

## SECTION 3

DISTRICT  
REPORTS

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## &lt;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
<b>Total SA crop</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>3,738,000</b>	<b>4,009,500</b>
<b>Total SA crop</b>	<b>Prod'n</b>	<b>5,362,700</b>	<b>4,970,900</b>

## 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.

...52▷

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## &lt;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.