



DISTRICT REPORTS.....

Western region



NORTH

July delivered very good rains over most of the region and crops were looking spectacular by the middle of August.

But unfortunately August was very dry for much of the west of the district and crops are suffering as a result. Geraldton had its driest August on record.

Poor sand soils with low water holding capacity have suffered the most and have lost much of their potential over the last couple of weeks. Most of the northern and eastern areas had a season-saving rain on August 27 and 29 – some south eastern areas received 30 to 50 mm.

Most had 10 to 20 mm in the eastern region while Geraldton and many western areas recorded two to five mm.

With rain forecast over the next few days we could yet get out of jail in the west.

The crops

Wheat: Crops in the western areas had very good potential and dry conditions have knocked them around. Eastern and northern fringe areas have had extra rainfall this year and look spectacular. Many farms could have record average yields. Disease pressure is relatively low in this area and if we can jag one more rain, grain quality will also be very good.

Canola: Crops are on average the best the region has ever had. Aphids and budworm are being sprayed in some crops this week. Diamond Back Moths are present but are not the major insect threat. Most crops will be finished flowering by mid September. Swathing will be underway in early October.

Barley: All crops look very good and yield potential is very high. Most are in the late stages of grain fill and will be finishing by the end of the month.

Lupins: Crops yields will be well above average and many farms look like setting a new yield record. Even later sown crops have bulked up well with the wet July. Budworm and aphids are the only threats and many paddocks are being sprayed for these pests this week.

At this stage it looks like a potential record harvest for our region but we are still one rain away from cracking it in the western areas. Hopefully September can deliver some rain to finish crops in the west and put the icing on the cake!

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

SOUTH COAST

Seasonal conditions on the South Coast during the past two months have been mixed. July rainfall was very good with the whole region receiving between 50–120 mm of rain which really turned the season's prospects around.

But August has seen a return to dry conditions with many areas receiving less than 10 mm for the whole month. Some isolated areas to the north of Beaumont, and also to the north of Salmon Gums, were fortunate enough to get some good thunderstorms resulting in 20–30 mm.

Apart from these isolated areas it is only the country within 20 km of the coast getting any reasonable rainfall.

The crops have generally hung in well up to this point, but they have used all the July rainfall soil reserves and are getting very desperate for a good soaking rain.

Many barley crops are showing severe signs of boron toxicity in the drier mallee regions.

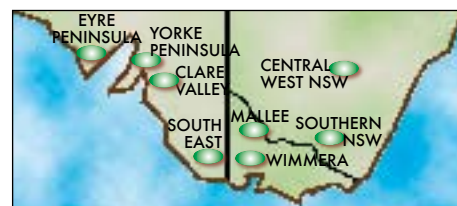
Aphids are now starting to move in on some stressed broadleaf crops but insect pressure is generally minor, as is foliar disease in cereals. This is good news as growers are not too keen to spend money on crops during these drier conditions.

If the remainder of September and

early October results in average rainfall, the majority of crops should still produce slightly below average yields.

**Quenten Knight,
Precision Agronomics Australia
September 6, 2008**

Southern region



SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Weather and rainfall

Conditions were cool to frequently cold during August with mean daily maximum and minimum temperatures up to 2°C below average with frosts in some areas.

Monthly rainfall was around average in most parts, with totals ranging from 50–100 mm in the south down to 25–50 mm in northern areas.

Growing season rainfall to date (April–August) remains below average over much of Western Eyre Peninsula, southern Yorke Peninsula and parts of the Mallee and South East districts.

Season to date

Seeding was largely completed during May and early June albeit under marginal moisture conditions in some parts.

Crop growth was rapid during June with relatively mild temperatures, although establishment was patchy in drier areas and strong winds damaged some emerging crops.

Good rains during July and August in most districts enabled crops to maintain growth, although colder, frosty conditions did slow crop development. While stored soil moisture is now quite good in many areas, favourable spring weather is needed to realise current yield potential.

Crops

The majority of cereals are at jointing to early booting, with some flowering in

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the earliest districts.

Most canola crops are at stem extension to mid flowering, with peas and beans also flowering.

Post-emergence herbicide spraying has continued, although hampered by wet weather in some areas.

Post-seeding nitrogen in both granular and liquid forms has been applied to cereals and canola where soil moisture levels were adequate.

Stripe rust is now widespread in wheat crops with many farmers applying a protective fungicide to susceptible varieties.

Foliar diseases appear to be currently at manageable levels, but will be dependent on spring weather conditions. With reports of some fungicides in short supply, farmers need to plan ahead to ensure they hold sufficient fungicide stocks for future requirements.

Crops in many districts now have good yield potential, but all districts will need timely spring rains and ongoing mild temperatures to maintain growth.

Total winter crop area in South Australia is estimated to be 4.02 million hectares with crop production currently estimated at 6.49 million tonnes.

Pastures

Pastures continued to grow, although somewhat slower with the abnormally cold conditions.

Paddock feed is quite adequate for stock requirements and will increase as temperatures rise during spring.

Cereals sown for feed have continued to prove very worthwhile.

Some farmers are starting to prepare paddocks for hay/silage to replenish on-farm stocks this spring.

Peter Fulwood, Rural Solutions SA
September 3, 2008

VICTORIAN MALLEE

Spring time is off to a good start and August was much kinder than last year.

We received 33 mm of rain for August compared to 3 mm in 2007. Along with the extra rain we have not copped any unseasonal summer temperatures yet.

Crops are variable and were starting to wilt prior to a 15 mm rain event at the end of August. Some have made a remarkable recovery.

To the end of August, Berriwillock had recorded 170 mm with 108 mm falling in the growing season.

Stripe rust has been evident in wheat and the message to protect susceptible

varieties early, has generally been adopted. Varieties treated with in-furrow fungicides have mostly avoided rust.

Wheat and barley have been subject to an invasion of cutworm and armyworm. Numbers have been high in some crops and the potential for damage is accordingly high.

Legumes are doing well and have begun their spring growth spurt. There should be some good vetch hay crops around. Chickpea crops are growing steadily but will get going when the weather warms up.

Canola crops have been flowering for a while and will need to rely on spring rain to get the good yields as stored moisture is low.

The potential is still there for a good season but yields will vary widely.

I would like to think that cereal growers can average 1.8 to 2.2 tonnes per hectare.

There is a high demand for mallee cropping country with prices being around the \$1000 to \$1200 per hectare mark. Cropping land for leasing is also in high demand.

Simon Severin
Landmark Berriwillock
September 5, 2008

WESTERN MURRAY VALLEY

Rain? That's all everyone is talking about and in short, it's just not happening. To date, the Western Murray Valley (WMV) has had a total of 171 mm of rainfall for the year. Now that might sound OK, but the reality is that 80–90 mm of that was in January resulting in summer spraying – the remaining 80–90 mm has been from April to date.

Again this might seem OK but we have had 14 rainfall events and 11 of those events have resulted in 7 mm or less.

With lack of rainfall in mind the district yield potential has dropped severely. On average the WMV has a yield potential in cereals of 2.5 to 3.2 tonnes per hectare. Wheat yields will range from zero tonnes on the heavy clays where crops barely emerged – to an average of 4–6 bags (0.8–1.2 tonnes per hectare). Some exceptional early sown crops may get 1.6 to 2 tonnes per hectare.

Very few crops had any nitrogen applied due to lack of rainfall and poor yield potential. Also, the good summer rainfall resulted in adequate mineralisation giving most soils an additional 60–80 kg N per hectare.

Disease pressure

Stripe rust is prevalent and is affecting most wheat varieties. Any crops treated with Impact (flutriafol) up front have held up well against infection and now wheat crops coming into flag leaf (Z39) are being treated with low rates of foliar fungicides (Opus, Folicur and some Tilt).

It is interesting to note our most common wheat variety Ventura, has not been infected as quickly as others such as Diamondbird, Janz, H-45, Yitpi, Frame and Wedgetail. But in the past week stripe rust has been observed in any early sown Ventura.

With most foliar fungicides now below \$10 per hectare it isn't hard for growers to make a decision on treating crops.

The foliar disease yellow leaf spot is quite obvious across the district affecting nearly all varieties except H-45/H-46 and Wyalcatchem. For our district this disease is becoming as much a problem as stripe rust.

Yellow spot is stubble-borne and direct drilling/stubble retention systems have not helped slow this problem. Last year's hay/silage cutting reduced stubbles enormously but we still find this disease a problem. Many growers and agronomists have now adopted the attitude of choosing to grow YLS resistant varieties and treating stripe rust annually because it is such a moving target.

Army worm in some heavier clay soils has been observed, and with late fungicide applications some heavy cereal aphid infestations are being treated when controlling stripe rust.

Canola is an unknown and prior experience has prompted many growers to brown manure (spray fallow) to ensure critical grass control and also avoid windrowing and harvest costs on very poor yield potentials.

Some better canola crops may be cut for green chop and go direct to dairy farmers' silage pits.

Lupins and peas are very slow and the lack of autumn and winter rain has resulted in poor early vigour and lupins may not be tall enough to harvest. Past experience with peas suggests there is still a chance for moderate yields with a good spring.

Currently the Murray Irrigation Limited has the WMV irrigators on zero allocation with some water now being put down channels for stock and domestic use only.

In short, the WMV will have well below average yields and with lack of

winter rainfall the option for hay won't be there as it was last year.

Let's hope spring does what it's supposed to do and rain!

**Laurence Pearce, Agronomist
IK Caldwell, Deniliquin
September 7, 2008**

MURRAY VALLEY RICE REPORT

A 'Rice Report' for the Murray Valley seems a misnomer at present – there is not likely to be any significant crop area again this coming season.

There are plenty of willing growers, but if they are without water again this season (for the third consecutive year) there is little they can do.

There will be a very small area of rice grown on deep bores. This will mostly be confined to areas east of Deniliquin where water quality is more suited to rice production.

There have been several attempts to produce rice on bores west of Deniliquin in the past few years, but these mostly have proven to be disappointing.

Results east of Deniliquin – provided water was managed to prevent salinity build up on the crops – have been far better.

Very few growers are optimistic about obtaining adequate water allocations this coming season. Winter inflows have again been very low and time is running out for the situation to improve. Any spring water that is available is likely to

be used to finish the current winter crops or held over until autumn to commence next year's winter crops.

Most growers are committed to the industry and look forward to when they can next produce a crop. Their main fear is the continued escalation of farm debt level – some fear they may not be able to survive much longer – especially if they do not get a good winter crop harvest this season.

**John Fowler
Deniliquin
September 5, 2008**

CENTRAL WEST

We are all walking around with an orange glow in the Central West from the amount of stripe rust spores in the air! It is rampant and the management strategies are often changing due to the intense disease pressure. This has put a serious strain on fungicide stocks on resellers' shelves – even WD-40 is walking out the door.

Even the most resistant of varieties have had some infection if they have been put under high enough disease pressure.

Add to this ascochyta in chickpeas, blotches in barley, wheat streak mosaic virus in wheat (funnily enough), mouse damage, frost, yellow leaf spot, aphids in canola – and we've got the lot.

Season 2008 will be known as "another day, another disaster!"

Luckily for most of us we can now

scrap "dying from moisture stress" from the above list. We were saved (just) on the last weekend of August with rainfall of at least 10 mm in most areas and up to 50 mm in the east of the region.

But this was too late for some with crops west of Nyngan in trouble and those late crops around Tottenham looking fairly average. More rain was received late last week – and more forecast this week – has put smiles on a lot of faces.

This is the make or break year for many farms, so we remain with fingers – and all other parts of our body – crossed.

**Penny Heuston
Heuston Agronomy Services
September 8, 2008**

Northern region



DARLING DOWNS

Overview

This has been one of the coldest winters on the Downs with temperatures regularly below freezing, and 16 consecutive frosts in the first half of August. This really slowed winter crop growth, and it has been the warmer weather in the last week of August which has picked the crops up, rather than the recent rain.

Winter crop

Wheat has so far escaped any signs of the dreaded stripe rust as it moves into the jointing stage. Growth has been slow with the cold, but the weather over the past two weeks has helped the crop improve, and many crops now have a fair yield expectation.

Chickpeas likewise have recovered from some heavy frost damage, which did kill some plants, and crops are now starting to flower. There have been no reported cases of ascochyta so far.

Mice are still an issue attacking wheat at the jointing stages and potentially being a problem in chickpeas once the peas start to pod.

Summer crop

The recent rains and the price fluctuations have drawn attention to the summer ...56▷



Heavy aphid pressure in canola crops has been just one of a long list of management challenges in the Central West this season.

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crop options. Over the past week we have seen cotton improve significantly in price, feed corn take a jump, whilst new crop sorghum has remained static.

This is causing almost daily changes to the gross margins, but the end result is that a number of growers are considering switching some area to cotton, possibly at the expense of sorghum, and corn is favoured where gritting contracts are available.

Strong prices for soybeans and sunflowers have increased intended plantings of these crops, both in their traditional areas and further afield.

Many growers need a little more rain and warmer soil temperatures to start planting, but with the September forecast looking fair, this month could see a large summer crop plant.

Hugh Reardon-Smith
Agronomist Landmark, Pittsworth
September 8, 2008

SOUTH BURNETT

Winter has been fairly good in the South Burnett. This has meant a reasonable area planted to wheat and barley. We enjoyed good rain in June and July, then started to worry about the lack of rain in August but have been heartened by useful rain in early September.

ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

Both photos are of a Loyd, manufactured in England in the late 1940s using brengun carrier undercarriage components (note the difference in the track grousers) and ex military Fordson truck transmissions. Mick's unit is powered by a side valve Ford V8 and the second unit (part of the outstanding Booleroo Steam and Tractor Preservation Society collection) is powered by the technically interesting Freeman Sanders V4 diesel.



Some key issues

- Some blotches in barley.
- First stripe rust in wheat found in early September.
- Some big frosts, but little sign of damage at this stage.
- Mice activity across the Burnett at low levels but with lots of damaging potential.
- Growers extremely concerned about high fertiliser prices.
- Legume area will increase to offset high nitrogen prices.
- Land prices are now too dear on good cropping land for plantation eucalypts.

We need another year like the 2008 summer season to start restoring growers' confidence.

Ian Crosthwaite
BGA AgriServices, Kingaroy
September 5, 2008

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

After getting off to a slow start the Central Highlands winter crop was looking promising in many areas for 2008, but with an unusually cold winter and a number of consecutive frosts, it appears large areas may have suffered quite considerable frost damage.

The harvest outlook has been revised down from previous estimates. The most severe frost damage has occurred in the low-lying paddocks and in some areas along the Comet River flats to the south east of Emerald.

It's hard to estimate a damage which won't be fully realised until harvest. But some reports by farmers are that their lowest paddocks have no wheat in the head, and that their chickpeas have lost all flowers and have empty pods – if any.

Chickpeas have started to reflower and the recent rain will help but their yield potential is now much lower.

Winter crops on the Central Highlands vary in their growth stage as planting dates have been staggered from April through to July.

The earlier planted crops, particularly those on the southern Highlands that weren't frosted, are looking good.

It's the later planted crops that are not doing so well. They already have a lower yield potential because they were planted so late.

Crops to the north around Clermont have done it tough. Crops were deep-planted in April but received virtually no rain until July.

Of concern is the confirmation of ascochyta blight in chickpeas on three dif-

ferent properties in the Dawson Valley. At this stage there has been no positive identification on any properties in the Highlands.

Growers and consultants are being encouraged to inspect their crops and in the meantime to take precautions with regards to hygiene.

Early September brought some good news with welcome falls received throughout the Central Highlands. Clermont to the north received 15 mm while areas in the southern regions received falls ranging from 30–70 mm.

This will provide a welcome boost to the later planted winter crops and top-up soil moisture profiles as we head towards the spring and summer crop planting opportunities.

William MacSmith,
QDPI&F Extension Officer, Emerald
September 4, 2008

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