Crop and Pasture Summary

Issue 3 Season 2021-22: Winter Performance – September 2021

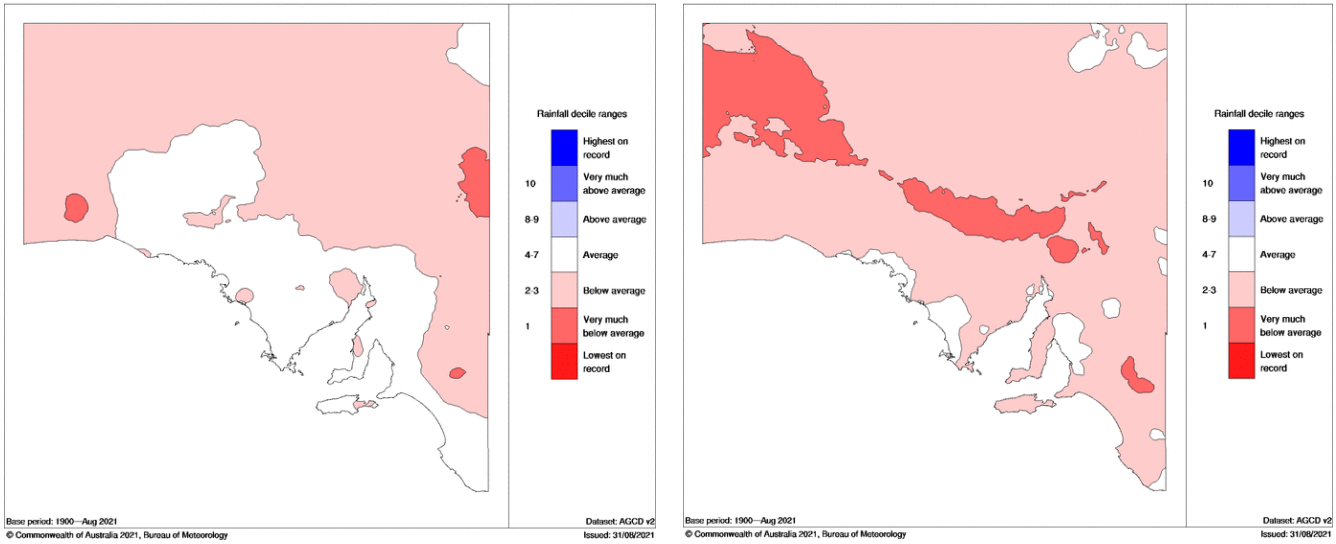
Summary

Following mostly average summer rainfall, the first five months of the growing season from April to end of August, received mostly average rainfall - Figure 1 (left), largely due to a wetter period of above average rainfall starting with the mid-June opening rains extending through July. The months of April and May received mostly well below average rainfall especially in the east of the State. August rainfall was also below average across most cropping areas.

Given the late arrival of the opening rains, as much as 70% of the crop was sown into dry soil in some districts. Crops did not establish particularly well until the mid-June opening rains fell, which also invited a weed germination requiring control in emerging crops. Strong winds in June and July damaged newly establishing crops on lighter soil types with some crop area requiring reseeding. However, the rainfall arriving with the winds provided good growing conditions except for waterlogging in the wetter areas. The June and July rainfall replenished soil moisture reserves, but crops have depended on these reserves during the drier August and hot windy days during early September.

The late opening rains, delayed crop establishment and slow early growth is likely to limit crop production prospects. However, rainfall mid-winter and drier August easing waterlogging in higher rainfall areas provided good crop growth conditions. Most of the State's crop condition is good but given growth started late, will need good spring conditions and finishing rainfall to improve on the current near average production estimate and potential record farm gate value.

Figure 1. South Australian Rainfall Deciles 1 April to 31 August 2021 (left) and South Australian Rainfall Deciles August 2021 (right).
Distribution based on Australian gridded climate data.



Sown crop area and production for previous six seasons

Seasons	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22 *estimated*
Area sown (ha)	3,894,000	3,565,000	3,572,000	3,898,000	4,003,000	*3,906,000*
Production (t)	11,145,000	6,921,000	5,795,000	6,467,000	9,135,000	*7,981,000*
Farm gate value	$2.2 billion	$1.7 billion	$1.7 billion	$2.0 billion	$2.5 billion	*$2.8 billion*

Next update for release September 2021 – Winter Crop Performance

Information accurate as at 16 September 2021.

Government of South Australia
Department of Primary Industries and Regions

The season so far…

RAIN – Year-to-date rainfall has been near average due to the wet June and July, except for the Murray Mallee and parts of the South East. Growing season rainfall from April to date ranges from below average to average in most districts to well below average in the Murray Mallee. Growing season rains arrived late starting mid-June with good rain continuing through most of July improving prospects for the season, but August was drier than average, and September is also tracking below average. Pastoral districts remained dry for the winter.

SUBSOIL MOISTURE – Rainfall since the opening has filled soil profiles, but crops and pastures have been utilising this moisture with the drier conditions starting in August. The crop is dependent on spring rains to achieve average production or better.

CROP MIX – The area of wheat is near average. Farmers opted to use barley in place of longer season pulse crops due to the late season opening. High canola price outlook was an incentive to stay with the crop despite the late start. Barley area sown increased to above average. Export hay areas were significantly reduced due to a decline in export hay demand.

SEEDING – Farmers commenced dry sowing during April, with seeding into dry soil continuing during May into early June. For some cropping districts, as much as 70% of the crop was sown into dry soil. The late arrival of opening rains and dry seeding of crops before weeds germinated resulted in weedy crops, successfully treated with herbicides.

LIVESTOCK CONDITION AND FEED – Pasture growth and feed availability was limited by the late opening rains and in some districts, subsequent waterlogging during the wet mid-winter. Most livestock are in good condition except the districts with poor pastures. However, as paddock feed biomass is limited, producers in most districts have continued to supplementary feed livestock. Grain and hay reserves in many districts are either very low or depleted with some replenishment to come with harvest.

Outlook for the year

RAINFALL OUTLOOK – The Bureau of Meteorology's most recent update of the season outlook for the August to October period (issued 16 September 2021) shows the probabilities favouring a wetter than normal period across the entire State with temperatures more likely cooler than median. Outlooks in South Australia for this period have a past accuracy of 55-65%.

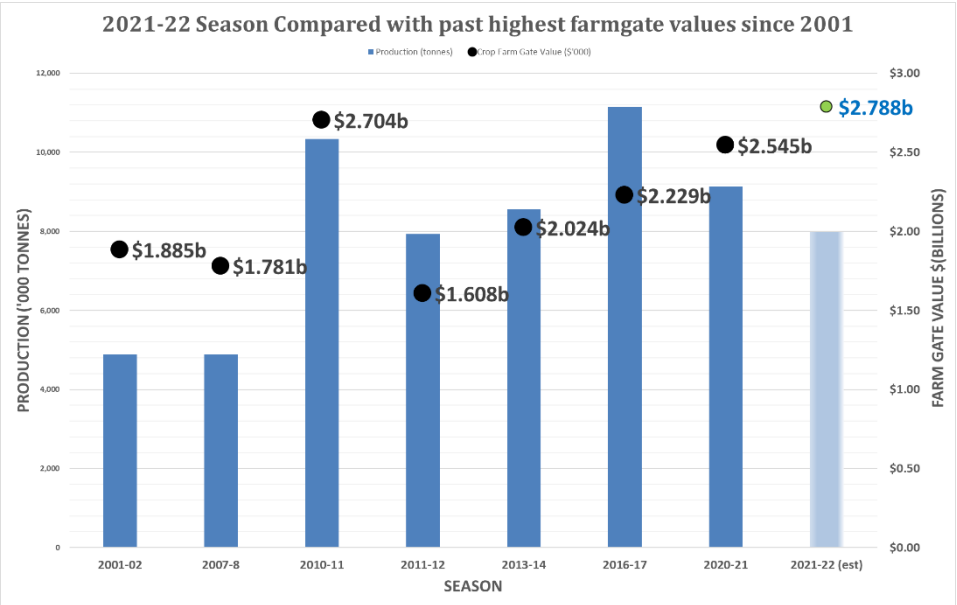
Challenges and opportunities

PESTS AND DISEASES – The cereal crop has not had significant pest or disease issues to date, but some districts report moderate levels of some leaf disease in lentils and bean crops. Earlier reports of increased mice numbers were successfully baited to control numbers and minimise crop damage and seed loss, but a spring number increase is possible. Snails are at normal levels, suppressed with baiting combined with a short wet period.

ADVERSE EVENTS – To date, apart from the dry conditions and strong winds causing localised raised dust, erosion and crop damage, there has been no significant adverse events.

MARKET DRIVERS – Unfavourable finishing conditions in all major northern hemisphere crop exporting countries from dry weather has resulted in poor harvest outcomes. The drought affected production in Canada has caused canola and lentils to reach near record prices. High global wheat prices also support the record high farm gate value estimate for the current crop production estimate.

REGIONAL ISSUES – Crop moisture stress is evident in some districts due to the dry late winter and spring period so far, otherwise no other significant regional issues from current seasonal conditions. Financial recovery from earlier years of drought and fires remains an important focus of recovery efforts in support of affected communities.



May 2021	July 2021	Sept 2021	Nov 2021	Jan 2022	Apr 2022
		This update	Next Update		
Seeding intentions	Seeding and crop establishment	**Winter crop performance**	Spring crop harvest	Harvest	Final summary and estimates