

NSW DPI Irrigated Farming Systems Report

IREC Annual General Meeting – 2008

Drought continues to have a major impact on irrigated farmers in the Murrumbidgee Valley. The general security water allocation announcement of 7% with 2% after February and added 5% company internal allocation were greatly welcomed leading to either limited winter crop watering, small rice areas, saving for pre-watering next autumn, carryover or selling on the temporary market.

Unfortunately winter crops have again been greatly affected by the drought. Dryland crop potential ranges from zero to 2.5t/ha and varies from locality to locality depending on the amount of summer fallow rain and growing season rainfall. Some irrigated crops grown on bore water have 8-10t/ha potential.

Successful cereal field days were recently held at Yanco Agricultural Institute, Hillston, Griffith and Coleambally attracting 30 farmers per site. The Irrigated Cropping Forum, GRDC and NSW DPI Irrigated Cereal Evaluation Variety Project trials were featured at each of the field days and yield potential is high at 8-10t/ha.

The prospects for rice production still remain poor. However the small irrigation allocation has resulted in some small surface water sowings in addition to bore water. This led to the first rice pre-season meeting being able to be held for 2 years with 35 farmers in attendance. Current potential area is 6500ha or 66,000tonnes which is about 3 times the previous season but still only 6-8% of the normal area. Big rains in the catchments at the end October/early November would encourage extra sowings. Crop growth has been up and down with a cool start, then high temperatures, then cool and then higher temperatures at the end of October. Most sowings were mid to end October.

Rice research funding from RIRDC has been hit hard with 5-6 technical positions lost and no replacement of a Professional Officer position by NSW DPI.

On the bright side there are 4-5 farmers testing the early stress rice system of intermittent flushes and delaying permanent water until panicle initiation which is estimated to save 15-20% water use and improve gross margins/ML. This is being backed up with a one year LWA/CSIRO funded water management trial being conducted at YAI.

A recent Climate Change Workshop held at YAI confirmed climate change for our area is expected to only decrease rainfall by 3-5% between now and 2030 which is much less than the 50-75 % decrease we have been experiencing from climate variability during the drought. Hence once the drought is over we should return to a more normal rainfall pattern and more normal water allocations. Hopefully most farm businesses can hold on until the drought breaks as world grain prices are expected to stay high because of low grain stocks.

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