Emerald region have received a 12 per cent water allocation for the season, up from zero per cent – enough for any of the remaining crop to grow on also allowing growers an opportunity to irrigate mungbeans or corn and potentially a winter crop.

Since the wet weather event, growing conditions have been favorable, offering a reprieve from high temperatures. Table 1 highlights how moderate the temperatures have been, with daytime average temperatures in the 30s and very few nights above 25°C.

TABLE 1:

Location	Date range February 1 to March 24, 2020
Emerald Airport	
Day Degree Base 12	811
Cold shock days	0
Days above 36°C	6
Nights above 25°C	3
Days above 40°C	0
Average temperatures (°C)	27.6
Theodore	
Day Degree Base 12	753
Cold shock days	0
Days above 36°C	5
Nights above 25°C	0
Days above 40°C	0
Average temperatures (°C)	26.5

Source: CSD Day Degree Calculator www.csd.net.au/ddc

With lower than average temperatures across the region the grown-on cotton crops have had good growth and lateral development delivering adequate NAWF and a very high top five retention. Small amounts of Pix have been applied to manage rank growth or a cut out rate. Cotton growers have applied extra nutrition when irrigating to try to maximise their top end yield which will be picked in May/June this year.

Insect numbers have remained low, with some mirid activity observed resulting in fields being sprayed. Silverleaf whitefly had become a concern before the rain with insecticides applied on open cotton pre-pick. Since the rain, the pressure has ropped back below threshold because of the cooler conditions.

The storm activity has offered little in terms of run off in the catchment of the Fairbairn dam. Current storage level is sitting at 17.4 per cent. There will need to be further inflow to receive any allocation for the next cotton season. The Callide catchment missed out during the weather change with minimal allocation available for the start of the new season. Good flows were

reported through the Dawson valley, replenishing their weir systems.

Stewart Brotherton
March 26, 2020

St George and Dirranbandi

Well, after the past few years of doom and gloom caused by the drought and a lack of cotton at Dirranbandi and St George, it has been a huge relief that our situation has changed so dramatically!

Obviously, due to Coronavirus there is currently a lot of doom and gloom around, but this would have been so much harder to deal with if we were still stuck in the grasp of a major drought. For the time being I will leave the Coronavirus to the side.

After having survived 2019 – the driest year on record for our shire with an average of 102 mm of rain at St George and 79 mm of rain for Dirranbandi – we are looking at a much brighter future ahead. For 2020 so far St George has recorded 240 mm of rain and Dirranbandi is up to 175 mm. This combined with a large flood event in the Balonne and Moonie Rivers during February has meant that everyone can now see light at the end of the tunnel. Although proceeds from the next cotton crop are still 15 months away, most growers will have dryland wheat and chickpeas that will now have full profiles to plant on during the winter.

The floods in the Balonne and Moonie have meant that most growers along these rivers now have full storages with decent river flows lasting longer than 30 days. At this stage Cubbie Station is not full but will have enough water to put in close to 80 per cent of their area which will have a hugely positive effect on both Dirranbandi and St George businesses and communities.

At this stage there will be some irrigated winter crops planted though most will reserve their irrigated fields for cotton and could see Dirranbandi, St George and Thallon plant up to 54,000 hectares next season. This would be the first time that the area has reached this level since the 2012–13 cotton year. A huge boost for our struggling towns!

With the current crop being the smallest on record, originally at 600 hectares but with dropped or ploughed out fields reducing this to approximately 400 hectares, it will be a very welcome contrast. Picking has begun on some of the earlier fields though the majority planted are just about to be defoliated. Yields will be lower this year due to most of these crops having been stretched at some stage and with recent rain causing some boll rots. But everyone is looking forward to the season ahead.

Dallas King
March 27, 2020

Darling Downs

Much to the relief of many, the Downs received some very good rainfall in the months of January and February. Beginning in mid-January, there were a number of decent falls over the next month, through until mid-February. Totals were widely varied and depending on which storm or rainfall event you were under, some areas recorded anywhere up to 350 mm for the two months. While a number of growers were able to pick up water from these events, both in river flows and overland flows, the moisture in the profile is still quite variable as we head into autumn.

Many of the earlier planted crops were not able to benefit

from the rainfall, although it helped many late planted crops. Not just from an in crop perspective, but for the fact that many growers were able to finish crops with a final water, something which has been somewhat of a rarity over the past couple of seasons.

On the pest and weed front, most crops have been well managed this season and the insect pest pressure has not been too excessive. Mirid pressure has been somewhat consistent and mealybugs have also shown up in some hotspots. Early in the season there were large numbers of flea beetles present which caused some cotyledon damage, but crops quickly grew out of this. Weeds were not a problem early in the season with the dry weather, but since the rainfall, weed control has certainly been at the forefront of most grower's operations. All kinds of weeds have been actively growing in large number, with pigweed and feathertop Rhodes grass in particular growing abundantly.

The majority of crops on the Downs are close to being finished and defoliations are about to begin, as of late March. Picking will likely get underway by mid to late April, as conditions have remained dry and somewhat warm to the current date. Any crops that ran out of water will likely suffer somewhat in regards to yield, but many of the crops that benefitted from the rainfall in January and February are loaded with good numbers of sizable bolls that will likely equate to some very good yield results. Quality is also likely to be quite good in many of these crops.

The recent Darling Downs Cotton Grower of the Year field day was held at 'Cullingral', near Miles, hosted by current Grower of the Year, Ashley Geldard. The 2019 High Achiever, David Balmain also featured on the day, along with their respective agronomists. Initially, the date had to be postponed due to wet weather,

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something which would have certainly looked unlikely to occur when the date was originally set! This didn't deter the attendees when the new date rolled around and there was once again great attendance and interaction from those present on the day. Congratulations to the committee once again for organising such an informative and interesting event.

All in all, the outlook for the Downs is certainly much more positive than it was at the end of 2019, or even the beginning of 2020. Forecast rain fall events for March were largely uneventful, which was disappointing, considering they would have further added to moisture in the profile as we draw closer to winter. Here's hoping for at least average rainfall throughout the autumn and winter months, which will no doubt mean some good winter crops and a good start to the summer crop planting later in the year, with an increased area of cotton planting.

Sam Lee
March 30, 2020

Border Rivers

Three months into 2020 and it is already a year we are unlikely to forget. On the downside is the current pandemic that is Covid-19 and the disruption and adjustment to daily life that

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is required to slow its spread. On the plus side many are seeing a reprieve from the drought with some very handy falls of rain that have already exceeded totals recorded for last year.

Good rainfall occurred throughout February and early March. These falls were predominantly from storms and therefore totals varied but cumulative totals for the year range from 100–200 plus mm. Many growers were able to capture some on farm runoff during these events. Several rises in the Macintyre River and Weir River saw some water harvesting opportunities but this varied in accordance with the resource and appropriate conditions particularly for NSW with the embargo that was in place.

Looking forward, optimism has improved with a pleasant change of colour with pasture grasses growing fast. Similarly, fallows have greened up requiring control with the supply of some chemistry tightening up. Fallow profiles have improved significantly with sub soil moisture accumulating which has improved prospects for winter and summer crop opportunities.

For the small area of cotton that is progressing, the rainfall events in February were welcomed with the softer conditions seeing irrigation schedules pushed out to three or four weeks. But on the downside was the extended periods of cloudy, overcast and sometimes humid weather which did see several shedding events and consequently some vegetative growth occurring. Furthermore there has been an increased incidence of *Alternaria* leaf spot, while *Verticillium* and *Fusarium* wilt have been observed, mostly in areas known to be problematic for these diseases.

Conditions for the remainder of March have been good for filling bolls with all crops now cut out, with earlier planted fields starting defoliation. Insect management has been mixed with some mirid activity requiring intervention through February and, although quieter than previous seasons, silverleaf whitefly activity has been observed with some use of IGR reported.

Unfortunately, conditions in upstream storages have only changed slightly as falls were far lighter in their catchments. So far more rainfall is required in these catchments to see significant inflows into Glenlyon and Pindari Dams. At the time of writing Glenlyon is at 13.7 per cent capacity (34,407 ML) and Pindari at 10.1 per cent capacity (31,651 ML) or a combined total of 11.7 per cent (66,058 ML), which is only a 3.1 per cent increase on this time last year.

With increased restrictions regarding Covid-19 the Macintyre Valley Cotton Field Day Committee made the decision to postpone this year's Bayer Cotton Grower of the Year field day. The new date for this event is November 25, 2020.

Chris Teague
March 27, 2020

Mungindi

There has been some water picked up from overland flow in NSW but this will not allow any significant areas of cotton to be planted this coming 2020–21 season. There will be some planted but I expect it to only be five per cent of the potential area on

NSW side at this stage. The Queensland side has been a little better with an expected 20 per cent plant. Hopefully we will pick up a bit more summer rain before the season is over.

Mick Brosnan
September 17, 2020

Gwydir Valley

In my previous report I commented that the couple of storms received at the end of January were welcome, but were a long way off in really turning things around. Well February and March certainly came through with the goods!

Persistent fronts through February brought steady, soaking rain which was great for starting to fill soil profiles and even allowed for capturing some tail water off fallow fields, but it came with many consecutive days of cloud cover and high humidity. Crops in the Gwydir were delayed in reaching cut out, with fruit shed widespread as a consequence of the rain and overcast conditions. This reduced boll load resulted in continued vegetative growth and crops holding at 5 to 6 NAWF for a number of weeks. Higher rates of Pix than normal in this part of the world were used in an effort to pull the crops up.

Knocking on the door of defoliation now, it's a pretty consistent picture across the 2400 hectares of cotton in the Gwydir. Many first positions were lost lower in the plant and there's really not a great deal of fruit on vegetative branches. The crop has compensated quite well on top though, with boll counts ranging from around 130 up to 170 plus bolls per metre. Of the cotton that managed to hang on down low, boll rot is widespread, as is tight locking which with more rain on the forecast is likely to worsen.

It is difficult to find a field not affected by *Verticillium* wilt and *Alternaria* leaf spot. In terms of insects, an advantage of the rain has been that silver leaf whitefly hasn't had the opportunity to build in numbers and has been kept largely at bay without growers needing to spray.

The couple of double skip crops that may have received a watering up and then been left to their own devices have really come home well. Had we had the opportunity to plant it would have been an excellent year for dryland cotton. In that space, the focus now will be on maximising the winter crop and getting some stubble back across the landscape. Growers will need to think carefully about their rotations, essentially starting from scratch on dryland country that hasn't seen a winter crop for two or three years (or a decent one anyway), to hedge their bets on a bumper dryland cotton season in 2020–21 – as long as they have the country spare to plant.

Alice Curkpatrick
March 31, 2020

Namoi Valley

Great rain has fallen across most of the Namoi valley since late January with a range of 180 to 400 mm. This created the first flows in the Namoi river for over a year and it was good to see. Although much of plains had good rainfall there was a lot less rain in the Keepit Dam catchment, but the Dam has risen from 0 to 12 per cent over the past month. With many soil profiles half to full there will be a massive winter crop grown across the valley and particularly in the western regions around Cryon and Walgett.

The rain that fell has been good for irrigated crops that were

going to run one to two waters short in mid-January, but as consequence of prolonged cloudy weather there has been a lot of fruit shedding during February. Narrabri alone had nine days straight of rain in mid-February which has also caused some boll rot in the bottom of some crops.

There has been an increase in the levels of Verticillium Wilt through February. There will be little impact on the early crops but the later crops could see a yield hit due to the lateness of these crops. These late crops have been hard to stop with some large Mepiquat Chloride rates being applied – around two to three litres per hectare. Varieties such as Sicot 748B3F have kicked on and have required more growth control than the other varieties.

Insect pressure has varied but was relatively low before the

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rain. Those growers that had whitefly issues have seen the rain help with their situation and we are also seeing a range of caterpillars in the crops that may require a late spray if numbers become too high.

While many dryland farmers will be wanting to plant as much winter crop as possible, there will be some land fallowed over for dryland cotton so as to try and maintain some sort of rotation for weeds and fallow management.

At this stage boll counts range from 110 to 140 to the metre and while they aren't as high as we have seen recently in the Namoi, the numbers suggest it will still be a reasonable pick. The early crops will start to be defoliated in late April while most crops will be picked in late April and into early May.

The annual CSD and Lower Namoi Cotton Growers Association field day was held in February attracting over 100 participants with a wide range of researchers presenting up to date research information. Due to the rain the field day was taken indoors to the new CSD delinting and processing plant. It was a great day enjoyed by all with some 20–30 students from Sydney University attending.

Bob Ford
March 10, 2020



Attending the CSD Field Day – Andrew O'Connor, Peta Miguel and Emma Lambeth.

Macquarie Valley

To say it's been a season like no other is an understatement, we are now in a 'lockdown' scenario with many of us working from home due to the pandemic known as Covid-19. It has had a worldwide impact and is not like anything our generation has been through before. Luckily farmers are pretty isolated in their day to day business and we can continue to do what we do best.

As we reach the home stretch on what has been a very challenging season, for those who have had a crop this season its definitely been a long hot dry slog for the most part. Analysis of the Day Degree data for the Narromine region (where most of the cotton is being grown) has taken a bit of dive in the past month or so and we have seen some welcome and overdue good rainfall across the region.

The season was tracking very closely to the 2018–19 season up until about February 20 where it took a dive to come in line with the 2016–17 season. The 2019–20 season has still had the most days above 40°C in the past 10 years, although it only had half the number of nights above 25°C. The rain meant some crops that were potentially a water short are going to make it home. But this has played around with crop development and many crops are way behind where we usually are at this time of year.

Defoliation is looking to start in the next few days for some of the earlier crops. Boll numbers and sizes are down on what we would like to see for some fields – the average is somewhere between 140 and 160 bolls per metre. There have been some issues with boll rots on some of the early opening cotton lower on the plant due to the weather so we are hoping the top crop will be able to bring it home.

The pressure from insects has not been significant this season.



At the CSD Field Day – Dr Hiz Jamali, Dr Carlos Trapero and Dr Shimming Liu CSIRO.

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We have seen some of the highest beneficial numbers recorded, and they are having a big impact on any sliverleaf whitefly (SLW) numbers that are present in the field – it is hard to find a viable SLW nymph on leaf at present. Boll rot and disease including Verticillium wilt and Alternaria leaf spot are widespread this season, partly because some fields have a long cotton history and there has been a cooler end to the season.

Prospects for next season look very similar to this year with groundwater being the only water available at the current time. Burrendong dam has had some inflows taking it from three to seven per cent over the past few weeks. We will need to see inflows of around 310,000 ML into Burrendong before any allocation announcement. 30 per cent of carryover water is still held in a drought suspension from last season and is potentially available for next season.

Amanda Thomas
March 30, 2020

Southern NSW

The season is starting to come to an end with just about all crops in Southern NSW receiving their last irrigations. Some growers have received up to 100 mm of rainfall in late February, which has helped with either stretching out the last irrigation or it was enough to save the irrigation all together. Crops are ranging from 5 to 20 per cent open, while crops in the far south are only just starting to crack open.

Insect pressure has been very low this year, which has resulted in crops having high retention. Some agronomists are seeing the odd whitefly about and mites are once again making an appearance as crops start to senesce.

As a result of the rainfall, boll rot and Alternaria are creeping into some crops in the district. This year could be one of those wet picking seasons.

The crop yield potential for this year is still looking good with some crops expected to go over 13 bales per hectare, while most will be around 11 bales per hectare. Even with the cold start to the crop this year, fruit retention was maintained around 85–90 per cent, which should bring in an early crop. There were some crops that were late with cut out and were still sitting at 6 nodes above white flower in early March. Our last effective flower date is between February 10 and 14, so these later crops will need some good heat to mature them up.

The area planted for next season is still anyone's guess. There could be a decrease in groundwater allocation and if this happens we will see the area come back again. Dam levels are still encouraging, sitting higher than this time last year. We still need good winter rainfall to get above this year's allocation of six per cent general security.

Jorian Millyard
March 14, 2020



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