



DISTRICT REPORTS.....

Western region



SOUTH COAST

Seasonal conditions on the South Coast have remained damp for the previous two months. The whole district has a full profile of stored soil moisture as a result of over 300 mm of rain since October 2008. Many growers have now completed at least two summer sprays to control weeds, with some up to three applications.

The cereal green bridge has been present for some time and we are now starting to see evidence of cereal leaf

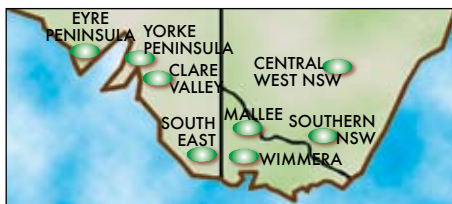
disease on volunteer cereals with barley leaf and stem rust the most obvious.

Growers are now busy getting seeding machinery ready as seeding could begin as early as mid April. All we will need is 10–20 mm of rain to wet the soil to the surface and join up with the sub-soil moisture.

The season outlook is positive with the inland Mallee areas very well set up with stored soil moisture. But those closer to the coast are a little nervous as water logging could be a very real issue with all the summer rain.

**Quenten Knight, Agronomist
Precision Agronomics Australia
March 7, 2009**

Southern region



SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The 2008–09 South Australian winter crop harvest is now finished in all districts. There are currently very limited paddock activities given the very dry conditions. There is some gypsum and lime being spread as well as small areas of clay delving and spreading.

Spraying for summer weed control was limited by the ongoing dry conditions, nevertheless summer weed populations have declined as a result of spraying, grazing and hot, dry weather. This is reducing the risk of a green bridge carrying over disease.

While most districts are reporting no significant changes to intended crop area and crop type for the coming season, a likely reduction in area sown to cereals on Western Eyre Peninsula will see total crop area for South Australia drop marginally in 2009.

A trend away from higher risk pulse and canola crops as well as more wheat than barley, is likely in some districts.

But the final crop mix will vary depending on the timing and amount of the opening rains.

The final estimate for the 2008 season was a crop area of 4.01 million hectares with total grain production of 4.93 million tonnes.

Pastures

Paddock feed remains adequate in most areas with stock numbers relatively low, however feed levels have declined over the past month.

While cereal stubbles are still providing some feed, many pasture paddocks are largely grazed out.

Surface cover levels remain satisfactory, however with ongoing dry conditions paddocks will need to be monitored to avoid overgrazing.

**Peter Fulwood
Rural Solutions SA
March 7, 2009**

VICTORIAN MALLEE

Spraying summer weeds to conserve moisture has been the main activity in the Mallee for the 2009 season. After receiving 120 mm rain for November and December, growers were juggling harvesting and summer weed spraying.

But the tide changed for 2009 and we only saw 1 mm of rain for the opening two months. March has looked more promising and we are again waiting for rain to top-up stored moisture.

As Mallee farmers prepare for the season ahead, they will take a conservative approach in an effort to maximise the return on input dollars spent. There will be fewer legumes and again very little canola in the rotation.

There is also a trend toward some low input hay paddocks to spread the risk.

Many growers are soil testing to fine-tune phosphorus and nitrogen inputs.

But there is some optimism about the return on capital in the Mallee. Some recent auctions have seen cropping land sell from \$550 to just over \$700 per acre (\$1360–1730 per hectare).

**Simon Severin
Landmark Berriwilllock
March 11, 2009**

ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

The tractor is a British Wallis, manufactured in Lincoln, England by Ruston and Hornsby between the years of 1920–1929. The English firm held a licensing arrangement with The Wallis Tractor Co. of America, which was owned by the J. L. Case Plow Works of Racine, Wisconsin. The tractor pictured is owned by B. W. Lyon of Temuka, New Zealand.



EASTERN MURRAY VALLEY

Little or no rainfall has fallen across the region for the calendar year to date – again breaking more records. But this is one that doesn't matter too much for the moment. Although some subsoil moisture would be nice, we'd settle for a planting rain of say 40 to 50 mm in April.

Soil testing and cropping program planning are now in full swing. Colwell P levels from the soil tests going through our company are averaging over 60 mg per kg. Lower P fertiliser rates – coupled with recent MAP/DAP price reductions – are giving some welcome respite.

Cereal areas will be way up this coming season. Canola area will be down about 10 per cent making up 10 to 15 per cent of total cropped area. Pulses will be less than five per cent and barley planting intentions look to be fairly stable at 10 per cent of cropped area.

With a decent planting rain we may have the largest wheat area the region has ever seen.

Large numbers of paddocks will get their third or fourth wheat crop in a row. Early Predicta-B test indications are showing most root diseases at low levels. Rhizoctonia is the exception in a few paddocks. While we don't expect high levels of our key root diseases across the region this year, 2010 will still be a challenge.

Pre-emergent chemicals used will be the proven performers such as trifluralin and chlorsulfuron. Glyphosate prices – now less than 50 per cent of what they were mid last year – are also very welcome. Let's hope we get to use it.

Greater areas of cereal on cereal rotations will also see a further increase in at-sowing fungicides such as flutriafol.

Corey Uebergang
I.K. Caldwell, Corowa
March 10, 2009

MURRAY VALLEY
RICE REPORT

There is a small area of rice in the Murray Valley this season as no surface (that is river or channel) water was allocated to irrigators in time for plantings. Current allocations are at nine per cent, which is useful to bore pumpers for augmenting their ground water supplies, but not sufficient to produce crops in its own right.

As previously reported, the season got off to a slow start due to below average temperatures in November and December. This turned around dramatically in



The six NSW DPI rice field days held recently were a great success attracting around 150 farmers from the Griffith, Yanco, Coleambally, Finley, Deniliquin and Barham districts. (PHOTO: John Lacy)

January and early February when mean temperatures were substantially above the long term average. Maximum temperature at Deniliquin was a very uncomfortable 46.6°C on Black Saturday – though thankfully we were spared the fires that our Victorian neighbours suffered on that day.

These warmer temperatures increased nitrogen mineralisation and promoted strong crop growth. By the end of the first week in February, crops were mostly looking very good. The late growth spurt may lead to pre-harvest crop lodging in aerially sown crops.

There were fears that these extreme temperatures would cause high levels of sterility due to pollen desiccation, but this does not appear to have occurred. Australian rice varieties are probably the best in the world at tolerating heat at flowering.

The high evaporative demand in January and early February placed a strain on water supply. Bore delivery rates were well and truly tested, and most crops ended the period with minimal water depth.

Weed control has mostly been quite good. The main pest issue has been a general infestation of army worms in crops in the Deniliquin area.

The Murray Valley Rice Field Days were held in the first week of March. These attracted very good attendance, even though most growers have not had a crop for the past three seasons.

It showed the commitment that growers have to their industry. Many are looking forward to the time they can grow their next crop – hopefully it is not too far away.

John Fowler
District Agronomist, Deniliquin
March 12, 2009

Northern region



DARLING DOWNS

Overview

The early summer grain crops are mostly harvested and yields have been at or above expectations on the Eastern and Central Downs, even though the second half of the season was drier than hoped.

Harvest weather has been good and it's back to storage problems again. The Western Downs has lacked rainfall leading to lower average yields of dryland crops.

Sorghum

Most varieties have performed strongly with good yields, despite a general reduction in planting population this season. Growers decided to reduce populations to prepare for poorer rainfall, and where rainfall was good, the crop's have compensated and performed well.

Yields have generally been between five and eight tonnes per hectare but there have been paddocks yielding up to 10 tonnes. The in-crop rainfall differences have accounted for most of the yield variation, along with attention to midge control and nutrition. Some varieties have taken longer to dry down, so some growers have opted to harvest first and dry later.

On the Western Downs rainfall was much more limiting and yields have been between 3.5 to 5.0 tonnes per hectare, which was all that could be expected.

Cotton

The dryland crops are being defoliated now and have a good yield potential, especially where there was better rainfall. Three to seven bales per hectare is expected with no particular quality issues.

Irrigated crops are approaching defoliation and yield potential is again dependent on the amount of water applied, but above average yields of eight to 12 bales per hectare are expected where full irrigation was available.

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**Maize**

Grain crops have yielded well above expectations, despite a difficult finish, with dryland crops up to 7.5 tonnes per hectare and irrigated crops up to and over 10 tonnes. Late crops filling through the dry part of the season have been relying on subsoil moisture, and the cobs at this stage look better than would be expected.

Pulses

There has been a significant increase in the area sown to mungbeans (mainly dryland) and soybeans (mostly irrigated) this summer – and the crops look good.

Mung beans are starting to be desiccated after reasonable pressure from mirids, heliothis, loopers and GVB (green vege bugs) and from powdery mildew. But with proper monitoring from accredited agronomists most growers have crops with good potential.

Of interest will be comparing the yields between the new variety Crystal and the widely grown Emerald.

Soybeans have grown thick and tall this summer, with the new varieties released this season looking good. Insect pressure has been steady with possibly GVBs being the main threat. These crops are at the pod fill stage now.

Sunflowers

Yields of the spring planted crops were good but the summer planting has struggled with lack of rainfall and head size is smaller as they start to dry down.

Water melons

This crop deserves a mention this summer. Grown mainly in the Chinchilla region, strong prices and very good yields have made this a very rewarding summer for melon growers.

Hugh Reardon-Smith
Agronomist Landmark, Pittsworth
March 10, 2009

SOUTH BURNETT

Overall, the district has good potential. Scattered storms through the growing season have covered most of the area, even though the rain has been received at different times.

Runoff rain has been very patchy and in some areas, stock water is being carted in.

The area to the north of Kingaroy needs significant rain immediately to realise its potential. One peanut grower in the drier end said: "If we do not get good rain now we will be harvesting peanuts in two to three weeks with a yield of about two tonnes per hectare. But if we get good rain out of this change we will harvest about double that in four to five weeks."

Some early sorghum has been taken off with yields up four to six tonnes per hectare. Heliothis have been sprayed in quite a few crops. Natural NPV, although present, was slow to take off this year.

A small inflow into Bjelke-Petersen Dam has not raised allocations.

Key issues

- High insect pressure in beans – mirids, loopers, soybean moth and heliothis;
- Peanut prices are apparently going to fall significantly;
- Peanut leaf diseases – leafspot and rust – have been sprayed; and,
- Growers are very concerned regarding grain prices and the ability to sell the crop and receive payment quickly.

It looks like cyclone Hamish has passed us by without leaving any decent rain behind. We'll keep looking expectantly at the fronts moving in from the west.

Ian Crosthwaite
BGA AgriServices, Kingaroy
March 10, 2008

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Storage upgrade

Modern Engineering and Construction (Kotzur silos) have recently successfully completed an upgrade to an existing grain storage facility for Cargill's at their Jindalee feedlot near Temora, NSW. MEC was commissioned to demolish the two existing 500 tonne flat bottom grain storage silos and replace them with two new 596 tonne elevated conical silos incorporating a new in-feed and reclaim conveyor system.

The task seems simple enough, however the feedlot was operational and only one of the existing silos could be removed at a time. Manager of Engineering and Projects David Packer said that the task was made more difficult due to the additional height of the new conical silos versus the shorter existing flat bottom silos.

The solution was to incorporate two new over-silo drag chain conveyors. The drag chain conveyors and associated access walkways were supported off the silos.

"Despite the site process challenges the project was completed successfully and on time. As a testament to the quality of work provided, MEC has been invited to quote on additional work," David said. ■



Original facility at Temora.



Upgraded facility with over-silo drag chain conveyors.