



# DISTRICT REPORTS.....

## Western region



### NORTH

The remnants of Tropical Cyclone Rosie gave most of the Northern Region significant rainfall beginning April 29. Many areas had in excess of 40 mm over a couple of days. Some areas had close to 200 mm for the last two weeks of April. This has been just what the doctor ordered.

Seeding has been underway since mid April on many farms with most canola growers now completed their program. Lupins programs are also finishing up with almost all of them in by the end of the first week of May.

A few growers in the 'low' rainfall areas have been seeding wheat for a couple of weeks and the earliest crops were two leaf on May 1.

There may be a slightly increased frost risk for some of these crops but it is a punt I would readily take with the longer varieties.

### GOOD SOIL MOISTURE

All areas have very good soil moisture but those paddocks with stubble cover will retain the moisture for much longer than those without. Also there are a few paddocks being sown with full cut seedling equipment to level them out.

The extra moisture loss from full cut sowing compared to knife points has been astounding.

April has been pretty kind to us in this area but we hope the rest of the winter months can get to average – or above – to keep the good start rolling.

**Peter Norris, Agronomy For Profit,  
Geraldton  
May 4, 2008**

### SOUTH COAST

Conditions on the South Coast have continued to remain dry, whilst the majority of the WA grain belt has had very good April rains. The Esperance region has received very little in the way of rain-

fall – for those lucky enough to get some, 20 mm during April is close to the highest recorded. Most other falls have been in the order of 3–5 mm.

This rain has resulted in some weed germinations, but the soil moisture is gen-

...46 ▷

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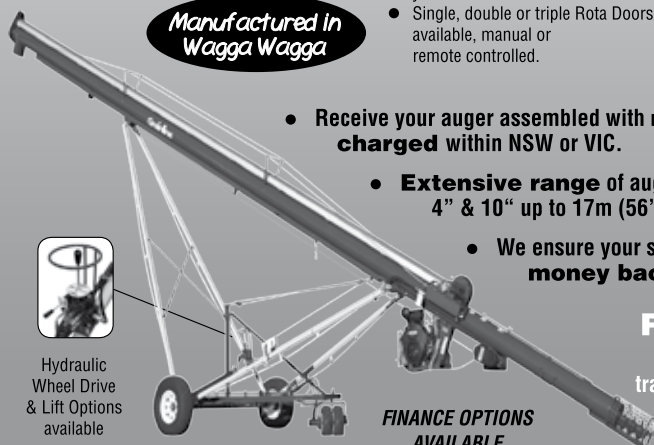
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## &lt;45...DISTRICT REPORTS

erally too patchy to consider sowing. The soil will dry rapidly once disturbed – even with knife point seeding systems. Most growers have decided to play the waiting game.

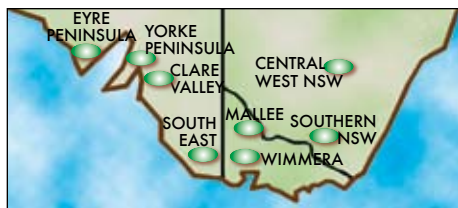
When a decent break occurs, seeding should be relatively straightforward. Most paddocks are quite bare so knockdown sprays should be simple. The challenge will be for growers to wait around to allow for good weed germinations.

With the past few seasons providing the South coast with some of WA's earliest seeding opportunities, it appears that 2008 is the year where we have to be patient and remind ourselves that good things come to those who wait.

A positive thought for many growers is that an analogue year that 2008 could replicate is 2001 – let's hope so!

**Quenten Knight,  
Precision Agronomics Australia  
April 30, 2008**

## Southern region



### SOUTH AUSTRALIA

#### Weather and rainfall

Temperatures ranged from cool to occasionally warm during April, but cooled noticeably late in the month.

There was light, patchy rain during April with heavier falls in central districts at the end of the month.

Rainfall for April was near average, with most totals around 15–35 mm.

#### Cropping

Following good falls at the end of the month seeding started in some districts, with crops such as oats and winter wheat for hay and forage going in as well as canola, beans plus some barley and wheat for grain where there has been good weed control.

In other districts farmers are waiting for weed germination or further rainfall before commencing seeding operations.

While the season has started in some areas, all districts need substantial follow-up rainfall to really get the season underway.

Most farmers had their fertiliser and

seed well before sowing and have avoided supply issues. But there have been ongoing reports of some farmers having difficulties obtaining supplies of seed, herbicides and fertilisers.

Some paddocks considered to be high risk, such as those with poorer soils or weed and disease problems, may be pulled out of cropping this season and given over to grazing and hay production, largely because of high fertiliser and herbicide costs.

In other situations there are reports of an increased number of grazing paddocks being cropped this year due to high grain prices.

Overall it is expected that the total crop area in SA will increase somewhat this season with more wheat and canola in particular likely to be sown, as well as an increase in hay production.

#### Pastures

Paddock feed continued to decline during April, with most pasture paddocks having very limited surface cover.

Pasture germination and emergence should be good with the recent rain in the absence of earlier false breaks.

Grazing will need to be carefully managed and ongoing supplementary feed for livestock will be required until new pastures are established.

**Peter Fulwood, Rural Solutions SA  
May 6, 2008**

### VICTORIAN MALLEE

As we approach the second week of May, a decent rain is needed to get some weeds germinated, and boost grower confidence in the forthcoming season. To date, 3 to 6 mm showers have been teasers, and grain growers anxious to sow the crop have been forced to wait for a flush of weeds.

Stored moisture is isolated to the areas which received January storms, and this is pronounced where sheep feed has been sown and is now flourishing.

Sown crops will need another good rain to reach the seedbed and get them established on the heavier flats. Lighter rising soil types are germinating and getting established.

February was the first full calendar month for many years where we didn't get a drop and April was nearly as dry.

Due to last year's great start and disappointing finish, many are opting to sow back their paddocks to barley or wheat. This is also driven by the rising cost of inputs. Even fallowing is an expensive option with the high costs of

diesel and glyphosate – so some growers are sowing these paddocks to vetch or sheep feed.

Very few paddocks have been sown to canola. Field peas and lentils are falling out of the rotation, but will be replaced by the rising acreage of chickpeas being sown.

Fertiliser inputs have been conservative. But due to many farmer's paddocks having a good phosphorus history, soil tests have returned positive results.

The season is now dependent on follow up rainfall.

**Simon Severin  
Landmark Berriwillock  
May 1, 2008**

### EASTERN MURRAY VALLEY

As of the beginning of May, approximately 50 per cent of canola in the region had been planted and some early grazing wheats. Again, planting is difficult based on marginal moisture conditions.

Most of the region has 25–50 mm of stored soil moisture but that is 150–200 mm below the surface.

Anywhere from 5 to 17 mm of rain fell in the last week of April, which hasn't met this subsoil moisture.

Planting conditions are good on the lighter or loamy soils but the heavier soils will need at least another 15 mm.

A good pre-sow weed knockdown has again eluded us. We have patchy germinations of Patterson Curse and marshmallow. Ryegrass will again have to be dealt with in-crop for those that have chemical options still available.

But for a large percentage of growers, their only option is a mechanical means of ryegrass control.

The cropping mix has changed a little this season. Wheat area is up at the expense of pulses, followed by pastures and then canola. But canola area will be down only marginally.

#### A good spring is not far away

Continuous croppers are resigned to the fact they need canola in the rotation and believe somewhere in the not too distant future, we will have a spring to finish the crop.

Sowing systems continue to evolve at a rapid rate. Two cm accuracy GPS units are almost becoming the norm. Most cropping programs above 1000 hectares in the region have a two cm auto steer system of some kind.

**Corey Ubergang, I.K. Caldwell  
Corowa  
May 1, 2008**

## CENTRAL WEST

They lied to us, they all lied! They said it was going to be a very wet April – not a drop. We had a lovely wet Easter, with some receiving up to 50 mm. This led to lots of questions of “how early can I sow canola/wheat/anything?”

The token areas of oats and winter wheat were sown. But the main consequence of the dry April? Lots of bags of canola seed sitting in sheds. There are some exceptions to this, with a smattering of paddocks in around the district, some with good stands, some not so good.

There is the odd rig still going up and down – these are generally on the better clay soils where management has been spot on. I think it tells a tale when one farmer is going over his country with a Kelly chain (again) and the neighbour is sowing early wheat in a timely fashion.

It is a very frustrating time, with many farmers with a full profile of moisture (120 cm plus) and not being able to sow. We were looking forward to a normal sowing, starting late April and moving through the varieties at a non frenetic pace. But nah, it will be on for young and old again when it rains.

Regarding the crop mix: There is a huge push towards sowing every hectare of wheat to get a bit of cash flow. This will be at the expense of barley, although a late sowing may push a few more down this path. Chickpeas will continue to grow in area, there will be a few fieldpeas in the mix and lupins will more than likely hit the same obstacle as canola with the late break.

The main challenge over the year so far has been weed control. We have spent a fortune controlling them and the fact that it doesn't look like we will get a winter break in May has a few farmers very nervous.

Some are up to their fifth fallow spray, with medic and milk thistle proving quite elusive to control.

The price of other inputs hasn't helped lift morale, with fertiliser the main culprit here. Soil testing has been showing up some interesting things this year and is well worth the investment to help refine decision-making.

Summer crop wise, the few paddocks of cotton have been stripped and sorghum harvest is staggered due to the staggered nature of the sowing dates.

Not much news from here – just waiting...waiting...waiting.

**Penny Heuston**  
Heuston Agronomy Services  
May 2, 2008

## Northern region



## LIVERPOOL PLAINS

With the majority of summer crops harvested, the current onset of cool temperatures has been delaying harvest of later crops.

Most growers have completed their soil testing program and are now looking into fertiliser options to best address deficiencies.

Rain events during summer have given long-fallowed paddocks a full moisture profile. However a minimum of 25–50 mm of rain will be required in most cases for growers to start planting.

With high commodity prices for canola we anticipate a larger area of canola to be planted, but the ideal planting window is fast approaching and rain will soon be required to minimise frost damage later in the season.

Crown rot issues and high N prices will also see reasonable areas of chickpeas being sown.

In the areas where crown rot is under some degree of control, wheat and barley will make up the majority of the winter crop area.

Overall, the district is looking for a decent rain event to trigger sowing and to generate much needed livestock feed heading into winter.

**Aaron Goddard**  
Landmark, Gunnedah  
May 2, 2008

## DARLING DOWNS

## Summer crop

Sorghum yields have varied from 3.5 tonnes per hectare – mainly in areas of the Eastern Downs which missed out on rain between November and February – to 10 tonnes in areas west of Dalby which caught good rainfall events.

Many crops across the Downs have averaged between 5 to 7 tonnes per hectare which is an excellent result.

The sorghum had to cope with a few problems – some heliothis, more Rutherglen bugs than seen before, some heavy midge and more fungal diseases such as

charcoal rot, fusarium and some ergot. There was also some small seed on a few early and late crops, but overall it has been a successful season.

But agronomists do have concerns at the increase of some disease issues – particularly where sorghum has become a monoculture – and are looking for rotational opportunities.

Mung beans have had fair growing conditions, with relatively light pest pressure, but we have seen Green Vegetable Bugs (GVB) become more of a problem than usual. Most mung bean crops have yielded between one and two tonnes per hectare.

Corn has yielded according to the amount of irrigation and rainfall, but there have been some excellent yields of up to 14 tonnes per hectare, and the irrigated soybeans have yielded strongly with GVBs the main pest.

The increase in sunflower prices also saw this crop planted more on the southern Downs.

Cotton is being picked now and despite the cool season, the crop is yielding well. Dryland crops are in the range of 2.5 to 6 bales plus per hectare with early irrigated crops yielding towards 10 bales. There are some late crops but they are struggling to open bolls with the cool temperatures and frosts at the end of April.

## Winter crop

There is a big move to wheat, with the area expected to be three times that of last winter. This has been mainly driven by the favourable price, and has come at the expense of some barley area, which will be about 75 per cent of last winter.

Chickpeas are also gaining popularity as their price firmed last month, but will remain a small area of the winter crop. If growers have good stored moisture, chickpeas can offer a good gross margin return, as well as being an excellent rotational crop.

Planting is expected to get underway in late May for chickpeas and longer season varieties of wheat. So growers are hoping the weather forecasts are correct for rain in late May.

**Hugh Reardon-Smith**  
Agronomist Landmark, Pittsworth  
May 2, 2008

