



DISTRICT REPORTS

Western region



NORTH

So far, so good. The rain that was forecast in my last report did arrive with a good opening rain over 95 per cent of the region with most areas getting 20–35 mm around June 22. We have had reasonable to good rains since this with most of the region with 60 mm and the exceptional areas at around 110 mm in the past four weeks.

Seeding is complete and crops are growing away rapidly. Dry sown crops have boomed. The odd paddock that had very heavy opening rain has poor crop emergence due to furrow fill and 'crusting' where the soil above the seed has dried and hardened. These paddocks are in the minority and less than 0.5 per cent of dry sown crop area has been reseeded.

Weed control in dry sown crops ranges from spectacularly good to none at all and the latter crops are now playing catch up with post emergent sprays.

Mice are a problem in some sand soil paddocks where cereal harvest losses were high in 2008. Most of these paddocks have been sown to canola and lupins and patchy damage has occurred.

Baiting to avoid damage later in the season is underway.

Wheat

There are very good stands of wheat all over the landscape. Dry sown crops are tillering and the latest sown are just emerging. Post emergent weed control is in full swing.

There are leaf spot diseases in crops sown into wheat stubble and early fungicide is going out over these.

Nitrogen top ups are going on franti-

cally as well with most crops looking to have good potential – with even as little as another 125 mm for the season.

Canola

Crops are generally two to four leaf. Dry sown crops without pre sowing atrazine emerged very weedy while pre treated crops have been very clean. Post emergent spraying is underway and I expect crops to be tidied up by mid-July.

Lupins

Most were dry sown and are now eight to 12 leaf. They are generally very clean and look good. Some lighter sand soil paddocks had furrow fill problems and have low stand density.

Barley

Crops look good but some early sown crops are quite weedy and are being sprayed at the moment. Barley scald and net blotch can be found in most crops and fungicides will need to be added to most boom spray passes.

At this point the season is looking good but we need 50 to 100 mm in July and no prolonged dry spells to achieve an above average yield result. There is again significant rainfall forecast as I sign off. I just hope there is plenty of rain for all who need it.

Peter Norris
Agronomy For Profit, Geraldton
June 23, 2009

SOUTH COAST

Seasonal conditions on the South Coast have changed dramatically over the past two months, May was very dry with only small rainfall events of five mm or less. During this time many growers continued sowing into dry or minimal soil moisture with the hope that the furrow would harvest enough rainfall to get the crops up and running.

Fortunately the start of June saw the arrival of some very good cold fronts with a strong south westerly push behind them. This resulted in the whole region receiving 12–25 mm or rain – the remainder of June has also been very favorable with weekly falls of 12–25 mm.

For most of the region the soil profile

is now full, with the surface moisture now well and truly joined up with the sub soil moisture from the 250–300 mm of summer rainfall.

Most growers have now completed seeding and crops have established very well – although two weeks later than average. There appear to be very few major agronomic problems to date. Weed pressure is a little higher than normal in some of the dry sown crops, otherwise the appearance of barley leaf rust in some early May sown barley is the only concern.

Growers are now applying post emergent sprays to the early sown crops where rainfall was sufficient to get them going. Otherwise, seeding gear is being cleaned down before going back into sheds, July looks like being a very busy month for post emergent spraying and nitrogen top ups.

Quenten Knight, Agronomist
Precision Agronomics Australia
June 22, 2009

SOUTH EAST CENTRAL

Small April and May rainfall events have caused delayed sowing in this region with some seeding rigs still rolling as I write this report. Weedy and pasture paddocks have caused the most trouble as there has been no grass weed germination before sowing and 300lb break out tyne seeders have struggled in heavy soils.

Surprisingly, dry sown crops, pre May 21 are relatively clean from grass weeds as most were sown into clean wheat, canola or lupin stubbles. The earliest of these cereal crops are three leaf while the lupins are four leaf and canola is cotyledon to the two leaf stage.

The majority of insects are not causing damage except lucerne fleas on heavier soil types.

Plantings have gone close to original seeding plans. Canola hectares are slightly lower than 2008. Growers in this region still see this crop as a profitable break crop mainly due to the yield potential of shorter season varieties. Barley plantings are down five to 10 per cent

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due to commodity prices. With a small malt/feed spread, malt plantings are 90 per cent of total barley hectares.

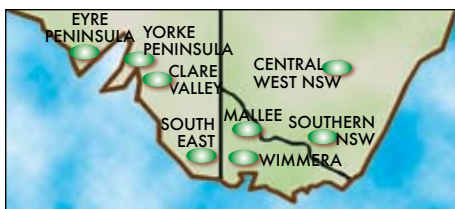
Wheat is still the staple crop with minor hectares shifting to pasture because stock feed levels are very low.

The month ahead will hopefully hold significant precipitation events to turn 2009 into a profitable season. Yield predictions will be the talk of town as the decision of nitrogen top-ups are made.

Post emergent grass sprays in barley and wheat crops will be the first job on the hit list.

Brad Smoker
Synergy Consulting, Kulin
June 21, 2009

Southern region



VICTORIAN MALLEE

Season 2009 has opened with a positive outlook, with an early break on Anzac Day and some good follow up rains across most districts. This saw crops sown on good moisture, after January and February recorded no rain. Sowing was steady and a majority of the crop was sown by the first week of June. This was followed up with 43 mm of rain which fell during the first 10 days of June.

It was a pleasant change to be able to control some early problem weeds after the break.

Not much canola has been sown, but what has is now cabbaged up after some early threat from vegetable weevils. Growers have been spreading sulfate of ammonia on canola and some cereals.

There has been some brome grass, wild oats and ryegrass sprayed out of cereals and legumes, but not to the magnitude of the problem in previous dry starts. Broadleaf weed spraying in cereals is underway. Some wheat crops are quite clean due to carryover of residual herbicides being used in the summer.

November and December were wet months, each receiving in excess of 50 mm, so summer weeds were prevalent.

Good growing conditions have meant that knockdowns and pre-emergent sprays

have worked effectively. Resistant ryegrass has been targeted hard with Boxer Gold which delivered successful results.

Insect numbers in crops have not been as high as in dry years, but there have been some cases of lucerne flea and sitona weevils in vetch and lucerne.

Malting barley varieties have been top dressed with urea, liquid nitrogen or sulfate of ammonia. More of this will happen in wheat ahead of rain forecasts in the near future as fertiliser rates were trimmed back this year.

Provided this happens and the spring delivers, there is every opportunity for a good catch up year.

Simon Severin
Landmark Berrilllock
June 23, 2009

EASTERN MURRAY VALLEY

Crop and moisture conditions are good. It feels pretty good to say that after a three and a half year wait.

Most districts received a general rain on Anzac Day – the unofficial start up day of the cropping season. May then stayed dry with some districts recording no rain. But western parts of the region received the tail of a big rain event that landed over Western and Central Victoria at the end of May. A dry May allowed the crop to go in, in near record time and now good rains through June have set the early part up the season up well.

Most districts have recorded 40–80 mm through June in two or three rain events. The wet, showery period from June 1 to 9 was much talked about, being the first ‘normal wintery’ period in recent memory.

Stock are now on the early sown grazing cereals. With the exception of some later sown canola which didn’t germinate until the early June rain event, canola is four to six leaf and in the process of post emergent weed control.

Cropped area is continuing to change with the conservative option of wheat becoming more predominant after the past three years. Wheat is now making up 75–80 per cent of the cropped area at the expense of everything else. Canola would be around 10 per cent and a mix of barley and pulses the remainder.

Roundup Ready canola – or to a greater degree hybrid canolas – are increasing in area at the expense of Triazine tolerant canola.

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 change is bryobia mite which is continuing to show a year on year increase in numbers based on the increase in stubbles and retention of crop residues.

Also weevils such as Sitona and Mandalotus appear to be more prevalent.

In-crop deep soil nitrogen testing is now in full swing with early results showing enough potential for approximately 2.0–2.5 tonnes per hectare cereal crops. We’ll need these favourable conditions to continue well into August before most people target yields above this with applied nitrogen. Based on the disappointing springs of the previous three years, one grower during the week said to me: “I’ll do a deep N, target 80 per cent of the yield I think we’ll achieve and when its time to apply urea I’ll give it another week.”

Corey Uebergang
I.K.Caldwell Corowa
June 23, 2009

GRIFFITH RICE REPORT

After good rains towards the end of April, winter crops sown on that rain began to struggle after a relatively dry May. Up until the end of May only 63 mm of rain had been recorded in Griffith for the year, compared to a long term average for the same period of 172 mm.

Good soaking general falls between 30 to 40 mm early to mid June, provided much needed relief to struggling crops in and around Griffith. It came at the right time, freshening up crops already sown and also enabling the last bit of winter crop to go in.

Rain received early June more than doubled the rain Griffith had received for the entire autumn period and had been the best rain growers had received in around 18 months.

Rain for June to date is 57 mm, with 120 mm of rain to date for the year (compared to a long term average of 199 mm to date for the year).

With winter crops now progressing well, growers need to monitor crops for pest and disease. After such a promising start follow up rain and conditions in the spring will be the key for success.

Rachael Whitworth
Extension Agronomist
NSW DPI, Griffith
June 22, 2009

CENTRAL WEST

Greetings from the tropics of the Central West – it is wet, wet, wet here, a common call in the northern part of the Central West. In the southern and eastern parts of the region, the rain gods have not been as kind but things are a lot rosier than a couple of months ago. After the excellent Easter rainfall, no rain was received till May 19.

Many farmers had to stop sowing due to the disappearing moisture. This was certainly the case where disc machines were in use and the associated issues of being able to chase moisture at depth.

Others were burning lots of diesel and using all their horsepower to sow down to China – the chickpeas have loved this and have, on the whole, come up very well.

Since the end of May, finding paddocks dry enough to sow has been a challenge with over 100 mm received in the space of a month – it has been the old ‘ducks swimming on paddocks’ scenario! There are still a few paddocks to be sown, with some being left out till next year due to the lateness in the season.

Some of the early crops were taken out by locusts and mice damage has also been reported. These areas were small and luckily early enough to allow re-sowing.

But with all good things there has to be a flip side (not that we are allowed to say anything negative about the aforementioned rain gods!). A small amount of re-sowing will have to be undertaken due to water-logging and seed burst.

There are a lot of yellow crops out there due to de-nitrification and disease. The diseases include yellow leaf spot and blotches in barley. Most chickpea growers have been vigilant in getting their first fungicide on and so far (fingers crossed), there have been no Ascochyta reports.

The early sown crops look fantastic, some are very advanced – this is a worry and a consequence of the lack of frosts and mild weather we have experienced. Many hectares have been top-dressed as farmers are buoyed by the luxury of a full profile of moisture.

Weeds are thick – especially grass weeds and spraying is being hampered by the conditions. Some earth mites, oat mites and cutworm have been sighted, but many of the crops have been big enough to handle the mite pressure.

**Penny Heuston
Heuston Agronomy Services
June 30, 2009**

Northern region



DARLING DOWNS

Overview

This has been one of the best starts to a winter season for many years with a good soaking planting rainfall in mid to late May allowing the longer season varieties of wheat to take up more of the planting mix.

Winter crop

Most of the planned winter crop has now been planted with wheat the dominant crop and an increased area of chickpeas over last season.

The most advanced crops are the oats

and forage wheats and barleys, and these have suffered some leaf damage from the severe frosts that came through in the second week of June.

These frosts also cleaned up remnant summer weeds, especially volunteer sorghum, and even damaged winter weeds such as sowthistle.

The earliest chickpeas have already had their second preventative fungicide spray, but most crops are still emerging, with seed availability issues meaning a wide range of varieties have been planted. West of Dalby mice are proving a major problem digging up the seed and young plants with many crops needing control.

Wheat and barley sown after the recent rain is emerging now and establishment depends very much on the planting conditions. Most crops are looking good, but a few crops planted too wet are struggling to establish at this early stage.

There have been a few reports of early leaf disease, mainly the net form of net

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blotch in early barley. Many growers chose to buy dressed seed or apply a seed dressing to protect against early stripe rust this winter and most crops appear to be free of disease so far.

But agronomists are concerned and are keeping a close eye on crops as they progress and a few cereal crops west of Dalby have received a fungicide application.

Summer crop

The later sown crops are still waiting to be harvested, mainly corn and some sorghum, but most growers have been happy with their results this summer. Crops that did not look particularly heavy have yielded above expectations.

Hugh Reardon-Smith
Agronomist Landmark, Pittsworth
June 23, 2009

CENTRAL QUEENSLAND

The Central Highlands experienced variable but generally good rainfall in April but were dry in May whereas the Dawson and Callide Valleys were generally dry in April but wetter in May. Except for light rain (20–35 mm) across the southern highlands (Springsure to Rollleston) central Queensland grain growing

areas received little effective rain during June.

The April rain where it did fall was extremely valuable in finishing the sorghum crop following good rainfall during summer (December 2008 to February 2009). This created record sorghum yields for some farmers and better than average for most farmers throughout Central Queensland. Paddock yields of three tonnes per hectare are common and four to five tonnes per hectare in better paddocks, which is a good result for CQ. One farmer at Dysart harvested six tonnes per hectare (540 tonnes from 90 hectares), which is exceptional for dryland cropping in CQ.

About 400,000 tonnes of sorghum will be produced this season.

Most of the sorghum south of Emerald was planted earlier and nearly all of this was harvested by the end of April with few problems. But the crop north of Emerald was planted later and has been very slow to dry to moistures levels low enough to harvest. I estimate there is still about 30 per cent of the sorghum area north of Emerald still to be harvested.

Extended periods of cloud during the growing season is less than ideal growing conditions for cotton, but despite this, cotton farmers in both Emerald and the Dawson/Callide Valleys grew average yield (more than 8.5 bales per hectare) and most of this achieved at least average quality.

Currently the Fairbairn Dam at Emerald is at 87 per cent capacity or 1.138 million ML. Most river storages on the Central Highlands and the Dawson River are near full. High levels in water storages suggest a big cotton plant for next season of 20,000 hectares (16,000 hectares at Emerald and 4000 hectares in the Dawson/Callide).

The half dozen farms in CQ that grow peanuts have finished harvesting with yields averaging about five tonnes per hectare. A number of diseases (old and new) were present in crops this year.

Three farms grew and harvested rice in Emerald this year and delivered rice to Lismore. Yields were not high but a lot was learned including the need to select better adapted varieties for Emerald conditions. Some who grew rice this year have said they will do so next year as will some new growers but one grower said 'once was enough'.

The big rains in summer that built full soil water profiles, gave promise of a large area of winter crop this year. But since then the rain has been below aver-

age and patchy resulting in less than the usual area planted to wheat and chickpeas.

Without significant rain some crops will fail or perhaps be called 'cover crops' rather than 'grain crops'. Much of the chickpeas were 'deep planted' to get into moisture.

About 35,000 to 40,000 hectares of chickpeas have been planted and about 200,000 hectares of wheat but good rain would have seen much more. The area planted to irrigated winter crop is not large but a higher than normal percentage is planted to chickpeas.

Maurie Conway
Principal Technical Officer
QPIF, Emerald
June 25, 2009

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