

District Reports...

May–June 2019

Southern region

SOUTH AUSTRALIA SUMMARY

Rainfall in South Australia during March and April was below average and soil moisture levels were also below average when planting of winter crops commenced. Above average and timely rainfall in most cropping regions during May increased soil moisture levels and improved planting and growing conditions.

But parts of the northern Murray Mallee did not receive sufficient rainfall in May to germinate dry sown crops. Planting is now largely complete, except in the south east, where planting can continue well into winter.

Most cropping regions had average or better levels of soil moisture in May with significant parts of the Eyre Peninsula and lower Yorke Peninsula at well above average or better. The ongoing development of crops will be aided if winter rainfall is timely.

The area planted to winter crops in South Australia is forecast to be around 3.6 million hectares in 2019. Winter crop production is forecast at around 7.4 million tonnes, slightly above the average production in the 10 years to 2018-19.

Area planted to wheat is forecast to increase by about 8 per cent to 2 million hectares. Wheat production is forecast to increase by 46 per cent to 4.3 mt.

Area planted to barley is forecast to increase by 10 per cent to 900,000 hectares. This is a result of expected favourable returns from growing barley compared with production alternatives.

Barley production is forecast to increase by 37 per cent to 2.1 mt.

Area planted to canola is a forecast 210,000 hectares. This is 14 per cent below the 10 year average to 2018-19, reflecting an increase in the area planted to barley and pulses at the expense of canola. Canola production is forecast to be 290,000 tonnes.

From ABARES June 2019 Australian Crop Report

VICTORIA SUMMARY

There was above average rainfall in many cropping regions in Victoria during May. This rainfall replenished soil moisture levels depleted by unfavourable seasonal conditions during March and April. But there was insufficient rainfall in parts of the northern Mallee in May to germinate dry sown crops.

Lower layer soil moisture levels in May were above average in central cropping regions and mostly average in other cropping regions. The notable exception is parts of the Mallee where it is below average.

Area planted to winter crops in Victoria is forecast to increase by 13 per cent – compared to the drought affected season in 2018-19 – to around 3.3 million hectares. Winter crop production in 2019-20 is forecast to be around 6.2 million tonnes, similar to the average production in the 10 years to 2018-19.

Area planted to wheat is forecast to rise by 11 per cent in to around 1.6 million hectares. Wheat production in 2019-20 is forecast to increase by 64 per cent to 3.2 mt.

Area planted to barley is forecast to increase by 10 per cent to 850,000 hectares, which largely reflects expected higher returns relative to production alternatives, particularly canola. Production is forecast to increase by 64 per cent on last year to 1.8 mt.

Area planted to canola is forecast to increase by 33 per cent to 400,000 hectares, largely reflecting significant area taken out of oilseed production and cut for hay in 2018-19. Canola



Incorporating delved clay by spading on non-wetting sand in the Beaumont region about 130 km east of Esperance. The property is owned by Viridis Ag.



A spectacular nighttime vista of burning canola windrows. These burns are just one of the ryegrass weed control strategies employed at the Scaddan district property of MKM Farming.

But the mallee areas 60 km from the coast are still very marginal with varying degrees of crop emergence. Some growers in these areas are scaling back cropping programs this year. A number of growers have dropped canola from their rotations with such a late start and no stored subsoil moisture.

Water is becoming scarce for both crop spraying and livestock. Many growers are having to cart water to keep up with demand.

In those areas that have received sufficient rain, post-emergent grass weed control has commenced in the early sown canola and pulse crops.

Rain is the vital ingredient missing from this season. Hopefully some decent falls arrive soon.

**Quenten Knight
Agronomist, Agronomy Focus, Esperance
June 6, 2019**

production is forecast to increase by a massive 80 plus per cent to 550,000 tonnes.

From **ABARES June 2019 Australian Crop Report**

VICTORIAN MALLEE

Warm and dry conditions in the first four months of 2019 forced Mallee growers to dry sow to keep up with logistics and optimal sowing dates. Growers have focussed on vetch, oats and pastures for sheep feed – with regular checks of the weather outlook. When the rain finally came in early May (between 6 and 21+ mm), some growers changed their sowing program opting for more canola. This was prompted by the excellent subsoil moisture made available by December 2018 rainfall.

The rain has generally continued and with excellent crop establishment, optimism across the region is high. Growers have been keeping a keen eye on the performance of pre-emergent herbicides in the dry sown paddocks. Most growers have been happy with the pre-em results.

Now that sowing has concluded, growers are busy inspecting for insects, rolling lentils and applying early nitrogen or sulphate of ammonia. Some spraying is also underway for post emergent weed control.

The Mallee has experienced some cold temperatures – nearing zero in late May – but this has barely hindered crop development.

Bryobia mite were observed in cereal and canola crops in parts of the Mallee but damage so far is minimal.

Other activities include budgeting for nitrogen applications. The Bureau of Meteorology says all but one of the models surveyed suggest positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) levels will be maintained throughout winter. Half the models suggest drier rainfall trends and warmer temperatures predicted for the next three months. Growers will be keen to closely match their inputs with yield potential.

Excellent sheep prices are providing some very welcome cash flow for livestock producers. Some producers are selecting lambing paddocks and are waiting for pastures to establish with enough root system prior to grazing.

Louisa Ferrier
Engagement and Member Services Leader,
Birchip Cropping Group
June 7, 2019

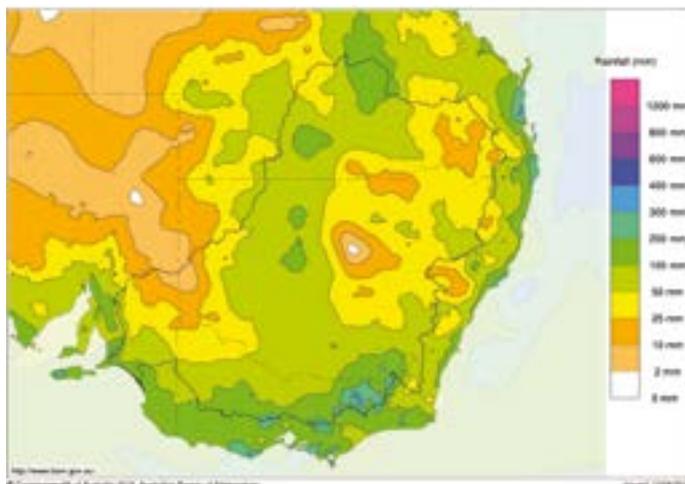


With generally good rainfall across the Mallee, crop establishment has been excellent.

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Murray–Darling Basin rainfall totals (mm) for April 1 to June 12, 2019
Australian Bureau of Meteorology



The southern states are generally away to an encouraging start to the 2019–20 winter crop while central-west and northern NSW and southern Queensland are still dry.

Northern region

GRDC NSW SUMMARY

Tough is the word Lake Cargelligo grain grower, private consultant and GRDC Northern Panelist Andrew McFadyen is using to describe the current seasonal conditions across much of New South Wales' grain growing regions.

He says reasonable rain was needed in the next three to four weeks to give winter crops a fighting chance after a dry summer and autumn.

"In seasons like this, it is really important to remember we are all in this together and it's always rained. It will turn around this time too," says Andrew. "In the meantime, I believe we have to think outside the square, find ways to keep busy, create alternative incomes and reach out for help when we need it."

"Most panel members are involved in the grains industry either as growers or as farm advisers or researchers, so we know firsthand the challenges that come with a season like this one. We are also conscious that for many growers this is the second or third year they've struggled to get winter crop in," Andrew said.

"In the Lake Cargelligo region, the past 18 months have been incredibly dry, and we are now at a point where we need rain in the next three to four weeks to give winter crops a chance, or in some cases to get winter crops in the ground."

Further south, GRDC Northern Panel member Roy Hamilton, who owns a 4400 hectare mixed farming operation at Rand in the southern Riverina, said heavy rain in early May caused some soil issues and hampered the emergence of canola crops.

"We had 48 millimetres in one rainfall event in May and have had none since. This brings the total rainfall for the year to just 100 mm, with many growers opting for 'safer' cereal crops, such as wheat and barley, over canola this season," Roy said.

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“But the fact is all these crops need rain now and we haven’t had any follow-up. We are also contending with a lot of damage from wildlife.

“The situation is similarly stressful for irrigators with the Hume and Burrinjuck dams at 15 and 29 per cent respectively.”

Roy said the second dry season in a row had prompted many grain growers to consider trying to get livestock back into the system to spread risk, but this was proving difficult due to stock prices and infrastructure issues.

“In the north and west of the Riverina – which was 80 to 90 per cent cropping – this is now closer to 60 or 70 per cent as growers try to get livestock back in their systems. So there are some significant changes going on as producers work out the best way to adjust to the climate challenges,” he said.

At Forbes, GRDC Northern Panel member Tony Hamilton said the season had been “very patchy” with reduced canola plantings, very little chickpea planted and some irrigation water available to carry over.

“Irrigators are definitely disillusioned. But the planting decision window could extend from mid-June to July if the price outlook is good and we get some rain,” Tony said.

At Wyalong, grower and GRDC Northern Panel member Roger Bolte said it was a similar situation despite 70 mm in late March giving growers hope for a great autumn start to the season.

“We had another 50 mm in early May and that helped set up some growers across this area, but the conditions vary significantly through this region,” he said.

“The south-eastern area has fared well and most of the crop is in the ground and range from just planted to established, again into variable moisture levels.

“Wheat and barley are the main crops this season at the

expense of canola and legumes. Canola could be back as much as 90 per cent this year across this district. A small area of chickpeas and lupins will really round out what’s in the ground here.”

Roger said the northern eastern part of the Wyalong region had largely missed out on falls and was ‘patchy at best’, while in the south east towards Barellan growers had planted opportunistically where rain had fallen but other areas remained unsown.

We’ve been here before in the Central West

In central western NSW, grain grower and GRDC Northern Panel member Bruce Watson has a “dèjà vu” feeling that 2019 in the Parkes area could be a repeat of the 2018 season.

“We have missed out on most of the rainfall that was received in the Riverina and North West Slopes and planting here ranges from finished to not even started depending on who got under storms,” Bruce said.

“Subsoil moisture is generally less than it was this time last year and we have seen a strong emphasis on cereals with very little canola or grain legumes going in.

“Without significant rainfall in the next two to three weeks, there will probably be a significant proportion of long fallow through this region, especially west and north into the Trangie and Nyngan areas.

“There is also a trend of moving back into sheep with a renewed focus on grazing crops.”

Bruce said some growers in his region were entering their second year without a winter crop, which was virtually unheard of in country generally viewed as “safe”.

“Others have been dry sowing and the dust has been unbelievable. This is very hard on discs/tyres, bearings, seals, staff and emotions,” he said.

Further north on the Liverpool Plains, agronomist Pete McKenzie said there was limited subsoil moisture and minimal winter planting.

“Some crops have been planted and emerged south of Coonamble and down to Gulargambone, which really is the best area west of the Newell to date,” he said.

“There has been some light rain of 25 to 50 mm in the Walgett area, but these were pretty patchy and not enough to make much difference. West of Moree and Rowena, growers have been using planters to create ridges to stop wind blowing topsoil and they have added some seed.

“But the ‘golden triangle’ is only 10 to 20 per cent planted and this has been on very long fallow paddocks or into recent fallows for ground cover only or really as a huge punt.”

Pete said further cuts to groundwater allocations were also a risk, as water table levels dropped.

“This is the first time this has ever happened so these are challenging times and the planting window in this region is rapidly closing, so we need rain.

“I would say, at a conservative estimate just 15 to 20 per cent of the region has been planted. This is a major concern after a disappointing summer crop. But I think the message I keep telling my growers and the wider industry is that we are all in this together, and if we look out for ourselves and each other we can get through this.”

The GRDC will be running a series of Drought Management Workshops throughout NSW in July and August.

For more information or resources from the GRDC on Dealing with the Dry, go to <https://bit.ly/2WItQhO>. If you would like more information about mental health support go to <https://bit.ly/2I00XFH>.



On the Liverpool Plains, agronomist Pete McKenzie said there was limited subsoil moisture and minimal winter planting. (PHOTO: GRDC)

Well-known American Will Rogers once said 'a farmer has to be an optimist, or he wouldn't still be a farmer'. In Qld, this season – and like much of the northern cropping region – Will's statement is proving to be pretty accurate.

Seasonal conditions remain variable across Qld as grain growers head into June still optimistically looking skyward for rain as the winter crop planting window narrows.

Southern Qld

In southern Qld, Chinchilla grain grower and GRDC Northern Region panelist Arthur Gearon, says that for many growers this will be the second or third consecutive year without good rain and that starts to really impact on how you cope.

He says the season is a mixed bag for much of the western and inner Darling Downs and further south to the Queensland and New South Wales border.

"You can draw a line north from about Bungunya where most of the area to the west received either no or little rain in March and good falls in April, with exceptions as some growers missed out completely," Arthur said.

"To the east it was the opposite, with big rains in March and smaller (5 to 10 mm events) in April but again some growers missed out entirely.

"Put into the context of the preceding seasons, it is quite interesting. Most summer crop growers actually planted on limited moisture and crops struggled to yield anything at all.

"Whilst in the winter-prominent areas the biggest issue seems to be successive years trying to chase high chickpea prices which has meant there is very little ground cover and as a result an inability to store moisture."

Arthur said looking ahead, growers were predominantly concerned about ground cover and were evaluating the cost of planting barley or wheat even if they had limited chance of a reasonable yield, just to get cover on paddocks.

"Some optimistic growers chasing moisture have put in deep sown chickpeas – so there is a bit happening – but the reality is the planting window has not closed yet so if we get rain there is still time."

Wide Bay Burnett

Meanwhile, growers on Queensland's coast and across the Wide Bay Burnett region are also battling dry conditions with minimal rain during the traditionally wetter summer months of December to February and late falls in March.

Maryborough's GRDC Northern Panel member and researcher Jo White said it was the third dry summer in a row for growers in the Wide Bay region.

"Maryborough received four per cent of its usual rainfall in January and 16 per cent of the average in February," Jo said.

"Conditions improved in March and April with 210 mm and 90 mm respectively and this pattern was similar for the South Burnett/Kingaroy region.

"Dryland peanuts suffered due to drought conditions with yields well below average in the Burnett. Rain in late March had little impact on improving the yield potential of peanuts in this region.

"The quality and quantity of peanuts were better under irrigation in the Bundaberg region. But issues with irrigation management due to lack of water availability and PKS (Peanut Kernel Shivel), has reduced overall quality."

Jo said the situation was better for peanuts in North Queensland where good rainfall and disease management produced high yields.

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Maryborough-based researcher Jo White said it was the third dry summer in a row for growers in the Wide Bay region.
(PHOTO: GRDC)

"Soybeans fared better this season, coping reasonably well in the hot, dry conditions. December-planted crops fared worse than January-planted soybeans which yielded two tonnes per hectare," she said.

"Simply speaking, there just isn't enough water for crops so we really need some good falls to top up water supplies for irrigators, as well as replenish soil moisture levels."

Central Qld

Central Queensland remains one of the more positive regions after receiving reasonable rain in three separate falls in March, April and early May.

Emerald-based private agronomist and GRDC Northern Panel member Graham Spackman said even within his region there were stark differences in soil moisture levels.

"Overall, it has been a good start to the season, with a significant amount of the Central Highlands and parts of the Dawson regions planted on good moisture. But the Callide area centred on Biloela is still very dry," Graham said.

"Late rain saved sorghum crops in the Capella and Clermont areas, although it did lead to a significant influx of Helicoverpa

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moths that growers had to manage. Growers are now harvesting but it is tricky as there is some re-tilling with 2–3 stages present in the crop.

“A large amount of winter crop has now been planted in the Central Highlands with many growers opting to grow wheat and restore stubble cover to paddocks. There has also been more barley planted than usual, and there is a significant planting of chickpea.

“The earliest planted cereals received in-crop rain and weed control programs are underway. Some early barley and grazing oats crops, and the occasional early wheat crop, have suffered infestations of armyworms and Helicoverpa.

“But despite a good start, many winter cereal crops in the region now need in-crop rain to establish properly and to prevent them maturing too early.”

Graham said those with irrigation in the region were also facing some challenges with Fairbairn Dam currently at 21 per cent which had resulted in reduced allocations.

“Allocations from July 1 are expected to be low, but there will be some carryover from the current year. Comet River irrigators were able to harvest substantial volumes of water following a 200 mm rainfall event over Carnarvon Gorge courtesy of Cyclone Trevor. This will enable a reasonable planting of primarily cotton for those irrigators in spring,” Graham said

For information and other resources such as farm business management advice, evaluating planting pros and cons in dry times and mental health resource links see <https://bit.ly/2WItQhO>

DARLING DOWNS

Weather conditions

After some rain in March, April was back to form with just one mm and May produced about five mm, leaving the first five months of 2019 with just 35 per cent of its average rainfall and already 180 mm behind where it should be. June to date has seen five to 30 mm in patchy falls across the Downs, and temperatures are rising to above average now after a cold spell with numerous frosts.

Winter crop

There has been some dryland planting in the western areas with deep planted chickpeas and barley where some of the heavier falls occurred, but less than 10 per cent of the anticipated area is in the ground. Oats were planted on the March rains and after turning blue with the dry, have started to put some roots down and grow. There are also a few paddocks of faba beans planted around Dalby.

Deep planted chickpeas are going in on long fallow paddocks

ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

It is Chamberlain Super 90 – one of the most powerful two wheel drive tractors of the seventies.



Some Darling Downs' (bore) irrigators have dry sown barley and then watered up. Widespread rainfall would be a great relief for these irrigators – not to mention dryland growers still waiting for a start!

where there is fair subsoil moisture. Wheat and barley will be the main crop if a planting rain falls in June, with many growers keen to have stubble cover to catch future rainfalls.

On the Eastern Downs the only paddocks being planted are those with some irrigation, where wheat and barley are being dry sown and watered up.

Summer outlook

Growers are holding back some of the few paddocks with good stored moisture for summer crop. The irrigators are expected to stick with their usual cotton and corn, but dryland growers are looking at another large sorghum plant and hopefully mungbean plant. But some good rain is needed to fill profiles that are currently only 25–60 per cent full.

Hugh Reardon-Smith
Agronomist – Landmark, Pittsworth
June 7, 2019

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SOUTHERN AUSTRALIA

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COVERING CROPPING SYSTEMS OF SOUTHERN NSW, VICTORIA, TASMANIA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA & WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Canola blackleg breakthrough

NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) researchers have identified genetic regions which could be used to develop new canola varieties with durable resistance to blackleg disease. A three-year international study under field and glasshouse conditions led by DPI molecular scientist, Harsh Raman, found multiple genes throughout the canola genome can control resistance to blackleg.

“Eight regions on the canola genome with resistance to blackleg were detected across diverse environments including Australia, the United Kingdom and France,” Harsh said.

“These identified genomic regions could be targeted to breed elite canola varieties with durable or long-term blackleg resistance and global application.”

Blackleg disease is caused by the fungus, *Leptosphaeria maculans*, the most devastating pathogen affecting crops since 1970, which threatens canola production worldwide.

Multigene resistance and a highly diverse pathogen

Harsh said identification of a durable source with multigene resistance is significant for Australian canola production systems, where the pathogen is highly diverse.

“Durable resistance genes offer opportunities for canola breeders to develop new varieties with quantitative resistance,” he said. “We continually need to discover new sources of major

and quantitative resistance in canola and related species to minimise yield losses.

“Major resistance genes often do not protect canola plants in the long-term, as gene mutations in the blackleg pathogen render those genes ineffective over time.

“Given that quantitative resistance is difficult to select and is complicated by environmental factors, molecular markers linked with resistant loci could be used to enhance blackleg resistance in canola germplasm.”

To manage blackleg disease farmers use a number of strategies including crop rotation, stubble management, seed dressing and resistant varieties. The use of resistant varieties is the most widely adopted, cost-effective and environmentally friendly approach.

This research was funded through NSW DPI, GRDC, Victoria’s DED, Jobs, Transport and Resources, University of Western Australia and INRA, France. ■



DPI molecular scientist, Harsh Raman.



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Haloxypop spray compliance is critical for continued use on canola

NATIONAL Working Party on Grain Protection (NWPGP) chair Gerard McMullen is reminding canola growers to adhere to label application directions on herbicides containing haloxypop as part of an industry-wide effort to avoid unacceptable chemical residues.

When and where NOT to use haloxypop

For herbicides containing haloxypop as the active ingredient, label directions stipulate they must not be applied to canola and other specified oilseed crops:

- After the eight-leaf growth stage; or,
- After the stem elongation growth stage has commenced (this may occur before the eight-leaf growth stage – so determine the crop growth stage before application); or,
- Under or between windrows (this is not a registered label use and could result in chemical residues).

Of the haloxypop herbicide products available in Australia, Verdict 520, Asset and Inquest herbicides are examples of those commonly used by canola growers.

Highlighting the importance of complying with label directions, Gerard says residue testing by the National Residue Survey has detected haloxypop residues above the Australian maximum residue limit (MRL) in canola traded domestically, which is of concern.

Also, the European Union – Australia’s main canola export market – is implementing new, tighter import controls.



Canola at the leaf production stage, left (before the eight-leaf growth stage), and after the stem elongation growth stage has commenced, on right.

EU to lower haloxypop MRL

Gerard says the EU has indicated it plans to lower its current haloxypop MRL for canola to 0.05 milligrams per kilogram.

Although still to be finalised, this revision reducing the haloxypop MRL for canola sold into EU markets is expected to occur before the 2019–20 harvest.

The haloxypop MRL for Australian canola exports to Japan – another major market – remains at 0.1 mg per kg.

“Australian grain growers have a very good history of compliance with product label directions and, as an industry, we need to ensure that haloxypop continues to be used in accordance with label directions,” Gerard says.

“Growers are also encouraged to consider other herbicides containing products with different active ingredients for in-crop control of grass weeds in canola.”

Trade risks

To help tackle the trade risks that haloxypop residues pose to domestic and export canola markets, the Australian grains industry has established a Haloxypop Working Group. The need for this group was flagged at the annual NWPGP Conference in Melbourne in June 2018.

Also chair of the Haloxypop Working Group, Gerard says the new group has developed a series of steps, supporting previous industry measures, with the aim of further reducing haloxypop residues in canola.

GRDC crop protection officer – west, Georgia Megirian, reiterated the importance of adhering to label directions when applying herbicides containing haloxypop.

“Applying haloxypop to canola after stem elongation will result in chemical residues that exceed maximum residue limits,” Georgia says.

“This, in turn, can lead to the rejection of canola shipments in export markets and create ongoing market access issues.

“Following label directions is not only a regulatory requirement, it is also important in preserving haloxypop herbicide chemistry as a cost-effective grass control option for canola growers across the country.”

A more detailed article about haloxypop is available on the GRDC website at <http://bit.ly-2HoNrLC>



NWPGP chair Gerard McMullen is reminding canola growers to adhere to label application directions for herbicides containing haloxypop. (PHOTO: GRDC)