



# DISTRICT REPORTS.....

## Western region



### NORTH

Harvest is underway in the North but progress is slow due to cool damp weather. Crop yields are average to spectacular and grain quality is generally quite good.

Since my last report, the dry August gave way to an average rainfall in September. Crops recovered very well and now generally look very good.

Cool and damp conditions have plagued growers who are trying to get their crops harvested. But there's been no downgrading as it hasn't rained yet on mature crops.

The Geraldton Port Zone receivals to November 12 stand at 687,000 tonnes. This is made up of:

Wheat – 417,000; Canola – 89,000; Barley – 91,000; and, Lupins – 89,000.

Receival site records are expected at Yuna, Binu and Northampton. The record for Geraldton is 2.56 million tonnes and grower estimates give an expected 2.4 mt for the year. I think the zone will go very close to breaking the record.

(Source: Eric Cooper, CBH Geraldton)

### The crops

Wheat: Crops in the usual 'low' rainfall areas are spectacular. Yields are well above average to records for the more meticulous growers who sprayed summer weeds and retained summer moisture. As stated above, the record yields at the fringing grain receival sites tell the story. Grain quality is very good but some paddocks that have very high yields are low in grain protein.

The southeast fringe of the zone has also come home very well. This area had

a late start to the season but is now set to be in record crop yield territory.

Yields are 1.4 tonnes per hectare on deep sands and up to 5.0 tonnes on good clay loam soils.

Canola: Canola yields are variable with some growers a little disappointed. Areas that had severe dry conditions in August were lower yielding than expected and good soil types again performed well. Aphid control has given extra yield again.

Yields are 0.7 to 1.8 tonnes per hectare with most around 1.2 to 1.4 tonnes. Oil contents are 40 to 44 per cent.

Barley: Most of the crop has been harvested and yields again are very good. Most malt growers have hit the quality window. Feed varieties have performed very well. Barley suffered more than wheat during the dry periods. And the barley crops are almost all on wheat stubble so are not getting the 'drought fallow effect' that other crops are.

Yields are between 2.5 and 4.0 tonnes per hectare.

Lupins: As predicted in my last report, yields are spectacular on most farms. New paddock records are being set. The very low water holding capacity sands are the exception with the dry August doing damage.

Paddock yields are from 1.7 to 3.5 tonnes per hectare with most in the 2.0 to 2.5 tonnes per hectare window.

Many of the eastern and northern fringes of the zone are smashing production records.

Closer to Geraldton the news is not so good but yields should be close to average. At this stage quality is good but protein is down due to high production. But thunderstorms are forecast for tomorrow in the southeast of the zone. Harvest will be complete on some farms next week.

I think the port zone record will get broken due to the huge crops being harvested in the 'low' rainfall parts of the Northern Agricultural region. Let's hope we get some warm weather to get the crop into the bin.

**Peter Norris, Agronomy For Profit  
Geraldton  
November 12, 2008**

### SOUTH COAST

Seasonal conditions on the South Coast during the past two months have had a remarkable turnaround. Most areas have received between 75 to 150 mm and this has been a huge benefit during flowering and grain fill particularly for wheat and field pea crops.

The only downside to this rain has been the germination of summer weeds. As a consequence, many growers will be jumping from header to boomspray during harvest to keep these weeds under control.

Canola harvest has just commenced, which is three to four weeks later than the previous two seasons. To date only a small amount of canola has been harvested – yields and quality seem to be very good with crops ranging from 0.8 to 1.7 tonnes per hectare and oil content between 41–44 per cent. Most canola crops seem to be yielding 200–300 kg per hectare better than they look. This is largely due to the good spring rain which has produced large grain and pods that are consistent in size from top to bottom.

### Barley

Barley yields look like being in the range of 1.5 to 5.0 tonnes per hectare with the lower yields coming from the inland Mallee areas where the dry August had a big impact on tiller abortion. In these drier areas crops have reshot during September and October which is delaying harvest as growers have to wait for these late heads to mature.

Many of the mature barley crops that are ready for harvest will have some quality issues with a large proportion of the grain having some level of fungal staining due to the late rains.

Wheat crops are still three to four weeks away from harvest. Quality should still be very good with expected yields in the order of 1.5 to 4.5 tonnes per hectare.

Field peas also responded very well to the late rains, with most putting on between 0.5 to 1.0 tonne per hectare of extra yield. Expected yields are now in the order of 1.2 to 2.5 tonnes.

Lupin yields are also expected to be

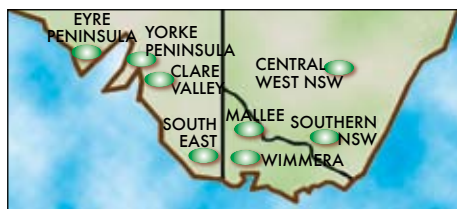
very good with a yield range of 1.5 to 3.0 tonnes per hectare.

In general, the exceptional late finishing rains have ensured that the South Coast will go close to producing an average crop.

This is a great result considering the dry windy start. We just need some kind harvest weather to get the crop off and to maintain grain quality.

**Quenten Knight, Agronomist  
Precision Agronomics Australia  
November 10, 2008**

## Southern region



### SOUTH AUSTRALIA

#### Temperature and rainfall

Mean daily maximum temperatures during October were at least 2–3°C above average in most districts. Several frosts were recorded, mostly in northern and eastern districts.

October rainfall was well below average in all districts. Some centres had their lowest October rainfall on record while totals in most areas were 10 mm or less.

On a statewide basis this has been the driest October on record. Growing season rainfall (April–October) is almost uniformly below average across all districts.

#### The season to date

Seeding was largely completed during May and early June under varying moisture conditions. Rapid crop growth occurred during June with relatively mild temperatures, although patchy establishment and frequent strong winds delayed emerging crops in some areas.

Good rains during July and August enabled crops to maintain growth, although colder, frosty conditions did slow development. Well below average rainfall in both September and October caused crop yield potential to drop significantly in all districts.

Harvest has now commenced and further rainfall will be of benefit only to a few later maturing crops.

Minimal rainfall during October caused an ongoing decline in yield potential in all districts, although many crops did appear to hang on remarkably

well reflecting differences in soil type and crop management.

In most cases earlier sown crops have done better, however some have struggled through the exceptionally dry spring where additional nitrogen was applied during winter causing excessively bulky growth.

Harvesting of barley commenced around Port Pirie in early October with both yield and grain quality showing the extreme variability typical of a very dry, hard finish.

Paddocks in some areas will not be reaped or will barely return seed and stock have also been turned onto failed crops, although most farmers are waiting as long as possible before grazing to maintain soil cover.

Grain marketing is causing general concern with issues such as freight charges, silo closures, marketing schemes and prices foremost.

Yet again we have seen an extremely disappointing finish to a season that had great potential at the end of winter – the ongoing financial implications for many farmers are likely to be severe.

Total crop area is estimated to be four million hectares with crop production estimated at 4.74 million tonnes.

#### Pastures

Pastures have largely dried off but paddock feed levels and soil cover are generally adequate at this stage. In the driest areas the feed situation is already of concern and farmers are looking for harvested stubble paddocks as soon as possible.

Haymaking progressed during October, including areas of frost-affected crops as well as some well grown crops on heavier soil types considered to have better value as hay rather than grain.

**Peter Fulwood  
Rural Solutions SA  
November 5, 2008**

### WIMMERA

Cropping in the Wimmera, and indeed most of Victoria, has been a challenge in 2008. With a good start in May, June and July we were set up for a decent crop along with some attractive commodity prices for the first time in many years.

A huge planting of every available hectare went smoothly and was completed quite early. Many air seeders were back in the shed by the end of May. Some timely rains in the depth of winter lead us all to wonder just how we would cope with the big harvest to follow.

August was an interesting month with a couple of good rains at the start and the finish and crops generally looking good. All diligent agronomists were busy finding stripe rust in abundance in wheat crops throughout the state and the race was on to ensure there was enough fungicide to go around.

The rest is history really. Geelong lost the Grand Final, it did not rain again, we had a dust storm in September, aphids moved in, and there was plenty of fungicide to go around!

We would need to consult the record books, but the lack of rain from the end of August until after the Melbourne Cup must be some sort of record – one we do not want broken.

The result was the cutting of many Wimmera wheat crops for hay again. We vowed not to do it again after last year, but hay has become an important back stop for cereal growers in the Wimmera in the past few years, and needs to be considered as an option.

Barley harvest is underway as I write and yields of 1.0–1.5 tonnes per hectare of poor quality grain will probably not cover costs in those paddocks this year. A drop in commodity prices due to better world grain production has taken away the drought spike we need in seasons such as this to balance the budget.

Harvest will be over before long and contemplation of a new year will begin. One thing seems certain – we will be planning for farming in low rainfall from now on. 2010 will be another year of breaking the rotation rules and keeping a lid on costs as those wily Wimmera farmers strive to grow the most grain from the least rain.

**Mike Laidlaw  
Senior Agronomist  
Harberger Farm Supplies, Donald  
November 12, 2008**

### VICTORIAN MALLEE

Spring may have started well compared to last year – but finished in a very similar fashion – a dry September, and only six mm of rainfall recorded in October.

Harvest began prior to the end of October in the Mallee, and the rain we so desperately needed came in the form of 21 mm on November 7, outside of the growing season. In the areas that are good enough to be harvested, barley yields have ranged between 0.2 tonnes per hectare to 2.5 tonnes, with the higher yields generally coming from the lighter, northern areas.

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Lentils are also being harvested, with yields between zero tonnes per hectare and 0.5 tonnes. Hopefully the chickpeas will do better as they have stayed green longer and retained some height.

Canola has mainly been direct headed with low yields and oil contents typical of a dry spring. Fortunately, not too many acres were sown to canola this year.

Weeds have started to germinate due to the November rain and some are requiring spraying already. Bindi eye and melons would account for the most common species of summer weeds.

A new grain storage site at Berriwillock has been developed by farmers and has been utilised. But there will be more than enough storage available due to poor district yields.

Growers will soon run out of good crops to harvest. The consequence of receiving less than 200 mm of annual rainfall before the end of October will again underline the need for spring rainfall in the Mallee.

**Simon Severin**  
**Landmark Berriwillock**  
**November 13, 2008**

**EASTERN MURRAY VALLEY**

At the time of writing we've finally seen a change in the weather, 20–30 mm in the last 48 hours. The problem however is it's too late for most crops, even 14 days earlier would have added significant value. The critical September and October rainfall amounted to no more than 20 mm in most districts. The region as a whole finished on Decile 1 or less for the growing season.

The positive is that this season showed us more than ever that with some stubble cover and diligence with summer weed control these summer rain events add significant stored moisture and yield.

Wheat yields in the region will vary between 0.5 to 2.0 tonnes per hectare with the difference being the presence or absence of significant rainfall last summer.

The few canola crops left for harvest will be disappointing to say the least. The top half of pods are unlikely to have any viable seed. Yield potentials are only 200–500 kg per hectare. The largest share of canola crops were cut for hay or silage, if the grower was lucky enough to have a market. A large area of canola was just grazed.

Barley again will be the shining light, with yield potentials 50–80 per cent higher than wheat in the same districts.

After three Decile 1 years in succession the biggest management change going into 2009 will be the area of barley grown. Barley will take more of both canola and pulse areas.

**Corey Uebergang**  
**I.K.Caldwell Corowa**  
**November 10, 2008**

**GRIFFITH  
RICE REPORT**

In mid-October a general security water allocation of nine per cent was announced for Murrumbidgee Valley Irrigators, with two per cent of that being deliverable after February 2009. Murrumbidgee Irrigation made a further announcement of an additional five per cent savings enhancement on top of current allocations for general security shareholders, taking allocations to a total of 14 per cent.

Rainfall in the district has been variable and as a result winter crops in the district are also variable. Rainfall figures for Griffith to November 9 were 282 mm compared to 371 mm for the long term average, with 44 mm to date for November.

**Winter crop**

Winter crops, which were either pre-watered or watered up, progressed well and were the crops which were watered in the spring. Crops which were sown on marginal moisture had patchy establishment and were stressed too much by the time water was made available in spring. Due to a relatively dry spring, and where growers had the water, most wheat and canola received two spring irrigations.

After the outbreaks of stripe rust in wheat this season, growers will be waiting to see the results and how well varieties have held up before making decisions on varietal choices for next year.

**Rice**

There will be a small area of rice this season, and given the drought and reduced water availability, a few growers are again trialling the technique of delaying the application of permanent water to rice to save water and improve water productivity.

The application of permanent water is delayed until Panicle Initiation (PI) and flushes are only carried out to supplement rainfall to keep the crop alive.

Due to the moisture stress the crop experiences, crop growth and yield are likely to be reduced by 10–20 per cent, compared to a conventionally grown

crop. But with lower inputs and potential water savings of up to 20–30 per cent, the gross margin per megalitre of water applied and tonnes per megalitre, are likely to be higher than a conventionally grown crop.

**Rachael Whitworth**  
**Extension Agronomist**  
**NSW DPI, Griffith**  
**November 10, 2008**

**CENTRAL WEST**

The 'Year of the Disaster', 2008, is finally reaching its climax with the headers only just starting to get rolling throughout the area.

Harvest has been slow to commence due to the lovely soft finish we have experienced. This has been coupled with some timely rain in September and October – traditionally our lowest rainfall months. As an example, the 'tropical' region of Warren received 100 mm of rain in 10 days at the start of October! Stripe rust loved these conditions and spraying was extensive.

Most of the canola has now been picked up with mainly disappointing results. The crops sown on time, and looked a million dollars, proved to be real show ponies with low oil and small seed. Frosts have a lot to answer for this year. Those canola crops sown late (too late in many cases) are coming off nicely thank you very much! This has been no doubt due to the spring rainfall and cool finish.

There are few yields to report on cereal crops at this stage, but rumours from the Nyngan district suggest 0.8 to 2.0 tonnes per hectare – the average will be to the lower end of this scale.



**Chickpea crops in the Central West enjoyed the spring rains – but so did aschochyta.**

Frosts have caused a lot of unexpected grief, mainly in the early sown wheat crops. Crops at Tottenham and further south drop away very quickly in keeping with the rainfall pattern.

Paddocks stripped around Warren are up around the 3.0 tonne range which is lovely, but there are only a few crops in the bin at the moment.

It has been a hard road to get here with every disease, plague and pestilence to haunt us. And it hasn't stopped just because harvest has arrived. Emus

are now causing major crop damage to the west of the region.

Mildew was the disease of choice in the later part of the season for barley, but so far the locusts have stayed further south (but the mice didn't).

The chickpea crops have loved the mild finish as has ascochyta, with some crops of Yorker and Flipper having five plus fungicide sprays. Yields off this crop type will be great so farmers are mindful of the intricacies of correct harvesting.

The irrigated summer crop is nearly a

non-event again. With the one per cent water allocation we have, there is only a handful of cotton crops in the ground. In most cases, any irrigation water farmers had went onto wheat.

**Penny Heuston**  
**Heuston Agronomy Services**  
**November 11, 2008**

## Northern region



### DARLING DOWNS

#### Overview

Winter crop harvest is underway with some excellent early yields on the ground with better stored moisture. Around 70 per cent of the summer crop has been planted with sorghum the dominant crop. But these are increased areas of corn and cotton compared to last season. Sub-soil moisture is not as good as farmers would wish, so in-crop rainfall will determine the quality of this summer's crops.

#### Winter crop

Wheat harvest is still in the early stages with some strong yields right across the Downs of between 2.5 and 5.0 tonnes per hectare, with good protein levels and low screenings. It has not been a simple run with the wheat with a significant increase in stripe rust across a number of varieties, heavy mouse outbreaks and fungal head blights.

The barley harvest is nearly finished also with strong yields of three to five tonnes per hectare. These crops had an increase in blotch this year, predominantly the spot form, as well as mouse damage.

The chickpeas are ripening after desiccation and look to have fair yields, but have suffered from early mouse damage, the usual heliothis which were comfortably controlled, and some outbreaks of ascochyta, the first for a number of years. All this was the result of a wetter than usual winter.

#### Summer crop

There was a significant planting of sorghum in September and these early crops are now well into the tillering stage

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A good crop of wheat in the Armatree district of the Central West.



A 2008 field pea crop at Collie.

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and growing well. Later sowings have struggled to get established through dry and cool conditions, so the current rain events will help these. There have been some issues with slower germination and increased soil pest activity, and some re-planting has been necessary.

The corn has been mostly planted on irrigation and after one watering is looking good. The cotton area is at least double that of last summer, with the early crop now at four leaves after being slowed by the cold weather, and only a small amount of dryland still to be planted. The alteration to the Bollgard planting window allowed growers to take advantage of the moderate rainfalls in September to plant in early October.

Recent rainfall has been patchy, leaving some areas still moisture stressed, but a number of growers are now looking to finish their sorghum planting before moving onto mungbeans, soybeans and some lab lab in early December.

**Hugh Reardon-Smith**  
Agronomist Landmark, Pittsworth  
November 8, 2008



## SOUTH BURNETT

Rain has been patchy to finish off the winter crops. Most areas have now had rain to get summer crop planting underway.

Winter crop harvest is well underway.

Key issues:

- Dryland yields from 1.25 to four tonnes per hectare.

- Stripe rust was a significant issue in some crops. Some spraying was done.
  - Mice damaged crops. Baiting was sporadic due to a limited supply of bait.
- Summer crop planting has started. Key issues

- Sunflowers were the early movers. Some mice and atrazine residue issues.
- Areas of beans (mung, navy and soy) will increase.
- Big concern over fertiliser prices with swing to legumes and alternative nutrient sources.
- Significant number of paddocks worked due to glyphosate prices and hard to control weeds such as fleabane.

Another year like the 2008 summer season is needed.

**Ian Crosthwaite**  
BGA AgriServices, Kingaroy  
November 10, 2008

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## ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

The 'impossible to guess' tractor is in fact a GO, which was produced by the General Ordnance Co of Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1920. It was a rehashed version of the National tractor, originally built by the Denning Tractor Co, which, following bankruptcy, was acquired by GO. The tractor was powered by a four cylinder 22 hp Waukesha engine. It was only produced for a couple of years, as the General Ordnance Co also went bankrupt. The first photo was taken at the Western Development Museum, North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada. The second photo (below) is of a GO owned by Sandstone Estates, South Africa.

