



DISTRICT REPORTS.....

Western region



NORTH

Good rains over the last week have the season shaping up far better than the last couple. Much of the region had 19 to 40 mm over the past five days and more rain is forecast later in the week. Most growers have tempered optimism about how things are going and where they could end up.

The landscape looks vastly different to the 2006 and 2007. So far this year Geraldton has had 172 mm, Binu 239 mm, Mullewa 142 mm and Morawa 122 mm. The variability in rainfall is huge with one large farm having a range of 125 mm to 293 mm of rain. These gauges are 12 km apart.

Even with this variability crops look very good. The exceptions are the heavy soil types in the area – which have also received the lower rain falls.

The south-eastern parts of the district

had very little summer rain and crops are late and have a long way to go. But areas that received significant summer rain and good late April rains are steaming ahead.

May was decile 1 with most areas only receiving nine to 15 mm. This has had us looking for moisture and some crops were starting to get moisture stressed before a rain on June 9.

June rain has been below average but most areas have received 50 to 60 mm.

The crops situation

Wheat: Early crops are in ear and looking very good. The majority of the crop is tillering to early jointing. Some crop is just emerging to three leaf. Crops are very clean for weeds and the question on everyone's lips is: "How much N?" Nitrogen spreading and spraying has been underway for a week or so in wetter parts. Weed spraying still has a way to go on most crop programs.

Canola: Probably the most consistent crop across the region. Those who planted it did so into good moisture and the crop was away early. They are cabbage to 70 per cent flower and looking very good. DBM and aphids could still play a roll but with prices where they are, we will be treating crops early.

Lupins: The majority of crops were sown early and are 10 leaf to flowering. Generally very clean and looking very

good. Some have enormous yield potential if we can score another 50 mm of rain and cool September conditions.

Barley: Planted area is down but crops that are in are later planted. Crops are clean and have good potential where rain has fallen.

Generally (and there are exceptions), the region is looking very good. We will only need another 70 mm to get better than average yields.

Anything above this and anything is possible.

For my money, we are overdue for a good crop and hopefully 2008 is going to deliver.

**Peter Norris, Agronomy For Profit,
Geraldton
June 30, 2008**

SOUTH COAST

Seasonal conditions have remained dry on the South Coast, with the majority of the area sitting on decile 1 to 2. Rainfall has been very patchy and light. But despite this, seeding is about 95 per cent complete with crop emergence remarkably good considering the marginal soil moisture most crops have.

Modern no-till machinery has certainly enabled farmers to sow crops after 10–15 mm rainfall events or less, with the subsequent furrows harvesting water very

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The photos show the contrasts rainfed agriculture can have in WA's northern cropping region.

The photo on the left is from July 21, 2006 (93 mm year to date) and went on to yield 1.5 tonnes per hectare.

On the right is the same location, taken June 30, 2008 (166 mm year to date) and the yield is ... well let's hope a big one.

<45...DISTRICT REPORTS

effectively – even in two to five mm rainfall events.

The biggest hurdle we have had to face apart from insufficient rain is strong wind. The region has been buffeted by 40–50 km per hour north-westerly and westerly winds for the first two weeks of June. This coupled with dry soil has caused wind erosion issues on some paddocks, particularly bare pasture paddocks that were sown to canola. These paddocks have drifted badly and have cut off cotyledon to four-leaf canola.

In the worst case scenarios these paddocks will require re-sowing even though it is getting very late for canola.

Bare paddocks sown to cereals have suffered some wind damage but these should recover OK and should not require re-sowing. Paddocks with good stubble cover have remained relatively unscathed from wind damage. This again highlights the importance of stubble conservation in our environment.

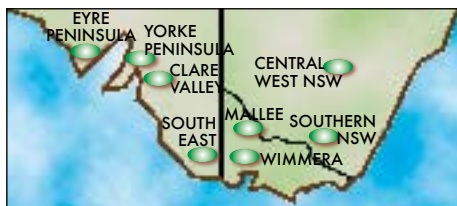
Post emergent spraying has commenced and at this stage, only early sown canola and lupin crops require spraying as these crops have the greatest weed pressures. Most other crops are relatively weed-free due to the dry inter-row conditions.

Most growers are now preparing themselves for a drier type season and are making decisions on post emergent nitrogen applications and what rates to apply – if any at all.

Hopefully the remainder of the season provides at least average rainfall and allows the South Coast to harvest a slightly below average grain crop.

**Quenten Knight,
Precision Agronomics Australia
June 17, 2008**

Southern region



SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Weather and rainfall

Temperatures were mostly cool to occasionally cold during June with relatively few frosts and mean daily maximum and minimum temperatures slightly above av-

erage. Strong to gale force winds on several occasions caused significant drift on some exposed paddocks in drier areas.

June rainfall was generally below average, with most totals around 15 to 30 mm. Growing season rainfall to date (April–June) is below average throughout most districts.

Season so far

Seeding has largely finished and crop growth has been rapid with the relatively mild temperatures, although establishment has been patchy in drier areas and strong winds have caused some damage. There is very little stored soil moisture throughout the agricultural districts and significant rainfall is required to maintain crop and pasture growth.

Cropping

Seeding finished by mid-June in most districts, but there has been some reduction in intended crop area in Western Eyre Peninsula and the Upper North as seasonal conditions deteriorated.

Where soil moisture was adequate and crops were sown early, emergence and subsequent growth has been rapid due to the relatively mild temperatures and absence of frosts, with crops well advanced for this stage of the season.

In some areas crop establishment has been patchy as a result of marginal soil moisture conditions and strong winds on several occasions causing damage to young crop plants.

The driest areas are to be found on Western Eyre Peninsula, the Southern Mallee and parts of the Upper North. These areas are in urgent need of rainfall for crops to maintain yield potential and for pastures to grow and provide cover for paddocks that are increasingly susceptible to erosion.

Net and spot forms of net blotch as well as powdery mildew have been reported in barley crops, particularly where sown early back into barley stubbles.

With below average rainfall for June, good falls are needed during the next couple of months to maintain yield potential and build up stored soil moisture going into spring.

Pastures

Pastures continued to put on growth – but with limited rainfall and lower temperatures later in the month growth has slowed.

Paddock feed is barely adequate for stock requirements in many areas and grazing pressure needs to be carefully managed with supplementary feeding

ongoing. In the driest areas, paddock feed is critically low and minimal cover is increasing susceptibility to severe wind erosion. Early sown cereal crops are providing good feed for stock in some areas.

**Peter Fulwood, Rural Solutions SA
July 7, 2008**

VICTORIAN MALLEE

It seems like *déjà vu* that I write this report once again during a dry period.

While the rainfall figures suggest little available moisture, many crops look to be holding up well. Early sown crops on light country have tillered out, while late sown cereals on heavier flats have emerged in an uneven pattern.

While some dry-sown paddocks were sown without a knockdown, grass weed pressure doesn't seem as high as expected. Improved management practices via variety selection and astute herbicide timing has assisted grass weed control. Broadleaf weeds are contaminating cereals but will be controlled after the next rainfall event.

There are very few canola crops about but they have taken some pressure from vegetable and grey banded leaf weevils. Lucerne flea have also been found in cereals and legumes.

The majority of legumes grown now are chickpeas which are emerging slowly.

I think an extended warm period in autumn in the Mallee really assists in getting crops established. Last year's good start and reasonable autumn/winter rainfall didn't convert to a good season. This emphasises the need for spring rainfall. Crops will survive on minimal rain through winter, but we are dependent on a generous spring.

Half way through the calendar year, and we have received just 102 mm of rain. If we are to get near our annual average of 340 mm, we will need to get some good rain throughout the growing season. To date, February, April and June have been very dry.

Again the season is hanging in the balance – but there is still a long way to go.

**Simon Severin
Landmark Berriwilllock
June 27, 2008**

GRIFFITH

Coming into the 2008 winter cropping season growers were much better situated than the previous year as good rains in November (79.8 mm for

Griffith), December (58.8 mm) and January (51.6 mm) provided a good basis to start. February, March and most of April proved to be dry, and the majority of crops were sown on the rain (22.4 mm) received late April.

Irrigation in the district ceased at the end of April, with little water available for pre-irrigating winter crops and pastures. With the reduced rice area it has also meant that little crop was sod-sown after rice.

Conditions to date have been very mild and crops which were either pre-watered or watered-up have progressed well, whilst crops sown on marginal moisture have had patchy establishment and need more follow-up rain.

The main winter crops grown this year are wheat, barley and canola. Recent rains, whilst welcome, have also been very patchy with falls between 5 mm to over 25 mm.

Rachel Whitworth
NSW DPI Extension Agronomist
June 24, 2008

EASTERN MURRAY VALLEY

The dry continues! The crops are in the ground, most have emerged but soil moisture conditions are deteriorating. The regions rainfall is at around decile 3 and declining.

Small patchy rain events have occurred over the past two weeks resulting in some crops looking good but others have had only 3–4 mm since sowing which is now up to six to eight weeks ago.

The positive is that the summer rains have left around 50 mm of available subsoil moisture at depth – as long as we can access it.

Most crops are just now showing signs of wilt and all but a few people have ceased in-crop spraying until a rain arrives. A few showers forecast this week will hopefully freshen up the urgent spray jobs.

A small number of grazing cereals are at mid-tillering stage and have stock on them but most crops will need further rain before significant grazing of these crops occurs.

Canola varies from 4 leaf to full ground cover and is looking better than the previous two seasons at the same stage – although they're starting to go backwards now. The area has seen an increase in canola hybrids of both Clearfield and a few Roundup Ready types.

Weed pressures are relatively low at this stage. A reasonable knockdown was

achieved and pre-emergent herbicides are performing well.

Insect pressures have also been relatively low. Lucerne flea and red legged earth mite hatchings are both lower than previous years.

But the emerging pest is bryobia mite which is continuing to show a year on year increase in numbers caused largely by more stubbles and retention of crop residues. Dry starts to the season also contribute to their higher numbers.

Early in-crop deep soil nitrogen tests are showing relatively high results giving growers some relief from the dual pressures of high urea prices and a precariously balanced season.

Corey Ubergang, I.K. Caldwell
Corowa
June 29, 2008

CENTRAL WEST

Hallelujah brothers and sisters it has rained in the Central West – or at least in most of it! Warren and Nyngan received close to 70 mm for the month of June, Coonamble 40 mm, Dubbo 32 mm and Parkes 60 mm. The June long weekend came through with the goods – as it has for the last few years – with some timely precipitation. The eastern part of the region hasn't fared as well.

So where are the crops up to in this district? From head emergence to still being put in the ground, but then again variety is the spice of life! Canola from two leaf to flowering, and did I mention that that was in the same paddock.

Sowing would be close to 90 per cent finished, which reflects the individual's attitude to dry sowing. Reluctance by many to dry sow has been understandable with the current cost of fertiliser and the run of horrible years we have experienced.

So some had sown a large percentage prior to the June rain whilst others – not a seed. On the better soils where moisture had been conserved judiciously, sowing in May was onto moisture. This was at great depths and at very slow speeds, many a groaning machine and breakdowns occurred during this period.

The Easter rains saw some canola go in, of which some looks magical, but most is patchy. Some dry sown wheat crops in the Nyngan district didn't go in quite as dry as farmers imagined and are now coming out in head – the same goes for a number of barley crops in the district. Early maturity has not been helped by the high June temperatures we received with day temperatures two degrees above average and night tempera-

tures three degrees above the average for Trangie.

Planned crop rotations suffered at the hands of the later break, with not as much canola sown, few lupins in the ground and some field peas and chickpeas sown quite late. More barley than first planned will make the last of the sowings.

Stripe rust has been found in a number of early sown winter wheat crops that went in on that Easter rain. This is not desirable for innoculum levels later in the season and has not been helped by the higher than average temperatures.

Bug wise, a few red legged critters and blue oat mites starting to cruise about the place but many crops are big enough to handle some insect pressure. There are some aphids in canola and cereals as well.

It will be a hectic post-emergent weed spraying session in the next few weeks, with many of the dry sown crops understandably dirty.

With many growers with full moisture profiles, good crop stands and quite buoyant commodity prices, fingers are crossed for a winter crop that is crucial for the economic health of many farms in this area.

Penny Heuston
Heuston Agronomy Services
July 2, 2008

Northern region



DARLING DOWNS

Overview

It's been a less than ideal start to the winter season with limited rainfall reducing the areas which can be planted, and leading to some risks regarding crop establishment. Rainfall over the past three months has ranged between 40 and 90 mm – generally below the 20 year average for the district.

Winter crop

Wheat is the predominant crop planted this winter, but with variable rainfall, the area planted is only about 70 per cent ...48▷

◁47...DISTRICT REPORTS

of what was planned. Crop planting has been underway since late May, and the earliest wheat crops are at the early tillering stage, with no sign of any disease as yet.

There have been some isolated reports of armyworm activity coming out of pastures, but this is limited at this stage.

A number of growers have planted chickpeas into sorghum stubble, leading to a significant increase over last winter's area. But with the cool weather recently, the peas are slow to emerge.

Mice are a significant issue on the Eastern Downs, with plenty of activity in stubble paddocks and protection required for the newly sown chickpea crops.

Both the oats and barley plantings are well back this winter. Oats sown earlier have been showing a fair amount of leaf rust, whilst most of the barley is only being sown now.

A number of growers faced with too little rainfall have decided to hold their ground over for summer crop, and with strong forward prices for sorghum, a fair summer planting is expected.

Fallow issues

The dreaded weed fleabane is once again emerging, so a number of paddocks have been targeted for early control. Some of the weed plants, starting to seed now, are providing headaches for growers. Recent frosts are stressing the plants and they will be very hard to control.

There has been a significant increase in soil testing due to the increased fertiliser prices, as growers try to fine-tune their inputs for this summer. This has shown up some very low levels of nitrogen in high yielding paddocks from last summer, but also some high levels in the long fallow paddocks.

Retirement

Mention must also be made of the retirement from agriculture of long time



Downs agronomist, Paul Macintosh. A recent hip operation has left Paul unable to continue his paddock role and he has reluctantly had to hang up his magnifying glass (his eyesight went years ago). The Downs agronomy community will miss his input – but not his appetite.

Hugh Reardon-Smith
Agronomist Landmark, Pittsworth
June 27, 2008

SOUTH BURNETT

The mood in the South Burnett is still fairly positive after the good summer season. But confidence is starting to be eroded by the big increase in fertiliser, fuel and glyphosate prices. Growers are commenting that the commodity prices will need to stay high to make a reasonable return.

The big concern for many growers is finding the cash to plant the crop with the significant rises in up-front costs.

The South Burnett had planting rains around the end of May and start of June. Wheat was the main crop planted with the proportion of barley much less than usual.

Chickpeas are few and far between.

There has been increased interest in bean crops for the coming summer season – this is prompted by the 'free' nitrogen to be taken advantage of.

We are hoping for a winter crop just like the 2007–08 summer crop.

Ian Crosthwaite
BGA AgriServices, Kingaroy
June 24, 2008

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

The Central Queensland winter crop is off to a slow start in 2008 with planting rains proving hard to come by for most farmers. But some have been lucky enough to catch good rain at the end of May and into June with some places recording up to 60 mm in the south around the Gindie district. There were some handy falls around Rolleston as well.

This unfortunately has not been widespread with many farmers to the north of Emerald missing out. Most of these farmers are still waiting for some additional rain to get their wheat in.

Due to the good summer rain received in January and February, subsoil moisture profiles are good – the issue has been getting enough rain to wet up the topsoil and to get the moisture to meet. Around Gindie, where we received the most rain, this has occurred, but some people further south around Orion and to

the north around Capella could do with a bit more rain.

Whilst waiting for that ever elusive planting rain, many farmers opted to deep-plant their chickpeas which meant they sowed in the optimal planting window – and most are looking good at this stage. Around 50 to 60,000 hectares have been planted to chickpeas.

For most growers, wheat is the only option now this late in the season.

A large portion of the northern wheat was deep planted and has received little in-crop rain whilst most wheat to the south was planted on the June rain (if you were lucky enough to get it).

An estimated 200 to 250,000 hectares of wheat is expected to be planted if sufficient rains are received across the district.

The last of the sorghum is still coming off with many farmers juggling planting with harvest.

William MacSmith,
QDPI&F Extension Officer, Emerald
June 27, 2008

Advertisers' Directory

Allied Grains	21
AgriDry	21
Beaurepaires	7
Barcoo Lodge	29
Case IH	18, OBC
Charlton Tackle	37
Darling Downs Tarps	N
Dinner Plain	6
Dow AgroSciences	N
drumMUSTER	33
Ellis Equipment	15
Excel Agriculture	3
Geronimo	16
Gessner Industries	31
Graintec	22
Holmes Sackett	19
Incitec Pivot	Insert
Jaylon Industries	23
John Deere	17
Kohler Engines	5
Kotzur Silos	23
Nufarm	Insert
Serafin Landpower	9
Study Tours	IBC
Syngenta	10&11
TACS	20
Teejet	13
Westfield Augers	N, S
WANTFA	6
Warrego Gypsum	N