

SECTION 3

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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

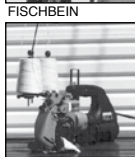
The 2007 season started with good rainfall in January and February, providing a good summer crop for most growers. The rain dropped away until June, when we ...58▷

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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