Crop and Pasture Summary

Issue 5: Harvest – January 2020

Summary

After a record dry first five months of 2019, May to June rainfall was average to above average, providing a timely season opening, normal crop establishment and a return to an average crop area. Rainfall from middle of July through to the end of the growing season (October) was below average for most of the State. Growing season rainfall from April to October (Figure 1) was below average to well below average across the cereal zone and well below average to record low for the pastoral zones. Harvest proceeded with few rain interruptions (Figure 2). Harvest is now complete across the State, except for the lower South East, which normally finishes late January or early February. Frequent frosts in early spring has damaged crops in a number of districts.

Crop performance varied greatly across South Australia. The lack of spring rain across the State reduced crop yields although in several districts were better than last year's crops. Crops harvested better than expected in the southern Murray Mallee, parts of the Yorke Peninsula and Lower North. Lower Eyre Peninsula had significant crop losses from strong winds in December reducing grain production estimate to around 7% above the long-term average. Crops and pasture performed poorly in drought-affected areas on the eastern Eyre Peninsula parts of the Upper North and Northern Murray Mallee with yields low and some crops not harvested.

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

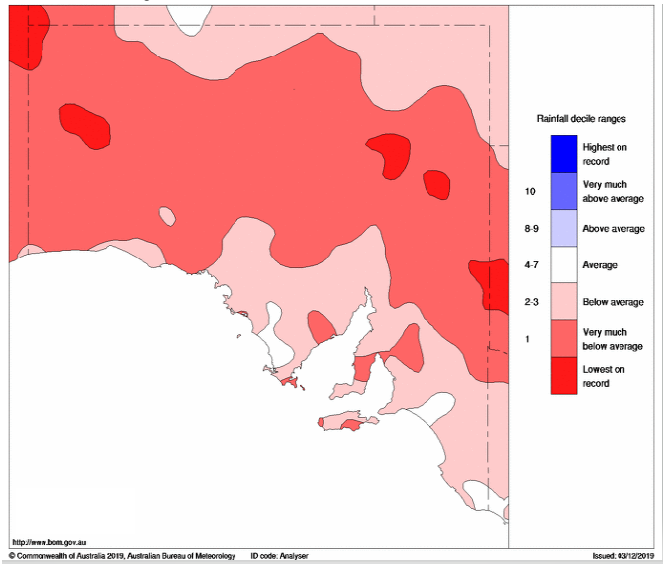
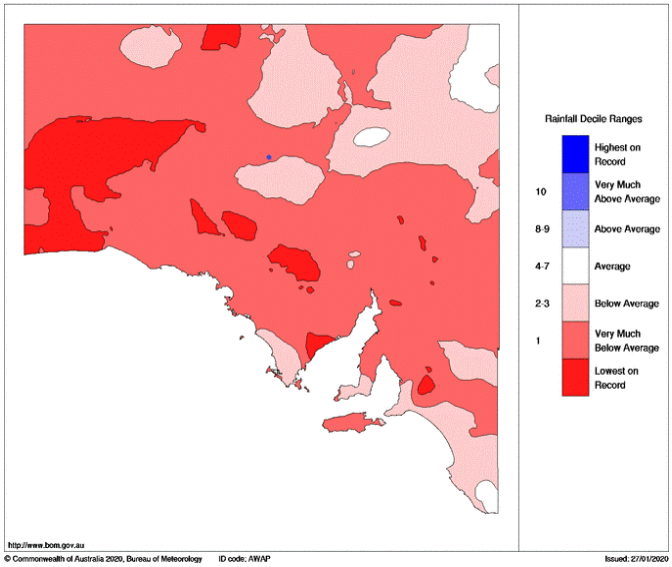


Figure 2. South Australian Rainfall Deciles 1 November to 31 December 2019
Distribution based on gridded data



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

Seasons	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2 019–20 Estimate
Area sown (ha)	3,899,000	3,821,000	3,894,000	3,565,000	3,572,000	3,853,000
Production (t)	7,667,000	7,211,000	11,145,000	6,921,000	5,795,000	6,224,000
Farm gate value	$2.0 billion	$1.6 billion	$2.2 billion	$1.7 billion	$1.7 billion	$1.8 billion

Next update for release March 2020 – Final Season Summary

Information accurate as at 7 February 2020.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Government of South Australia
Primary Industries and Regions SA

The season so far…

RAIN – Early growing season rains were important in establishing crops and setting the crop performance potential for the season. The growing season (April to October) rainfall (Figure 1) in the cereal zone was below to well below average and both pastoral zones were below average to lowest on record. Some rain in pastoral zones in November, but drought conditions returned in December.

SUBSOIL MOISTURE – While early winter rains wetted seedbeds providing good conditions for crop seeding and early crop establishment. Subsequent dry conditions and crop growth depleted soil moisture.

CROP MIX – Area sown of 3.9 million ha is a return to average crop size. Area of wheat, barley and other cereals increased 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 since the middle of July, combined with frost, high temperature days in September hastened crop ripening, allowing early completion of harvest producing 6.2 million tonnes of grain.

LIVESTOCK CONDITION AND FEED – Paddock feed levels are low in the driest areas but some districts have good pasture bulk and crop stubbles. Paddocks without plant cover are vulnerable to wind erosion. Farmers have increased area of pasture and cut more hay to replenish farm hay supplies and to capitalise on a hay market with good prices. Frosted grain crops, cut for hay added to the hay supply.

Outlook for the year

RAINFALL OUTLOOK – The Bureau of Meteorology's most recent (30 January 2020) update of the season outlook for the February to April period shows a high chance of above median daily maximum temperatures but an improved rainfall outlook compared to recent 12 months with roughly equal chances of being wetter or drier than average.

Challenges and opportunities

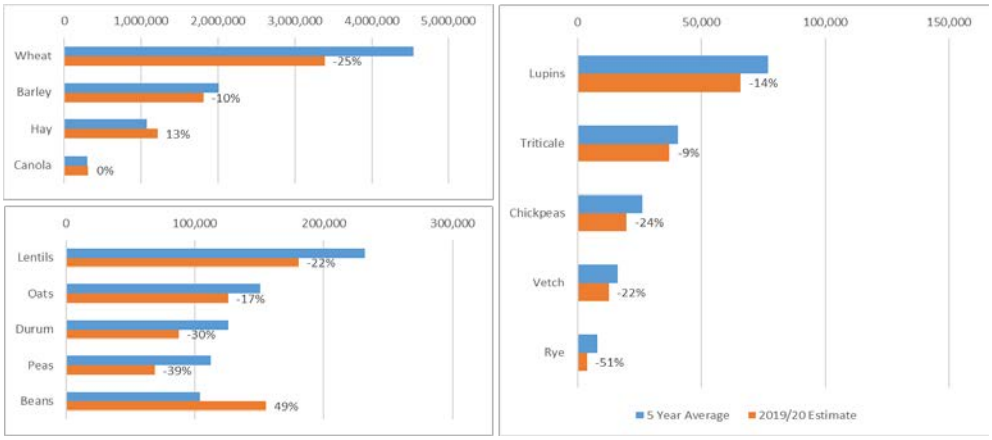
PESTS AND DISEASES – There was less snail activity due to the dry conditions and baiting provided effective control where needed. Foliar disease did not cause yield loss. Where insect pests exceeded economic thresholds, crop treatments were successful.

ADVERSE EVENTS – Strong winds continue to cause soil erosion and raised dust where soil surface is dry and has no plant residue cover, and in December a number of districts lost grain yield from strong winds, the worst affected being Lower Eyre Peninsula.

MARKET DRIVERS – An above average northern hemisphere grain crop harvest is contributing to increased global stocks of major grains, except for the Black Sea. Grain prices are slightly down on last season but remain above average with Black Sea providing some price upside potential. Domestic demand driven by eastern state drought conditions continues to provide domestic price premiums for fodder and feed grains.

REGIONAL ISSUES – Below average crop and pasture production with feed and fodder shortages for animals. Severe dust storms has caused road safety issues. Fires in several regions caused losses of farm infrastructure, more than 60,000 livestock, fodder and grain. The Yorke Peninsula fire in November destroyed 1563ha of unharvested crops. The late December fires on Kangaroo Island destroyed livestock, stubble cover and fencing but harvest was largely complete on the island with grain stored before the fires.

Figure 2. 2019-20 Crop Production Estimates (tonnes) Compared with 5-year Average (percent change).



May	July	Sept	Nov	Jan 2020	Mar 2020
				This update	**Next update**
Seeding intentions	Seeding and crop establishment	Winter crop performance	Spring crop harvest	**Harvest**	Final summary and estimates