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Crop and Pasture Report South Australia

2017-18 CROP SEEDING INTENTIONS

MAY 2017

PREMIUM
FOOD AND WINE FROM OUR
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Government
of South Australia

Primary Industries
and Regions SA

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

Dave Lewis
Grains Account Manager
Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA)
GPO Box 1671, Adelaide SA 5001
Telephone +61 8 8429 0472
Email dave.lewis@sa.gov.au

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State Summary

WEATHER

- March rainfall was average to below average in most agricultural districts with the exception of Kangaroo Island and the Mid and Lower South East which received above average rainfall.
- April rainfall varied from below average on parts of Lower and Western Eyre Peninsula to very much above average in parts of the Upper North and Upper South East.
- Mean maximum temperatures were above average in the Far West and very much above average in other districts for March, and average to above average across all districts for April.
- Mean minimum temperatures for March were above to very much above average in most districts. Minimum temperatures in April were average to above average across all agricultural districts.

CROPS

- Heavy stubble loads following high yields in 2016 have been managed by heavy grazing, churning, discing and light off-set disc tillage (speed tilling) to improve seeding operations.
- Stubble burning and windrow burning is more prevalent this year in some districts and likely to increase during early May to manage snails and high stubble loads.
- Wet conditions in the South East have made stubble burning difficult.
- Good summer weed control was achieved with spraying and grazing in most areas of the State.
- Continued wet weather in the South East and Kangaroo Island resulted in further weed germinations.
- Dry-sowing of pastures and canola commenced in several districts in mid-April but the area dry-sown was less than in the past few years due to the higher risk of mice damage.
- Soil profiles across most districts of the State have moderate to good levels of subsoil moisture particularly where summer weed control was successful.
- Medium to heavy rainfall in most districts from 20 to 24 April has resulted in a good germination of weeds and pastures. Most of Eyre Peninsula and parts of Yorke Peninsula and the Lower North, only received light falls.
- Seeding of canola, oaten hay and long-season wheat varieties has commenced in districts that received good falls of rain in April and is likely to continue through to completion where stored soil moisture levels are high.
- Some dry-sowing has occurred in areas that received only light falls of rain but most farmers are waiting for better falls of rain before sowing the majority of their crops.
- Snail numbers are higher than normal in many districts because the mild wet summer was unfavourable to achieve adequate control with rolling and churning stubbles and high summer weed levels allowed numbers to increase. Widespread baiting has occurred in paddocks with high numbers and follow-up baiting is planned after crops have been sown.
- Mice numbers are high in some districts and in isolated areas of other districts. Baiting of some paddocks has already occurred and numbers will be monitored to determine if further baiting after seeding will be required. Current bait supplies have been exhausted and more is being sourced from overseas.
- Russian wheat aphid has been identified on volunteer cereals and grasses during autumn. High levels of predators were also identified which has kept aphid numbers at relatively low levels. Many farmers have treated a large proportion of their cereal seed with an insecticidal seed dressing to ensure early control of aphids.

- There will be a large reduction in the area sown to barley and oaten hay as a result of low prices and limited availability of contracts for oaten hay.
- The area sown to canola is likely to increase in most districts, due to its good price and the early start to the season. Despite a shortage of seed, most farmers were able to source enough to meet their needs.
- The area sown to lentils will increase slightly on last year's record area.
- The area sown to chickpeas will also increase in several districts due to its current high prices. There have been reports of poor germination of chickpea seed, which might restrict the area sown.
- The area sown to faba beans will be reduced in many districts, due to its current low price.
- The wheat area will be maintained or even increased across most districts.

PASTURES

- Although there are still reasonable quantities of dry feed in most districts, feed quality has deteriorated.
- There has been an excellent germination of annual pastures and sown feed in districts that received good April rainfall.
- In several districts, livestock producers have increased flock numbers by keeping old ewes.
- Good livestock returns are motivating farmers to sow improved pastures and improve pasture management to increase productivity.
- Livestock across the state are in good condition.
- Farmers in areas that have not received "break of season" rains are providing hay and grain to stock in paddocks or confinement areas.

KEY LINKS TO OTHER INFORMATION

Department for Environment, Water and Natural Resources - Soil and Land Condition monitoring:
www.environment.sa.gov.au/Knowledge_Bank/Science_research/Monitoring_evaluation_analysis/Monitoring/Soil_and_land_condition

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 as available.

District Reports

Western Eyre Peninsula

WEATHER

- March rainfall was below average to very much below average with all districts recording less than 5 mm of rainfall for the month.
- April rainfall was above average north of Wirrulla but average to below average further south. Mean maximum temperatures were above to very much above average in March and average in April.

CROPS

- Herbicide applications following summer rains provided good summer weed control and dry conditions throughout March and early April slowed weed growth.
- Some farmers north of Wirrulla were able to begin seeding following rains in late April but landholders in most districts have only sown small areas of feed, vetch and canola.
- Most farmers are waiting for good opening rains to sow the majority of their crops.
- Although most subsoils contain moisture at depth, top soils were generally dry at the end of April.
- Early indications are that farmers are not intending to make significant changes to their cropping area unless dry conditions continue into late May.
- Given the dry conditions there has been little opportunity for germination and control of winter weeds. This may result in some weedy paddocks when seeding resumes after opening rains.
- Although there have been reports of increased mice activity there has not been a large increase in the amount of bait sold in Western Eyre districts.
- Some farmers will bait a small percentage of their earlier sown crops but widespread mouse baiting is not expected at this stage.
- Farmers have been burning stubbles to manage residue loads for easier sowing and better herbicide efficacy.
- It is expected that widespread snail baiting of susceptible crops will occur at seeding due to increased snail numbers in 2016 and limited opportunities for cultural control methods such as chaining and rolling during summer.
- Insect pest numbers have generally been low with dry conditions and effective control of green growth that can carry pests and diseases into the next season's crops and pastures.

PASTURES

- Paddock pasture feed levels are very low.
- Farmers have removed livestock from paddocks with lighter textured soils to avoid overgrazing vulnerable areas.
- Many farmers are supplementary-feeding livestock, with most having adequate supplies of hay and grain on farm to carry stock until pastures produce adequate amounts of feed.
- Livestock are generally in good condition.

Lower Eyre Peninsula

WEATHER

- Rainfall was below average to very much below average for March and April.
- Most districts received less than 5 mm in March and less than 10 mm in April.
- Mean maximum temperatures were very much above average in March and above average in April.

CROPS

- Herbicide applications and dry conditions resulted in very low levels of weed growth during this period.
- There has been a small increase in the amount of residue burning during this period compared to recent years. Whilst most were partial burns to control weed seeds in header rows, a number of paddocks were completely burnt to manage high stubble loads before seeding.
- Higher amounts than usual of lime and gypsum have been applied to improve soil condition.
- Although most soil profiles contain some moisture at depth, continued dry conditions have resulted in very dry top soils.
- Early indications are that there are not likely to be significant changes to the area of crop sown unless the dry conditions continue into late May or June.
- Some farmers have dry-sown cereals and vetch for feed.
- Farmers with large cropping programs have sown a small proportion of canola and pulses as well as some long-season wheat varieties. However, most are waiting for good opening rains before sowing the majority of their crops.
- Insect pest numbers are low due to unfavourable conditions and a lack of weed germination to carry them over to this season's crop and pastures.
- Russian wheat aphid has been reported in paddocks near Tumby Bay and Port Neill. Some farmers (less than 20%) will apply an insecticide on a small proportion of their earliest-sown crops to manage aphid numbers and reduce the risk of crop damage but most will monitor numbers to see whether an insecticide application is warranted after crop emergence.
- There have been few reports of significant mice activity in paddocks. Farmers will monitor numbers at seeding and apply bait to early and vulnerable crops if numbers increase beyond control thresholds.
- Due to the increased snail numbers in 2016, many farmers will bait canola and pulse crops, immediately after seeding even where these crops are sown into dry soil.

PASTURES

- The quantity of feed supplies in pasture paddocks is low.
- Many farmers are supplementary-feeding stock in containment areas.
- Most producers have adequate supplies of hay and grain on farm to continue feeding livestock until pasture paddocks begin to produce significant amounts of biomass.
- Livestock are generally in good condition.

Eastern Eyre Peninsula

WEATHER

- March and April rainfalls were generally below average except in the Kimba district where a major thunderstorm brought falls of up to 60 mm on April 20.
- Mean maximum temperatures were very much above average in March and average in April.
- Cooler nights were experienced in late April resulting in minimum temperatures slightly below the April average.

CROPS

- Herbicide applications and dry conditions during this period resulted in good control of summer weeds, reducing the risk of carryover of insect pests and diseases.
- A large amount of residue burning was undertaken during this period. Whilst most were partial burns to control weed seeds in header rows, a number of complete burns were completed to manage stubble loads prior to seeding.
- Soil profiles have some stored moisture at depth from the summer rains, however, at the end of April top soils were mostly dry.
- Early indications are that the area of crop sown will not vary significantly from last season unless dry conditions continue to the end of April.
- Farmers have sown vetch, medic pastures and some cereals for feed. There have also been small areas of canola sown.
- Most farmers are waiting for good opening rains before beginning to sow the majority of their crops.
- Insect pest numbers are very low due to the dry conditions.
- There has been some increase in mice activity but numbers are mostly below control thresholds and widespread baiting is not expected at seeding. Growers will continue to monitor numbers at seeding and bait when necessary.

PASTURES

- Paddock feed supplies are generally low.
- Some farmers are supplementary-feeding stock in containment areas to provide an opportunity for annual pastures to germinate and grow before they are grazed.
- Livestock are generally in good condition.

Upper North

WEATHER

- March rainfall was average to below average.
- April rainfall was above average in the south of the district and very much above average in the north.
- Mean maximum temperatures were very much above average for March and average for April.

CROPS

- Conditions remained dry during March and the first three weeks of April and the top 30cm of soil became very dry.
- Good levels of stored soil moisture remain further down in the subsoil on paddocks where summer weeds had been controlled.
- Most farmers have been churning heavy cereal stubbles to speed up straw breakdown to aid seeding operations.
- Dry sowing of vetch and cereals for livestock feed began in the second week of April. Some farmers sowed oaten hay and canola into dry soils in mid-April on the basis of forecast rain.
- The area dry-sown was much lower than normal due to the arrival of early rain and concern about mice damage.
- Heavy falls of rain (60 to 100mm) in late April across the district resulted in good levels of stored soil moisture.
- Although there was a rapid drop in air temperatures following the rain, warm soil hastened germination of pastures and weeds.
- Many farmers in the northern part of the district, commenced seeding as soon as possible after the rain with 20% or more sown by the end of April.
- Snail numbers are higher than normal and farmers are baiting crops immediately after seeding where numbers are high.
- In isolated areas where mice numbers are high, some farmers are spreading bait to reduce numbers.
- Russian wheat aphids have not been observed but most farmers have applied an insecticidal seed dressing on cereal seed to give early control.
- The area sown to barley is expected to fall by 10 to 20% and the area sown to oaten hay is expected to reduce by 40% or more.
- The area sown to canola will increase by 25% and most farmers have sourced enough seed to sow this increased area, despite a shortage of seed.
- The lentil area is likely to increase by 30% and chickpea area will increase substantially from a low base. The area of faba beans and peas should remain stable.

PASTURES

- During March and early April there were still high levels of feed in most areas of the district, although quality had deteriorated and many farmers supplemented livestock with hay and grain. A few farmers decided not to crop paddocks where there was a good germination of legume pastures.
- Following the rains, there is a good amount of green feed, reducing the need for supplementary feed.
- Some farmers have increased sheep numbers by keeping old ewes and a higher percentage of ewe hoggets.
- Livestock have maintained good condition and lambing has commenced.

Mid North

WEATHER

- Rainfall was average to below average for March.
- April rainfall was average south of Clare and above average further north.
- Mean maximum temperatures were very much above average for March and average for April.

CROPS

- Farmers have been chaining and discing paddocks that have high levels of stubble to reduce stubble loads before seeding.
- Some paddocks have been burnt and many more are likely to be burnt in early May.
- Dry-sowing of vetch, clover and cereal pastures began in early April and some dry-sowing of canola in mid-April before the rain.
- Since the rains the majority of canola has been sown and farmers have commenced sowing wheat and other crops.
- Farmers have undertaken deep soil tests to measure available nitrogen levels.
- There are pockets of high numbers of mice across the district and farmers have been baiting before sowing to reduce numbers. There have also been reports of high numbers of rats around sheds and even in paddocks.
- The level of stored soil moisture is highly dependent on summer weed control and there are good levels of moisture down to 80cm or more where summer weed control was timely. There is limited soil moisture where there was poor or no weed control.
- Snail numbers are higher than normal across the district with farmers chaining the worst paddocks over summer to reduce numbers. Following the rains, areas have been baited to reduce numbers before sowing.
- Russian wheat aphids have been identified across the district but there are also high numbers of predators that have kept aphid numbers low.
- The area sown to oaten hay will be reduce by 50% or more, due to a lack of contracts available from hay processors.
- The area of lentils will increase by 10%, canola area will increase by 20% and durum area will increase by 10 to 20%.
- Due to current low barley prices the area sown to barley is likely to be reduced by 20% or more.
- The area of chickpeas is unlikely to change significantly, despite high prices, due to the high disease risk and the low germination of seed supplies.

PASTURES

- Stubble and dry feed quality has deteriorated but following the rain there are good supplies of green feed.
- Most farmers are still supplementary feeding livestock with hay and grain, although the quality of some hay is very poor.
- Many farmers have increased their ewe numbers by keeping old ewes and more ewe hoggets.
- Livestock have maintained good condition.

Lower North

WEATHER

- Rainfall was average to below average for March and average for April.
- Mean maximum temperatures were very much above average in March and above average in April.

CROPS

- Most farmers achieved good weed control through February resulting in low levels of weeds, during March and April. Some farmers with livestock grazed weeds and volunteer crops, resulting in poorer control.
- A range of stubble management has occurred, including baling straw, stubble cutters, speed tiller (light off-set disc tillage machines), discing and burning.
- There was pressure in some district councils to ban stubble burning, due to the risk of smoke taint to unharvested grapes. Several councils have implemented restrictions on burning.
- Before the rain there was good sub soil moisture below 30cm to a depth of 1 to 1.2m.
- Approximately 10% of farmers commenced dry-sowing of canola and some wheat in mid-April.
- Since the rain on April 20, farmers have completed sowing canola and commenced seeding longer-season wheat varieties.
- Mice populations are high across approximately 20% of the area, with numbers higher in paddocks where there were high levels of grain on the ground following harvest.
- Some baiting has been done and stocks of zinc phosphide bait have been exhausted and more are being brought in from overseas suppliers.
- Some paddocks will be baited for mice before sowing but most will be done immediately after sowing and repeated five days later to ensure good control.
- Russian wheat aphid numbers are at relatively low levels and most farmers have treated all their cereal seed with an insecticidal seed dressing to reduce aphid build up.
- There is likely to be a 50% reduction in the area sown to barley and a 40% reduction in the area sown to faba beans. This will be replaced mainly by lentils and canola, with a 10 to 15% increase in lentil area and a 15% increase in canola area.
- The area sown to chickpeas is likely to double, due to their current high price.
- The area of export oaten hay will be reduced but farmers with domestic markets will maintain their hay area.
- There is concern that the rapid fall in pork prices may affect pig numbers and reduce the demand for feed grain and labour.

PASTURES

- With continued good livestock returns, farmers are motivated to improve pastures to increase productivity.
- There has been some germination of annual pastures in parts of the district.
- Some livestock producers are considering increasing livestock numbers and pasture area at the expense of feed barley.

Yorke Peninsula

WEATHER

- March rainfall was average to below average.
- April rainfall was average to above average, ranging from around 10mm on central Yorke Peninsula up to 70mm on southern Yorke Peninsula.
- Mean maximum temperatures were very much above average for March and average to above average for April.

CROPS

- Stubble burning commenced in early April with more burning likely this season because of high stubble loads. Stubbles have also been chained and slashed to make sowing easier.
- Some pastures were dry-sown after Easter and small areas of canola, wheat, and even lentils have been dry-sown in lower-rainfall coastal areas.
- Most farmers were unprepared for the rain on April 20 and were still getting ready for seeding.
- Although the rain was patchy across the district there has been sufficient rain in most areas to allow sowing at the optimal time. Farmers on central YP are continuing to sow into dry top soils.
- In areas that received 20mm or more of rain, a good germination of weeds should occur before sowing.
- Canola, oaten hay, some wheat and a few faba bean paddocks have been sown following the rain.
- Stored soil moisture was excellent before the rain with moisture levels of between 40mm (sand hills) to 150mm (red clay loam). Top soil had dried to a depth of 10cm.
- Mice numbers are on the increase after the large 2016 harvest and summer rains, with growers baiting prior to or immediately after seeding. The worst affected areas currently are southern YP, around Port Broughton to Wokurna and along the Moonta to Wallaroo coastline.
- Snail baiting started as early as January and February, with the most successful control being from baiting performed straight after the rains in January. Snail baiting was stopped as mice were eating the bait but it will resume after seeding.
- Aphids have been observed on milk thistles, medic and some volunteer legumes increasing the risk of virus infection. Russian wheat aphids have not been observed but monitoring has been limited.
- There is likely to be a 5 to 10% increase in the area sown to lentils, due to good returns last season.
- The area sown to barley will be reduced by 10 to 20% due to its low price. The area of oaten hay will decrease due to low hay prices and reduced offers of export contracts.
- Wheat area will increase slightly (5-10%), with more wheat-on-wheat sown to replace barley in the rotation and wheat sown onto last year's large area of lentil and other legumes.
- Chickpea growers will increase the area sown due to its high price but there is unlikely to be many new growers of this crop.
- The area sown to canola will increase 20%; and this area would have been higher if there had been adequate seed supplies.

PASTURES

- Most stubble and pasture feed has been exhausted and supplementary feeding of livestock was required during April.
- Livestock are in average to good condition with summer weeds and volunteer cereal growth providing some feed over summer and early autumn.
- Livestock owners have increased their numbers slightly but high stock prices have prohibited farmers buying in large numbers of stock.

Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu Peninsula & Kangaroo Island

WEATHER

- March rainfall was above average on Kangaroo Island and average for the Central Hills and Fleurieu.
- April rainfall was generally around average on Kangaroo Island and the Central Hills and above average on the Fleurieu Peninsula.
- Mean maximum temperatures were very much above average for March and above average in April.

CROPS

Central Hills/Fleurieu

- There has been some minor burning of heavy stubbles and/or header stubble rows.
- The mild, damp weather conditions over summer and autumn led to repeated weed germinations, requiring more weed spraying than usual.
- There has been limited dry-sowing of crops.
- Stored soil moisture levels vary with soil type but are reasonable on heavier soil types.
- Mice numbers have increased in paddocks but have not reached plague numbers. Some baiting has been undertaken for both mice and snails.
- There have not been any reports of Russian wheat aphids or other pests.
- There will be a small increase in the area sown to canola and lentils with a corresponding drop in the area sown to beans.

Kangaroo Island

- There has only been minor paddock preparation with limited stubble burning and spraying or grazing of summer weeds.
- There has been very little dry-sowing of crops, with most farmers waiting for further rain before they commence seeding. A few of the larger operators have commenced seeding.
- Stored soil moisture levels are above average for this time of year in most areas.
- Mice numbers are slightly higher than usual but there have not been any reports of baiting.
- Snails are becoming active and some farmers have commenced baiting.
- There have not been any reports of Russian wheat aphids or other pests.
- Some farmers planned to increase the area sown to canola but have struggled to source seed. There will be a slight increase in the area sown to barley.

PASTURES

- On the Fleurieu Peninsula there are high levels of pasture feed due to a combination of reduced livestock numbers and summer rains that have kept some pasture species and edible weeds growing.
- Pasture feed available for livestock on Kangaroo Island is above average due to the early germination of pastures but supplementary feeding of hay and grain continues.
- Livestock are in reasonable to good condition due to the germination of pastures and edible summer weeds.

Lower Murray

WEATHER

- Rainfall for March was average in the south to below average in the north.
- April rainfall was average to above average across most of the district with the exception of some small pockets which received below average rainfall.
- Mean maximum temperatures were very much above average for March and above average for April.

CROPS

- Soil moisture conditions were reported to be excellent at the end of April with the exception of small pockets of the district, which missed out on significant April rains.
- Results of early soil testing have shown low soil nutrition following last year's record yields. Extra fertiliser will be required to replace nutrients removed in grain.
- Seeding began in mid-April and around 60-70% of farmers are estimated to have now started seeding, mostly canola and pulse crops.
- The late harvest led to many farmers feeling unprepared for seeding or having to skip some post-harvest farm management practices to ensure timely seeding.
- Wet and warm soil conditions in late April helped early-sown crops to emerge quickly, however significant weed emergence has also been observed and may cause problems for some early-sown crops.
- Mice have not been reported in significant numbers as livestock effectively cleaned up grain in paddocks in many situations.
- Paddocks with crops damaged by hail have been disc-chained, burnt or heavily grazed to promote emergence of grain that was lost on the ground.
- Snails are in high numbers and farmers have been baiting on a large scale across the district.
- Russian wheat aphids are present and many farmers have applied an insecticidal seed dressing to avoid crop damage and will closely monitor aphid numbers once crops have emerged.
- The area sown to barley is expected to decrease as a result of poor prices.
- A moderate increase in the area sown to canola and legumes is expected.

PASTURES

- Farmers will increase pasture area for livestock, as stock prices remain high.
- Livestock are in good condition with adequate feed in stubble paddocks and an early germination of pasture.
- There has been an increase in both sheep and cattle numbers across the district.

Northern Murray Mallee

WEATHER

- Rainfall was below average for March.
- April rainfall was average to very much above average, with falls generally being higher in the northern part of the district.
- Mean maximum temperatures were very much above average in March and average for April.

CROPS

- While March was very dry, the late April rainfall has been sufficient to mark the break of the season.
- Despite forecasts of a drier season, farmers are reasonably confident at this stage due to the good opening rains and high levels of stored moisture from summer rains.
- Most farmers have started seeding canola, pulse or pasture feed crops and generally should be able to continue seeding through to completion given the high soil moisture levels.
- The area sown to lentils and chickpeas could increase by 30% this season through the eastern, central and southern areas, as a result of successful crops and good prices in 2016.
- It is expected that the area sown to canola will continue to increase because of the benefits it provides in crop rotations.
- There has been a high germination of weeds which will be controlled before sowing, greatly improving grass weed control in cereal crops this year.
- Mice are present in higher numbers than last season but are not at high enough levels to require widespread baiting. Farmers will continue to monitor numbers and bait if required.
- There were reports of Russian wheat aphid on volunteer cereals earlier in March but little activity has been reported since.

PASTURES

- Stubble and pasture feed has generally been more than adequate with summer weeds and volunteer crop growth.
- There has been a good germination of annual pastures following the rain in late April.
- Some farmers were supplementary-feeding stock with grain up until the end of April.
- Good meat and wool prices, along with poor cereal grain prices, will mean a greater emphasis is placed on livestock enterprises in mixed farming systems in 2017.

Southern Murray Mallee

WEATHER

- March rainfall was average.
- April rain was average to above average, with a few small areas that have received below average rainfall and remain relatively dry.
- Mean maximum temperatures were very much above average for March and average to above average for April.

CROPS

- Stubble management has been a priority for many farmers. Stubble burning has been taking place on a greater than normal scale across the district in preparation for seeding, given the heavy stubble residues from last year.
- Soil moisture conditions are variable throughout the district depending on the amount of rainfall received in April.
- Little dry-seeding has taken place.
- Seeding is expected to be around 10 days later this year as many farmers struggled to be prepared following the late and lengthy harvest.
- By the end of April an estimated 50% of farmers were sowing either feed cereals, legumes or canola.
- A good germination of weeds resulted from the April rainfall and will give farmers a good opportunity for early weed control.
- Snails are in high numbers and the wet conditions in late April enabled farmers to undertake early snail baiting. Snails are likely to cause significant crop damage where numbers have not been adequately controlled.
- Mice numbers are high and paddocks have been heavily grazed by stock to reduce grain on the ground. Baiting has been undertaken on a large scale.
- Russian wheat aphid is reported to be present on volunteer cereals and farmers will be monitoring crops closely in the coming months.
- The area sown to crop is expected to remain similar to last season, however there is expected to be a modest increase in lentil and canola areas at the expense of barley.

PASTURES

- Livestock numbers remain high across the district with farmers confident in the livestock industry this season.
- Stock are in excellent condition with good feed supplies still available in stubble paddocks.
- A large percentage of ewes are lambing on paddocks with a good germination of annual pastures.
- Some supplementary feeding of livestock with hay and grain is taking place.

Upper South East

WEATHER

- March rainfall was below average in the north and above average in the south.
- April rainfall was very much above average throughout the district.
- Mean maximum temperatures were very much above average for March and average for April; mean minimum temperatures were above average for March and April.

CROPS

- There is good top and subsoil moisture across the district.
- Rainfall enabled summer weeds to persist and stimulated germination of winter grasses. Spraying has continued throughout the autumn period.
- Stubble burning has been hampered by damp conditions in the south but has been extensive. More success was observed in the north, where it is likely that more burning of raked stubbles and header rows will occur before seeding.
- Speed tillers (light off-set disc machines) have also been used to manage stubble loads. An estimated 30 to 40% of producers have speed tilled or burnt stubbles.
- Dry-sowing of crops and pastures was planned but early rainfall enabled farmers to control germinating weeds before sowing. Pre-sowing knockdown herbicides have been applied with good success.
- Sowing commenced throughout the district in the last week of April and will intensify in coming weeks.
- The canola area is expected to be up in comparison to 2016 due to the good seasonal conditions. The area sown to lupin and faba bean crops will be reduced.
- The area sown to barley and oats will be reduced due to high feed availability and low prices. The area sown to wheat is expected to increase, with more wheat sown into wheat stubbles.
- Gypsum is being widely applied before sowing of canola crops.
- Mice numbers are higher than in recent years but no crop damage has been reported. The threat of damage should diminish as temperatures continue to fall.
- Snail numbers are high throughout the district and egg-laying is occurring. Baiting is ongoing and will be repeated after sowing if needed. Conditions are also favourable for slugs and they will be monitored closely as crops emerge.
- Russian wheat aphids have been detected widely throughout the district on volunteer cereals and barley grass, and also reported on some pasture species (cocksfoot and fescue). Imidacloprid insecticide has been applied in conjunction with knockdown herbicides and also as a seed dressing.
- Producers in the region are optimistic, reporting the “best start for decades”, “the best since Ash Wednesday” and “the best start in living memory”.

PASTURES

- Ground cover is dense throughout the district and feed supplies are plentiful.
- Livestock condition was exceptional at the start of lambing and calving. Shearers are complaining of fat sheep. Livestock numbers have remained high in the district, due to high prices and abundant feed.
- There has been renewed enthusiasm for livestock in mixed enterprises, resulting in increased pasture renovation and establishment of perennial pastures on previously cropped land. There are reports of a shortage of pasture seed.
- Lime sales have been well above average with mines struggling to meet demand for soil acidity treatment.
- Red-legged earth mite emerged in late April and will be monitored and controlled accordingly.

Lower South East

WEATHER

- Rainfall was above to very much above average for March and average to very much above average in April.
- Mean maximum temperatures were very much above average in March and average to above average in April.
- Mean minimum temperatures were above average in March and average in April.

CROPS

- The district has received widespread, regular, heavy rainfall and soil profiles are full.
- Water tables are rising and surface ponding has been reported on the plains.
- Farmers are sowing crops and pastures in the mid-South East before the ground gets too wet. Sowing will commence in the Lower South East in early to mid-May.
- There is a high probability that there will be an increased area sown to spring barley and alternative legumes, predominantly pasture seed crops.
- The area sown to faba beans is expected to drop.
- The area sown to cereals is likely to remain steady.
- The area sown to canola is expected to remain low throughout the Lower South East.
- Snail numbers are reported as being higher than normal, due to the warm and wet summer. Baiting has been widespread and is expected to be repeated after sowing.
- Burning of stubbles has been relatively unsuccessful due to damp conditions.
- Mice have been observed but are not causing damage.
- Summer weeds have been controlled using herbicides and speed tillers (light off-set disc).
- Annual ryegrass germinated throughout summer and herbicide resistance is evident, especially along fencelines.

PASTURES

- Pasture feed is abundant across the district; phalaris remained green throughout summer and is now actively growing.
- The early germination of sub clovers has made the control of summer weeds challenging.
- Sowing of annual and perennial pastures has commenced.
- Lambing and calving is underway and livestock are in good condition.
- Farmers have been buying lime to treat soil acidity.
- Red-legged earth mite are active in the district, causing damage to newly-emerged pastures.