



Chairman's foreword

After another winter crop failure, no rice crop planted for most of the local irrigation farmers, and very limited areas of other summer crops, there is now a tentative mood of optimism as grain prices and climate indicators move together in a positive direction.

Rainfall since the beginning of November has been very variable across the region. At my place, 10 kilometres north west of Leeton, 186 mm was recorded to the end of February. Total rainfall for 2007 was 278 mm however almost half fell in the last two months. The annual average is 400 mm.

The summer rainfall generated a multitude of weeds which have been controlled by sprays but as chemical shortages occurred the cob webs were blown off disc cultivators and diesel tanks refilled. Caltrop, paddy melon and wireweed were common and all three don't mix well with tyned sowing machinery and if not sprayed have been disced out.

Many farmers were affected by contract wash out costs, and with no water allocation guaranteed for next season most are reluctant to commit to the current good prices on offer. Most of the grain grown locally has a domestic market and the recent approval of the Coleambally ethanol plant and a 6000 head dairy is good news for grain growers with another market opening for high starch grains.

Fertiliser prices appear to be good for shareholders however the local 55,000 head cattle feedlot has run out of composted manure as growers switch to other forms of phosphorus as the shock of current prices for DAP hit home. Lower rates will obviously be used on paddocks where crops failed to make it through to harvest last year.

Our peak summer harvest months of March and April will be very quiet. Hopefully it will be the last time we are in this situation with extra time to prepare for winter cropping and "holidays" at Easter.

Professor Shahbaz Khan (the most recent chair of the Irrigated Cropping Forum) is taking up a prestigious new role with UNESCO as the Chief of Section on Sustainable Water Resources Development and Management in Paris. Shabaz and his research teams at CSIRO and Charles Sturt University have had an enormous impact, from local irrigators through to national water policy and the international scientific community.

Bryan Clark has also moved on to bigger challenges with his appointment to Grain Growers Association of Australia. Bryan has left a legacy for irrigators with the many research projects he was able to get funded and established during his term as executive officer for IREC and the Irrigated Cropping Forum.

Both Shabaz and Bryan are strong supporters of the irrigation industry and we wish them all the best for the future.

My thanks again to Lucy Kealey who does an excellent job as editor; and to all the contributors who make this publication a useful information source for irrigators. I hope you find this issue valuable and that the weather allows you to put your skills and knowledge into practice with a bumper season in 2008. ☀

Peter Draper
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