

SECTION 3
DISTRICT
REPORTS

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Western Australia

Northern

The 2007 season was another very dry year in the Northern WA wheat belt. Growing season rain ranged from highs of 220 mm down to under 90 mm. The patchy areas that received good rain did have reasonable crop performances but they were still well down on average yields.

Most areas had no useful seeding rain until the last week in June. Many paddocks had to be sown after this date to get cover back onto paddocks. After the very dry 2006, the landscape has been extremely bare and wind erosion has been a constant threat.

The region did get some late rain that enabled the low yielding crops to fill grain well. CBH crop estimates were exceeded due to September rain.

The CBH estimate was for just under 400,000 tonnes for the port zone and receivals tallied just under 450,000 tonne. This port zone usually produces more than two million tonnes.

Many CBH sites were not opened to take grain in 2007. Low harvest heights also gave delivery problems with soil contamination for some growers.

Many growers who hedged grain prices during 2007 have had difficulties meeting their hedge commitments.

It has been very expensive for many farm businesses to wash out hedge positions and many farmers will probably stay away from risk management tools in future. The changes to 'limit up' amounts on futures contracts and the hedge funds 'playing' in futures markets mean a grain grower can get a long way out of the money in a hurry.

Many will opt to produce first and sell only when they have grain on hand.

AVERAGE YIELD ESTIMATES FOR 2007

Crop	Western Zone	Central Zone	Eastern Zone
Wheat & barley	1.0–2.5 t/ha	0.5–1.6 t/ha	0.0–1.6 t/ha
Lupins	0.8–1.2 t/ha	0.3–1.0 t/ha	0.0–0.4 t/ha
Canola	0.4–0.9 t/ha	0.3–0.9 t/ha	Nil grown.
Rainfall April–Sept	160–220 mm	125–180 mm	80–160 mm



Tanami canola.

Wheat

Better yields came from paddocks that were sprayed out in 2006. Much of the eastern zone only had 300 to 500 kg per hectare yields and many paddocks in the south east of the region were abandoned. Grain quality was surprisingly good with very few screenings. This was probably due to the late start and very little nitrogen being applied to these crops.

Barley

High protein and high screenings were an issue in malt varieties with very little making quality. Feed varieties did OK but generally, barley did not handle the dry conditions as well as wheat.

Lupins

Yields were well down and many crops were sprayed out. The poor prices offered for lupins are a major threat to this crop staying in farm rotations.

Canola

Crops were generally only grown in western areas and on deep soil types. This produced reasonable yields given the season. With high canola prices, this crop gave the highest gross margins on most farms where it was grown.

Livestock

Sheep are leaving the landscape in droves. There are around 20 per cent of the numbers there were two years ago. With little cover on paddocks, and wind erosion events common, they will not be back on many farms in the next few years. Many properties that have bred sheep in the past will move away from them totally in the short term but may trade in and out of them as seasons allow.

Cropping trends

The move away from stock, and the landscape being bare, means many farms will be sown fence to fence in 2008. Cereal crops will take up most of the extra area but the canola area will also be up.

High grain prices mean crop area will increase in 2008 and other enterprises are coming under pressure to stay in the farming system.

Land sales

Property sales have been stagnant with very few properties selling. Vendors have generally had to reduce their price expectations to get properties to move. Quality country is maintaining the recent high prices but eastern areas have seen prices drop marginally. A good season will again see prices on the upward trend.

Peter Norris, Agronomy For Profit and Synergy Consulting, Geraldton.

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Windrowing canola in WA's Geraldton district.

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<46...WESTERN AUSTRALIA

South Coast**Overview**

The 2007–08 season started very wet with a big January storm dumping between 100 to 200 mm over the entire region. So once again this rain brought on a big summer weed spraying program but it also provided soil moisture reserves which were extremely beneficial later in the season. The season opening occurred during mid April with good rains which continued well into May – most crops were well and truly sown by the end of May.

Crop establishment was excellent and there were very few agronomic problems, in fact the season was almost textbook. Rain continued to fall at the right times and the region was looking at a decile 8–9 year. But history does repeat itself at times. The spring was starting to be very reminiscent of 2006 with poor finishing rains, but fortunately 2007 did not have the hot north winds of the previous season. In the end, crops finished very well with no major frost problems. Most growers at least achieved average yields. Grain prices were very good, and coupled with good yields, resulted in most south coast growers having the best financial returns that they can recall.

Wheat

Yields ranged from 1.5 to 4 tonnes per hectare, which is in line with five year averages. The lower yields came from the lower rainfall zones or areas that experienced frost damage.

Barley

Yields ranged from 1.8 to 5.5 tonnes per hectare – again in line with five year averages.

Canola

Yields ranged from 0.7 to 2.5 tonnes per hectare. The best yields came from high rainfall areas to the east of Esperance which experienced a better spring than most areas.

Pulses

Lupin yields ranged from 1.0 to 2.8 tonnes per hectare; field peas 0.2 to 2.5 tonnes per hectare; and faba beans 1.8 to 2.8 tonnes per hectare.

Cropping and property trends

There is a trend to more crop area on the south coast. The area sown to canola will increase at the expense of pasture or livestock and to some degree other legume break crops such as peas and lupins.

Wheat area will also increase at the expense of barley with more wheat-on-wheat. Growers are unsure of forward barley pricing and are more confident with forward pricing of wheat.

Growers are starting to look more closely at variable rate fertiliser application with the record high fertiliser prices.

Property values are up once again – a property 65 km to the north east of Esperance in 450 mm rainfall country, recently sold for \$2700 per hectare. The property has average wheat yields of 3.2 tonnes per hectare and canola around 1.4 tonnes. Another property 90 km north of Esperance in 375 mm rainfall country sold for \$1500 per hectare with average wheat yields of 2.2 tonnes and field pea yields of around one tonne per hectare.

Quenten Knight
Precision Agronomics Australia

South Australia**Overview**

2007 was the warmest year for South Australia since statewide records began in 1910 and the 15th consecutive year of above average temperatures.

Winter-spring rainfall for 2007 was the lowest on record for the state and continued the below average rainfall seen over the past 10 years.

Crop yields were extremely variable even at the most local level, ranging from those paddocks struggling to return seed through to above average yields in some of the later areas on Kangaroo Island and the lower south east.

Severe frosts in the upper south east in early October had a significant impact on some crops, particularly canola, with estimates of up to 30 per cent yield loss in parts.

High prices and limited availability for commonly used nitrogen and phosphorus fertiliser blends have caused many farmers to review their fertiliser strategies and prompted increased interest in alternative fertilisers.

Farmers have been taking delivery of fertiliser requirements where possible to ensure availability when the 2008 winter season starts.

There are reports of canola seed shortages for some of the preferred varieties.

Total crop area in 2008 is likely to increase marginally, although the crop mix will vary depending on the timing and amount of the opening rains.

The increased crop area is expected to be mainly for wheat and to a limited extent canola, in response to the current high prices.

In the south east, harvesting of dryland lucerne was completed by late March with near average yields.

Total crop area in 2007 was 4.01 million hectares with crop production of an estimated 4.97 million tonnes.

Western Eyre Peninsula

Harvest was completed before the rains could affect grain quality.

Eastern Eyre Peninsula

Generally 90 per cent of the harvest was finished in eastern areas around Arno Bay through to Rudall by the start of December.

Yields varied from 0.5–1.0 tonnes per hectare for wheat and were similar for barley, although there were a lot of barley crops with boron toxicity problems given the extremely dry conditions in spring, with some of these areas being non harvestable.

Pea crops yielded poorly with some also not harvested and left for livestock grazing.

Around Mitchellville was very poor with reports of farmers not even being able to recover any seed and a similar situation around Buckleboo.

Because the 2007 season started reasonably early, there were significant areas of pulse crops (predominately peas with smaller amounts of lupins and beans) planted. Cash flow demands will make this less likely to occur in 2008 for all but the more reliable areas, as farmers seek to recover from the past two seasons.

Other than the wetter parts of the Cleve hills, not much

canola is expected to be planted in 2008. This is due to the extremely poor performance of canola over the past two years, current profitability of cereals, as well as the high cost of production.

Lower Eyre Peninsula

The harvest was finished by the end of the first week of December.

Yorke Peninsula

Yields were variable throughout but generally a bit below average, while grain quality was mostly satisfactory.

Early sown crops performed best, although many crops struggled on coastal country and stony soils but did better on some of the sandy soils.

High snail numbers were a problem at harvest, particularly on southern YP.

Lower North

Yields were variable ranging from well below average to near average or better in some situations, while grain quality was mostly satisfactory.

Sowing time and soil type was critical in the 2007 season, with early sown crops on the better soils clearly outyielding those sown later or on poorer soils.

A combination of close to average yields and well above average prices provided good returns for some growers.

Mid North

Harvest progressed quickly, with few hold-ups. Yields were mostly good for the season and better than expected.

Yields were very good (3.5–4 tonnes per hectare) in the

southern wetter areas, but there were patches of poor yield in northwest parts of the district.

Grain quality was also been mostly good and better than expected. Together with the excellent prices which have helped compensate for the poor season, most growers were happy with the outcome.

Some growers with various forms of forward contracts were hit with notional or real losses if they were unable to fully deliver grain against them. This is expected to lead to a greatly reduced interest in these marketing mechanisms in 2008.

Farmers are concerned about rising fertiliser and chemical prices in 2008. Cropping intentions are likely to favour the planting of wheat and canola in particular, due to their forecast high prices.

There is likely to be an increased focus on cropping due to the high prices currently for all grains. Most growers will maintain their current crop rotations and mixes.

Upper North

Harvest was completed in most parts of the district in early December. Some wheat crops in the eastern part of the district, which had been frosted in October, reshot and remained green until the third week of December.

Heavy rains in the third week of December caused erosion on bare and worked paddocks, particularly in the Carrieton and Quorn areas.

There is major concern from growers regarding the rapid rise in the price of fertiliser and glyphosate.

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<49...SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**Kangaroo Island, Central Hills and
Fleurieu Peninsula**

On Kangaroo Island, bushfires destroyed a significant unharvested crop area during December. But yields were above expectations on the mainland, where crop yields of 2–2.5 tonnes per hectare for wheat and barley and 1.2–1.5 tonnes for pulse crops were common.

Kangaroo Island had some of the best crops in the state with wheat yielding up to 4.5 tonnes and canola 3.0 tonnes per hectare.

Northern Murray Mallee

Wheat and barley crops were generally above expectations (although mainly still below average), particularly on the loamy sand soils with reasonable rooting depth.

Heavy clay soils, stony soils and deep sand soils yielded very poorly due to the dry season.

Grain quality was very good across the district, with generally low screenings and good protein levels.

Southern Murray Mallee

Harvest continued through December relatively uninterrupted due to the number of warm days early in the month. Wheat and triticale crops were mostly left to harvest during December and grain quality was good.

Protein levels in some hard wheat crops were a bit low to make H1 classification, but comfortably made H2 classification. Wheat yields were generally lower than expected, ranging from 0.4 up to 1.5 tonnes per hectare.

Triticale yields ranged from 0.4 up to 1.0 tonne per hectare. Some growers took the opportunity to bale straw where stubble was thicker.

Lower Murray

Crop yields varied significantly with time of sowing, sowing depth, frost and moisture all playing important roles in determining final results.

Overall grain quality was good considering the year, with most barley being malt and good quality wheat with low screenings.

Barley yields ranged from 0.8 to 2.5 tonnes per hectare, with wheat slightly lower.

Any later sown crops suffered yield reductions of 20 to 30 per cent.

Canola yields were down with many opting to cut canola for hay.

Upper South East

Yields were variable ranging from somewhat below average in northern parts of the district to near average in the southeast, depending on sowing time and soil type.

Yields ranges for wheat were 1.5 to 4.0 tonnes and beans/lupins 1.0 to 1.5 tonnes per hectare.

Lentil crops did well in some cases with above average yields of 1.5–2 tonnes.

Grain quality was mostly satisfactory.

The severe frosts in early October had a significant impact on some crops – particularly canola – with estimates of up to 30 per cent yield loss in some places.

Quite a lot of oaten hay was cut with reported yields around 6.0 to 7.0 tonnes in better areas.

Total crop area is likely to increase marginally in 2008, mainly in wheat and to a lesser extent canola.

Lower South East

Yields varied from near average to somewhat above average, with some very good yields recorded in southern areas. Barley and canola had yields up to 6.0 tonnes and 3.5 tonnes per hectare respectively.

Clover seed crops were harvested with near average yields.

Crop area may increase by up to 20 per cent in 2008 as farmers continue to reduce livestock numbers, especially in sheep breeding flocks, in favour of cropping.

There is also a trend away from small seed crops into cereals. The major increase will be in wheat as a relatively low risk crop, including feed wheat to supply the dairy/feedlot industry, although an increase in canola and beans is also anticipated.

There are reports of difficulties obtaining some varieties of canola seed.

Fertiliser prices have continued to increase as suppliers have reportedly resorted to allocating/rationing some products. Farmers have been purchasing fertiliser and storing it on farm as it becomes available.

PIRSA Rural Solutions contributors**Victoria****Wimmera**

All started on track for 2007, with a generally wet start to the year and heaps of optimism from district growers. By June or July there was concern over what to do with all the grain to be harvested in the lead up to Christmas.

History shows there was no need to worry. Rainfall ceased in mid winter only to recommence in mid summer leaving crop yields once again in the doldrums. Most growers were able to 'get out' with costs covered thanks to buoyant grain prices – where early contracts had not been entered into.

Thousands of hectares of poor crops in the Wimmera and southern Mallee were cut for hay in the hope of cashing in on feed shortages in the dairy industry.

Further south, growers enjoyed average grain yields following a Melbourne Cup rain, and were able to cash in on the prices being offered.

Farmers are a resilient bunch and most will be back into cropping in 2008.

**SOUTH AUSTRALIA 2007–08 WINTER
CROP PRODUCTION (tonnes) AND
AREA (hectares) AGAINST THE
5 YEAR AVERAGE**

		5 year average	2007–08
Wheat	Area	1,877,500	2,013,000
	Prod'n	2,586,100	2,305,000
Durum	Area	68,900	54,750
	Prod'n	129,900	95,400
Barley	Area	1,073,100	1,170,000
	Prod'n	1,810,200	1,772,000
Oats	Area	83,400	90,600
	Prod'n	100,200	88,900
Rye	Area	8600	9000
	Prod'n	5800	4800
Triticale	Area	89,200	106,100
	Prod'n	101,700	107,700
Peas	Area	121,600	133,800
	Prod'n	141,300	142,650
Lupins	Area	63,700	67,150
	Prod'n	69,400	67,000
Beans	Area	92,100	91,200
	Prod'n	136,300	130,600
Chickpeas	Area	3000	5800
	Prod'n	2500	5130
Lentils	Area	62,600	64,800
	Prod'n	65,000	67,200
Vetch	Area	22,200	24,900
	Prod'n	10,600	10,100
Canola	Area	171,000	177,500
	Prod'n	203,100	173,500
Total SA crop	Area	3,738,000	4,009,500
Total SA crop	Prod'n	5,362,700	4,970,900

Property sales

For those who have opted to sell out this year, land prices have held up or marginally increased despite drought conditions for the second consecutive year. Growers have been able to leave the industry on reasonable terms with sales recorded in the \$2000 to \$2500 per hectare range.

The prop holding up land prices is strong commodity prices and the bullish outlook for continued strong demand in the agricultural commodity markets. This needs to be balanced with rapidly rising input costs – particularly fertilisers. It would seem we might need to get used to fertiliser prices in excess of \$1000 per tonne for the longer term.

With good agronomic practises – and a little bit of rain at the right time – the bottom line looks better than it has in many years.

It is a good time to be involved in agriculture.

Mike Laidlaw
Harberger Farm Supplies, Donald

Victorian Mallee

Overview

It is difficult to be general when reviewing the 2007–08 harvest. There was great variability in yields ranging from zero to 3.0 tonnes per hectare. But there weren't many yield records set. Similarly, wheat from last year's harvest could have been sold anywhere from as low as \$200 to as high as \$500 per tonne.

A great attraction to forward sell wheat when crops were looking their absolute best in early August, saw many growers lock in at around \$250. The rain stopped at this point, many crops wilted and the disappointment of another drought was worsened by the rising grain prices when growers had already taken out contracts.

The success of last season depends on who you talk to. But in terms of production it was poor and those with lighter soil types and red rising loams got the most out of another dry season.

Cutting crops for hay played an important part in income recovery last year, but like the grain profit, this varied on the method of marketing.

Berriwillock received 288 mm of annual rainfall in 2008, but 100 mm of this was during the summer months.

Wheat

Realistically, it would be generous to say that wheat averaged a tonne to the hectare. A far cry from the 2.5 tonnes planned for at the beginning of the season, a yield close to the district average. Around 20 per cent of the area would have been cut for hay and yielded around 1.5 tonnes per hectare if it was cut on time. A spring drought meant crops which had potential withered away and amounted to very little.

Barley

Barley crops got away to a good start after ideal sowing conditions. There was wide-

spread confidence that this was going to be a good catch-up season, but rain stopped at the end of July and the barley was reduced to an even poorer result than the wheat.

Canola

Canola crops were equally as poor as the cereals last year and very few crops made the great journey through the feeder house of a hungry header. Some were cut for hay and those which were sold early were profitable, but when the hay market hit saturation point, canola hay was not the buyers' first option.

Legumes

Harvested legumes yielded between 0.2 and 0.6 tonnes per hectare. These crops consisted of a mix of field peas, chickpeas and lentils. Chickpeas have been back in vogue in the Mallee with the introduction of the variety Genesis 090. Many will be growing some in the coming season. Lentils and field peas will be replaced in some paddocks with chickpeas. Ascochyta blight resistance has not really been tested but viruses were detected in a widespread area last year, emphasising the importance of aphid control.

Trends in agriculture in the Mallee

While the early days of no-till farming in the 1980s turned heads, there is no doubt that the rate of adoption in recent years has convinced us all that this is no fad. Adoption and success has been positive and a good season would cure the sceptics. Rising glyphosate prices have caused agronomists and farmers to rethink their chemical control program.

Anyone who likes to attend a clearing sale has been kept busy in the past 12 months, which is a sign of the times.

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<51...VICTORIA

Property sales have been more frequent in the past three years and land prices have reflected this. Some farmers who don't have children returning to the farm have chosen to get out rather than get bigger. Some property has been snapped up by prospectors coming from other areas, who can see the potential return on capital in the Mallee environment.

Land is valued at around \$1000 to \$1500 per hectare where in the past it may have only reached \$750 to \$1200. While cropping country is increasing in value, it may be proportionally more affordable than land in some higher rainfall districts.

Rising fertiliser and chemical prices have been particularly unwelcome following a poor season, but the optimism and character of Mallee farmers is still there and a bumper 2008 season with good prices will restore growers' faith in their lifestyle.

Simon Severin

Landmark – an AWB Company, Berriwillock

New South Wales

South West Slopes & Plains

Overview

The Wagga area had an excellent start to 2007 with optimum planting dates being achieved for canola and lupins. Good pre-sowing weed knockdowns were also generally achieved prior to sowing.

The first frost occurred much later than usual, but when it came, it came hard. Any later (June) sown crops, particularly field peas, emerged very slowly and pasture production slowed dramatically.

Average rains were received through to the start of August when crop potential looked promising and the seasonal forecast at the time gave a positive outlook. On this basis a considerable area of crop was topdressed with urea pending a predicted rain front which only produced three mm.

From that point, the season deteriorated dramatically with no substantial rainfall until the first week of November. This resulted in generally poor grain yields and many crops being cut for hay.

Later planted crops generally suffered the most with poor hay yields and many later crops failing to be harvested. Crops to the south east of Wagga around Holbrook which generally finish later, hung in until the November rains – resulting in some very good yields.

Canola

Around 95 per cent of canola crops were cut for hay with an average hay yield of 1.0 to 3.0 tonnes per hectare in the Wagga area.

Some crops that received an extra storm or two – and were grown in well fallowed paddocks – harvested some canola with yields up to 1.0 tonnes per hectare.

Wheat

About 50 to 60 per cent of wheat was cut for hay with an average yield range of 2.0 to 5.0 tonnes. In hindsight, we possibly cut a little too much.

Of those crops that were harvested, the average was

around 1.0 tonnes with a range of 0 to 2.5 tonnes per hectare. Quality was mostly good for a number of cereals as crops only set themselves up for modest yields. Later planted crops did not perform well.

Lupins

Yields of up to 0.4 tonnes per hectare were reported with some crops being a total failure.

Field peas

Peas were virtually grown on soil moisture alone and only achieved between 0.5 and 0.8 tonnes per hectare where harvested.

Trends in cropping/livestock

- There is an increasing area of grain production generally at the expense of new pasture area.
- The pulse crop area is expected to be down with an increased area of wheat and canola.
- Popular wheat varieties like Ventura and Ellison will likely need fungicide applications for stripe rust if we get a decent season. There is likely to be an increase in the area of Gregory and a new variety, Lincoln – with good stripe rust tolerance – which will help to manage input costs.
- There was a lot of summer fallow activity with good early summer rains – general soil moisture levels are down to 15 to 60 cm or more.
- Soil tests indicate good mineralisation of nitrogen in fallowed paddocks and a general trend of increased phosphorous on cropping country after two poor years – the majority of tests show more than 60 ppm Colwell.
- There will be a reduction of starter fertiliser in line with set yield targets and higher soil phosphorous levels – soil testing and nutrient budgeting is critical.
- Many growers still maintain a suitable level of grazing country, or dual purpose crops, to ensure a lower risk profile with the crop/livestock enterprise mix.
- Popular cropping herbicides are under supply pressure which, we are led to believe, will continue into the summer crop, with supply pressure on atrazine.
- Cropping costs have increased between 30 and 40 per cent.
- Croppers are being advised to consider the potential of rhizoctonia and crown rot problems in cropping paddocks after a dry spring in 2007 and early summer rains.
- There are some good new crop protection products out for 2008 including Hombre and Zorro seed dressing, Roundup Ready Canola, Boxer Gold and Crusader wheat herbicides and granular inoculants for pulses.
- Ongoing adoption of GPS assisted cropping technologies, hybrid canola varieties and highly winter active lucerne varieties are setting up an exciting 2008.
- To sum up: We need rain in 2008!

Trends in property values

Comments from Landmark Wagga real estate agent Bill Schulz indicate that enquiry to acquire grain properties in the Wagga area has increased dramatically. Principal demand is for properties that are in a position to produce grain in 2008. Approximately 60 per cent of this market is being driven by interested parties or investors outside the area looking to contract the farming operations.

The remainder of the market support is coming from local growers wanting to expand while they have the opportunity.

Strong commodity outlook for the short to medium term is certainly supporting property demand. Property sales and values dipped in late 2007 – making it hard to meet vendors expectations. But the trend has reversed with sales now occurring.

A very general trend for cropping country south of the river is an increase in approximately \$100 per acre (\$250 per hectare) per year from 2005 to present – a rise from around \$800 to \$1100 per acre (\$2000 to \$2700 per hectare). North of the river, good farming country was off around \$100 per acre (\$250 per hectare) but has now recovered.

The demand is swinging in favour of grain production properties over livestock. General pricing for cropping country with average rainfall of around 475 to 500 mm is \$1000 per acre (\$2500 per hectare). More productive properties with average rainfall of more than 500 mm, are fetching up to \$1500 to \$1700 per acre (\$3700 to \$4200 per hectare).

Leasing activity on cropping country has been strong with a recent lease south of Wagga reportedly going for \$90 per acre (\$220 per hectare).

**Warwick Nightingale – Senior Agronomist
Landmark Wagga Wagga**

Central West

I don't really want to relive 2007 – my therapist has told me not to go back to the 'dark year'! One word to aptly describe 2007 was horrible.

The Central West had a similar story to most regions in that the year started off OK. Slightly below average rainfall at the start of the year but then in May–June useful falls were received and with a year of average rainfall being forecast, off we went again all guns blazing. This was also a response to that other horrible year (2006). Growers were out to recoup some of the cash lost in previous crook years.

Then the rain stopped.


I had some crops that didn't get any rain from the day they were sown until a week before harvest. Oh, did I mention that we then got up to 200 mm in November–December to rub salt into the wound. The best thing about 2007 was midnight hitting on December 31.


I would estimate only around 40 per cent of crops were harvested in the Nyngan–Warren area. The bulk of these

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Liberty Barden and her four legged mate, Bonnie Heuston, in a crop grown on long-fallow at Warren.






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<153...NEW SOUTH WALES



One of the good canola crops – south of Nevertire in the Central West.

crops were only viable to harvest because of the high grain prices. Even crops as low yielding as 0.2 tonnes per hectare were stripped.

Farmers were talking about yields in how many tipper loads they got off per paddock as opposed to how many tonnes you can fit on a road-train in a good year!

The only exceptions to this could be found around the Narromine district where some huge yields were very gratefully received.

Canola

Very few crops were sown in this part of the world as sub-soil moisture levels were not great and farmers weren't willing to take a punt with this higher input crop. Of those crops that were sown, most were cut for silage or grazed off.

Wheat

The golden grain (wheat) was of course the popular pick in 2007 with much of it sown dry. Fertiliser rates were skimmed on or non-existent. You could spot these crops even when they were very small as they had a poor colour and poor vigour. And yes, lots of these crops were also destined for animal's throats via hay or grazing.



This is how Warren district crops looked like in 2007 before they died. Photo taken at 'Barkers' owned by Peter McKay.

After the good-ish start to the year, the early crops set themselves up well with plenty of bulk, which saw them crash harder when the dry hit. The flip side to this was that at least there was some bulk to bale.

Hay-cutting decisions were very tricky when one looked at the Chicago future prices on a daily basis. Some crops that looked to be total failures did actually make some grain. It amazes me what a tough little critter the ol' Triticum can be!

The later sown crops just didn't get the rain to get the secondary roots going and consequently struggled all year.

Crops sown on rotation paddocks or on long fallows were the biggest winners. These cereal crops took advantage of the moisture left at depth from the previous legume crop. Paddocks performed better where fallow management was sound.

Barley and oats

Not much of either barley or oats was sown and their fate closely followed that of wheat. Oats proved it is probably not as tough as wheat or barley.

Chickpeas

Chickies continued to enjoy their resurgence, but gave growers little joy at the end of the year with crop height being one of the main problems. Headers just couldn't get low enough to get all the pods. This wasn't helped at all by deep furrows created at sowing to get seed separation from herbicide. Adequate rain didn't fall to melt these huge crevices.

But chickpeas did handle the dry very well due to their low moisture requirement earlier in the season, saving it up for the crucial flowering period. Some farmers had chickpeas come out with a higher gross margin than their wheat paddocks.

Other legumes

Small areas of field peas and lupins were sown, but few crops were stripped, although those growers lucky enough to harvest grain have enjoyed some great prices. Heliothis were in very high numbers with some crops being sprayed twice.

Lessons learnt

So what have we learnt from our *annus horribilis*? Timely fallow spraying is imperative, fertiliser use is essential, chickpeas are tough little critters and crop rotation is king (and we never want to live through that again!).

Trends for 2008

Survival is the major objective for 2008. We have a wonderful opportunity this year with full profiles of moisture and good commodity prices. Lakes are still quite common around Warren. It's a good start when you see ducks swimming in your paddocks!

Of course with rain comes weeds and more weeds and thanks to China for holding the Olympics and running the price of glyphosate up!

Some farmers are already on their fourth spray and others have opted to use the devil's tools (read as disc ploughs) in paddocks this year. Prickle and Kelly chains are all the rage at the moment – but they are still a tillage implement and it makes me cry to see plumes of dust (alias topsoil with lots of nutrients in it) blowing off paddocks.

Fertiliser is a burning (in the pocket) issue this year,

but can you afford not to use it? Some growers are talking of no starter fertiliser, which to me is false economy. Rates are understandably being cut as the price has tripled. There is also a lot of interest in more biological approaches to fertiliser and soil health.

The crop mix will be greatly dominated by wheat, more so than is the norm. This is obviously due to the high commodity price for this grain, the need for cash flow and the decreased stock numbers due to the drought.

Penny Heuston
Heuston Agronomy Services, Warren
Griffith

Overview of the 2007–08 season

Although very dry coming into the 2007 winter crop season, there was a reasonable start, with most crops sown on the rain received at the end of April and May. Unfortunately in-crop rainfall was very poor, with only 136 mm (compared to 256 mm long term) falling at Griffith.

No significant rain fell after early June and there was a hot, dry, windy end to winter (with record breaking temperatures at Griffith of up to 30.3°C) which devastated crops.

With only a few winter crops either pre-irrigated, watered up or sod sown into rice stubble on irrigation in 2007, the majority were reliant on subsoil moisture and rainfall to get them through. Most crops were moisture stressed and due to limited yield prospects were either cut for hay or silage.

Coming into the 2008 winter cropping season, growers are better situated as good rains in November, December and January have provided a good basis to start. For example, fallow rain coming into the 2007 season was under 55 mm compared to the 217 mm which has fallen already for 2008 (at Griffith).

For the 2007–2008 rice season, seasonal temperatures have been well above average. This has provided excellent conditions for rice crop growth and development, although the crop size is very small. Harvest began in late March.

Wheat, barley, oats and canola in 2007–08

Irrigated cereal crop yields were extremely variable due to the various watering regimes, with spring irrigations ranging mostly from zero to two waterings.

Soft wheat which received two spring irrigations yielded over 6.0 tonnes per hectare. With one spring irrigation, soft wheat yielded up to 5.0 tonnes, with the majority around the 4 to 4.5 tonne mark. In some cases wheat yields were surprisingly good even when crops received no spring irrigations and survived on water from rice which was abandoned in early November the previous year.

Milling oats yielded over 5.0 tonnes per hectare where they received two spring irriga-

tions. Barley generally received one spring irrigation and yielded 3.75 to 4.0 tonnes.

Canola yields were again disappointing with yields ranging from 1.5 to 2.25 tonnes per hectare with one spring irrigation.

Although it was a small harvest for most winter crops in 2007, rain caused a few interruptions.

Rice in 2007–08

The 2006–07 rice crop yielded above expectations with an average yield of 9.9 tonnes per hectare. This was the third highest yield on record, but the crop was the smallest for 50 years. Most of the crop was grown in the Murrumbidgee Valley.

There was a short cold snap at the end of January which had a minor impact on yield.

Lack of rain, above average evaporation and tempera-

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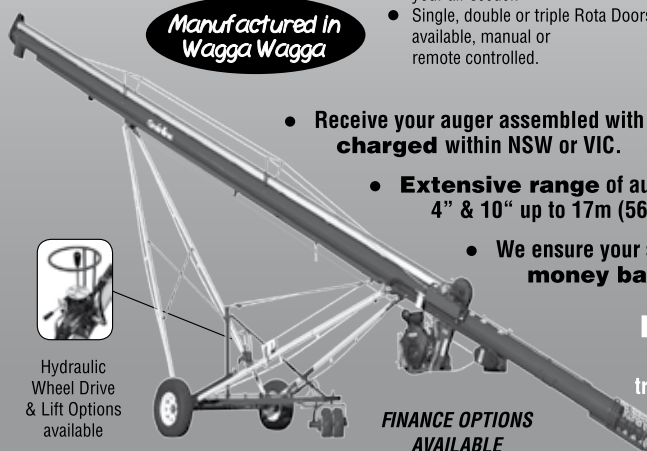
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<155...NEW SOUTH WALES

tures, and the small crop resulted in an early finish to the harvest, which was completed by the end of April, 2007.

Cropping trends

Given the scarce water situation and current commodity prices, more emphasis in recent years has been placed on the winter cropping program. Wheat will again be the main winter crop grown in the area in 2008, although barley has been seen as an alternative to wheat as it requires less water in the spring.

Canola will also be grown as a break crop as opposed to faba beans – also due to less water needed in the spring.

Rachael Whitworth
Extension Agronomist, Griffith

Queensland**Darling Downs****Overview**

The winter season in 2007 had some early promise but with the lack of in-crop rainfall – until too late – yields were disappointing.

But the spring rains heralded the start of a much better summer with many growers receiving good in-crop falls and producing some excellent yields on ground with limited subsoil moisture. The use of zero-till has certainly assisted this summer, and fallows set aside for winter 2008 now have good potential.

Winter 2007

June rain allowed an increased planting of cereals compared to 2006 but with limited subsoil moisture, chickpeas were reduced in area. There was a strong planting of winter forage crops, especially oats and barley. Follow-up rain came in August and all winter crops took off dramatically, but with little subsoil moisture to support them, yields in the end were disappointing.

Interestingly, there were unusually high numbers of heliothis in many winter cereal crops, although in most cases they didn't cause significant damage.

**DARLING DOWNS WINTER CROP YIELDS
IN 2007**

Crop	Eastern Downs	Western Downs
Wheat	0.6–1.0 t/ha	1.0–2.5 t/ha
Barley	1.0–2.0 t/ha	—
Chickpeas	Failure–1.0 t/ha	—

Summer 2007–08

The August and early September rain heralded the start of a much more optimistic environment for the summer crops, and encouraged some early planting of grain sorghum. Irrigation water supplies though were very thin.

What water was in storage was mainly used on grain crops such as maize and some sorghum rather than for cotton, which had its lowest area for many seasons.

October and November had good rainfall which arrived just in time for the early sorghum crops, and allowed further plantings right through to January.

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Early sorghum crops had some heavy heliothis and Rutherglen bug pressure. The heliothis were successfully controlled but some patches suffered significant damage from Rutherglen bug. The heliothis did not build back up again and later sown crops had to contend with sorghum midge as their main pest.

In the New Year, the Western Downs received the better rainfalls, and this led to some excellent early yields of sorghum with good quality seed. The earliest crops on the Eastern Downs were too mature to make use of the good early February rain, and while yielding reasonably, did have problems with screenings.

Later plantings produced good quality seed, and the last plantings – which are now approaching harvest – have struggled against midge and some ergot damage, but most will yield well. Grain storage has been an issue for the big sorghum crop but the main receival sites of AWB Grainflow and Graincorp near Jondaryan have put down extra pads and are storing record amounts of sorghum.

DARLING DOWNS SUMMER CROP YIELDS

Crop	Eastern Downs grain	Eastern Downs silage
Sorghum	3.0–11.0 t/ha	To 30 t/ha
Irrigated maize	8.0–14.0 t/ha	30–50 t/ha on limited irrigation
Mungbeans	Potentially to 2.0 t/ha	

Most of the maize was grown under irrigation, although in many cases limited irrigation, and yields have been good for the conditions.

The mung bean and soybean areas were also limited, but the crops have only had moderate pest pressure and it is lack of moisture that will limit yields the most.

Millet and sunflower crops have grown well this season with good prices, but they have been the minor crops as far as area goes.

Winter crop outlook for 2008

Most of the long fallow paddocks now have a full profile of moisture, and because of its very strong price, wheat will be the dominant crop this winter. Oats and forage plantings have been limited and barley and chickpea plantings will be reduced because wheat will more than double its acreage from last season.

There are also some irrigators looking to irrigate wheat this winter to maximise returns, and Landmark's gross margins for winter cereals show that despite variable costs rising by 30 per cent compared to 2007, gross margins have increased by 40 to 100 per cent.

The only crop showing a poorer gross margin is chickpeas, where the price has remained stagnant.

Hugh Reardon-Smith, Agronomist
Landmark Pittsworth

Central Highlands

Overview

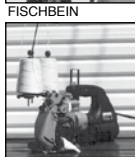
The 2007 season started with good rainfall in January and February, providing a good summer crop for most growers. The rain dropped away until June, when we ...58▷

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received 143 mm in Emerald, providing a late (but still good) start to the winter season. No rain followed in July, but 20 mm in August and 30mm in September changed a very average winter cropping season to one where growers were able to harvest good crops at a time when other areas of Australia produced very little wheat.

Sorghum 2006-07

An intense storm of 200–250 mm during the night of February 15, 2007 in the Fernlees district (about half-way between Emerald and Springsure) caused enormous damage to sorghum crops, with much of it needing to be replanted.

The wider area also received intense storm rainfall of around 50–100 mm. This caused problems in crops that had only recently been planted as it caused extra soil to cover seed and washed atrazine into the furrow – both of which reduced and killed germinating sorghum.

Rainfall for January and February in Emerald was above average, about average for Springsure and slightly below average for Clermont.

Approximately 200,000 hectares of sorghum was planted in the Central Highlands. The better crops planted in early December yielded up to 3.0 tonnes per hectare but the average was closer to 1.5 to 2.0 tonnes.

There were some issues with lodging and screenings – particularly in the north.

Sunflowers 2007

With the identification of tobacco streak virus in sunflowers, and no real solution to the problem, sunflower plantings remained very small in 2007. Approximately 5000 hectares was planted, mostly after mid February in the northern districts of Capella to Kilcummin.

Tobacco streak virus was identified by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries and research to find out how this virus can be managed is currently being undertaken.

Wheat 2007

Most of the wheat crops in 2007 got off to a late start as we didn't receive any decent rain until June. With no rain recorded in July, yield prospects for many growers were rapidly declining.



Cultivation under water during the Emerald floods in January, 2008.



Chickpea and wheat trials on the Central Highlands.

Growers on the southern Highlands and Dawson-Callide were fortunate to receive around 20 mm of rain in August but areas north of Emerald generally missed out. A cold winter slowed the development of these crops.

The later planted wheat crops which received good follow-up rain yielded around 2.0 to 2.5 tonnes per hectare, but averages were closer to 1.5 to 2.0 tonnes. Some yields were as low as 0.5 to 1.0 tonne. There were reports of high screenings in some of the later crops.

Some crops were planted earlier – around April-May. Most were deep planted (dry) especially in the Kilcummin area and poor establishment resulted in two germinations – one in May and another in June.

There was scattered rain in the southern highlands so they had better plant establishment. The best early crops yielded 2.5 up to 3.5 tonnes but the average was closer to 2.0 tonnes to the hectare. There was some frost damage (light to significant in patches) in earlier planted wheat crops (0–20 per cent loss) and the combination of patchy establishment and frost damage resulted in some lower yields of around 1.2 tonnes per hectare.

About 430,000 tonnes of wheat was produced from 220,000 hectares in CQ.

Chickpeas 2007

Chickpea crops performed very well in CQ in 2007, with reports from many growers that their chickpeas yielded nearly as well as their wheat. Most growers who planted a winter crop opted for wheat over chickpeas due to the superior stubble cover wheat provides.

But due to the ability of chickpeas to handle deep-planting, a substantial area was sown during the ideal planting window. The area planted to chickpeas in 2007 was about 43,000 hectares.

The best early planted crops yielded 2.5 tonnes but most crops averaged around 1.0 to 1.5 tonnes per hectare. In some cases chickpeas out yielded the later sown wheat crops.

Crop prospects for 2008

The prospect of a good winter crop is very good with most soil moisture profiles full after the recent wet weather. With some good recent falls in the north and the east of the highlands, planting is now getting underway for some of the early sown crops. But a busy time is ahead with a lot of this year's sorghum still to come off.

William MacSmith
QDPI&F, Emerald