

**DISTRICT
REPORTS**

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MASSEY FERGUSON

Challenger

<49...SOUTH AUSTRALIA

cleaning of barley to increase quality – alternatively a lot was warehoused in the hope of better prices.

Frosts around October 7 damaged flowering barley and vetch in the Keith area.

Lower South East

Crop yields were variable and generally below average but crops in southern areas of the district around Millicent were about average.

Barley yields ranged from 2.0 to 2.5 tonnes per hectare, with variable grain quality.

Canola yields ranged from 1.0 to 1.5 tonnes per hectare, with many crops looking better than what they actually yielded.

Faba bean yields ranged from 1.2 to 1.6 tonnes.

While some winter wheat was cut for hay for specific markets such as the dairy industry, relatively few cereal crops were cut for hay.

There was some sprouted/shot grain – including split canola where windrows were rained on – but the effect on grain quality from the mid December rain was limited.

PIRSA Rural Solutions contributors

Victoria

Wimmera

I signed off last year's report with the comment that 'it is a good time to be in agriculture' – and despite the global financial crisis and some trying weather conditions, this is generally still the case.

The Victorian Wimmera endured another year of below average rainfall in 2008 but many farmers were able to bin a substantially better harvest than the previous year.

The key to (moderate) success in 2008 was to sow crops early. Those crops sown before mid May yielded reasonable cereal yields while those sown later were not harvested or were cut for hay.

Hay was again a successful option for Wimmera growers provided the decision to cut crops was made early while reasonable dry matter quantity was able to be harvested. Vetch hay was also a good option as the dry finish took its toll on pulses sown for grain. Pulse crops such as lentils and faba beans are becoming a rarity in the Wimmera as the drier seasons persist.

Canola too is difficult to find in most rotations north of Horsham. It will need a good early break to the season with ample stored soil moisture to encourage growers back to these crops.

As a consequence of tighter cereal rotations, we are seeing increased incidence of cereal root diseases such as crown rot. This will need to be addressed by improved rotations or new crops which can offer a break from the continual use of cereals. The use of a winter fallow occasionally could also be useful to provide the break and build up moisture reserves.

Property sales in the district have been substantial compared to other years. Several significant sales have been made at prices reportedly at or above market expectations. With rocketing land prices in the Western District, many growers there are looking to the Wimmera and southern Mallee to expand their operations at affordable prices in the vicinity of \$2500 per hectare.

Looking forward to 2009 there is cautious optimism as we see lower commodity prices being balanced out by lower fertiliser, chemical and fuel costs. The hope of a return to more favourable rainfall was given recently when a season forecaster suggested we are coming out of the dry part of a 60 year cycle. Accordingly we can expect to see rainfall above average more often than below average as we go forward.

So I will leave this report with the same optimism as last year. When we hear the news each morning of company collapses and share market plunges and so on – 'it is still a good time to be in agriculture'.

Mike Laidlaw

Harberger Farm Supplies, Donald

Victorian Mallee

Overview

It is difficult to be general when reviewing the 2008–09 harvest. There was great variability in yields ranging from zero to 3.0 tonnes per hectare. Mostly, crops would have averaged 0.5 to 1.0 tonne per hectare. While we totalled 310 mm of rain for the year, our wettest months were January, November and December, equating to more than half the year's rainfall.

Growing season rainfall was only 128 mm. That is 100 mm below average GSR. Lack of rain in the growing season and spring has again had the undesired effect on crop yields.

The success of last season depends on who you talk to, but in terms of production it was poor and those with lighter soil types and red rising loams got the most out of another dry season.

There was less hay cut than in the previous season.

Cereals

Realistically, it would be generous to say that wheat and barley averaged 1.0 tonne to the hectare. A far cry from the 2.5 tonnes planned for at the beginning of the season – close to the long term district average. A spring drought meant crops which had potential withered away to amount to very little.

Canola

Canola crops were equally as poor as the cereals last year and very few crops made the great journey through the feeder house of a hungry header. There will be very little canola sown in 2009 as a result – a dry start, and higher input costs – will not encourage many to have another go.

Legumes

Harvested legumes yielded between 0.2 and 0.4 tonnes per hectare. Any lentils harvested would have been worth in excess of \$1000 per tonne and made the exercise worthwhile. In order to reduce risk, this year there will be a reduction in all legumes other than vetch. This provides options depending on the season's progress, such as grazing, hay, green manure, or grain. While many have been optimistic about the ascochyta resistant chickpea variety Genesis 090, there has been little opportunity to bulk up seed in the previous two years.

Summary

The past two years have forced a conservative approach to cropping in the Mallee with fertiliser rates being reduced.

This is also due to rising fertiliser prices. Sheep have also been utilised as a substitute income.

On a positive note, there have been some recent land sales bringing \$1300 to \$1700 per hectare for rising red loams.

The 2008–09 harvest was interrupted with 120 mm of rain falling in November and December. There was a necessity to control the subsequent emergence of summer weeds and the stored moisture will contribute to a hopefully better 2009 harvest.

*Simon Severin
Landmark – an AWB Company, Berrillilock*

New South Wales

Overview of the 2008–09 winter crop

Spring conditions in 2008 were extremely favourable in northern NSW for finishing winter crops resulting in the best yields for many years. But yields in the west of the centre and south of the state were poor as a result of very dry spring conditions in those areas.

There was also variable damage to cereals and canola across most central and southern districts from a frost on October 23. Yield losses ranged from less than 20 per cent to more than 80 per cent in affected crops.

NSW WINTER CROP PRODUCTION		
	2008–09 (kt)	2007–08 (kt)
Wheat	6452	1805
Barley	1244	702
Oats	329	77
Triticale	292	93
Canola	235	42
Chickpea	324	224
Faba bean	46	9
Field pea	46	8
Lupin	56	28

The north

Yields for the 1.38 million hectares of winter crops were generally above average with well-timed spring rains and below average temperatures assisting grain-fill.

Yields varied depending on sowing time, planting

moisture and growing season rainfall. Rain at harvest in the Liverpool Plains and the north east interrupted proceedings but the rain also consolidated prospects for early sown summer crops and enabled the remainder of the summer crop to be planted.

The centre

Poor seasonal conditions in the west reduced grain yields and produced variable quality. Yields and quality did improve in the eastern areas. The estimated 1.65 million hectares of winter crop produced roughly average yields. Quality down-grading was common in many western districts.

The south

An estimated 1.42 million hectares of winter crop was harvested. Conditions in the south east were similar to the central region. But western and far south west regions produced very low yields.

Moisture stress during September resulted in high screenings in cereals and lower oil contents in canola.

Summer crop

Grain sorghum production for 2008–09 is forecast at 708,600 tonnes from an estimated 156,000 hectares – an average of 4.5 tonnes per hectare. In the previous season 841,800 tonnes were harvested from 181,400 hectares (an average of 4.6 tonnes).

Harvest of the estimated 280,000 hectares of summer crop (excluding rice) in NSW progressed well with many northern districts having experienced good summer growing conditions.

NSW SUMMER CROP PRODUCTION		
	2008–09 (kt)	2007–08 (kt)
Grain sorghum	709	842
Maize	113	139
Mungbean	4	7
Soybean	56	14
Sunflower	19	35

Winter crop prospects 2009–2010

Preliminary estimates are for the sowing of 5.0 million hectares of winter crops in NSW in 2009, comprising 4.35 million hectares of winter cereals and 650,000 hectares of pulses and oilseeds.

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