



# NSW Grains Report



**Compiled 20 September 2006**

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## **HIGHLIGHTS**

- Prospects for all winter crops have deteriorated following one of the driest Augusts on record. The first three weeks of September was also dry across most cropping regions.
- Winter crop area for harvest is estimated at around 4.02 M ha. If significant rain does not occur in the next 7-10 days this area could decline to around 2.5 M ha.
- At this early stage summer crop prospects are poor with little water available for irrigation. Best prospects are in the north where some soil moisture profiles are full and some early sunflower and maize has been planted. Current planting estimates (excluding rice) are 376,000 ha.

## **SEASONAL CONDITIONS**

Rainfall in the first week of July was generally less than 10 mm across the states grain growing regions. Around 15-16<sup>th</sup> most of the state received 25-50 mm. Recordings around Forbes and Wagga through to Albury were only 10-25 mm. Some good falls were received in the third week (10-25 mm) in northern areas and the central and southern slopes. Falls on the western slopes and plains were below 10 mm. August was dry across the state with most

rainfall recordings less than 5 mm. In the first week of September 10-35 mm was recorded across most of the North West Slopes and the southern border areas and the eastern Riverina.

With the majority of the state drought declared all areas need soaking rains of 50-100 mm to maintain current crop yield potential, boost summer crop prospects and alleviate severe water shortages.

Yield prospects for all crops are generally below average in most districts. Early sown cereals, oilseeds and pulses have much better yield prospects than the crops sown after the mid-June break. Some crops were sown late July.

Currently in specific regions the outlook is:

North – Prospects for the 1.20 M ha of winter crops vary markedly. Crops around Moree, Narrabri, Inverell and on the Liverpool Plains that were sown on a full moisture profile have good yield potential. These crops also benefited from 10-35 mm rainfall around the end of the first week in September. Crops to the west of Coonamble and Walgett have low yield potential and many will be grazed out or cut for hay.



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- Centre – Conditions for the estimated 1.38 M ha are extremely poor across much of the central region with some western areas looking at total crop failure. Soil moisture is non-existent with crops surviving on showers during early September. Grazing or spraying out failing crops will be common as there is not enough dry matter to consider cutting for hay. Yield potential ranges from extremely poor in the west to below average in the east.
- South – An estimated 1.43 M ha of winter crop has been planted in the south. No soil moisture, combined with late sowing and heavy frosts during June, July and August has reduced crop growth and yield potential. Rainfall around the 9<sup>th</sup> September (15-30 mm) around southern border areas and the eastern Riverina and South West Slopes provided a boost to struggling. Without significant rain in the next 7-10 days widespread crop failure will occur.

## WINTER CEREALS

Crops are at varying stages of development depending on sowing time. Development ranges from head emergence and flowering in early sown crops to mid to late tillering for July sown crops.

Yield prospects in most areas have decreased significantly following one of the driest Augusts on record. During September variable rainfall of 15-35 mm around 9-10<sup>th</sup> helped yield potential in some favoured districts of the North West and south. In some earlier finishing districts these rains were too late to be of significant benefit to crops. All grain growing regions need soaking rains and cooler temperatures during the next 3 weeks to maintain current yield potential. Without soaking rains the area for harvest and yield of remaining crops will drop significantly. Grain quality is also likely to be affected.

Yield potential is below average in all areas, but especially in western areas. Grazing out of crops in the west has already commenced.

With the low yield potential of many crops and the uncertainty of seasonal conditions growers

have abandoned most post-sowing nitrogen applications.

Seasonal conditions have also affected weed control. Dry sown crops were planted without pre-emergent herbicides and post-emergent herbicide applications were either delayed or neglected due to difficult spraying conditions and the uncertainty of yield potential.

Stripe rust has been reported in some northern districts during August through to mid September. Spraying with fungicide has occurred to protect the yields of susceptible varieties.

NSW harvest area '000 hectares

	2006 forecast	2005 harvest estimate
<b>Wheat</b>	2619	2558
<b>Barley</b>	631	786
<b>Oats</b>	215	246
<b>Triticale</b>	111	113
<b>Canola</b>	152	119
<b>Chick pea</b>	164	55
<b>Faba bean</b>	41	34
<b>Field pea</b>	48	40
<b>Lupin</b>	38	28

**Wheat** – District Agronomists estimate the area to be harvested at 2.62 M ha with an estimated average yield of 1.66 t/ha. The extremely dry August and lack of significant rainfall in most areas in September has reduced yield potential, especially in areas west of the Newell Highway. Both the area to be harvested and yield potential is expected to decline markedly over the next 10 days with little prospect of widespread rain. An estimated 2.56 M ha was harvested in 2005. Crown rot is expected to be exacerbated in the north by the dry finishing conditions. Stripe rust has been reported in northern crops but at lower levels than in the previous two seasons. Spraying of susceptible varieties has occurred.

**Barley** – Early sown crops are in head. An estimated 630,500 ha could be harvested producing about 1.06 M tonnes. An estimated

786,000 ha was harvested in 2005. Yield potential has declined significantly with little to no rain received in the last 6 weeks in some of the major growing regions. Leaf diseases have not been a major issue this year with the extremely dry growing conditions.

**Oats** – Yield predictions for the estimated 214,650 ha to be harvested (60% of plantings) are 1.45 t/ha. Growers have continued grazing crops past the optimum shut up date due to the lack of pasture feed during winter. Most harvested grain will be used to replenish on farm stocks. Replenishing hay and silage supplies will also be a priority for many growers. Grain prices have risen substantially in recent weeks with the poor harvest outlook.

**Triticale** – Yield potential of the 110,940 ha is below average following the poor early spring conditions in the major growing areas of the South West Slopes and eastern Riverina. Production is currently estimated at 200,457 tonnes for an average yield of 1.80 t/ha. Most of this production is likely to be stored on farm at harvest for sale to intensive livestock industries, particularly dairies.

**Cereal Rye** – Sowings of 2,540 ha are estimated to produce 3,985 tonnes. Crops have been suited by the late sowing but will need good rains to achieve current yield potential.

**Canola** – The estimated 152,090 ha canola crop has below average yield potential (1.01 t/ha) due to the very late planting, poor winter growth and subsequent late flowering in most areas. Widespread crop failure is likely to occur in the next 7-10 days without rain. Earlier sown crops in more favoured districts are at full flowering while the latest sown crops are under severe moisture stress and trying to flower. Temperatures during flowering of early sown crops have generally been favourable. Irrigated crops still have excellent yield potential (2.0 - 2.4 t/ha). Oil yields are likely to be reduced, especially in later sown crops. Insects have not been a major problem to date although heliothis, aphids and diamondback moth have been reported in recent weeks. However the

poor yield potential and possible failure of many crops makes spraying uneconomic.

## Pulses

Where crops were able to be sown on time yield potential is average to slightly below average. However, most lupins have been sown much later than desirable, resulting in poor crop growth and reduced yield potential. Field peas have been suited by the late sowing. Pulses in general require a cool moist finish to the season. Heliothis activity has been reported in northern and western crops. Crops are being monitored with some spraying required. Virus is evident in some southern field pea and faba bean crops.

**Chickpea** – About 77% of the 164,470 ha is grown in the North West areas of Walgett, Moree, Coonamble and Narrabri. Average yields are estimated at 1.37 t/ha. Warren is the major production district in the Macquarie Valley. Crops range from 30 cm high and first flower to 60 cm high with 10 pods. The later sown crops require favourable finishing conditions to achieve yield potential. Diseases have been minimal to date.

**Faba bean** – An estimated 41,160 ha, of which 35,090 ha is in the north, is expected to produce 71,941 tonnes for an average yield of 1.75 t/ha. At the same stage last season average yields were estimated at around 2.65 t/ha. The major production areas in the north are Moree, Walgett and Narrabri. About 12% of the crop (5,050 ha) is in the southern irrigation areas. Most northern crops have finished flowering and have been sprayed for heliothis.

**Field pea** – The estimated 48,090 ha is expected to produce 58,986 tonnes for an average yield of 1.23 t/ha. Field peas appear to be handling the dry conditions better than most cereal and canola crops. Southern crops are yet to flower.

**Lupin** – The estimated 37,985 ha is expected to produce 42,391 tonnes for an average yield of 1.12 t/ha. The albus crop is expected to average 1.26 t/ha from 18,255 ha, while the angustifolia crop is estimated to average 0.98

t/ha from 19,730 ha. Yield potential is low and the crop is very short due to the late sowing. This may cause some harvesting difficulties.

## SUMMER CROPS

There is limited potential for summer crop at this early stage. In some northern areas with full moisture profiles small areas of early sunflower and maize has been planted. Around Narrabri the large area of winter crop has meant less area available for summer crop. The lack of irrigation water may see missed cotton plantings translate to dryland or partially irrigated grain sorghum and mungbean production. Early estimates are for plantings of 376,000 ha (excluding rice). Last season an estimated 638,680 ha was harvested. Sorghum areas are likely to increase if substantial rain occurs.

**Grain Sorghum** –The majority of plantings will occur in the Gunnedah, Moree and Narrabri areas where sub soil moisture reserves on long fallow are full and short fallow 60-75%. Early estimates are for plantings of 195,275 ha. Substantial rain will be needed to see this area increase. Last year an estimated 857,920 tonnes was produced from an estimated 292,870 ha.

**Maize** – Area prospects of 24,970 ha are down on the estimated 38,065 ha harvested in 2005/06. An estimated 18,030 ha was harvested in 2004/05. About 72% of the crop will be planted in the north due to zero or low water allocations in the Riverina. Narrabri, Moree and Gunnedah are the major production areas in the north.

**Mungbean** – Plantings are expected to be around 10,440 ha, about 25% below the estimated 14,180 ha harvested in 2005/06.

**Soybean** – Early indications for soybean sowings of 12,900 ha are well down on the harvest estimate of 16,615 ha in 2005/06 and 16,990 ha harvested in 2004/05. At this early stage the North Coast planting estimate is 7,150 ha, about 55% of total plantings.

**Sunflowers** – Forecast sowings of 22,725 ha are well down on the estimated 79,950 ha harvested in 2005/06. About 19,600 ha were harvested in 2004/2005. About 74% of the estimated early crop of 13,800 ha has been planted. About 61% of the crop is expected to be planted early, with early sown crops now emerging.

**Cotton** – The Australian irrigated cotton crop is forecast to be around 150–170,000 ha this coming season, with about two thirds (100-110,000 ha) of this area to be grown in NSW. Little dryland cotton is planned under the current weather conditions and price outlook. With limited irrigation water available growers are looking for significant rain to allow planting to commence rather than pre-watering. Current prices at around \$400/bale are low and below break-even for many growers.

**Rice** – Prospects for rice this season are poor because of the drought and low irrigation allocations. Water inflows into the catchment dams have been at record lows from June to August. Irrigation allocation in the Murray Valley is zero with farmers using carryover water from last season to water winter crops and pastures. The situation is similar but not quite as critical in the Murrumbidgee valley which has a 24% allocation and about 10% as carryover water. Current area estimates for rice are low at 20-30,000 ha. There is still hope for a bigger area if substantial rainfall is received in the catchments before the end of October.

**Disclaimer** – These forecasts are based on knowledge and understanding at the date of compilation. Due to market and seasonal changes, users should ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and, check the currency of the information with the appropriate officer of NSW Department of Primary Industries listed in the footnote below.

The next edition of the '**NSW Grains Report**' will be issued on 27 October 2006 being an update of winter crop potential production and summer crop area prospects.