Issue 3 Winter Crop Performance – September 2019

Summary

Late autumn and early winter rainfall was average to above average, providing a timely opening to the season, but the record dry January to April resulted in dry subsoils in most districts. The generally good opening rains resulted in a normal crop establishment, with a return to near average crop area across the state. However, rainfall in July and August was below average across most areas. Overall, rainfall for the growing season to date has been average to below average across much of the cereal zone and below average to record low for the pastoral zones. Frequent frosts in August and early spring may have damaged crops in some districts.

The best crop prospects at this stage are on the Lower Eyre Peninsula, southern Murray Mallee, South East and Kangaroo Island districts where production is expected to be near or slightly above average. Crops and pasture on the eastern Eyre Peninsula and parts of the northern Murray Mallee are in poor condition, while in other parts, the earlier good crop potential has declined with the lack of rain, although at this stage they remain an improvement on the crops of last year in a number of these districts. Hay supplies are short, but new season hay cut will ease shortages as it becomes available from late September.

Figure 1. South Australian Rainfall Deciles 1 April to 31 August 2019
Distribution based on gridded data

Crop area and production for previous five seasons and the new crop

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area sown (ha)</td>
<td>3,899,000</td>
<td>3,821,000</td>
<td>3,894,000</td>
<td>3,565,000</td>
<td>3,572,000</td>
<td>3,844,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Production (t)</td>
<td>7,667,000</td>
<td>7,211,000</td>
<td>11,145,000</td>
<td>6,921,000</td>
<td>5,795,000</td>
<td>6,193,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farm Gate Value</td>
<td>$2.0 billion</td>
<td>$1.6 billion</td>
<td>$2.2 billion</td>
<td>$1.7 billion</td>
<td>$1.7 billion</td>
<td>$1.8 billion</td>
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Next update for release November 2019 – Early Crop Harvest

Information accurate as at 13 September 2019.
The season so far...

RAIN – Below average rainfall for July and August. The growing season to date in the cereal zone is now mostly below average with some districts being average. For the pastoral zones, rainfall has been below average to lowest on record (Figure 1).

SUBSOIL MOISTURE – Soils in most districts have dry subsoils, but early winter rains wetted seedbeds allowing crop seeding. The late winter dry conditions and good crops have largely depleted subsoil moisture in all districts except the South East.

CROP MIX – Area sown increased to near the average of 3.8 million ha, with area of wheat, barley and other cereals increasing at the expense of canola and most pulses due to the dry subsoils. Frost damaged cereal grain crops have been cut for hay instead of leaving for harvest of grain.

CROP GROWTH – Dry conditions across the state in July and August, combined with frost, slowed crop growth and hastened crops into flowering stage. Canola crops in many districts commenced flowering in August, likewise cereal crops were in head.

LIVESTOCK CONDITION AND FEED – Paddock feed levels are low in the driest areas, but some districts have good pasture bulk. Many producers have reduced stock numbers to reduce supplementary feeding and take pressure of grazing erosion-prone paddocks. Farmers have sown an increased area of pasture feed and hay. Newly frosted grain crops will be cut for hay.

Outlook for the year

SPRING RAINFALL OUTLOOK – Bureau of Meteorology season update is for higher chance of drier and hotter than average conditions into October, increasing the potential for an early start to grain harvest. The season outlook for November - December signals a higher chance of drier and hotter than average conditions, which may result in less rain interruptions to harvest.

Challenges and opportunities

PESTS AND DISEASES – Snail activity is less due to the dry conditions and baiting providing effective control to-date. Cases of foliar disease in pulses and cereals in some areas and root rots are widely reported, due to moisture stressed plants.

ADVERSE EVENTS – Strong winds continue to cause soil erosion in paddocks in districts with dry soil surface and no plant residue cover.

MARKET DRIVERS – An above average northern hemisphere grain crop harvest is contributing to increased global stocks of major grains. Grain prices have eased on last season but remain above average. Domestic demand driven by eastern State drought conditions is providing domestic price premiums for fodder and feed grains. Frost damage on flowering cereal crops may make hay cut an option over harvesting a frosted crop for grain.

REGIONAL ISSUES – Below average crop and pasture production and feed and fodder shortages for animals in some districts. Recent severe frost has damaged grain crops. While some growers have already cut crops for hay, others may follow as crop damage assessments progress.

2019-20 Crop Area Estimate Compared with Last Season and the 10-year Average (percent change).