

DPI NSW Rice Farming Systems Report

IREC Annual General Meeting - 2009

Drought continues to have a major impact on irrigated farmers in the Murrumbidgee Valley. The general security water allocation announcement of 7% plus 5% internal efficiency in October 2008 was insufficient to either encourage significant winter crop watering or rice sowing with most rice grown on bore water. Most farmers sold their water on the temporary water market and with prices of \$300-400 it was a very useful source of secure cash income. Consequently in autumn this year there was little winter crop watered up or pre-watered with the rest carried over.

Unfortunately winter crops in 2009 have again been greatly affected by the drought, although the start in June was great. Dryland crop potential ranges from zero to 1.5t/ha and varies from locality to locality depending on the amount of summer fallow rain, effectiveness of weed control and amount of growing season rainfall. Hay demand and market prices were poor so few crops were baled for hay or silage. Poor cereal prices eg \$185/tonne for H1wheat because of the high Aussie \$ has led to few farmers spring irrigating crops with any water used to water crops for seed. Odd fully irrigated winter crops have 7-10t/ha potential.

Successful cereal field days were recently held at Yanco Agricultural Institute, Hillston, Griffith and Coleambally attracting 20 to 35 farmers per site. The third year of the Irrigated Cropping Forum, GRDC and DII NSW Irrigated Cereal Evaluation Variety Project trials were featured at each of the field days and yield potential of the fully irrigated trial is again high at 8-10t/ha. Farmers were also interested in the comparison of the fully irrigated yield performance with pre-irrigated yield performance.

The attraction of a \$550/tonne rice price led to the first SunRice pool of 65,000 tonnes being filled mainly by bore pumpers. The subsequent early water allocation increase on the 22nd October and 1st November to the current 14% allocation and 4% efficiency led to further rice sowings mainly from surface irrigators. It is predicted the potential production is 160,000 tonnes from 18,000 ha making this the biggest area since 2007 but this is still well short of the 800,000 tonnes SunRice is targeting once the drought is over. The increase in rice resulted in 3 farmer rice pre-season meetings, up from the 1 held last season.

Rice research funding from RIRDC is still very low because of the low amount of levies collected over the last few years. However, core research projects continued but with cuts to budgets. Joint venture discussions between DII NSW, SunRice and RIRDC continue. A few DII NSW and EH Graham Centre staff have been engaged by ACIAR to commence 4 year rice projects in Laos, Cambodia and Bangladesh with the benefit of complementary funding for Australian rice research which will help ease the pressure on some of the RIRDC funding.

Although the increase in rice area is the first good news for a few years broadacre farmers are well and truly sick of the 7 years of drought and hope as they have wished for the last few years for the drought to break in 2010.

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Yanco
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