



# DISTRICT REPORTS

## Western region



### NORTH

Harvest is completed in the north and most CBH receival points have closed. Crop yields have finished up around average on most farms.

Damp conditions did delay the harvest by a few days and there was a small amount of wheat downgraded due to rain damage.

The Geraldton Port Zone receivals to January 18 stand at 2.445 million tonnes. This is made up of (in tonnes):

- Wheat 2,009,000;
- Lupins 248,000;
- Barley 94,500;
- Canola 92,000; and,
- Other grains making up the balance.

The overall total is close to the in-season forecasts of production.

(Source: Bruce Heritage CBH Geraldton).

Average yields, with low grain prices and very high crop costs mean that 2009 will go down as a low or no profit year on most farms.

There has been virtually no post harvest rain so most growers have started holidays and there is not much on-farm activity.

Budgeting and planning the 2010 program is the next job on most farms.

There are only a couple of strips in the region that have had summer rain and most of these have been sprayed for weeds.

Hopefully things can stay dry into March to keep our 2010 costs down.

I hope 2010 rainfall can get close to the long term Geraldton average rainfall which would give us a bumper grain season. We then only need the Aussie dollar

and grain prices in the right place and we have every chance of 2010 returns being in the black.

**Peter Norris**  
**Agronomy For Profit and**  
**Synergy Consulting, Geraldton**  
**January 18, 2010**

### SOUTH COAST

Seasonal conditions on the South Coast remain hot and dry. Not a lot of activity has taken place since the end of harvest – most growers are still enjoying a well earned break.

The odd paddock is getting sprayed for summer weeds, seed grain is getting graded and treated and plans are starting to be put in place for the 2010 season.

If the region does not get any of the traditional summer rains we normally experience, most growers will continue to have a relatively quiet summer – which is a nice change.

**Quenten Knight, Agronomist**  
**Precision Agronomics Australia**  
**January 15, 2010**

### SOUTH EAST CENTRAL

Relaxing, fishing, swimming and sleeping are on the South East Central region job list for this month. Some harvesters finished before Christmas while the tail completed reaping early in the new year.

With lower than average grain prices, most hope they will not see another 2009 for at least two decades.

All grain yields were below average in this region. The cause of lower canola yields was probably due to a low canopy growth in the early growing months.

Barley yields weren't too bad but barley quality had a large impact on gross margin.

Wheat crops seemed to really suffer with the hot dry September, October weather. At first sight a wheat crop looked to be high yielding, but as the yield monitors showed there, was 'no one home'.

Screenings in some cultivars were the main issue causing many seed cleaners and the blending of grain from differ-

ent paddocks to be used so the wheat could achieve Australian Premium White grades.

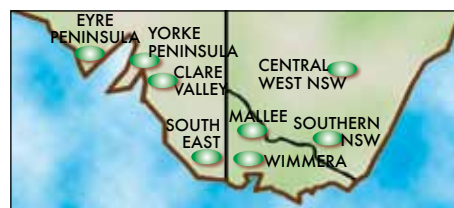
The only paddock activity at the moment is summer spraying for Afghan melons, paddy melons, calthrop and flaxleaf fleabane. Decile 6 rainfall for November and December has caused some summer weed pressure but with low glyphosate prices, the decision to spray or not to spray is very easy.

A different priority this year will be to keep the chaff windrows free of weeds. Many growers in this region chose to windrow behind the harvester to collect any in-crop weed seeds. If green weed growth occurs within these windrows there is a large reduction in the burning temperature.

This allows the chaff to burn and leave the weed seeds untouched because the fire is not hot enough.

**Brad Smoker**  
**Synergy Consulting, Kulin**  
**January 8, 2010**

## Southern region



### SOUTH AUSTRALIA

#### Temperature and rainfall

Conditions were hot to very hot during the first three weeks of November with mean daily maximum temperatures 4–6°C above average, followed by near average temperatures for the remainder of November and December.

An infeed of tropical moisture with associated thunderstorm activity in late November resulted in widespread rainfall with scattered, lighter falls in December.

November rainfall varied from average to well above average with totals in excess of 100 mm in parts of the Upper North, while December rainfall was below average to near average with to-

tals in agricultural districts generally less than 25 mm.

**Previous seasons**

The 2008 season saw a patchy start, quite good winter rains but an exceptionally dry spring, resulting in below average yields and variable grain quality.

Season 2007 was similarly variable with below average production following the severe state-wide drought of 2006.

**Seasonal conditions in 2009**

Seeding was completed during May–June following opening falls in late April. Good rains during July and warmer temperatures in August resulted in rapid crop growth. Warm, dry weather in early September slowed growth, however good falls and mild temperatures from mid September to late October provided near ideal conditions for grain development.

Heatwave conditions in November followed by widespread rain impacted significantly on later maturing crops. Harvest was largely completed by the end of December with mostly average to above average yields and variable quality.

**Crops**

Unseasonably high temperatures in the first half of November prematurely dried out grain in later maturing districts reducing both yield and quality.

Widespread rainfall in late November together with further falls during December interrupted harvesting and caused some weather damage to crops, with reports of sprouting, low protein levels and low test weights, as well as staining and mottling in a number of cereal and pulse crops.

Frost damage in combination with the extreme heat in November caused significant yield losses in a few areas.

Overall harvest is estimated to be approximately 90 per cent finished.

Crop yields have been highly variable across the state ranging from exceptional on much of Western Eyre Peninsula to significantly below average in parts of the Northern Mallee.

Some farmers have commenced summer weed spraying.

Total crop area for 2009 is estimated to be 4.02 million hectares, with crop production now estimated to be 7.70 million tonnes having dropped by about five per cent mainly as a result of the heatwave conditions.

**Pastures**

There is sufficient paddock feed currently on offer for stock with stubbles

and green pick available, although there has been some deterioration in dry feed quality as a result of the rain.

Lucerne and other perennial pastures have responded to the rain and are providing feed in some areas.

Hay yields have been generally good, although quality has been downgraded in some cases as a result of the variable weather conditions.

**Peter Fulwood  
Rural Solutions SA  
January 14, 2010**

**WIMMERA**

For the first time in many years, Wimmera grain growers have finished a season with above average rainfall. The season started slowly with a dry autumn giving way to reasonable opening rains in April and May. Good follow-up rain in the winter lifted the hopes for all as we pondered how we could cope with all the grain to be harvested in the summer of 2009.

As with most other years, nature dealt a cruel blow with extreme temperatures during a mid September weekend followed by even hotter conditions as crops tried to fill in October and November.

The result has not been seen before by growers who have been around a lot longer than I. The heat stopped crops from maturing as normal resulting in barley crops almost dying before our eyes.

Harvest was upon us around two weeks early as a result. Early crops showed grain with high screenings, low protein, low retention, and many combinations of all three. In an area which normally grows about 50 per cent of its barley to a malting grade, we were again looking at a feed crop.

This was the pattern which has continued even as the harvest approached the coast in the trusty Western District.

Coupled with internationally low prices for feed barley, the gross margins for most barley paddocks are looking miserable when aligned with the historically good yields. So near yet so far again!

**Wheat the best gross margin**

Wheat yields were not record breaking, but quality has held up despite torrential rain throughout harvest. Wheat will be the highest gross margin in the district this year in a turnaround from seasons such as 2007 when wheat crops simply ran out of moisture.

Pulses have been a failure again and many growers and agronomists are wondering just how to fit them into the rota-

tion profitably.

Some of the bright lights from 2009 include the use of imidacloprid as a seed dressing. Growers at a field day at Marano were amazed to see the difference in aphid populations between treated and untreated barley. It is sure to be widely used by growers in 2010 after huge cereal aphid infestations in 2009.

Aphids were also blamed for the devastating viruses in chickpeas and lentils during the spring. A seed dressing for these crops would also be worthy of consideration in 2010.

The substantial summer rain has interrupted harvest and caused summer weeds to proliferate. Growers have managed the situation well thanks to lower glyphosate prices and most are now under control.

This extra moisture opens up the potential for a resurgence of canola into the rotation. Continued use of close cereal rotations is increasing cereal leaf and root diseases in the district. Canola has proven to be an excellent break crop and needs to be in a sustainable cropping rotation.

Despite the hardships of 2009, most growers can smile knowing that at least they have some tonnage of grain to market throughout the year – a feeling that has eluded us for the past four years.

**Mike Laidlaw  
Harberger Farm Supplies, Donald  
January 7, 2010**

**EASTERN MURRAY VALLEY**

Recent activity has focussed on summer weed spraying. Regular rain events through November and December resulted in 40–100 mm across the region.

The winter crop harvest was again a disappointing one. As mentioned in my previous report, most areas had growing season rainfalls in the Decile 2–4 range, but frosts and unseasonably hot October/November temperatures – with very little October rain – resulted in yields 20 to 50 per cent below expectations.

Earlier maturing crops such as canola were the better performers yielding 0.75–2.0 tonnes per hectare. Cereals that would normally yield twice that of canola, were only in the range of 1.0 to 2.5 tonnes per hectare. Only an occasional wheat crop yielded beyond 3.0 tonnes per hectare.

But grain quality held up well. Wheat consistently achieved H1 quality with screenings within acceptable ranges.

...46▷

<45...DISTRICT REPORTS

Grain quality across the region would normally be APW – or in a dry finish – H1 protein levels with high screenings.

Oil levels of canola also exceeded expectations. The majority of grain recorded 40–45 per cent oil with only the late sown or later emerging crops in the 36–40 per cent range.

**Corey Uebergang**  
**I.K.Caldwell Corowa**  
**January 11, 2010**

**MURRAY VALLEY  
RICE REPORT**

Rice crops are looking as good as you could hope for at present – something for which both growers and the wider agricultural community are thankful. Even though the majority of ‘growers’ do not have a crop again this season, there are sufficient small crops scattered around to remind us that we are a rice growing district.

Most crops were sown later than desirable due to the timing of water allocation announcements. The hot conditions in November helped them make up some of that time with crops getting from sowing to tillering very quickly. But there are still many crops that had not reached panicle initiation (PI) by the end of the first week of January.

These crops will not reach pollen microspore until early February – they therefore face a higher probability of encountering cold night temperatures at this critical growth stage. But most growers I have spoken to are confident their crops will get through relatively unscathed.

There has been a good uptake of the nitrogen tissue testing service offered by SunRice. It has been several years

since many growers faced mid season top dressing decisions and they are keen to get any objective assistance they can.

Most crops are looking good, but are showing a likely economic response to the application of additional nitrogen at PI.

The downside to the hot weather is the high crop water use it causes. To date, crop evapo-transpiration is running about 32 per cent above average. This has forced some growers to enter the temporary water market to ensure finishing the crop. While water prices are high, they have mostly been able to secure their needs for around \$200 per megalitre.

The availability of temporary water has also been a great asset to growers producing crops with bore water. They have been able to augment flow rates with channel water – something particularly helpful in the high water use period between PI and microspore. It will also enable them to keep salt levels low during the crops’ critical reproductive growth stage.

**Mid-season dry-down**

Mid-season dry-down of crops is also continuing to be a feature of rice production in the Murray Valley. Several growers have tried it for the first time this season on part of their crop area. If it provides them with any yield benefits then it will become even more widespread in future years.

The practice is more common in the western Murray Valley where physiological straight-head (or parrot beaking) is more common. It does cause some anxiety with growers who have never tried it before, especially if the crop turns white! But it quickly recovers once water is reintroduced.

Unfortunately, we do not know why the practice is giving some growers a

yield increase.

Army worms have been common in some areas, but are not causing a problem as yet. Most growers will re-evaluate population densities once the crops head out. Hopefully, control will not be warranted.

**John Fowler**  
**District Agronomist, Deniliquin**  
**January 12, 2010**

**Northern region**



**DARLING DOWNS**

**Overview**

The very tough conditions from the spring have continued into the summer with only storm rain falling and falling in narrow bands and being very patchy. This has allowed only paddock planting rather than full farm planting.

**Summer crop**

The area of summer crop able to be planted is about 50 per cent of the anticipated area on the Eastern and Central Downs, which is one of the smallest plantings in recent years. On the Western Downs there was better rain over the Christmas/New Year period, and a 70 per cent plant is expected, with the majority of the crop planted in January.

The spring and early summer plantings of sorghum produced a gappy establishment, which has been an advantage with



Above are two photos of rice that has been deliberately dried-off in December – I make reference to the practice in my report. The photo on the left is the day water is reintroduced to the rice on December 17 after 12 days without water (drained on December 5). Notice how stressed the rice is, especially in the middle of the bay. The photo on the right is of the same area on January 7, 2010 – three weeks after rewatering the bay. (PHOTOS: John Fowler, Deniliquin)

the long wait for rain. The storm rain has not infiltrated into the profile well and there has been precious little soaking rain, so many paddocks have not received even moisture, producing parts wet enough to plant but parts with the dry band still evident.

Sorghum is still being planted into January, but this will soon halt because of frost fears. The early sown crops are starting to ripen, having had only minor heliothis pressure, whilst crops flowering now are coming under midge pressure.

The early sown corn has grown well after needing an irrigation flush to emerge properly and there have been ongoing plantings through late December and into January. Mungbeans are also attractive with stronger prices and planting will take place during the first three weeks of January. A larger than usual mungbean plant is possible.

The cotton has been a little slow to grow this summer but is now at the flowering to early boll fill stage. Pest pressure has been light although mirids are increasing at the time of this report.

Overall this is a very difficult summer season. The yield potential of the early crop is varied, but probably average at best, and the late crop is yet to emerge. We could see the best potential yields coming from the Chinchilla district, with their better rainfall.

#### Winter expectations

As farmers put a halt to summer crop planting, there will be an increased focus on the winter season and we expect an increase in the wheat, barley, oats and chickpea plantings across the Central and Eastern Downs this autumn.

**Hugh Reardon-Smith**  
Agronomist, Landmark Pittsworth  
January 7, 2010

### SOUTH BURNETT

#### Key issues

- Patchy rain since mid December.
- Fewer peanuts and more corn planted.
- Weeds have exploded since the rain.

The five and a half months of dry conditions to the north of Kingaroy was the longest that many old timers could remember. Prior to the more general storm rains in mid December the last good rain was at the end of June. Some areas did not receive any significant rain until the last week of December.

Patchy storms at the end of October and early November have allowed planting to start on a very small part of the South Burnett. Storms continued to fill

in the gaps during December and early January. The season so far has been characterised by very small localised heavy storms. One paddock may have 50 mm and 500 metres away, there will be only five.

There are still some isolated areas too dry to plant. But follow-up rain will be needed very soon for much of the area. Total rains are 75 to 200 mm. Some of the smaller rainfall totals have been made up of many small falls with the largest falls of only 20 mm.

As soon as the weather turns hot these areas will be looking for rain. On the other hand some areas have been too wet and are only just drying out.

The peanut area is down from usual due to the lateness of the rain. Much of the area designated for peanuts has been sown to corn. Shorter season peanut varieties such as Walter have been preferred due to the lateness of the plant. The area planted to soybeans has increased.

Fallow and in-crop weeds have been high priority activities.

Hope the encouraging rains continue.

**Ian Crosthwaite**  
BGA AgriServices, Kingaroy  
January 11, 2010

### CENTRAL QUEENSLAND

Central Queensland has received very welcomed, steady, soaking rain, but the falls have been very patchy across districts – even across farms.

This rain is a good start but we need more and then some. The TV news showing reports of big rain and flooding in Central Queensland is showing western Central Queensland – places like Muttaburra, Aramac, Barcaldine, Longreach and Blackall. Big rain in those areas at this time of the year has the potential to set up the extensive Mitchell grass plains for a number of years.

Across the Central Highlands and the Dawson and Callide Valleys the long, hot, dry continued right up to Christmas Day. The rain that did fall during December 2009 was very patchy and mostly ineffective because it followed a string of dry months, the soil profile was dry and it was HOT, HOT, HOT.

Most districts recorded below or well below average rainfall for December 2009. Falls ranged from 50–80 mm on the Central Highlands and 60–100 mm in the Dawson and Callide Valleys.

Since Christmas most areas have received 50–100 mm, enough to grow weeds but even properties under the heavier falls report that there is still very limited sub-soil moisture to plant sorghum.

Some properties have received almost no rain while others have received over 400 mm. A report from Bauhinia Downs demonstrates just how variable the rain has been with 360 mm falling on one property between Christmas and New

...48▷



A farmer's favourite job – emptying the rain gauge. David Brimblecombe, 'Dalkeith' Capella received enough rain (75 mm) to grow weeds but needs more rain before he can plant sorghum.

<47...DISTRICT REPORTS

Year while a near neighbour, less than 20 km away, had 15 mm.

Accompanying the rain since New Year has been an extended period of cloud and almost no sun. I can almost hear the weeds growing. While most paddocks still only have 30–45 cm of wet soil, when it does fine up, spraying weeds will be the first priority and then selecting the wettest paddocks to plant some sorghum will be the next priority.

Feather top Rhodes grass on Brigalow soils and sweet summer grass on Downs soils are still the major weeds in cropping areas in CQ.

A big summer crop for Central Queensland would be 250,000 hectares of sorghum, 20,000 of mungbeans and 6000 of sunflower but this season the area planted to sorghum is unlikely to match the 170,000 hectares planted in

the 2008–09 season. Little stored soil water this far into the summer is a poor start for the 2010 sorghum crop. The area planted to sorghum in CQ will be further reduced without widespread falls soon and yields will be largely dependent on in-crop rainfall.

Already some forward thinking growers are moving to secure supplies of chickpeas and wheat seed for a larger winter crop planting.

Soil test reveal generally low levels of available soil nitrogen which is to be expected given the recent extended dry period. To mineralise soil nitrogen, wetting and drying cycles are required to convert the locked-up nitrogen in the organic pool, to the plant available mineral pool.

**Graziers get relief**

Steady rain and days of cloudy weather to reduce evaporation are ideal for growing pasture which is a God-

send for many graziers across Central Queensland suffering drought. Drought conditions across Central Queensland has forced many graziers into extensive supplementary feeding for both energy and protein with M8U, cottonseed and other supplements.

Early weaning of calves, sending cattle onto agistment or forced sales have all been practiced to cope with the widespread dry.

Numerous properties have been independently drought declared which entitles the owners to apply for freight subsidies. On some properties the drought has been exacerbated by fires, frequently started by lightning and in some cases burning out paddocks that had been spelled for grazing late in the season. Graziers who have suitable soils and machinery are likely to consider planting larger than normal areas of forage sorghum.

The area planted to forage sorghum in CQ is likely to exceed 50,000 hectares and will allow graziers to spell grass paddocks.

**Maurie Conway**  
Principal Technical Officer  
QPI&F, Emerald  
January 8, 2010

ANSWERTO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR QUIZ

The curse of early steel rear tractor wheels was – they clogged up with mud and became like 'slicks' and grew in circumference. The patented wheels used on Vickers tractors were self cleaning.

The Vickers (earlier models were known euphemistically as Vickers Aussie) were powered by a 6240 cc petrol engine equipped with water injection. The water served to reduce combustion temperatures, particularly in the area of the exhaust valves. The tractor pictured is on display at Tracmach Museum, W.A. and was part of the original Lou Whiteman Collection.

(PHOTO: IMJ)



**Barcoo**

*Enjoy a cool holiday this year, and at a great rate*

Barcoo is a superbly appointed lodge at Dinner Plain in the heart of Victoria's high country. This year round playground offers trout fishing, magnificent scenery, great restaurants, peace & quiet and other cool activities.

- 4 bedrooms (all with queen size beds)
- 3 bathrooms • Spa pool
- Sleeps up to 16
- Fully equipped with All mod cons



**GREAT VALUE FOR LARGE OR FAMILY GROUPS**

**Further details phone 1800 670 019 or  
www.dinnerplain.com**

**Advertisers' Directory**

Agridry .....	19
Allied Grain.....	29
Barcoo .....	48
Case IH.....	OBC
Charlton Tackle.....	37
Dow Agrosiences .....	N
Dinner Plain.....	25
Excel Agriculture.....	23
Flexicoil.....	Insert
Hardi .....	11
Kotzur .....	19
Landpower .....	IFC
Manutec.....	22
Monsanto.....	9
Neils Parts.....	29
Quirindi Grain & Produce.....	2
Study Tours.....	IBC
Syngenta.....	3–6, S
TACS.....	7
Ultimate Agri Products.....	15
Victorian Chemicals .....	Insert
Westfield Augers .....	N, S