Crop and Pasture Report South Australia
Crop performance summary and final crop estimates 2019–20
March 2020
Crop and Pasture Report South Australia

Information current as of 12 March 2020
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State Summary

Weather

- January rainfall for the agricultural area varied from above average in the Adelaide Hills to below average in parts of the Lower North, Southern Mallee and Upper South East.
- February rainfall was average to very much above average across the agricultural area.
- In the Pastoral Zone, January rainfall was average to above average in most of the North West Pastoral Zone and average to very much below average in the North East Pastoral Zone. Parts of the central Flinders Ranges received above average rainfall.
- February rainfall was highly variable across the Pastoral Zone ranging from very much below average in parts of the Far North and Far West to very much above average in areas around Cooper Pedy and in an area between Glendambo, Lyndhurst and Port Augusta.
- Mean maximum temperatures in January were average across the agricultural area and above average in parts of the northern Pastoral Zones.
- Maximum temperatures for February were very much below average on the Fleurieu and coastal areas of the South East, average in the south-west of Eyre Peninsula and below average in most of the remaining agricultural areas.
- Maximum temperatures for February in the Pastoral Zone were generally average in the Far North and Far West and below average in the remainder of the area.

Crops

- The estimated total SA crop production for 2019/20 has increased to 6.45 million tonnes from 3.85 million hectares.
- Harvest was completed in the Lower South East by early February.
- Yields of cereal, oilseed and pulse crops were highly variable across the State, depending on growing season rainfall received.
- Most areas of the State produced below average yields.
- The areas worst affected by lack of rainfall were the north and north-eastern section of the Upper North, the eastern Mid North, Northern Murray Mallee, the Far West Coast and Eastern Eyre Peninsula. Some farmers in these areas were unable to harvest enough grain for next season’s seed requirements.
- Yields in the Lower South East and western part of the Upper North were generally above average, and yields on the Lower Eyre Peninsula, Upper South East and Southern Yorke Peninsula were generally average.
- High water use efficiencies were reported in many barley crops across the State. Barley handled the hot dry finish to the season better than wheat.
- Wheat grain quality was average to above average due to low screenings, above average grain protein and high test-weights. A high percentage made milling grades.
- Barley quality was better than expected with a higher than normal proportion of malting barley varieties classified as malt and feed varieties producing good quality.
- Rainfall in early February germinated volunteer cereals and summer weeds in most areas of the State. Many farmers who intensively crop have sprayed weeds, while those with livestock have sprayed broadleaf weeds and grazed cereals.
- Despite heavy rain in some parts of the State during February, most districts have only low to moderate levels of stored soil moisture.
• There are a number of herbicides and urea that are in short supply, due to a number of issues. Most farmers have pre-ordered their herbicide and fertiliser requirements for seeding and the shortages are not likely to have a major impact on crop production in the short term.

• Lime and gypsum are being spread, with an increased amount of variable rate lime application following pH mapping.

• In parts of the State there has not been sufficient rainfall to reduce herbicide residues and plant back periods will impact the crop and variety choice in some paddocks.

• Mice are present in some paddocks in the Mid North, Yorke Peninsula and Mallee, particularly where wind damage caused grain losses. These paddocks will need to be monitored to avoid crop damage at seeding.

• In several districts there is expected to be an increase in the area sown to crop, particularly barley and hay, due to lower livestock numbers.

• Numerous fires were started by dry lightning and some by machinery. Significant livestock losses occurred in a number of the fires. Although large areas of land were burnt, only approximately 3,600 hectares of actual crop was destroyed, and most of this was burnt in the Yorketown fire.

Pastures

• There is minimal quantity of dry feed remaining in crop stubble and pasture paddocks.

• Rain in January and February has germinated volunteer cereals and summer weeds, providing some useful feed for livestock, however in many areas supplementary feeding is still required.

• An increasing number of farmers have moved stock into containment areas to maintain as much cover as possible on soils vulnerable to erosion and to ensure livestock nutritional requirements are being met.

• Livestock are generally in good condition and assuming a normal autumn break to the season, most producers have adequate supplies of grain and hay stored on-farm to continue supplementary feeding until pastures establish.

• There has been a germination of annual pastures in some districts, however follow-up rainfall will be required as most areas have limited stored soil moisture.

• Perennial pastures have responded to the rain in January and February, especially kikuyu on Kangaroo Island and lucerne and veldt grass in other districts.

• Perennial pastures in the Lower South East are providing good quality green feed for livestock, which should continue through to the break of the season.

• The total area burnt in the bushfires across the State was almost 270,000 hectares with stock losses of over 60,000.

• A large amount of hay was burnt in the Kangaroo Island fires and although significant quantities have been donated or purchased, more will be required.

• Although there had been adequate quantities of hay available for sale, the on-going drought and bushfires have increased demand with most of the surplus hay now committed.
Pastoral Zone

- Highly variable rainfall events in the Pastoral Zone in January and February have resulted in vastly different pasture germination and growth across the region.
- Some areas which received good rains have experienced a germination of annuals and some regrowth of perennials, while other areas have only experienced new pasture growth in flood-out areas.
- Limited areas received several sizeable rainfall events and have sufficient pasture growth for the next 12 months or more.
- Significant follow-up rain will be required in many areas to provide sufficient pasture growth to enable producers to re-stock.
- In some areas, high rainfall intensity resulted in significant run-off with many dams being either partially or totally filled.
- Kangaroo and goat numbers have been reduced by the prolonged drought, but are still at levels which could quickly eat out new pasture growth.
Key links to other information

Department for Environment, Water and Natural Resources - Soil and Land Condition monitoring

Bureau of Meteorology - Weather and rainfall observations

Notes on the 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.
# Crop Estimates

## TABLE 1 CROP ESTIMATES BY DISTRICT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Eastern Eyre Peninsula</th>
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### TABLE 1 CROP ESTIMATES BY DISTRICT (CONT)

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| Total        | ha                        | 24 400       | 153 600    | 360 600           | 254 500         | 195 900         | 69 000      | 3 897 700   |
|              | t                         | 48 900       | 174 850    | 147 860           | 376 300         | 415 900         | 236 750     | 6 466 780   |
### TABLE 2 CURRENT CROP ESTIMATES AGAINST FIVE YEAR AVERAGE

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<th>ha 2016/17</th>
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District Reports

Western Eyre Peninsula

Weather
- January rainfall was generally above average and February rainfall was average to above average.
- Intense thunderstorm activity on 1 February produced rainfall of up to 120 mm to areas around Minnipa, Mt Damper, Wudinna and Warramboo.
- Mean maximum temperatures were average for January and average to below average for February.

Crops
- Most farmers finished harvest before the end of December.
- Crop yields varied greatly depending on rainfall distribution and soil type. Yields were well below average west of Ceduna and below average in most other districts. The exceptions were average yields near Mt Damper, Minnipa and Wudinna and well above average yields in a narrow coastal strip from Haslam to Elliston.
- Grain quality was generally good with high protein, good test weights and low screenings.
- Dry conditions over summer resulted in minimal weed growth and summer weed spraying is well below usual levels.
- There was some germination of weeds and volunteer crops in districts which received early February rainfall. Some farmers have allowed these weeds to grow larger than normal before spraying to provide some cover for erosion protection.
- There are low to moderate soil moisture levels in parts of the district.
- Early indications are that the area sown to peas and canola will be less than usual given low stored soil moisture and the impacts of dry conditions and frost on these crops in recent years.
- There is likely to be a corresponding increase in the area of barley given current good feed grain prices and the option to use herbicide tolerant varieties to manage grass weeds.
- Most farmers preordered pesticide and fertilisers for the 2020 cropping season early and are confident of supply. Despite dry seasonal conditions in the last few years most farmers are still aiming to apply average fertiliser rates given positive responses to fertiliser applications even in drier years.
- Snail numbers have been lower than usual given dry conditions, with farmers reluctant to prickle chain/cable stubbles because of low surface cover levels. Some farmers have rolled paddocks with rubber tyred rollers to achieve some control without exposing soils to erosion.
- Most farmers also have snail bait on hand to protect vulnerable paddocks from damage at seeding.
- Mice and insect pest numbers are generally low.

Pastures
- Paddock feed has been grazed and most farmers have moved stock into containment feeding areas to protect vulnerable soils from wind erosion.
- Livestock are generally in good condition and assuming a normal autumn break to the season, most producers have adequate supplies of grain and hay stored on-farm to continue supplementary feeding until pastures establish.
Lower Eyre Peninsula

Weather
- Rainfall for January and February was average to above average.
- Thunderstorm activity on 1 February brought isolated intense rainfall to parts of the region with flooding and storm damage recorded in some areas.
- Mean maximum temperatures were average to above average for January and average to below average for February.

Crops
- Despite harvesting delays due to weather (both humid mornings and hot, windy weather) most farmers had finished harvest by the end of December.
- Crops which were unaffected by November wind damage yielded average to above average with good grain quality.
- Some summer weeds germinated early from rainfall in November, however hot, dry conditions in late December and January stalled weed growth and less summer weed spraying than normal has been required.
- Weeds and volunteer crops have germinated in districts which received above average February rainfall.
- The area of crop sown in 2020 is not likely to be significantly different from normal.
- Most growers pre-ordered fertiliser and pesticides early and are confident of sufficient supply for a normal cropping season.
- Large amounts of lime and gypsum have been spread for soil amelioration.
- Mice, snails and insect pest numbers have been low. Farmers will bait vulnerable paddocks at seeding to control snail numbers and will treat at least a portion of their seed to protect early crops against Russian wheat aphid.

Pastures
- Crop stubbles have provided high amounts of quality livestock feed.
- Livestock are in excellent condition and most producers have good reserves of supplementary feed stored on farm.
- Some farmers baled straw to provide feed for drought affected farmers in other parts of the region.
Eastern Eyre Peninsula

Weather
- January rainfall was average to above average and February rainfall was above average in the east and average in the west of the district.
- Thunderstorm activity on the 1 February brought isolated heavy falls of up to 45 mm.
- Mean maximum temperatures were average for January and below average for February.

Crops
- Despite humid conditions in December delaying harvest of some crops, below average yields meant a relatively quick harvest with most farmers finished by the end of December.
- Grain yields in the districts around Kimba, Cowell and Arno Bay were very poor, with many cereal paddocks yielding less than 0.5 t/ha and some were too poor to reap.
- Late September rainfall helped to fill grain on lighter soils in the Cleve Hills, Darke Peak, Kielpa and Wharminda districts with variable yields reported in the range 0.3 to 2 t/ha depending on soil type, time of sowing, frost damage and where rain fell.
- Grain quality was generally good with high protein, high grain weight and low screenings.
- Surface cover is generally low with some stored soil moisture, particularly in the eastern part of the district.
- In areas which received February rains there was some germination of summer weeds and volunteer crops. However, extended dry conditions reduced the need for summer herbicide applications this season. Most farmers have sprayed weeds in cropping paddocks to conserve soil moisture.
- The crop area for 2020 is unlikely to be different to normal, although there may be a small increase in the area sown for feed (vetch or barley) given low surface cover levels on pasture paddocks.
- Pest numbers have generally been low, however most farmers will treat at least a portion of their seed to protect early sown crops from insect damage, particularly Russian wheat aphid.

Pastures
- Paddocks contain little biomass and most producers are supplementary feeding hay or grain in containment feeding areas to protect vulnerable soils from erosion. On some properties in the Franklin Harbour district, supplementary feeding over an extended period has severely depleted on farm reserves of hay and grain.
- Assuming an average break to the season, most producers in the district (other than Franklin Harbour) have adequate grain and hay supplies stored on farm to continue feeding stock until pastures establish with livestock in generally good condition.
- Although February rainfall increased water levels in some dams in the Cleve Hills, rainfall distribution was extremely patchy and most farmers are still needing to cart water for livestock.
Upper North

Weather

- Rainfall for January was above average in the north-east and average in the remainder of the district.
- February rainfall was very much above average across the whole district, with thunderstorm activity on 1 February bringing heavy falls of 50 to 80 mm in some areas.
- Mean maximum temperatures were average for January and below average for February.

Crops

- A combination of cool weather and extreme hot windy days delayed harvest; with most farmers finishing harvest activities in mid to late December.
- Despite the dry finish to the season, cereal grain yields in the western part of the district were average to above average, with farmers achieving extremely good water use efficiencies.
- Pulse crop yields in the west of the district varied from average to well below average. In the eastern part of the district pulse yields were below average to well below average and some pea crops were not harvested because of frost damage or drought.
- Cereal grain yields in the eastern part of the district were below average to well below average but farmers reported high water use efficiencies and good grain quality. Many crops in the north and northeast of the district were either not harvested or only parts of paddocks were harvested.
- Cereal grain quality was better than expected and a high percentage of malting barley varieties were classified as malt. Wheat grain protein percentages were above average and had minimal screenings.
- Some farmers in the northern part of the district did not harvest enough grain to replace sown seed.
- The heavy rain in early February resulted in significant run-off on bare soils in the northern part of the district, however minimal soil erosion was observed. The run-off caused localised damage to fences, roadways and along creek lines.
- A significant number of pasture paddocks, with low cover levels in the northern part of the district were cultivated in preparation for cropping, following rain in early January and again in early February.
- Summer weeds and volunteer cereals germinated following the rain in January and February and farmers have commenced spraying, mainly for summer weeds including caltrop, melons and marshmallow. More farmers than normal have grazed volunteer cereals with livestock rather than spraying.

Pastures

- Most pasture and stubble paddocks have been heavily grazed and producers are supplementary feeding livestock in either sacrifice paddocks or containment areas.
- Some farmers sowed summer feed following rain in early January, however germination was relatively poor and pastures have only provided minimal feed.
- Lucerne pastures have responded well to the February rainfall with excellent growth and native perennial pastures have also provided some useful feed.
- Volunteer cereals are providing some feed, although most livestock still require additional hay or grain to maintain condition.
- Most producers have adequate levels of hay and grain to maintain their current level of livestock in reasonable condition.
Mid North

Weather
- Rainfall for January was above average in the east and average in the rest of the district. February rainfall was very much above average in the north-west and above average in the rest of the district.
- Mean maximum temperatures were average for January and below average for February.

Crops
- Most farmers completed harvest by mid to late December.
- Wheat crops yielded approximately 20% below average, but had reasonable grain protein percentages, low screenings and high test-weights.
- Barley yields were 15% below average, but grain quality was good, with a higher than usual amount classified as malt.
- Pulse crops yielded 20% to 40% below average.
- Most parts of the district received 40 to 50 mm rain in early February, providing some stored soil moisture.
- Following the rain, summer weeds germinated – mainly volunteer cereals but also summer weeds including low levels of melons, caltrop and heliotrope.
- Most farmers were well into spraying by the end of February with some already finished. The Mid North Mesonet weather station system has proven valuable in giving farmers guidance for when to start and stop spraying, reducing the risk of spray drift.
- Lime and gypsum are being carted and spread, with an increased amount of variable rate lime application following pH mapping.
- Mice are present in some paddocks, particularly those where wind damage caused grain losses and frosted crops which re-shot from the base.
- Despite the February rains, herbicide residue may need to be managed in some crops.
- There are a number of herbicides that are in short supply, due to reduced production in China.
- Snails became active following the rain and farmers are monitoring numbers to determine the best time to bait.
- The area sown to durum wheat and lentils is likely to decline and be replaced with hay and some sown pasture.

Pastures
- There is still some limited amount of stubble feed available, particularly from volunteer cereals that germinated following the February rain.
- On properties with limited pasture feed, sheep are being fed in containment areas.
- Some supplementary feeding of hay is occurring in pasture or stubble paddocks.
- Most producers are likely to maintain current stock numbers or even increase numbers where possible.
Lower North

Weather
- January rainfall was average to below average. Rainfall for February was average to above average across the district.
- Mean maximum temperatures were average for January and below average for February.

Crops
- Harvest was completed two to three weeks earlier than normal, due to earlier maturity and lower yields.
- Wheat and barley yields were 20% below average, with most crops achieving very good water use efficiencies.
- Barley grain quality was good and a high percentage of malting barley varieties made malt quality. Wheat crops had above average grain protein and relatively low screening percentages, despite the dry finish to the season.
- Pulse crops were affected by frost, dry conditions and strong winds, with yields of all crops well below average.
- Canola yields were well below average.
- Most farmers sold grain at harvest but those who delayed sales were rewarded with higher prices.
- The area cut for hay increased but yields were slightly below average with good quality. Prices had fallen from last year, however with the widespread bushfires, demand has increased and most surplus hay has been committed.
- There are only isolated small patches of the district with stored soil moisture.
- Following January and February rains there has been some germination of volunteer cereals, caltrop and marshmallow. Between 20% and 30% of paddocks will be sprayed to control summer weeds.
- An increased number of farmers have cut and baled straw for increased cash flow and to reduce the build-up of mice.
- There is likely to be an increased area sown to cereals with a reduction in the area of pulses and canola.
- Rain in January and February has germinated grain, reducing the amount of feed for mice.
- Snail numbers are at low levels, particularly in the Pinery fire area.

Pastures
- Crop stubbles have low amounts of available feed and most producers are supplementary feeding livestock with mainly hay.
- There is increasing interest in containment feeding, even in higher rainfall areas.
- Livestock are generally in good condition.
- On-farm hay reserves are good, although increased demand following bushfires has reduced supplies.
Yorke Peninsula

Weather
- Rainfall for January was above average on Southern Yorke Peninsula and average in the remainder of the district.
- February rainfall was above average across the district.
- Mean maximum temperatures were average for January and below average for February.

Crops
- Most farmers completed harvest in mid-December. High humidity and strong winds on Southern Yorke Peninsula delayed completion of harvest until mid-January.
- Although yields for most crops were below average in the northern and central part of the district, they were average to above average on Southern Yorke Peninsula.
- Snail contamination was reported in grain samples on Southern Yorke Peninsula but in other areas, grain quality was good. Wheat proteins were above average and with good grain size.
- A higher percentage than normal of malting varieties were classified as malt and most feed varieties were good quality.
- Numerous fires were started by lightning and machinery, with the largest at Yorketown burning more than 5,000 hectares and destroying 2,400 hectares of unharvested crop, numerous houses, buildings, machinery and 534 livestock. A total of 3,600 hectares of unharvest crop was burnt on Yorke Peninsula in a variety of fires.
- The February rainfall has provided some subsoil moisture to a depth of 30 cm, with the lighter sandier soils in the north having good soil moisture, while the heavier soils types only have low amounts.
- Volunteer cereals and summer weeds have germinated and farmers have begun spraying to control them while small and actively growing.
- There is likely to be an increased area sown to lentils and field peas due to higher prices. The area of chickpeas could be reduced by up to 30% because of lower prices, high cost of production and poor performance in 2019.
- Farmers have been slashing and rolling stubbles to reduce snail numbers with some paddocks being baited following the February rain.
- Seed cleaning is currently well under way in preparation for the new season.
- Current rainfall is unlikely to be sufficient to reduce chemical residue levels and plant back requirements are likely to impact crop and variety choice. Some of these varieties can be lower yielding, particularly wheat varieties.
- Mice numbers are currently low, however numbers have increased over the last few months and numbers will need to be closely monitored to avoid damage at seeding.

Pastures
- Livestock are presently grazing crop stubbles. Paddock feed for stock continues to be an issue, despite a germination of cereals and summer weeds.
- Most producers are feeding livestock with hay and grain to supplement paddock feed.
- Stubble grazing and the germination of cereal grain has removed some of the food source that would allow the buildup of mice numbers.
- Livestock appear to be in better condition than at the same time last year.
- There has been an increase in the number of livestock agisted on the Yorke Peninsula over the summer, due to drought and fires in other areas of the State.
Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu & Kangaroo Island

Weather
- January rainfall was average to above average on Kangaroo Island and above average to very much above average in the Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu. February rainfall was average on western Kangaroo Island and above average in the remainder of the district.
- Mean maximum temperatures were average for January and below average to very much below average for February.

Crops
Central Hills/Fleurieu Peninsula
- Harvest was completed by mid to late December with below average yields.
- Stored soil moisture is variable across the district with some moisture in the top 30 to 40 cm but limited moisture at depth.
- There has been a germination of summer weeds, across the district, however farmers have only sprayed cropping paddocks where there is some stored soil moisture.
- There will be an increased area of crop sown, particularly to barley and hay crops, due to lower stock numbers. Some crops will be sown with minimal inputs, due to reduced finances.

Kangaroo Island
- Harvest was completed early January: interrupted by hot windy weather and numerous fires.
- Wheat and canola yields were average to above average. Bean yields were average to below average.
- Most harvest was completed before the fires, with only 50 hectares of crop loss reported.
- Farmers have been busy cleaning up and re-fencing following the fires.

Pastures
Central Hills/Fleurieu Peninsula
- Pasture and stubble feed are limited, with producers supplementary feeding livestock with hay and grain.
- Many producers have reduced stock numbers due to high costs of feeding to opening rains.
- There has been a good germination of pasture in areas which received good February rains.
- In areas with less rainfall, germination of pasture was limited with mainly weeds.
- Follow up rainfall is required for pasture survival, due to limited or no sub soil moisture.
- Only a few farmers have moved stock into containment areas with most feeding in small sacrifice paddocks.
- The Cudlee Creek fire affected 537 livestock properties, burning 25,000 hectares and destroying more than 3,700 stock.

Kangaroo Island
- Numerous fires started on Kangaroo Island following lightning strikes with over 200,000 hectares burnt with 216 livestock producers affected and over 52,000 livestock destroyed.
- There has been excellent regeneration of perennial pastures, especially kikuyu following rain in January and February. There has also been a germination of sub clover, however further rain will be required to ensure this survives.
Livestock water availability has improved following the heavy rain in early February, although some farmers are still carting water in parts of eastern Kangaroo Island. The cooler weather has reduced the frequency of carting.

Most producers are supplementary feeding livestock with hay and many are containment feeding, mainly in the fire affected areas.

Most livestock are maintaining reasonable condition with high levels of supplementary feeding.
Lower Murray

Weather

- January rainfall was average to above average. Rainfall for February was above average across the district.
- Mean maximum temperatures were average for January and below to very much below average for February.

Crops

- Harvest was completed by mid to late December.
- Grain production was well below average across the district with extremely poor yields in the northern part and below average yields in the southern areas.
- Grain quality was generally good in crops not damaged by frost.
- Pulse and canola crop yields were well below average, due to dry conditions and frost.
- There is low to moderate amounts of stored soil moisture from February rains.
- Summer weeds have germinated on the lighter soil types, with limited germination on the heavier soils. Farmers have begun spraying to control weeds.
- Mice are present in many paddocks and farmers have begun monitoring mice activity.
- The area sown to lentils and chickpeas will be reduced, due to their higher risk and replaced with vetch, field peas and lupins.

Pastures

- Crop stubbles have been grazed with some paddocks or parts of paddocks eroding in windy conditions.
- Livestock are in reasonable condition with most farmers supplementary feeding with hay and grain.
- Most farmers have kept as many livestock as possible as the returns from sheep and wool have kept many businesses viable over the last few seasons.
Northern Murray Mallee

Weather
- January rainfall was average across the district. Rainfall for February was above average to very much above average.
- Mean maximum temperatures were average for January and below average for February.
- There were numerous days of strong winds with some raised dust.

Crops
- Cereal yields were well below average in western and northern parts of the district, with only the best parts of paddocks harvested. Some farmers failed to get their seed back.
- Pulse crops were badly affected by the lack of stored soil moisture, a late break and very dry finish to the season.
- Although most grain prices were above average, the extremely low yields meant that most farmers did not have sufficient grain income to cover cropping costs. This is now the third year in a row with poor crop returns and most farmers are under severe financial burden.
- Many farmers (particularly those with livestock) have poor soil cover on sandy rises, and these have suffered moderate wind erosion on numerous occasions.
- Some pulse crops in the south-east of the district produced some yield but not enough to cover costs.
- Despite the poor yields, cereal quality was generally better than expected due to high protein percentages and average screenings, however price premiums above feed quality grain were less than normal.
- Many failed crops were grazed by livestock.
- Rainfall in early February has increased store soil moisture content, with some moisture at depth where high falls were recorded.

Pastures
- Stubble and pasture feed are at low levels and farmers are supplementary feeding livestock in paddocks.
- An increasing number of livestock producers are using containment feeding areas.
- Summer rain has provided a germination of volunteer cereals and summer weeds for grazing.
Southern Murray Mallee

Weather
- Rainfall for January was below average in the west and average in the remainder of the district.
- February rainfall was above average to very much above average (40 to 100 mm).
- Mean maximum temperatures were average for January and below average for February.

Crops
- Most farmers completed harvest by the end of December.
- Yields in the southern part of the district were generally good with many being close to average, while yields were lower in the northern part of the district where less rain fell.
- Rainfall in February has increased stored soil moisture with moderate to good levels of moisture at depth across most of the district.
- Stored soil moisture is likely to be preserved in paddocks where good summer weed control has been achieved.
- Farmers have been actively spraying summer weeds with some spreading of fertiliser occurring. Other activities have included seed cleaning and machinery maintenance.
- Mice are present in many areas of the district and farmers are monitoring their activity. Areas with high mice activity will need to be baited before seeding to avoid significant crop damage.
- Farmers have grazed stubble paddocks with sheep to reduce grain and feed available for mice.
- The crop area and crop type are expected to remain similar to last year.

Pastures
- Crop stubble and pasture feed is at low levels and most farmers have commenced supplementary feeding with hay and grain to maintain stock in reasonable condition, particularly pregnant ewes.
- Lucerne and veldt grass pastures have responded to the early February rains and are providing reasonable levels of high-quality feed.
Upper South East

Weather

- January rainfall was below average in the north and average in the remainder of the district.
- Rainfall in February varied from average around Coomandook and Coonalpyn to very much above average south of Keith and Bordertown.
- Mean maximum temperatures were average for January and below average to very much below average in February.

Crops

- Most farmers completed harvest by the first week of January. In many cases crop yields exceeded farmers expectations, with most yielding close to average with good grain quality.
- Most farmers who warehoused grain at harvest were able to sell it at higher prices after harvest.
- Stored soil moisture has improved by 20 to 30 mm in most areas as a result of summer rain.
- Summer weeds have germinated with most farmers controlling growth by grazing with only about 20% of cropping paddocks sprayed to control weeds. Caltrop, melons and volunteer cereals are the major weeds.
- Many farmers are clay spreading, liming or spreading gypsum, with pH mapping resulting in an increase in variable rate lime application.
- Crop area is likely to remain relatively stable, with slight increase in beans and canola area.
- Farmers are monitoring snail numbers and will bait if necessary.
- The Keilira fire burnt 23,000 hectares and destroyed 3,231 sheep, 389 cattle, 46 other animals, 670 beehives and 130 hectares of pine forest.

Pastures

- Pasture dry feed and stubbles have been grazed, with the little remaining declining in value as a result of summer rainfall events.
- Dryland lucerne and veldt grass pastures have shown good production with summer rainfall.
- Annual pastures have germinated following the February rains but are providing minimal feed value. Without good follow up rain these pastures are likely to die out.
- Capeweed has germinated and could survive dry conditions while legume pastures may die, resulting in weedy pastures later in the season.
- There is likely to be an increased area sown to improved pasture this autumn, to maximise livestock production.
- Pregnancy scanning results have been high as a result of improved ewe nutrition, driven by the high value and returns from sheep.
- The number of producers containment feeding continues to increase each year, however there are still a large percentage of producers supplementary feeding in paddocks.
- Livestock condition is variable depending on the production system and management.
- Keilira received 40 mm of rain on the fire ground in late January that has resulted in some germination of pastures. However, follow up rain is needed to ensure the germination survives. Soils exposed by fire are at high erosion risk.
- Confinement feeding and re-fencing have been the main activities to date in the recovery phase following the Keilira fire, with significant amounts of hay brought into the area which has either been purchased or donated.
- Rabbit and deer control have been highlighted as a priority in the Keilira area.
**Lower South East**

**Weather**
- Rainfall was average for January and above average to very much above average for February.
- Mean maximum temperatures were average in January and below average in February.

**Crops**
- Most farmers completed harvest by mid-February, although a few were still harvesting in late February as a result of breakdowns or relying on contractors.
- Broad beans have yielded above average (2 to 4 tonnes/ha). There was some staining of the grain with unfavourable weather conditions slowing harvest. Bean size has been smaller than normal and they have been harder to trash, resulting in higher levels of trash in the grain sample.
- Wheat and barley yields were average. Average wheat yields have increased from 4 to 5 tonnes/ha to 7 to 8 tonnes/ha over the last 5 years as a result of newer varieties and increased inputs, particularly nitrogen.
- Canola crops yielded above average with oil contents 2-3% higher than normal.
- Approximately 80% of producers had completed harvest before significant rainfall events occurred, in early February.
- There will be minimal changes to crop type and area with a slight increase in canola area sown.

**Pastures**
- Perennial pastures are providing good quality green feed for livestock, which should continue through to the break of the season.
- Volunteer crops and weeds have germinated in stubbles as a result of rainfall events.
- Pasture paddocks are being monitored for crickets and wingless grasshoppers.
- Some bean stubbles have lost feed value from rainfall events before being grazed by livestock.
- Livestock are in excellent condition.
- Less containment feeding is being undertaken in the Lower South East compared to the Upper South East due to increased pasture availability.
- The producers who are containment feeding have found that pastures rested from grazing grow and establish quicker after the opening rains and produce greater amounts of feed than those which continue to be grazed.
- Clover pastures are well established and past the three-leaf stage.
- Barbers pole worms have caused health problems in some sheep flocks.
- Calving has commenced in many herds.