Crop and Pasture Report - South Australia
This is a bi-monthly report prepared by Rural Solutions SA, for the Agriculture, Food and Wine Division of Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA).

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ALL ENQUIRIES

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State Summary

WEATHER

- March rainfall was average in Northern Mallee, Fleurieu Peninsula, Northern Yorke Peninsula and the western parts of the Mid and Lower North. Rainfall was below average to very much below average in all other areas.
- April rainfall was very much below average in parts of the Northern and Southern Mallee and the coastal area between Elliston and Streaky Bay, and average to below average in other agricultural districts.
- Mean maximum temperatures were above average across agricultural districts in March.
- Maximum temperatures for April were very much above average in the Upper and Lower South East and the highest on record in other agricultural districts.
- Mean minimum temperatures for March were average to above average in all districts.
- Minimum temperatures for April ranged from above average to the highest on record for Fleurieu Peninsula and parts of the Upper Eyre Peninsula.
- Several days of strong winds were recorded during this period.

CROPS

- Strong winds during the second week of April caused exposed soils to drift resulting in large dust storms across a number of districts.
- Many farmers with livestock dry-sowed vetch and cereals for feed in mid to late April.
- Some dry sowing of crops, mainly wheat, canola and pulses, commenced in late April. Most farmers have been reluctant to dry-sow canola or pulses, due to low subsoil moisture levels.
- If conditions are still dry in mid-May farmers in lower rainfall districts will reduce the area sown to canola and pulses and replace these with barley.
- Most farmers treated some of their seed with an insecticide to control Russian Wheat Aphid however as there were few host plants to carry-over aphid populations, many farmers have reduced the proportion of seed treated.
- The area sown to wheat is likely to remain similar to last year, however there will be an increased area sown to barley in most districts across the State, due to the improved price outlook.
- Although there was a planned increase in the area sown to canola, limited seed supplies, low stored soil moisture levels and limited early rainfall may affect the scale of this increase.
- There is likely to be a reduction in the area sown to field peas in a number of districts, due to the forecast low price. Peas are likely to be substituted with vetch or sown pasture for livestock feed.
- With the improved market outlook for beans and the high grazing value of bean stubbles there is only likely to be a small reduction in the area sown, compared to earlier expectations.
- Heavy overnight dews increased snail activity and baiting has provided effective control.
- Mice numbers are variable across the State, with relatively low numbers on Eyre Peninsula and the Upper North, but high numbers noted in parts of Yorke Peninsula, Mid North, the Northern and Southern Mallee, and South East.

PASTURES

- Paddock feed levels in all districts are extremely low and all producers are supplementary-feeding livestock either in paddocks or in containment areas.
Livestock are in moderate condition in most areas of the State, due to high levels of supplementary feeding.

Many farmers have sown, or intend to sow, an increased area of pasture feed and hay.

There was a partial germination of annual pastures in some areas of the State where reasonable rains fell in the third week of April. However, growth was very slow because of the lack of subsoil moisture.

KEY LINKS TO OTHER INFORMATION
Department for Environment, Water and Natural Resources - Soil and Land Condition monitoring:

Bureau of Meteorology - Weather and rainfall observations:
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 dryland 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 when available.
District Reports

Western Eyre Peninsula

WEATHER

- March and April rainfall was below average to very much below average with less than 5 mm of rain falling over this period in most parts of the region.
- Mean maximum temperatures for March were average to very much above average with all areas except the Far West Coast being the highest on record. There were a number of consecutive days above 35°C recorded in mid-March and mid to late April.
- Very strong hot north winds were recorded on April 8, 9 and 13.

CROPS

- Strong winds during the second week of April caused exposed soils to drift resulting in large dust storms across the region.
- Top soil surface layers are very dry, although many soils contain some moisture at depth.
- Hot and very dry conditions limited weed growth during March and April, which has reduced the need for knockdown herbicide applications.
- Continued dry conditions have limited early sowing on the grey calcareous soils and sands. Some paddocks on the red-brown earths around Wudinna have been sown dry with barley or vetch for pasture feed.
- Most farmers are waiting for good opening rains to sow the majority of their crops.
- Farmers are not intending to make significant changes to their cropping area unless dry conditions continue through to mid-May.
- If conditions are still dry in mid-May most farmers will reduce the area sown to canola and pulses and replace these with barley.
- Deep nitrogen testing has shown that many paddocks have high levels of soil nitrogen from mineralisation in late spring/early summer. Some farmers will reduce nitrogen applications at seeding and apply extra nitrogen at a later crop stage, depending on how the season progresses.
- Most farmers have treated some of their seed with an insecticide to control Russian Wheat Aphid, however the proportion of seed treated has been reduced due to the dry summer which has limited the number of host plants to carry-over aphid populations.
- Heavy overnight dews increased snail activity and baiting has provided effective control.
- The mice population in most areas has fallen to more normal levels because of reduced food supplies.

PASTURES

- Livestock are generally in good condition.
- Paddock feed levels are extremely low and all producers are supplementary feeding livestock either in stubbles on heavier-textured soils or in containment areas.
- There is a limited availability and quality of feed on most properties for autumn lambs and although lambing percentages have been high, there are reports of lower than average weaning percentages.
- Most farmers currently have adequate supplies of feed grain, however if dry conditions continue into May, there are some concerns that these supplies will run short.
- Many livestock producers have sown or intend to sow an increased area for pasture feed and hay to replenish supplies depleted during the last 12 months.
Lower Eyre Peninsula

WEATHER

- Rainfall was below average for March and average to below average for April.
- Mean maximum temperatures were above average for March and the highest on record for April, with several periods of consecutive days above 35°C recorded in both March and April.
- Multiple cold fronts reduced temperatures, but most brought little rain, except on April 14 where rainfalls of up to 15 mm occurred.
- Very strong, hot north winds were experienced across the region on April 8, 9 and 13.

CROPS

- Although many soils have some moisture at depth, surface layers are generally very dry.
- Summer herbicide applications and continued dry conditions have resulted in good control of summer weeds.
- Small areas of vetch and cereals were sown for feed in April.
- Farmers with large cropping programs have dry sown a small proportion of canola and pulses as well as some long-season wheat.
- Most farmers are waiting for good opening rains before sowing the majority of their crops.
- Early indications are that crop areas will be close to the long-term average.
- After poor canola growth in 2017, farmers are more cautious about sowing large areas dry. If sufficient rains are not received by mid-May, there may be a reduction in the area sown to canola and pulses.
- Mice numbers are generally low.
- Snails became more active with heavy overnight dews in late April. Farmers will bait canola and pulse crops after seeding to control numbers and reduce potential damage.
- Most farmers have applied insecticide seed treatments to the majority of their cereals to control Russian Wheat Aphid.

PASTURES

- Livestock are generally in good condition.
- Feed supplies in pasture paddocks are extremely low.
- Most farmers are supplementary feeding stock, either in stubbles on heavier soil types or in containment areas.
- Most farmers still have some supplies of feed grain on farm, however if dry conditions continue well into May there is some concern that these supplies will run out.
Eastern Eyre Peninsula

WEATHER

- Rainfalls for March and April were below average across most of the district. Little rainfall was recorded in the Kyancutta and Kimba districts and Cleve received less than half the average rainfall for this period.
- Mean maximum temperatures for March were above average and the highest on record for April. Several centres recorded their hottest April day on record on April 9 and consecutive days above 35°C were recorded from March 8 to 10 and April 9 to 11 and 19 to 22.
- Very hot, windy conditions were experienced on April 8, 9 and 13.

CROPS

- Many soils have deep subsoil moisture, but surface and subsurface layers are extremely dry.
- Summer herbicide applications and extended dry conditions have been effective in controlling summer weeds.
- Strong winds in the second week of April caused erosion on exposed soils around Lock, Darke Peak, Kielpa, Wharinda, Arno Bay and Franklin Harbour, resulting in significant dust storms.
- Farmers have sown vetch and some early cereals for livestock feed in the Kimba, Franklin Harbour and Mangalo districts. Small areas of canola and long-season wheat have also been sown by farmers with larger cropping areas around Kimba and Cleve.
- Farmers with non-wetting sands or in less reliable districts are waiting for good opening rains before beginning to sow the majority of their crops.
- Dry conditions have reduced the need for a knockdown herbicide application prior to seeding. This may result in some weedy paddocks when seeding resumes following opening rains.
- Clearfield barley varieties are providing a good early sowing option as they enable post-emergent grass weed control.
- The total cropping area is likely to be similar to last year.
- The area sown to canola has already been reduced and this is likely to be further reduced if dry conditions persist to mid-May. Most of this area will be replaced with barley.
- Mice populations are generally low across the district.
- Heavy overnight dews have increased snail activity. Baiting is providing effective control.
- Most farmers have treated most of their cereal seed with an insecticide to control Russian Wheat Aphid.

PASTURES

- Livestock are generally in good condition.
- Paddock feed supplies are extremely low. All livestock producers are supplementary feeding stock either in stubble paddocks on heavier soils or in containment areas.
- There is limited quality feed available for lactating ewes and although lambing percentages have been high, large lamb losses have resulted in low weaning percentages.
- Summer forage crops have continued to provide valuable feed, despite the dry conditions.
- Most farmers currently have feed grain on hand. However, there is concern that if dry conditions continue these supplies will run short.
- Water levels in dams in the Cleve Hills are very low and livestock producers will need to start carting water to meet demand if good rains are not received by mid-May.
Upper North

WEATHER

• March rainfall was very much below average in the north east of the district and below average in the remainder of the district. April rainfall was average in the south-western corner of the district and below average in the remainder of the district.
• Mean maximum temperatures were above average for March and the highest on record for April.
• Strong northerly winds occurred during the second week of April.

CROPS

• Soil profiles have low to moderate levels of stored subsoil moisture remaining at depth.
• Strong winds in the second week of April caused wind erosion on bare pasture paddocks and some pulse stubbles.
• Mice numbers have remained low with reduced grain and other feed in paddocks. The risk of damage to emerging crops in autumn has reduced.
• Snails have become active following light rain and heavy dews, and farmers have baited areas where there are high numbers to reduce the risk of crop damage.
• Many farmers have dry sown vetch and cereals for pasture feed, and some farmers with large cropping areas have begun dry sowing wheat, lentils and oaten hay.
• A small area of canola has been sown around Wirrabara and Melrose where some properties received 15 mm or more in mid-April.
• There is likely to be a slight reduction in the area sown to canola, particularly in the lower rainfall parts of the district.
• The area sown to barley will increase slightly and the area of wheat is likely to remain relatively stable.
• The area of peas has been reduced, due to a combination of disease (bacterial blight) and the forecast low price, with most being replaced by vetch. Sowing of peas in the lower rainfall areas has been delayed due to a high risk of black spot.
• Despite a fall in prices, the area sown to lentils and chickpeas is likely to increase slightly as farmers become more confident in growing these crops.

PASTURES

• All farmers are supplementary-feeding livestock with hay and grain to maintain body condition.
• A partial germination of pastures and sown feed has occurred in some areas of the district that received 10 to 15 mm in the third week of April, but growth has been slow.
• Many farmers have increased their livestock numbers and have sown or plan to sow an increased area of vetch and cereals for pasture feed, due to low feed reserves and good livestock returns.
Mid North

WEATHER

- Rainfall for March was average in the north of the district and below average in the south of the district. April rainfall varied from average to below average across the district.
- Mean maximum temperatures were above average for March and the highest on record for April.
- Strong winds were recorded on numerous occasions during this period.

CROPS

- Stored soil moisture levels are relatively low with only minimal soil moisture at depth.
- Strong winds caused soil movement in paddocks with poor soil cover, particularly pulse stubbles and heavily grazed pastures.
- Some stubble burning has been undertaken to control weeds and reduce feed for mice.
- Mice are still at higher levels than normal in some areas and farmers will bait before sowing or immediately after sowing.
- Some farmers have commenced dry sowing canola and beans but most are waiting for good opening rains before sowing.
- There were intentions to increase the area sown to canola, but this will be reduced if good opening rains are not received before mid-May. Low levels of stored soil moisture and later sowing will significantly reduce canola yield potential.
- Canola is likely to be replaced by lentils or barley.
- The area sown to wheat is likely to remain relatively stable while there is likely to be a moderate increase in the area of barley.
- The area of chickpeas is likely to be similar to last year, despite the price reduction. Growers are becoming more confident in managing disease levels in chickpeas.
- The area of beans is likely to be only slightly reduced due to the improved market outlook and high livestock feed value of the stubbles.
- The area of oaten hay is likely to be maintained at current levels.
- There is likely to be a reduction in the area sown to field peas due to the poor price outlook.

PASTURES

- The amount of pasture feed is low across the district and farmers are supplementary feeding livestock in paddocks or in confinement areas.
- Farmers have begun dry sowing pastures, mainly vetch and cereals, to provide additional feed for livestock.
- There has been a germination of pasture in some areas of the district where sufficient rain has been received but growth is slow. Further significant rain will be required to increase pasture growth.
Lower North

WEATHER

- March rainfall was average in the western part of the district and below average in the eastern part of the district. Rainfall for April was below average in the west of the district and average in the east of the district.
- Mean maximum temperatures were above average for March and the highest on record for April.
- Strong winds were recorded on numerous days throughout this period.

CROPS

- The soil surface is very dry and there is minimal stored subsoil moisture at depth.
- Farmers with large cropping areas began dry seeding in mid-April, with most only starting in late April. A few farmers sowed canola but most sowed long-season wheat varieties and oats for hay.
- Mice numbers have fallen as food supplies in paddocks have run out. In areas with high mice numbers farmers have grazed livestock, cultivated soil or baited. Farmers will bait immediately after sowing where mice are present.
- Snail levels across the district remain low, particularly where the Pinery fire burnt.
- The area sown to wheat is likely to remain stable with a slight increase in the area of barley.
- The area sown to beans and lentils will fall slightly and chickpeas are likely to increase.
- The area sown to canola is likely to be fall and be replaced by barley.
- The area sown to field peas will be reduced slightly, due to forecast low prices.
- Oaten, wheaten and pasture hay from previous seasons has been sold and hay producers are optimistic of good sales in 2018. The area sown to hay is likely to be maintained at last year’s levels.

PASTURES

- Pasture feed levels are very low, and all farmers are supplementary feeding livestock with hay and grain.
- Rain in the third week of April in some areas germinated annual pastures but growth has been very slow.
- Livestock numbers throughout the district are likely to remain relatively stable.
- Stored hay from the last few years has been sold and prices have risen in late March and April as supplies have dropped.
Yorke Peninsula

WEATHER

- Rainfall for March was below average in Southern and Central Yorke Peninsula and average in Northern Yorke Peninsula. April rainfall was below average across most of the district.
- Mean maximum temperatures were above average for March and the highest on record for April.
- Mean minimum temperatures have been above average for January and February.

CROPS

- Stored soil moisture is exceptionally low with soil moisture probes indicating 0-30% moisture available in the top 1m of soil, depending on crop rotation and soil type. Most soil moisture is below 40cm on lentil crop stubbles on the sandy loam soils.
- Some farmers with large cropping areas have begun dry sowing but the majority only started at the end of April and early May. A few farmers have dry sown pastures for livestock feed.
- Due to the low risk of cropping on Yorke Peninsula, farmers are unlikely to make significant changes to their crop rotations until mid-May. If conditions remain dry past mid-May, they may begin replacing canola and lentil crops with barley.
- Mice numbers have increased throughout summer and early autumn but with less feed available have begun to decline in recent weeks. Some farmers have started baiting before seeding but most plan to apply it immediately after seeding.
- In the past two months, snail baiting has been delayed due to the drier weather and mice eating snail bait before the snails can reach it.
- With the dry autumn there is a low risk of early Russian Wheat Aphid infestation.
- The wheat area will remain similar to that of last year, but the area sown to barley is likely to increase significantly, and lentils will be reduced, due to the poorer price outlook.
- The area of chickpeas planned to be sown initially had increased but this was tempered by the anticipated reduced demand following changes to India’s tariff policy. The area sown is still likely to be higher than last year.
- There had also been a planned increase in the area to be sown to canola but with minimal stored subsoil moisture and a later than ideal break, the area might be reduced and replaced with barley.
- Oaten hay area will increase slightly as it is a ryegrass control option, but the area sown is still likely to be significantly lower than 2016.

PASTURES

- There is little, if any, quality paddock feed, with no significant germination of medic or broadleaf weeds.
- Some paddocks have been grazed to well below 40% ground cover level. Strong winds in mid-April resulted in raised dust in these areas.
- Livestock are in below average to average condition. Farmers have been feeding hay and grain to supplement what little stubble is remaining.
- Sheep grazing has removed some grain from the ground that would have provided food for mice.
- Livestock numbers have increased slightly. Current stockowners are increasing their pasture area as better gross margins are predicted for sheep, than for lentils and other break crops. It has been cost-prohibitive for farmers without stock to purchase stock at the current high sheep prices.
Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu Peninsula & Kangaroo Island

WEATHER

- Rainfall for March was average on Fleurieu Peninsular to very much below average on eastern Kangaroo Island. April rainfall was below average across most of the district.
- Mean maximum temperatures were above average to very much above average for March and the highest on record for April.

CROPS

Central Hills/Fleurieu

- Lack of significant rainfall combined with the warm weather has resulted in very low levels of stored subsoil moisture.
- The area sown to lentils and chickpeas will be reduced due to the forecast lower prices and will be mostly replaced by barley.
- Small areas of canola and pulse crops have been sown.

Kangaroo Island

- Dry warm conditions have reduced soil moisture levels.
- Most farmers have not made changes to their intended crop area, but this may change if conditions remain dry into late May.
- A few farmers have started dry sowing canola crops.

PASTURES

Central Hills/Fleurieu

- Pasture feed and soil cover levels are low to very low.
- Pasture germination and growth is variable; some areas received 30-50mm rain in April.
- An increased area will be sown to hay or pastures cut for hay to replenish depleted reserves.
- Livestock are in reasonable condition, mainly due to significant feeding of hay and grain.
- Good livestock returns have offset lower crop returns for mixed-enterprise farmers.

Kangaroo Island

- Pasture feed quality and quantity is very low and soil cover is minimal.
- There has been variable pasture germination and growth following late April rains. Warm weather at the end of the month caused plants on lighter soils to wilt and die.
- An increased area will be sown to hay or pastures cut for hay to replenish depleted reserves.
- Most livestock are in good condition as a result of significant supplementary feeding.
Lower Murray

WEATHER

- Rainfall was below average for March and below average to very much below average for April.
- Mean maximum temperatures were above average for March and the highest on record for April.
- Several dry weather systems have brought warm and windy days throughout March and in mid-April.

CROPS

- Soil tests are generally indicating low nitrogen and phosphorous levels following several years of good grain yields and low soil nitrogen mineralisation over summer.
- Subsoil moisture levels are low in most paddocks, although there is still some moisture at depth in paddocks sown to hay or pulse crops last year.
- Seeding started later than the previous few years, however by the end of April many farmers had begun dry sowing vetch and cereals for feed and hay.
- At this stage farmers are reluctant to change their planned crop areas. If dry conditions persist into May then cropping programs may change.
- A reduction in the area sown to lentils and field peas is expected in favour of vetch and more feed crops.
- Mice are still highly active in small areas across the district, depending on paddock management practices, however many farmers reported a reduction in mouse activity by the end of April.
- Mouse baiting is being done before and after sowing of paddocks.
- Snail control by farmers has been minimal and snails were reported dying in the last month due to the dry weather.
- Wind erosion has been significant across the district, particularly in over-grazed pasture paddocks or pulse stubbles.

PASTURES

- A large amount of supplementary feeding has been taking place as farmers look to maintain sheep numbers where possible.
- Livestock are generally in good condition for this time of year to the detriment of ground cover as stubble and pasture paddocks that are becoming overgrazed and are now very prone to erosion.
- Paddock feed is very low with a large feed deficit anticipated if rain is not received in early to mid-May to germinate pastures and sown feed.
Northern Murray Mallee

WEATHER

- Rainfall was average to below average for March and below average to very much below average for April, with some centres recording their lowest April rainfall on record.

- Mean maximum temperatures were above average for March and the highest on record for April. Mean minimum temperatures were average for March and above to very much above average for April.

- Strong winds were recorded on several days during this period.

CROPS

- Farmers have commenced dry sowing of mainly vetch or sown cereal for pastures to ensure rapid germination and growth following the next rainfall event.

- Most farmers still consider there is sufficient time to get their crops sown on time, despite the very dry start to the season.

- Farmers on the better soil types are more likely to continue dry sowing of their cereal crops, while farmers with a higher proportion of shallow stony soil are more likely to wait until opening rains occur.

- While cropping intentions remain similar to last season, there might be a reduction in the area sown to pulse and canola crops if the opening rains to the season are delayed past mid-May.

- The lack of summer rains has not enabled storage of subsoil moisture, so this year's crops will rely on growing season rainfall.

- Mice numbers are only slightly higher than normal across the district with some exceptions. Where mice numbers are still high, farmers are baiting.

- There has been increased wind erosion, particularly on sandy soils with poor soil cover following pulse crops or heavy grazing. Farmers have leveled some areas of paddocks where erosion has been severe.

PASTURES

- Paddock feed and growth is extremely limited, with insufficient rain to germinate pastures.

- Livestock are being maintained in good condition through extensive feeding of hay and grain.

- Currently livestock are generally being fed in paddocks, but confinement feeding may be required if the break to the season is further delayed.

- Despite the high cost of supplementary feeding, livestock producers are still very optimistic of good returns due to the excellent prices being received.
Southern Murray Mallee

WEATHER

- March rainfall varied from average in the west of the district to very much below average in the south west of the district. Rainfall during April was below average to very much below average.
- Mean maximum temperatures were above average in March and the highest on record for April.
- Strong winds were recorded on several days in mid-April.

CROPS

- Subsoil moisture levels are very low, and the extremely dry soil surface will require considerable wetting to evenly germinate crops once opening rains fall.
- There is moisture at depth in the east of the district where summer weeds were controlled.
- Paddock activities in March and April have included cabling for snail control, mouse baiting and windrow burning in April. Spreading of fertiliser has also taken place in some paddocks.
- Dry conditions have delayed seeding. However, farmers started dry sowing in the last week of April so some the crop will germinate when the rain falls.
- Around 20% of the southern Mallee area was dry sown by the end of April - mainly vetch, oaten hay and cereals for pasture feed.
- Farmers have not yet made significant changes to planned crop area. However, a decrease in canola area and an increase in the area of sown feed is expected.
- A reduction in high value legumes (lentils and chickpeas) is likely as returns for these crops has fallen and the lack of stored subsoil moisture has reduced their yield potential.
- Mice numbers have been falling although farmers are still baiting as a precaution where mice are more active.
- Strong winds in mid-April raised dry top soil and caused consecutive days of significant wind erosion across the district.

PASTURES

- Livestock condition remains good. However, paddock feed is very low, and overgrazing has become an issue in many areas.
- Sheep are being supplementary fed grain and hay in paddocks and many farmers have also moved sheep into confinement feed lots.
- On-farm hay and grain reserves are starting to diminish as feed has been sold or fed to stock.
- There has not been sufficient rain to germinate pastures and sown feed.
Upper South East

WEATHER

- Rainfall varied from average to very much below average for March.
- April rainfall was average in the southeast and below average in the remainder of the district.
- Mean maximum temperatures were average to above average for March and very much above average for April.

CROPS

- Subsoil moisture is generally low. However, some of last year’s cereal paddocks with good stubble cover have moderate reserves.
- Superphosphate has been spread on legume and pasture paddocks, and gypsum has been applied where needed.
- Farmers have begun dry sowing barley and oats for feed as well as some pasture legumes.
- Stubbles are being burnt in specific paddocks to control snails, mice and ryegrass and to reduce high stubble loads.
- Snail numbers are at normal levels and farmers have kept numbers low through a combination of burning, baiting, rolling and slashing during summer.
- Mice numbers are generally at low levels, but farmers are being cautious and baiting paddocks where canola is to be sown.
- The numbers of mice around farmhouses and sheds has increased with the onset of cooler weather.
- There have been reports of higher than normal mice populations in isolated areas often associated with lighter sandy soils or where dryland lucerne stands have provided additional food sources.
- Many farmers are implementing rotations that provide good ryegrass control as herbicide resistance and good seasonal conditions have increased ryegrass over the last couple of years. These rotations tend to include 50% cereal, 25% legume and 25% canola, avoiding cereal on cereal rotations.
- Hay crops, predominantly oats, will be sown to replenish hay stocks that are rapidly declining as they are fed out to stock.
- Dry sowing has commenced with some beans, canola and long-season wheat varieties being sown.
- Bean crops are usually sown in mid-May to reduce the risk of the crop flowering during high frost risk periods, but later sowing slows crop growth, reducing lodging and disease risk. Later-sown crops may still suffer frost damage, but yield penalties are expected to be less than from lodging and disease.

PASTURES

- A good germination of pasture has occurred but follow-up rains are needed.
- The majority of livestock are being supplementary fed. Farm feed reserves of hay and grain are rapidly declining.
- Lambing and calving is underway on many properties.
- Many producers are feeding sheep in small containment areas or using one paddock to confine and feed sheep.
- Livestock remain in good condition due to the additional supplies of hay and grain kept on farm.
- Many farmers have purchased lick feeders or other sheep feeders to increase feed use efficiency, weaning percentages and growth rates, due to the high value of livestock enterprises.
- Sales of animal health products such as vaccines have also increased.
Lower South East

WEATHER

- Rainfall for March was below average in the west, increasing to average in the east of the district. April rainfall ranged from below average in the south west to average in the remainder of the district.
- Mean maximum temperatures were above average for March and very much above average for April.

CROPS

- Soil moisture is low in most areas with the top 10 cm being very dry but some moisture is present at depth.
- Farmers have begun dry sowing of hay crops, canola and wheat.
- Snail numbers are lower than normal due to the dry summer. Some isolated areas had higher than normal numbers but baiting immediately after rainfall events provided effective control.
- Mice numbers are sporadic with high numbers in isolated areas.
- There has been less stubble burning than usual due to reduced stubble loads, although some stubbles have been burnt to control snails and reduce stubble loads at seeding.
- High ryegrass seed numbers are present in some paddocks so many of these are being sown to hay. This will enable good ryegrass control and help replenish hay supplies.
- Field crickets and wingless grasshoppers are still present in paddocks due to the mild dry conditions, but numbers are not high enough to cause significant damage.
- Some farmers will reduce the area of beans but others have kept beans in the cropping program for their stubbles' high grazing value for lambs.
- Some farmers have delaying seeding to achieve good weed control before sowing.

PASTURES

- Livestock are in good condition and lambing is underway.
- Cows with calves at foot have started to lose some condition but most are still in adequate condition.
- Livestock are being heavily supplementary fed and producers have purchased feed, driving up feed barley and lupin prices. Hay prices have increased slightly but are still relatively low due to reserves on farm.
- More farmers than usual have been buying and feeding sheep nuts and pellets.
- There has been an initial germination of some pastures, but follow-up rain is needed for further germination and growth.
- Farmers have commenced dry sowing of annual pastures. Only a limited number of perennial pastures have been sown, due to the high cost of establishment and the risk of poor establishment in a dry season.
- Phalaris and cocksfoot seed supplies are limited as a result of low seed yields in the last couple of years. There is an increased demand for these pasture species as they are more persistent compared to some of the ryegrasses and fescues available on the market.