



PRIMARY  
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**PIRSA**

# Crop and Pasture Report South Australia

2014-15 CROP SEEDING INTENTIONS

MAY 2014

**PREMIUM**  
FOOD AND WINE FROM OUR  
**CLEAN**  
ENVIRONMENT



Crop and Pasture Report - South Australia

This is a bimonthly report prepared by Rural Solutions SA, for the Agribusiness and Regions Division of Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA).

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## ALL ENQUIRIES

Dave Lewis  
Agribusiness Account Manager, Grains  
Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA)  
GPO Box 1671, Adelaide SA 5001  
Telephone +61 8 8463 6696  
Email [dave.lewis@sa.gov.au](mailto:dave.lewis@sa.gov.au)

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# State Summary

## WEATHER

- Rainfall for March ranged from average to below average.
- April rainfall was average for most of Eyre Peninsula, Kangaroo Island and the South East.
- Rainfall was well above average in the Northern Agricultural Areas and the Northern Mallee, with an intense band of tropical moisture from the northwest bringing heavy rain on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> April.
- The northern part of the Upper North and parts of the Northern Mallee received their highest April rainfall on record.
- Maximum temperatures during March were average across most of the State. Parts of the Lower South East were slightly above average.
- Maximum temperatures during April were near average across the whole State.

## CROPS

- The start to the season has been excellent in most parts of the State with ideal conditions for germination and control of weeds before seeding and for mineralization of nitrogen and other nutrients.
- There is now adequate to excellent sub soil moisture across the State.
- Seeding commenced in earlier districts in early to mid-April with pasture feed and some canola sown into dry soil.
- Summer weed control occurred in most districts during March and April with many growers applying two herbicide applications.
- There has been an increase in stubble burning this season in some districts in an effort to control herbicide resistant weeds, mice and snails.
- Following the rain in mid April, growers in the earlier districts of the Northern Agricultural Areas and Mallee began seeding, with a number of growers more than 50% completed by the end of April.
- Some growers are concerned about reports of an El Nino developing later in the year and are sowing earlier than normal to reduce the impact of a potential dry spring.
- In later districts and in areas which missed mid April rains, only limited seeding had occurred by the end of April. Many growers had sown pasture feed and a number had sown canola and legumes by the end of April.
- Following widespread rains in late April, seeding will get underway in all districts across the State in early May.
- The area sown to wheat is likely to increase in a number of districts.
- The area sown to barley is likely to fall slightly.
- The area sown to canola is likely to remain relatively stable across the State although there will be increases in some districts and reductions in others.
- The area sown to beans and lentils might increase in some districts at the expense of chickpeas and field peas. The area of oaten hay is also likely to decline in some districts.
- Despite the hot summer reducing snail numbers, rains in mid February provided ideal conditions for numbers to build up in some districts and burning and baiting has been necessary to reduce numbers.
- Mice numbers are in high to plague proportions in parts of Yorke Peninsula and the Lower and Mid North, and growers have baited before and after sowing to reduce damage. In most other districts numbers are relatively low.

- Grazed stubble paddocks have significantly lower mice numbers.

## PASTURES

- Pasture availability in the Northern Agricultural Areas and Mallee is excellent.
- Pasture feed reserves on Kangaroo Island, Fleurieu Peninsula and the South East are limited, with supplementary feeding required.
- Livestock are generally in good to excellent condition across the State.

## KEY LINKS TO OTHER INFORMATION

Department for Environment, Water and Natural Resources - Soil and Land Condition monitoring:  
[www.environment.sa.gov.au/Knowledge\\_Bank/Science\\_research/Monitoring\\_evaluation\\_analysis/Monitoring/Soil\\_and\\_land\\_condition](http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/Knowledge_Bank/Science_research/Monitoring_evaluation_analysis/Monitoring/Soil_and_land_condition)

Bureau of Meteorology - Weather and rainfall observations:  
[www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)

## NOTES ON CALCULATION OF CROP ESTIMATES

Crop estimates for the current year assume average rainfall and temperature conditions for the remainder of the growing season.

Grain estimates are for total grain production and include grain delivered for immediate sale and warehousing plus grain retained on farm for seed, feed and future sale.

Hay estimates are for total hay production and include all pasture, cereal and other crops cut for hay, both dry-land and irrigated.

The estimates are based on information provided by Rural Solutions SA District Reporters from a variety of sources and are updated throughout the season as conditions change and further information becomes available. They are intended to provide an indication of crop potential at the time the report is prepared.

The estimates are updated using ABS census data as available.

# District Reports

## Western Eyre Peninsula

### WEATHER

- Temperatures in March and April were mild to warm with isolated days above 35°C on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of March and 1<sup>st</sup> April.
- March rainfall was well below average in all districts.
- Rainfall events in excess of 10 mm on 9<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> April brought rainfall totals well above the April average.
- Subsoils on heavier-textured soils contain some stored moisture which should be available for the coming growing season.

### CROPS

- Dry conditions in March enabled growers to control weeds that germinated following February rains. Most growers achieved good weed control with two summer sprays.
- There was some germination of ryegrass after the February rains.
- Dry and mild conditions throughout March limited germination of brome and barley grass.
- Snail management was a key focus for growers in the region during March and April. Many growers have followed up summer snail management with a baiting program.
- Mice numbers have been generally low with most growers reporting that they are below threshold levels in paddocks to warrant baiting.
- There have been a number of growers who have used prickle or diamond harrow chains to break down high amounts of stubble from last year.
- Some growers in more reliable districts around Mt Cooper began dry sowing canola paddocks following rain on 9<sup>th</sup> April.
- Despite early rains, top soils were dry until the end of April when widespread rains on the 29<sup>th</sup> April, combined with some stored subsoil moisture, encouraged growers to begin sowing.
- Early indications are that the area sown to crop this season will be average, with a slightly reduced barley areas and a slight increase in wheat.
- Growers are using Clearfield cereal varieties strategically in their rotation, aiming to manage weeds prior to a break crop or pasture phase.

### PASTURES

- Stubbles continue to provide most of the paddock feed.
- Paddock feed reserves on heavier textured soils in the district are generally low.
- Many growers have dry sown oats or vetch for early feed.
- Livestock are in excellent condition.

## Lower Eyre Peninsula

### WEATHER

- Daytime temperatures in March and April were mild to warm with isolated days above 35°C on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of March and 1<sup>st</sup> of April.
- Both March and April were generally dry with no significant rainfall received until 29<sup>th</sup> April.
- Sub soils contain some stored moisture following February rains but most top soils were dry and only contain moisture in the top 2 to 3 cm following widespread rain on 29<sup>th</sup> April.

### CROPS

- Growers undertook weed control activities throughout March and April. Dry conditions during this period enabled good control of weeds germinated by February rains.
- A number of growers have sown crops on heavier soil types to provide early livestock feed.
- There seems to be a greater degree of stubble burning during this period compared to recent years. Most burning has been undertaken along header rows for control of ryegrass and other weed seeds.
- Early indications are that total crop area will be similar to last year with a slight increase in the area of legumes and a slight reduction in the area sown to barley.
- Growers have increased the use of vetch as a break crop with most growers intending on grazing or spraying off paddocks in spring rather than cutting hay or reaping grain.
- There is also increased interest in growing beans on heavier-textured soils.
- The area sown to canola is not expected to change significantly.
- Mice numbers are generally low although there are isolated properties where growers are baiting paddocks ahead of sowing canola.
- Growers have used bait to control snails in addition to chaining and rolling stubbles during summer.

### PASTURES

- Stubbles and volunteer cereals are still providing the bulk of livestock feed, Livestock are in excellent condition.

## Eastern Eyre Peninsula

### WEATHER

- Temperatures in March and April were mild to warm with isolated days above 35°C on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> March and the 1<sup>st</sup> April.
- March rainfall was well below average in all districts.
- Isolated rainfall near Kimba and Rudall on 9<sup>th</sup> April and widespread rainfall on 29<sup>th</sup> April resulted in well above average April rainfall recorded across the district.
- There is some stored soil moisture from February and late April rainfall events.

### CROPS

- In March and early April growers controlled weeds that germinated following February rains.
- Many growers have been sowing cereals or vetch to provide early sheep feed. These paddocks have responded well to mild conditions and April rainfall events.
- Early indications are that the area sown to crop this season will be around average and the area sown to cereals will not change significantly.
- The total area of pulses is not expected to change significantly.
- Some growers are considering reducing the area of peas due to poor returns and pest and disease problems, and replacing them with lupins and vetch.
- Some growers are also experimenting with small areas of lentils, chickpeas and beans.
- Limited options for break crops in rotations will mean that the area sown to canola will not be significantly different to recent years.
- There seems to have been an increase in the amount of stubbles burned this year compared to recent years, mainly to control resistant ryegrass and snails.
- Growers have followed up summer stubble rolling and churning operations by baiting ahead of rainfall events to reduce snail populations.
- Mice numbers have generally been low.
- There are isolated reports of mice numbers above threshold levels and active holes in paddocks in the Kimba-Buckleboo district.

### PASTURES

- Although rains in February reduced the feed quality of stubbles, the resulting germination of summer weeds and volunteer cereals has ensured a large amount of quality feed.
- Livestock are in excellent condition.

## Upper North

### WEATHER

- Temperatures during March and April were near average across the district.
- Rainfall was below average for March.
- April rainfall was well above average across the district with the northern part of the district receiving the highest April rainfall on record for example, Quorn received 96 mm (average 20 mm) and Wilmington 100 mm (average 29 mm).

### CROPS

- Summer weed control continued during March, following the heavy rain in February.
- A number of paddocks in the northern part of the district have been cultivated to control a range of weeds, particularly those difficult to control with herbicides.
- Some pasture feed was sown into dry soil conditions during early April.
- A tropical moisture band from the northwest brought heavy rain to all parts of the district in mid April.
- Many growers sowed vetch and cereals for pasture feed following the rain.
- Most growers in the lower rainfall parts of the district have also sown canola, peas and some wheat.
- Some growers had sown 50% or more of their intended crop area by the end of April.
- Many growers have been concerned about the reports of an El Nino developing later in the season and some are sowing earlier than normal to reduce the impact of a dry spring.
- Rain towards the end of April slowed sowing as growers waited for the soil to dry out.
- Mice numbers are higher than normal in the western part of the district with some baiting before sowing as a precaution. Numbers are relatively low in the rest of the district.
- Snail levels are relatively low with good control achieved over summer.
- Rain at the end of April will allow most growers in the lower rainfall areas to complete seeding without the need for further rain.
- The early start to the season has encouraged growers in the medium to low rainfall areas to increase the area sown to canola.
- Many growers are reducing the area sown to Scope barley due to severe wind damage experienced with this variety last year. Scope is being replaced with other feed barley varieties.
- The area sown to lupins is likely to increase and the area of beans will be similar to last years higher than normal levels.
- The area sown to wheat is likely to increase, particularly in the northern part of the district, due to the early break and high stored soil moisture levels.
- Early sown crops have emerged well with rapid early growth.

### PASTURES

- Pasture feed is excellent across the district with ample green feed following rain in mid April.
- Pasture feed sown in mid April emerged quickly and should provide good feed by early to mid May.
- Supplementary feeding of lambing ewes was required in early to mid April.

## Mid North

### WEATHER

- Temperatures were near average during March and April.
- Rainfall during March was average to below average and above average for April.

### CROPS

- April rainfall has been ideal for germinating and controlling weeds ahead of seeding and has provided ideal moisture conditions for seeding, germination of crops and application and activity of herbicides.
- The warm moist conditions have been ideal for the mineralization of nitrogen and other nutrients in the soil.
- The rain has also given growers confidence to sow crops such as canola that are more reliable with earlier sowing and good soil moisture reserves.
- In mid April many farmers had commenced sowing canola and faba beans into dry soils.
- By the end of April most canola will have been sown.
- Sowing of wheat has started and is expected to be completed in most areas by mid to late May.
- Some weeds that germinated following the February rains, particularly marshmallow and medics, were not well controlled, even though herbicide mixtures and rates were considered adequate. Weeds were green and appeared fresh but were apparently still affected by moisture stress.
- These surviving weeds will be controlled ahead of seeding using higher rates of herbicides.
- Growers reported good results where snails were baited in February.
- Mice numbers have increased to high levels in some paddocks.
- Some growers have baited for mice ahead of sowing, especially for the most vulnerable crops, such as canola. Many growers will bait just after sowing.
- Where paddocks were grazed by sheep (which removed a lot of grain on the ground) mouse numbers are much lower.

### PASTURES

- There is adequate feed available in paddocks as a result of the growth of self-sown cereals and other plants following the three rainfall events since February.
- Most pasture feed, such as cereals and vetch, has been sown into dry soil in early April.
- Livestock are in very good condition.

## Lower North

### WEATHER

- Temperatures during March and April were near average.
- Rainfall during March was average to below average.
- April rainfall varied from average in the southern part of the district to well above average in the north.

### CROPS

- There are high levels of stored soil moisture across the whole district.
- Weed control has been a priority over the last few months with most growers applying two summer sprays over their entire cropping area..
- The mix and large size of the weeds has made weed control expensive.
- Seeding is well underway in the earlier districts around Mallala with some growers' 50% completed seeding by the end of April.
- Some growers in the better rainfall areas have sown canola but most have waited for follow-up rain.
- Following the rain in late April, growers in later districts will commence sowing in early May. There is now sufficient soil moisture to complete seeding.
- The season has got off to an excellent start.
- Some more conventional croppers who have worked up are concerned it could easily get too wet. The no-till or zero-till majority should have minimal delays.
- Growers will continue intensive cropping with a slightly increased area of wheat, reduced area of barley and peas but similar area of lentils and canola.
- Mice are in high to plague proportions in the Mallala area and growers are baiting before sowing and again immediately post sowing to avoid crop damage.
- The highest mice numbers are in paddocks with full stubble retention which have not been grazed. Cultivated paddocks have the lowest mice numbers.
- The higher level of wheat in the rotation and wheat following wheat has increased the incidence of eye spot infection. Research to control the disease has commenced this season.

### PASTURES

- Medic pastures have germinated well and have grown rapidly with the mild conditions.
- The few livestock in the district are in excellent condition.

## Yorke Peninsula

### WEATHER

- Rainfall during March was average across the district.
- April rainfall varied from average on Southern Yorke Peninsula to above average on Northern Yorke Peninsula.
- Maximum temperatures were near average in March and April.

### CROPS

- There is now good subsoil moisture across the district with similar levels to those of the 2011 season.
- The majority of producers had to spray summer weeds after the widespread February rain.
- The February rainfall event germinated grain on the ground, reducing feed supplies for mice and therefore preventing mice numbers reaching plague proportions in most of the district.
- Paddock burning has been commonplace in April, mostly in an effort to reduce mice and snail numbers. Most burning is of header windrows or chaff cart heaps to reduce weed seed levels.
- Cabling, slashing and rolling were undertaken during the summer heat waves to reduce snail numbers.
- Sowing of pasture and canola started mid April in the Northern Yorke Peninsula.
- In the rest of the district only a small number of farmers started seeding in the last two weeks of April
- Seeding is expected to get into full swing across the district following the rains in late April.
- Soil mineralization driven by the February rain has increased nitrogen levels and these are already higher than the levels at the start of last season.
- Chemical residues are likely to limit crop choice this year in a few paddocks.
- The area sown to lentils will increase this season due to excellent returns in 2013. Increased lentil acreage will mainly come at the expense of chickpeas and peas
- Wheat area will increase by 5-7% due to the increased subsoil moisture. Barley area will remain steady, whilst canola will be slightly reduced due to lower than expected yields last season.
- The area of oaten hay will be down 10-15% due to low prices and problems with quality last year.
- The forecast of an El Nino developing later in the season will see farmers generally tending to be more conservative in their planning during the coming season.
- Mice numbers are high due to the amount of grain on the soil surface resulting from severe winds last year which caused head loss in barley and shaking in wheat varieties such as Mace.
- The worst affected areas have been in the central Yorke Peninsula (with up to 4,000 mice per hectare estimated in some paddocks) and Paskeville on Northern Yorke Peninsula, where producers have baited their worst paddocks at least once so far.
- Snail numbers are high due to the wet growing season in 2013, coupled with the December and February summer rains which provided excellent feeding and breeding conditions. Snail baiting was highly successful after the February rain.
- Lucerne Flea has been reported on medic on Northern Yorke Peninsula.

### PASTURES

- Pastures have established well since the February rain and recent rain should improve their growth.
- Livestock are in excellent condition although some blowfly strike has been present due to the amount of rain, humidity and follow-up warm temperatures.
- Volunteer cereals that germinated in February have given mice populations a new feed source as these plants begin to form grains and ripen.

## Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu Peninsula & Kangaroo Island

### WEATHER

- Rainfall was below average for the region until significant rainfall occurred on 29<sup>th</sup> April, with falls of up to 35 mm on Kangaroo Island and 10-15mm on Central Hills/Fleurieu.
- Temperatures have been average to slightly below for the entire region.

### CROPS

#### Central Hills/Fleurieu Peninsula

- Snails are active in some areas
- There have been limited reports of mice damage.
- Cropping programs are likely to be similar to last year with the exception of a potential increase in hay crops due to lower than average reserves on hand.
- Sales of annual ryegrass and feed oat seed have been high indicating that the growing of early feed will be a priority.
- Hard-grazed paddocks have been selected for cropping but growers are waiting on significant rainfall before commencing seeding operations.

#### Kangaroo Island

- Mice numbers are high and snails are active.
- Key paddock activities are lime spreading and burning of header residue rows.
- Cropping intentions have not changed with most growers waiting for significant rainfall before commencing operations.

### PASTURES

#### Central Hills/Fleurieu Peninsula

- Livestock are in good condition considering the dry summer.
- An early break before temperatures fall will be required to stimulate good pasture growth.
- The lack of significant rain has resulted in paddock feed reserves being depleted and a significant amount of hay and fodder has been fed out, particularly for lambing ewes.
- Summer active pastures have suffered a significant set-back because of the dry summer. Some areas might not recover after several consecutive dry summers.

#### Kangaroo Island

- Pasture availability is limited and supplementary feeding of livestock is continuing.
- Livestock condition is generally good.
- Kikuyu and other summer perennials have responded well to early summer rainfall events.
- Key paddock activities are fertiliser and lime spreading, and incorporation of clay on clayed or delved paddocks.

## Lower Murray

### WEATHER

- Rainfall was well below average in March.
- April rainfall was above to well above average with Mypolonga receiving 56mm (average 25mm) and Swan Reach receiving 88 mm (average 19mm).
- The region had average temperatures during March and April.

### CROPS

- Summer weeds were controlled throughout March and April.
- The excellent start to 2014 has resulted in most soils being full of moisture.
- There are excellent yield prospects across this region.
- There has been an excellent germination of weeds and the opportunity for control with pre-seeding applications of knockdown herbicide.
- Seeding is proceeding well, with approximately 40% sown by the end of April.
- Mice activity has been generally low at this stage.

### PASTURES

- Livestock feed has been excellent following the February and March rains, due to excellent medic germination and the germination and growth of sown cereal pastures.

## Northern Murray Mallee

### WEATHER

- The Northern Mallee has had a remarkably wet start to the year, receiving two to three times the average rainfall so far for 2014.
- March rainfall was below average.
- Rainfall in April was well above average with some areas receiving their highest April rainfall on record. Waikerie recorded 70mm (average 16mm), Loxton 58.2mm (average 16mm) and Wanbi 86 mm.
- Maximum temperatures were average for March and April.

### CROPS

- Most growers controlled summer weeds during March and April with many paddocks requiring two applications for effective control.
- This season has had an ideal start with paddocks having soils that are full of moisture after long soaking rains in February followed by good rains in mid and late April.
- Autumn rains have led to an excellent germination of grass and broadleaf weeds, allowing farmers to obtain excellent control prior to seeding.
- Approximately 30-40% of the crop has been sown, with canola, most pulses and some malt barley in the ground. Wheat will be the next crop sown.
- There has been a strong trend towards Clearfield varieties in recent years and this is expected to continue this season.
- Yield potential is very high this season, particularly on fertile soil types with few subsoil constraints.
- While mice activity is present in paddocks, farmers are not reporting this to be a significant problem at this stage.

### PASTURES

- Early rains have resulted in excellent volunteer pasture growth
- Early sown cereals for feed are keeping well ahead of livestock demand at this stage.

## Southern Murray Mallee

### WEATHER

- Rainfall in the Southern Mallee so far this year has varied from slightly above average on the south western side at Peake and Geranium, to almost double average from Karoonda to Pinnaroo in the east.
- March rainfall was average to below average across the district.
- Rainfall in April was well above average Pinnaroo 76mm (average 24mm), Lowaldie (near Karoonda) 55mm (average 24mm) and Wilkawatt 54mm.

### CROPS

- There has generally been an excellent germination of weeds, enabling good control with knockdown herbicides.
- Most farmers have been able to get two herbicide applications on paddocks with high grass numbers.
- Many farmers are saying that this has been the best opening to a season for a very long time.
- There is generally excellent surface and subsoil moisture, and good levels of mineralized nitrogen through the profiles of the heavier textured soils, particularly following pulse crops.
- The season appears to have good potential at this stage but extra fertiliser will be required to maximize yields on many soils if there are reasonable follow up rains.
- Approximately 30-40% of crops had been sown by the end of April. This comprised canola, most pulses and some malt barley and wheat.
- Farmers are generally keeping to their intended cropping plans this season and have not changed the balance between cereals and break crops.
- While there has been some mice activity at seeding time, they have not generally been considered to be at problematic levels.

### PASTURES

- There has been excellent volunteer pasture (including medic) germination and growth following the February and April rains.
- Early sown cereals for feed are outgrowing livestock consumption.

## Upper South East

### WEATHER

- Temperatures across the district were near average for March and April across the district.
- Rainfall for March was average to below average
- April rainfall was near average across the district.

### CROPS

- Stubbles are being burned to reduce stubble load control snails and slugs, and in some situations, reduce radish and ryegrass seed populations.
- Beans, canola and lupins will be sown in early May after weeds have been controlled.
- Snail numbers are no worse than normal and they are now active. Many producers have been proactive and baited over autumn with good success.
- Mice numbers are not of concern at this stage.
- Annual ryegrass resistance is a problem and many producers are including pastures and hay in their cropping rotations to reduce ryegrass populations.
- Most farmers are remaining optimistic despite the lack of rainfall to date.
- There are no planned changes to crop type or area at this stage.
- Some producers are now using nitrogen budgeting tools based on plant growth stage, soil moisture availability and rainfall forecasts.
- Most producers are aiming to get crops in as early as possible and using mid-length growing season varieties to help minimise the impacts of a shorter growing season that have been experienced in recent years.
- Producers have opted to grow more beans and less canola in response to price forecasts for these crops.
- Waterlogging prone areas are unlikely to be sown to canola following the widespread damage last season. These areas will be sown to other less susceptible crops.
- Some resellers are experiencing difficulties obtaining supplies of glyphosate herbicide.
- The rain in late April will prompt a good germination of weeds enabling applications of knockdown herbicide before sowing.

### PASTURES

- There has been a limited supply of green feed where there were isolated rain events but for the most part dry feed and dryland lucerne are in short supply.
- Pastures have been sown into dry soils.
- Livestock are being provided with significant amounts of supplementary feed.
- Ewes are now lambing.
- High incidences of Barber's Pole worm causing stock losses have been reported.

## Lower South East

### WEATHER

- Temperatures were slightly above average during March and average for April.
- Rainfall was average to above average for March and average for April.

### CROPS

- Stubbles are being burned to reduce stubble loads and control snails.
- Slugs are no worse than normal.
- Lighter-textured soils such as sands over clay have had a good germination of weeds and pasture plants, and reasonable amounts of soil moisture stored in the soil profile.
- Heavy-textured soils such as black cracking clays still have large cracks present with no or little weed germination indicating the soil profile is still relatively dry.
- Snails are no worse than normal and are being controlled through baiting and burning.
- Mice numbers are not of concern at this stage.
- Cultivation and spraying of paddocks for canola and wheat varieties of long growing season length is underway.
- Sowing will now commence in early May following the widespread rain in late April.

### PASTURES

- Crickets have been in high numbers causing damage to clover in isolated cases.
- There has been limited green pasture feed stimulated by isolated rain events.
- Some producers are providing supplementary feed to livestock.
- Some pastures, including barley for feed, were dry sown and these are already at the 3-4 leaf stage.