

that is occurring, both within regions and across different regions. There will no doubt be challenges to come, but hopes are that the wet season continues to deliver and that there will be some good results come picking time for the north.

Sam Lee
March 19, 2021

Northern Australia

Cotton planting areas have again increased across the northern parts of Australia this season, as expansion of the northern cotton industry continues. Early figures suggest there will be somewhere in the vicinity of 15,000 to 16,000 hectares of cotton in the north in the 2020–21 season, with the vast majority having already been planted as of mid-March.

Crops are spread across the regions and there are a number of new growers this season, which is exciting to see. In North Queensland, crops have been planted from Mareeba on the Atherton Tablelands; further west in the areas around Innot Hot Springs, Mount Garnet and Georgetown, and also in the Flinders region; near Julia Creek and Richmond. While most of the crops around Mareeba and some in the Flinders are irrigated, the vast majority of cotton in North Queensland this season is again dryland, utilising the wet season rainfall. Crops are currently ranging from 10–11 nodes, up to 20–21 nodes, depending on which part of the planting window they were planted in.

In the Northern Territory there are again large areas of cotton planted, with a mixture of rain grown and irrigated crops – mainly overhead irrigation and some underground drip also. While much of the crop is located in the Douglas Daly regions, there are also a number of growers in the Katherine region, as well as to the west and further south of Katherine.

The wet season kicked many of these crops off to a good start and growth regulant has been used quite abundantly to slow vegetative growth and keep the plant under control. With much of the earlier planted rain grown cotton holding good fruit numbers, a late monsoon influence could set crops up for some potentially good yields. The earlier planted crops are drawing closer to cut-out, while many of the irrigated crops, which were planted later in the window, still have quite a long way to go.

Cotton planting in the Ord was delayed by the monsoon, which brought wet weather to the region for much of February. While the window was set to open in late January, planting was unable to begin and did not kick off until later into February. Growers took every opportunity to plant between rain events and most of the area had been planted as of mid-March, with only a few fields that were designated for cotton yet to be planted. Due to the later planting, cotton in the region has a long way to go, but with good rainfall in the Lake Argyle catchment, there is full irrigation water available to take the crops through to completion.

To date, the wet season has delivered in the majority of regions this season. Although tropical cyclone numbers have been down, the monsoon arrived with a force, bringing large falls of rain early on and has hung around for quite some time, continuing to deliver good falls in many regions. For the most part, despite the very wet weather, the cotton has developed well.

It is good to see a real mix of new growers, existing local growers and long-term growers from southern regions now growing cotton in Northern Australia. The other very pleasing thing to see is the amount of information and expertise sharing

Central Queensland

Cotton picking started Mid-February on the early planted cotton. In a season that can only be described as very challenging the cotton fields that received their full quota of irrigation have produced some very good results, with yields ranging from 11 to 13 bales per hectare in both Emerald and Dawson Valleys.

With around 30 per cent of cotton grown on full irrigation this season, growers have had to implement other management strategies to grow cotton. The two different strategies employed this season include 'grown on cotton' or 'walk away cotton.' Grown on cotton has been very successful in the Dawson Valley for a number of years and has been adopted by growers in the Emerald region. The strategy is primarily influenced by seasonal conditions; water availability, a weather event or insect pressure.

The crop is grown traditionally to set as much fruit during the season with the resources available. But at some point during the season the crop may suffer a setback, typically an event limiting yield to below eight bales per hectare. If water is readily available at the point the crop would be defoliated; the grower then decides to grow the crop on, the crop will be irrigated and fertilised to grow on, putting on a second crop on top of early set fruit, effectively prolonging the growing period from six months to over eight months.

The 'walk away' strategy is a totally different mindset and management system. Cotton planted will be established on a profile of moisture with no further water available or allocated to the crop. It will then sit there until a significant weather event occurs to increase water allocation. Once water allocation has increased, the 'walk away' cotton will be irrigated, fertilised and grown on through to a harvestable product.

Currently CQ has around 30 per cent of its crop under a 'walk away' or 'grown on scenario' Both these practices come with a potential risk but ultimately allow growers to manipulate and manage their risk in different ways, capitalising on the long growing season that is unique to Central Queensland, enabling growers to plant and grow cotton in these more challenging years.

In the past week the Fairbairn dam catchment has received some very welcome rain and with more rain to come, an increase in allocation from the current 22 per cent is looking promising.

As the weather has come a little later this year, growers will be hoping for good growing conditions to finish off the late cotton crops in what has been another tough season.

Stewart Brotherton
March 22, 2021

Burnett, Fraser Coast and Brisbane Valley

Burnett Region

Cotton at Byee is currently looking great, as the weather has been kind, with relatively mild days. There has been some wet weather of late, which has helped to finish crops off. Growers who planted earlier have open bolls, as crops had finished early,



Mitch Brimblecombe's (Moir Farming) irrigated cotton crop and CSD trial at Forest Hill in the Lockyer Valley.

while growers who planted later and had water have some very nice crops. Further rain in mid-March should help to finish crops off. Late crops are not seeing any open bolls as yet and boll counts are averaging close to 180 bolls per metre.

The cotton crop at Mundubbera is heading towards the end of the season. Cotton planted in early October has been defoliated and picking will take place in March, weather permitting. The crop planted in late November is just beginning to open up. There has been some cavitation of fruit post cut out, in the November planted crop, but boll numbers remain strong and if it can hold the top fruit, the crop will produce good yield. A period of extended wet weather is predicted for the region during March, so signs of boll rot and further cavitation will be monitored.

Fraser Coast

The region recorded some good rainfall during March, which is going to help out the late planted cotton, as irrigation water supply is starting to get very low. But the hope is that there will not be extended periods of overcast weather, as this will likely see quite a bit of fruit drop off. As of mid-March, late planted crops are coming into cutout stage and are sitting around 19 nodes. First position retention is just under 80 per cent and there is an average of 120 bolls per metre in boll counts. Early planted cotton has been harvested and the interim results look quite promising, considering the season, although module weights are yet to come in.

Brisbane/Lockyer Valley

Wet weather in the Brisbane Valley during March has seen some good falls of rain recorded. Early planted cotton has open bolls and will likely be defoliated when the wet weather clears. Average boll counts in the region are around 140 bolls per metre. Cotton which was planted late, in December, is currently coming into cutout stage, with plants around 19–20 nodes and first position retention at 85 per cent.

Gatton hasn't seen much rain during the growing season. But the rain unfortunately decided to show up late in the season and the crop has received more rain since defoliation, than fell during the whole season. Hopefully conditions improve as picking draws closer, although the rain has still been very welcome for the region.

Dryland cotton at Forest Hill has been defoliated and is ready to be picked, pending further March rainfall in the

April–May 2021

region. Irrigated cotton will be defoliated when conditions are favourable, after the wet weather has cleared. Currently crops are holding very good boll numbers, ranging from 170–185 bolls per metre.

Chris Barry
March 18, 2021

St George and Dirranbandi

Righto, who pulled the picker out of the shed? Sure enough just as the first of the early planted crops are beginning to be picked, we're in for a forecasted 70 mm of rain. However, with the worst drought in over 100 years still seared in the memory of many people there are no complaints at this stage, well if there are, we're just not listening!

Although rain in the area has generally been light and patchy there have been good falls in the catchment and a decent flow in the system. Beardmore Dam filled and began to spill last night (March 21) with a minor flood harvesting event starting. Should we receive the forecasted rain then expectations and hopes are for a major flood harvesting event especially considering that irrigators along the river along with Cubbie Station and the Dirranbandi growers have just used the last of their water to finish this season's crop.

It would indeed be a spectacular 12 months if we do end up with a reasonable flood harvesting event after last March's flood and huge winter crop. Storms during the past three months have been slowly refilling the soil profile and is looking positive for a decent winter crop in 2021. If the area ended up with two good winter crops in a row and a decent flood now leading to another cotton crop in the Dirranbandi area, it would be just what the shire needs to get back onto its feet! With Beardmore full and most of the storages in the irrigation area being full combined with the growers on the Moonie river having their fourth flow in the past three months and being full as well, the prospect for next season is looking very positive.

As mentioned at the beginning of this report, picking was just about to begin on the earliest planted fields though the majority of the crop is just about to be defoliated. The bulk of the crop should be ready for picking just after Easter. Due to a much cooler summer with days 8–10°C below our normal temperatures, the crop is slightly later, though looks to have a decent yield potential.

As with most cotton growing areas this year, St George, Dirranbandi and Thallon also experienced high mirid pressure during the season. Applications for mirids ranged from three to five during the season and those fields that were treated with Regent tended to need one or two sprays for whitefly. Due to the cooler summer those fields treated with Transform saw high levels of parasitism which resulted in these fields not needing to be sprayed for whitefly, saving growers \$50–\$130 per hectare.

The Whitefly Decision Support graph developed by Richard Sequeira and Jamie Hopkinson has finally given the industry a great tool for gaining a baseline and being able to monitor parasitism levels throughout the tail end of the season. Generally,

other pests were quiet throughout the season though the higher number of Regent applications combined with cool, wet weather did see mealybugs become an issue for some farms.

Although we are, and no doubt will be suffering from some boll rot after the next few days of rain, to have 60–70 per cent of the area planted in the shire, potential yields looking good, the bale price hitting \$600 per bale and now storages filling with no further irrigations required, its difficult to imagine it gets much better than this! Here's hoping the rest of the Australian cotton industry receives decent rainfall and large river flows ready for the 2021–22 season.

Dallas King
March 21, 2021

Darling Downs

There will be mixed fortunes when it comes to picking cotton on the Downs this season. While some areas have been lucky enough to get under storms and have received reasonable falls, others have unfortunately missed out completely, with many parts of the region still remaining very dry. While a change in mid-March showed us that it can still set in rainy for a few days – where much of the region received decent totals over the space of three to four days – for many it was a case of too little, too late.

While there will be some reasonable yielding dryland crops across the Downs, there will be many that have run short of moisture, where yields will be well down, or crops may be removed prior to picking. Dryland crops were planted from October, right through until almost the end of December, so while there are some crops that are close to having a first defoliation, there are others that are still in the flowering stage.

Similarly, with the irrigated crops, those that ran short of water will likely be reduced in yield, while those crops that were able to be fully irrigated look set to produce some very good yields. The vast majority of irrigated crops have now cut out and are utilising the last of the moisture in profiles to fill bolls. There are some good boll numbers and boll sizes across fully irrigated crops, indicating that there could be some very good results at picking time.

There has been reasonable amounts of both Fusarium and Verticillium showing up in crops across the Downs, likely brought on by the milder conditions, couple with some wet weather events. Retentions have been lower right throughout the season, with many crops not holding a lot of fruit early on. But once these crops began to fruit up after a slow start, many of them powered into flowering and piled large amounts of fruit on, holding good retention. We are now seeing a lot of top heavy crops, as there are large gaps down low, but plenty of heavy bolls further up the plant. This has begun to cause some lodging, which will hopefully ease once defoliation starts and as bolls open up.

Crops in general are later this season than the past couple, most likely due to the slower start with cooler conditions. Defoliation is still quite a ways off for many of the crops in the

region and picking will also be likely later starting. Although further good rainfall is required to put more water in storages, many will be hoping the wet weather will hold off, as defoliation begins and picking draws near.

Sam Lee
March 19, 2021

Border Rivers

The past two months has seen relatively mild weather across the valley, particularly in the context of the last handful of years which has typically seen a run of very hot and dry weather around late January into February. This has not been the case this season with the exception of a spell of a few very hot days in the third week of February. Conditions otherwise have been relatively favourable for most fields.

Irrigated crops across the valley have cut out and are now filling bolls. Fields that saw lower early retention are carrying plenty of lateral and top fruit and may need a bit more time to mature depending upon how the next month plays out. Dryland fields are few and far between but some are seeing first defoliation being applied.

Irrigated fields range from having recently received their final irrigation through to others that may yet have one or two to go. Rainfall has helped some of those fields that were tight on irrigation as well as to extend irrigation schedules, while others have had the tricky decision on whether to apply the final irrigation or hold to see whether forecast rainfall occurs.

Storms have produced scattered and localised very heavy falls and falls to the north and west have contributed to rises in parts of the Weir river system. Although totals vary significantly they are adding up and topping up the thirsty landscape and fallow fields which are shaping up well for the next crop.

Typical for this time of year there are SLW present but under control. Occasional pests such as GVB and shield bugs have been observed with some control measures required. Mice are abundant and grasshoppers/locusts have been plentiful. Disease observations are a mixed bag with Verticillium in particular likely to be exacerbated by recent weather and some boll rot has also been reported.

In terms of looking forward there has been some small flows in the Macintyre river observed from localised falls and runoff, but the upstream storages are yet to see any significant inflows with combined capacity of Pindari and Glenlyon dams sitting at only 13.3 per cent this is only a small increase since last report and this time last year.

The Macintyre Valley Cotton Field Day went ahead on March 17. Due to some welcome wet weather the committee relocated from the intended farm visit at 'Mobandilla' to Riddles oval in Goondwindi. Attendance was pleasing considering the recent mixed rainfall totals and showery conditions on the day; a good cross section of industry relevant topics were discussed.

Because of Covid-19, no awards dinner was held last year so the field day was the first opportunity to present the Macintyre Valley 2019–20 Water Use Efficiency Awards. Individual fields entered in the comp were analysed by Goanna Ag and the winners were:

- 3rd Place – Nufarm WUE award – 'Cleveland', Doolin Ag.
- 2nd Place – Syngenta WUE award – 'Alcheringa', Morella Ag.
- 1st Place – Goanna Ag WUE award – 'Getta Getta' Coulton Farming.

Congratulations to the winners. Due to the low production

area last season the dryland, irrigated and consistency awards were placed on hold for the 2019–20 season reflecting no result.

The field day committee advise a date claimer for the annual charity golf day with major sponsorship by B&W Rural to be held September 10. Always a good turnout and is an important fundraiser with funds contributing to the Goondiwindi State High School Bursary.

Chris Teague
March 19, 2021

Mungindi

The majority of the cotton has now all cut out fully at 27 to 30 total nodes. Yield potential is very high, but cotton is very late due to the mild summer we have had. Picking is not expected to start until May which is very late for this area.

Good rain has allowed us to fully grow out the crops. Last irrigation is expected on a lot of the crop in the next two weeks. Growers are deciding on whether to chase full yield potential and risk weather damage, or pull crops up. The last irrigation decision is always a difficult one, but more so this year with crops being so late.

Insect pressure has been average with most crops receiving two to three Mirid/GVB sprays and one whitefly spray. The whitefly numbers are dropping off quickly due to very high levels of parasitism.

Verticillium wilt is high in a lot of crops and the usual level of Fusarium wilt is about.

Some growers are picking up some water depending on which stream you are on. Good rain is expected this week so hopefully we get some in the catchment. A nice little flood would be great for the district.

Mick Brosnan
March 21, 2021

Gwydir Valley

Fallow filling rain has been falling from some handy rainfall fronts that have been passing through since mid-December. This has made for great dryland cotton crops this season and given growers confidence to plan for dryland cotton fields next season also. A great change from only 12 months ago.

Last effective flower is a consistent discussion right now with many dryland growers wanting to push their late sown cotton flowering into late March, but this runs the risk for downgrades at ginning for low micronaire.

It is an encouraging sign to see more dryland fields submitted for crop competition entries this year than irrigated, it means that many dryland growers have had a terrific season and are feeling confident about their yields.

Irrigated growers have received in many cases their last irrigation in the form of rainfall. A great result usually, but the rain has been heavy from storms and resulted in some fields beginning to lay over as they fill top fruit, making them susceptible to lodging under the added weight of storm rain. With more rain forecast for the end of the month, growers remain hopeful they can get their crops through without downgrades from a wet finish.

Several growers took up the opportunity to hop on a bus from the Gwydir valley to attend the CSD field day held in early March. They joined a packed crowd for the field day and also made the most of the trip by fitting in a tour of the CSD seed operations

and laboratory at the head office site at 'Shenstone' Wee Waa after a tour of the Bayer trial facilities at their farm 'Locharba'. It was a very informative and worthwhile trip and I would like to thank all attendees and those that helped put the trip together.

Stuart McFadyen
March 19, 2021

Namoi Valley & Walgett

The Namoi has had good growing conditions throughout February and into March allowing crops to develop good boll numbers. The Lower Namoi crops have around 140 bolls to the metre and the Upper Namoi around 120 bolls to the metre. Good yield will be dependent on how those bolls fill, with irrigators still trying to finish top fruit with irrigations into March.

Verticillium wilt has been present across the Namoi since December, and will impact on some crops, although with the cooler season, and with good rainfall, it was expected to be worse. In saying that, most fields have some symptoms. Currently there are number of industry projects looking at the disease from a varietal, rotational and management point of view, with hopefully some promising results.

Insect pressure has been subdued due to the wetter conditions with good predation and very few issues with late season whitefly. This is in contrast to earlier in the season which saw consistent pest numbers throughout November, December and January. Mirids caused most of the damage with plants being tipped out and the loss of early season fruit. But retention picked up in late January and February.

Most irrigators have saved at least two waters which will help with winter cropping or next season's cotton crop. Keepit Dam sits at 40 per cent at present which will mean there will



The CSD and Lower Namoi field day drew a big crowd.

District Reports...

an allocation to Namoi irrigators next season. How much will depend on future rainfall through winter and spring.

Dryland crops across the Namoi look superb with rainfall falling consistently when crops required it. Some large boll numbers over 200 to the metre have been counted in both the upper and lower Namoi, suggesting a good year. There is a wide range of maturity in the crops due to the spread of planting from mid-October to later-December, but all in all they look good.

For the first time in a while Walgett has grown cotton and it is looking good with good boll numbers above 140 to the metre with defoliation scheduled for the later part of March. Mice and some spray drift seem to be the major issues out west. A baiting program is in place at the moment to reduce numbers before too many bolls are open. Unfortunately they have been there since the start of the season and are hard to remove.

The annual CSD and Lower Namoi field day was held at Wee Waa in early March with 87 attendees making for a good day out. The Upper Namoi field day is to be held in April after the annual growers' dinner on March 25.

Angus Marshall
March 19, 2021

Macquarie Valley

The season has been the coolest we have seen in the past 10 years; but the solar radiation is on par with the 10 year average so we have been cooler overall but there have been some good sunny days as well.

There is a range of crop maturity across the region, but in general we are a week or two behind the past few very hot seasons. Narromine has had 3526 Mj per square metre from October 10, 2020 to March 16, 2021 compared to the 10 year mean of 3336.9 Mj per square metre.

The absence of dust storms and smoke in the summer of 2020–21 compared to the past few years may have contributed to this. There have been three days above 40°C compared to 21 days last season and the 10 year mean of 9.5 days.

We have seen pockets of Verticillium wilt presenting in some fields in the first half of February. Some of the farms were not known to have this disease in the past. Defoliation could be impacted by the lower temps if the wet weather continues into March which may impact the picking dates in April.

Mice pressure continues to be a big concern for those with cotton, as well as those who plan to sow winter crops in the coming months. It is hoped the current high rainfall will impact the expanding populations and we hope to see a reduction in numbers.

The MCGA plans to host its Valley field day on March 25 with a wet weather plan in place. The theme of the field day is "Digitally enabled cotton farms in action." We will hear from those who have taken measures to improve connectivity and use digital solutions on their farms. The day will be grower led discussions and advocate for peer-to-peer learning.

Burrendong dam is sitting at 39.9 per cent. The March 2021 Water Allocation Statement (WAS) was released on 10th March providing additional four per cent allocation bringing the

total allocation for the Macquarie to 34 per cent. Prospects for growing next season look pretty good and we will probably have a similar area to the current season.

Amanda Thomas
March 22, 2021

Southern NSW

The season is starting to come to an end with just about all crops in Southern NSW receiving their last irrigations. With the outlook for a wet autumn some growers have brought their last irrigation in early. Crops are slow to open with early flowering crops still not cracking. Heat/day degrees have started to slow down, with temperatures falling below 12°C overnight and day temperatures lucky to get to 25°C.

Insect pressure has been low to moderate, with mites and whitefly starting to appear. Early fruit loss in late December has resulted in growers chasing the top crop. This will mean whitefly could become a problem as the time to mature the top crop could see the population of whitefly increase.

The crop yield potential for this year is still looking good with some crops expected to go over 13 bales per hectare. Boll size appears to be bigger and there are a high number of five lock bolls about, and 10–11 bales per hectare will probably be the average. Most crops have been managed so their last effective flower was achieved around February 10 and this will enable the bolls to develop and mature with less chance of discounts brought on by low micronaire.

Next season looks to be big for the south as other summer crops don't seem to stack up. Plenty of ground prep is already under way. With a strong cotton price, cheap water and good allocation outlook the area in the south could be back to 90,000 hectares.

Jorian Millyard
March 11, 2021

ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

It is a 1912 Aultman-Taylor 30-60, powered by a four cylinder engine with a 7x9 inch bore and stroke. Manufactured in Mansfield, Ohio. Photographed in Canada.

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