

District Reports...

Central Queensland

The first half of the 2020–21 summer will have to go down as one of the toughest cotton growing seasons for the Central highlands, with no water allocation from the start of the planting window followed by limited in-crop rain.

Central Queensland was granted a permit from the APVMA to extend the planting window to January 15, 2021. With good rain falling from late December through to early January a further 1850 hectares of cotton was planted under the permit.

The Dawson river had a fresh run resulting in an increased allocation for cotton growers in the Dawson Valley which enabled cotton fields to receive timely irrigations to mature bolls and maximise yield potential. The timing of the rain produced some good soil moisture profiles and provided a number of broadacre farmers an opportunity to plant dryland cotton and capitalise on the extended planting window. The Dawson/Callide Valley finished up with 5800 hectares of cotton for the 2020–21 planting season.

Cotton planted in September 2020 has received its final irrigation with defoliation on track for the mid/end of February. November planted cotton has reached peak flower and boll development stage with plant growth sitting at six nodes north of white flower. A plant growth regulator (mepiquat) will be applied within the next few weeks to manage vegetative growth. Retention numbers of these crops are very good and insect pressure has dropped to within threshold.

In Emerald the Fairbairn Dam catchment missed out on all the big weather which fell to the north or south, although falls from 80–100 mm across the catchment resulted in Emerald growers receiving a four per cent allocation. This allocation is not enough to kick start the cotton that had run out of water but the system is now primed for the next rain event. Approximately 6000 hectares of cotton has been planted in the Emerald district for the 2020–21 season.

Very good falls of rain have been recorded north of Clermont in the Belyando district, not only filling soil moisture profiles but creating run off to fill dams and creeks, which has led to an opportunity for cotton to be grown under irrigation.

August planted cotton that received full irrigation for the season will start to be defoliated at the end of January and into February, showing good boll numbers and size. Some cotton has been shut down due to a lack of water which will be grown on once there is a water allocation available.

Stewart Brotherton
January 28, 2021

Burnett, Fraser Coast and Brisbane Valley

Burnett Region

The weather has been kind to date, with some humid, but relatively mild days. There has also been some wet weather of late, which has been helpful to growing conditions. Cotton at Byee is looking good, with crops ranging from mid-squaring to

flowering stage. There has only been minor fruit loss due to the overcast weather and insect pressure has been very low.

Some good rain has fallen in the region, which has helped to relieve the pressure of irrigation scheduling – which is very tight due to minimal water allocations from Bjelke Peterson Dam.

Growers in the region have now started planting mungbean crops, following the welcome rain change. In regards to the cotton crop at Mundubbera, growing conditions have been ideal. Ongoing mild temperatures have helped the crop in the lead up to first flower, while there has been some square loss due to the weather conditions.

Fraser Coast

The region has seen some good rainfall in December, which has enabled the planting of late crops into good soil moisture, as well as helping with boll fill on early planted crops, which are approaching open boll stage.

The early September planted crops had six cold shock days during the establishment period and flowered for approximately 30 days before cutting out.

Late December planted crops are currently around the 9–10 node stage. To date, this season has been better than the last, where water allocations were cut off from the Mary River weir at the end of December, following the driest season they had seen for the region.

Brisbane/Lockyer Valley

Weather in the Brisbane Valley has been very humid, although temperatures have been mild, with some good rain falling in the area between the end of December and mid-January. Cotton in the region that was planted in early November is currently at flowering stage, with low insect pressure to date. Cotton that was planted in mid-December is currently sitting at 10–11 nodes and is beginning to set squares.

It has been a tough season at Gatton, in the Lockyer Valley, with water issues and very little rainfall, along with hot temperatures in December. This has led to the crop cutting out early and beginning to struggle, with bolls and flowers shedding.



Mitch Brimblecombe's (Moira Farming) irrigated cotton crop and CSD trial at Forest Hill – Lockyer Valley.

At Forest Hill, irrigated cotton is looking extremely good and is at flowering stage, with good boll counts. The dryland crop has cut out and there are signs that crop is beginning to struggle, with low boll numbers.

Chris Barry
January 25, 2021

St George and Dirranbandi

Although the La Niña has delivered patchy rainfall across eastern Australia and has perhaps been a little disappointing in the totals delivered so far for the St George area it has delivered in spades!

The majority of growers at St George had been irrigating cotton fields as though they would have full water available even though they knew most would be one to three irrigations short. Although some fields had been dropped out early, the majority of growers were making the decision in the first week of January as to which fields would be Pixed early with a cut out application so as to drop certain fields and fully water other fields. Just as these difficult decisions were being made it began to rain in the catchment which resulted in a flow into Beardmore Dam. This, with a large flow down the Moonie river ensures all growers at St George and Thallon will have enough water to finish the season.

Unfortunately, the flow has not been large enough to spill at Beardmore Dam to allow growers along the river and at Dirranbandi to pick up a flood harvesting event. Some of these growers also have tight water budgets and would benefit from a further flow. The cooler weather combined with the odd storm has certainly given growers more time to hold out for a flow but with the crop being later this year, most will still be irrigating in March.

During November and December, the St George, Dirranbandi and Thallon areas as with most of the cotton growing regions saw relentless mirid pressure. This has resulted in lower fruit retention early on and with mild conditions the Sicot 748 has tended to throw out plenty of vegetative branches before and after it started squaring. This, combined with quite a lot of tipping out has made for some ugly plants though during the past two to three weeks the crops are now looking much improved as mirid numbers have dropped off and crops are setting small bolls. Considering the mild weather and soft growing conditions it certainly appears to be a favourable Sicot 746 year. Whitefly are now becoming prevalent throughout the crops.

Although I see on the recent Moisture Manager that the La Niña has peaked, we are still hoping for the odd cyclone to poke on down the coast resulting in large downfalls in the catchment. I'm sure the Darling Downs wouldn't mind a couple of hundred millimetres over the next couple of months to make up for the 10 years of deficit. Here's hoping for a few more decent rainfall events to finish off what has already been a much kinder and wetter summer than the previous eight summers.

Dallas King
January 29, 2021

Darling Downs

While taking its time throughout spring and early summer, La Niña finally delivered some decent rainfall to the Downs from mid-December. The vast majority of falls have been storm rain and hence totals have varied widely across the region. All in all, most growers have received some much needed rainfall and

February–March 2021

many irrigators have been able to delay their first irrigation until at least mid-January. Despite this, there will still be a number of fields that may run short of water, unless we have an event which delivers water for storages.

There are currently around 21,000 hectares of irrigated cotton and 6500 hectares of dryland cotton planted across the Downs. With a wide range of planting dates, there is a major variance in crop stages, across both irrigation and dryland.

Crops are growing well after a slow start, with some irrigated crops looking to cut out, while many are still flowering, or yet to flower. Dryland cotton crops are ranging from four nodes (planted late December) up to first flower, or just beginning to fruit up. Some areas have received very good rain for dryland cotton and are progressing well, although profiles are still far from full and further rainfall will be required to finish many of the crops.

To date it has been a very mild growing season, with temps rarely climbing above 35°C and cooler nights for the most part. The milder weather and some overcast conditions, along with pest pressure have been precursors to lower first position retention and also delayed flowering.

Pest pressure has been consistent, with a range of pests and predators being found throughout the crops. Early planted crops were given a hammering by thrips, causing quite a bit of tipping out and slowing progress during establishment. Mirid pressure has also been consistent throughout the season, causing damage to squares.

There have been quite heavy Heliothis egg lays in some crops and mealy bugs have also been detected. There are good numbers of predatory insects present, which is very pleasing to see and they seem to be helping to control the pest pressure.

Weeds have been well controlled in general, with a few new flushes appearing after recent rainfall events. The usual, hard to control suspects are ever present, such as fleabane and feathertop Rhodes grass. In terms of disease, there was quite a lot of rhizoctonia and black root rot around during establishment, as well as some fields suffering from long fallow disorder, which all slowed initial progress. Fusarium has been showing up in a number of fields following rainfall events and there are also reports of alternaria in some fields.

There is still talk of better than average rainfall for the coming months, particularly February and March, which will hopefully come to fruition. As it stands, many crops are now fruiting up well and beginning to hold better retention. Hopefully the rain continues to top things up and crops can set up for good yields.

Sam Lee
January 28, 2021

Border Rivers

Good falls of rain through late December and into the New Year have brought some reprieve to irrigated and dryland crops throughout the valley. Mixed falls from storms saw a wide range of falls recorded as well as significant variance over short distances – December saw several events of over 30 mm and

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mixed totals in January with some significant falls contributing to localised runoff and stream flows.

These events have helped with water budgets and allowed irrigation intervals to be extended through this period. Depending upon planting date these events made scheduling of the first irrigation tricky, for others it has stretched time between irrigations and with capture of on-farm runoff has helped some get closer to finishing the crop. But this will all depend upon environmental conditions over the next month as some fields are still subject to being dropped out or likely to see irrigation fall short.

In general these conditions have been favourable for crop growth with fields ranging around 16–26 nodes to cut out, fruit retention and boll set varies as influenced by growth stage, water budgets, environmental influence and insect pressure.

Mepiquat Chloride applications have been required for vegetative growth management. Forecast conditions ahead look ok and will be ideal for crops to get some work done so hopefully we can avoid the February blast of heat that we often experience.

The past few months have seen *Helicoverpa* egg lays observed, some of which have been heavy. Mirid activity varied and fortunately has settled through January, but earlier control has been warranted in some cases. Whitefly adults have been observed moving into fields this month. Recent reports indicate an increase in locust observations and damage to summer crops with hoppers on the move through fallow and pastures and they may threaten adjacent crops.

The change in weather opened the door to disease with incidences of *Verticillium* and *Fusarium* wilt showing up, although mostly in known problem fields. Sporadic incidences of boll rot have been observed recently.

Upstream storages have not seen any significant inflows with combined capacity sitting at 12.8 per cent, which is only a small increase on this time last year. We can only hope that some significant falls occur in the near term to improve the outlook going forward.

The Macintyre Valley Cotton Field Day Committee are busy working on a program in the hope that a field day can proceed this year and anticipate circulating a date claimer very soon.

Chris Teague
January 29, 2021

Mungindi

The majority of irrigated cotton is at 25 to 27 nodes. Early fruit retention was lower than expected in Bollgard cotton but total fruit numbers are all healthy. First position retention for the early planted cotton is around 60 per cent which is lower than the usual high (80 to 85 per cent) percentages experienced in Bollgard in previous season.

There has been some disease apparent and samples have been sent as way to determine if they are *Fusarium* wilt or *Verticillium* wilt.

Insect levels have been low generally. Most crops have had

two mirid sprays. Some have had three. Whiteflies are present but at a low level at this stage. A few green veggie bugs are about. Very few aphids or mites.

Good rain has resulted in fewer irrigations being needed so far. We now expect the majority of crops will have enough water to grow them out to their full yield potential.

Mick Brosnan
January 28, 2021

Gwydir Valley

Good rain started falling across most of the Gwydir valley starting about mid-December and as a result dryland cotton planters took advantage of the later than ideal break.

Earlier dryland crops are looking good and are experiencing a dream run with regular rainfalls and mild temperatures do date. Dryland hectares in the valley are around 25,000 hectares. The rain and subsequent supplementary flow down the Gwydir system has also meant that the extra hectares that growers had put in banking on a wet summer now look as though they will have water to finish off the season.

Irrigated hectares are estimated to be 20,000 for the Gwydir valley, and this is a mix of fully and semi irrigated cotton grown on various row configurations and, interestingly, different plants per metre as an alternative to skip row configurations.

The La Niña influence on this season has been marked by the recent increase in rainfall and the return to the 10-year mean of solar radiation and a Base 12 DD lower than the 10-year mean. Both these values are distinctly lower than the previous four years and are taking a bit of adjusting to manage as the efficacy of mepiquat chloride is increased and in many cases not required as the NAWF decreases with every passing cloud.

Green mirid numbers now seem to be declining as *Helicoverpa* fly in on the storms and mice enter from adjoining fallows. Another recent pest that is quickly becoming a serious concern is locusts, particularly in the dryland fields. Irrigated country is more regularly sprayed with fipronil for green mirid control which also keeps any fly-in locusts in check, but dryland fields, particularly those near or adjacent to pasture paddocks, can be inundated quickly as the population moves and there have been some instances where the crop edges are completely defoliated as the hoppers cross the fence.

We are on cyclone watch at present here in the Gwydir as February is dam filling month and we are hopeful that the La Niña blesses us with significant rainfall for the catchment before completely deteriorating going into autumn.

Stuart McFadyen
January 27, 2021

Namoi Valley and Walgett

With the Namoi Valley finally experiencing some sunny, warm days, most crops are well into flowering with some early planted crops approaching cut out within the next two to three weeks. Flowering was delayed by up to 10 days in some crops due to significant fruit loss on the bottom five fruiting nodes.

In the majority of cases this was attributed to the weather conditions along with some unprecedented insect pressure which saw up to three mirid sprays. Boll numbers are lower than averages for the current day degrees, but some warm weather will quickly change that.

Some late dryland crops in both the Upper and Lower

Namoi are looking fantastic with some already receiving two Pix applications to slow vegetative growth and put on some much needed fruit. Further rainfall will be needed for these crops to reach their full potential, but they are set up extremely well.

Verticillium wilt is showing its ugly head in the Namoi, brought on by the cold, mild weather. The extent varies significantly, but it has come in earlier than usual and will impact on yield in crops that are not managed correctly.

In typical years some fields may be cut out early to maintain fruit already produced, but low retentions are making it hard to manage for this season. Pest numbers remain low although mice are causing damage in some areas and require bait spreading to thin the numbers.

Most crops west of Walgett range between 20–27 nodes and are progressing well, with some later planted crops, into chickpea stubble, around 6-8 nodes. Boll numbers in early planted crops are reaching up to 160 bolls per metre and tracking really well.

Some isolated but heavy rainfall has seen irrigation delayed on some farms taking a lot of pressure of growers. Silverleaf whitefly numbers are starting to build with control measure not too far off and later planted crops may see some increased SLW activity as spraying begins.

Angus Marshall
February 2, 2021

Macquarie Valley

The season is certainly progressing fast. Some crops in the southern end of the valley are one to two weeks behind where they would normally be and this is also reflected in the accumulated day degrees being below the 10-year average in both Warren and Narromine.

In-crop irrigation is sitting around five or six in most cases. There have been some storms and some good in-crop rain has most water budgets sitting pretty.

Mirid pressure has finally eased and there are the odd populations of GVB and pale cotton stainers. Silverleaf whitefly populations are remaining low in the south, but they are building in the north. Sampling of SLW populations has shown some very good levels of parasitism.

The main pest of the moment is definitely the mice. They have impacted crops across the region and even destroyed some late planted dryland crops. The damage ranges from minimal to yield reducing as they are taking out the growing terminal of the crop or fruiting branches (see picture attached). Aerial and ground baiting is continuing.

Anyone with grain stored on farm is feeling the pain at the moment as they are rampant and eating through silo bags like it's an Olympic sport. There are concerns that if the populations are not controlled prior to planting winter cereals it could impact our planting windows.

Plants are showing good fruit loads toward the top of the bush. Currently crops are getting cut out with Pix where it is needed. Overall, some crops are looking to have the best potential in years and others have a bit of work to do and a warm mild finish will be welcomed by all and get us back to the 'mayors office'.

Amanda Thomas
February 1, 2021



Mice damage in the Macquarie.

Southern NSW

The start to the 2020–21 season for Southern NSW was quite good compared to last year. Early temperatures were warm giving growers some of the best establishments seen for a few years. This was followed by a cool change which resulted in a slowdown in-crop development.

With good winter rainfall, water allocations were better this year and some Victorian growers were able to plant again. Restriction around the border crossing and Covid-19 made things interesting and concerns with agronomic support and research trials for these Victorian crops from New South Wales posed a few challenges.

This year's crop development saw the first fruiting position appear on node 5. This was followed by the crop putting two vegetative branches back on before setting into a fruiting phase. This occurred due to the fluctuation in temperature seen in the first two months of the crop's growth.

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Early insect activity (mirids) and overcast weather caused a lot of shedding of this early fruit set, so any advantage the crop had was soon lost. Most crops started flowering around Christmas and early in the new year. Crop growth rates were high this year with a number requiring growth regulants to slow them down.

Up to the middle of January crops had received two if not three applications of insecticides to help maintain the fruit load as the flowering window is narrow and growers didn't want to run the crops late and potentially receive a discount on fibre quality.

Day degrees have been progressing slowly, sitting just behind the average and last season's. There have not been as many cold shock and hot shock days, with the average temperature around 22°C. Late January the weather is predicted to turn warm, with a number of day over 40°C expected.

Crop water use is just slightly down at present. This has mainly been due to an increase in in-crop rainfall and the cooler growth conditions. At the moment the Murrumbidgee Valley now has 100 per cent water allocation. This should see a bigger crop next year as growers are buying cheaper water and maximising their carry over position.

Field days have started under Covid-19 conditions. The first Irrigation Research Extension Committee (IREC) field day saw around 100 people attend. They were able to look at rice, cotton and mungbeans as well as automation of crop watering. Researchers presented on crop trials and also great discussion was had on season conditions to date.

Jorian Millyard
January 22, 2021

ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

The tractor is a magnificently restored Ruggles and Parsons 12-20.



The IREC cotton field day had a big roll up with around 100 attending to hear about research and trials being conducted.

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