

Summary

The 2015 season so far has been defined by generally good rainfall across most of the grainbelt but with significantly long dry periods in between.

The GIWA October forecast for total grain production at just under 15 million tonnes is down slightly from the forecast at the beginning of September, on the back of the dry September.

Crops sown on soil types which have good water holding capacity, and therefore allow deep rooting depth of crops, will produce above yields in all regions of the state. However, September has been a very dry month and crops sown on soils type which don't hold water well, such as deep sands, have diminished yield potential as a result.

Grain quality is likely to be impacted by the forecast dry spring. Protein levels in wheat are expected to rise slightly on average, particularly in crops where yield potential has been substantially reduced. For barley, a dry spring invariably produces high screenings and higher protein levels. This will apply principally to crops on the sandy soils districts along the west coast in the west Kwinana zone.

The crops in the Lakes region and southern portions of the Albany zone are in very good condition with above average yields very likely. In contrast, winter rainfall has been well below average in the districts north of Kojonup through to Wagin and Williams.

Crops in districts inland from Geraldton, from Yuna to Mullewa and south to Kalannie will produce above average yields on the back of good autumn rains.

The Esperance zone is very likely to break crop yield and production records on the back of a very good season across the zone.

The incidence of frosts looks to be isolated and shouldn't have any major impact on the overall delivery totals.

WA Production estimates (tonnes)

Port zone	Wheat	Barley	Canola	Oats	Lupins	Field pea	State total
Kwinana	4,017,000	926,000	458,000	281,000	139,000	7,000	5,828,000
Albany	1,693,000	1,242,000	453,000	270,000	61,000	6,000	3,725,000
Esperance	1,440,000	962,000	414,000	17,000	18,000	22,000	2,873,000
Geraldton	1,918,000	57,000	174,000	19,000	272,000	1,000	2,441,000
Totals	9,068,000	3,187,000	1,499,000	587,000	490,000	36,000	14,867,000

Kwinana Zone

The Midlands

The season was proceeding well during August and early September before hot weather in the last 20 days finished the season. Overall, crop yields in the Midlands region are now expected to be average to slightly below average.

Crops yields in the areas between Dalwallinu to Latham, and Coorow to Latham are expected to be very good, while crop yields in the Wongan Hills district are expected to be average to below average. Most crops yields in districts west of the Midlands road on sandy soils are expected to be well below average, with the extended dry periods restricting crop development. Crop yield potential in the Dandaragan district is now just average with yields on sandy soils at about 1.5 to 2 tonnes per hectare when they had potential of 3.5 tonnes per hectare in August. Crops on the better classes of soils could still produce up to 4 to 4.5 tonnes per hectare.

Swathing of canola crops in the Midlands started this week. Canola yields are expected to be at least average in most districts. Hybrid canola crops have performed better than open pollinated varieties in the long dry spells between the rain events. Sclerotinia has been sprayed in crops sown west of the Bindi/Toodyay road with success. Sclerotinia has been increasing in incidence and severity but the dry spring may further restrict yield losses to this disease.

A month ago wheat crops in the areas from Dalwallinu to Kalannie were potentially yielding well above average but expectations are now for a crop yields only slightly above average after the dry September. All crops are at grain fill to almost finished, but could benefit from any late rains. In the Milling to Watheroo districts, late wheat tillering will mean smaller grain size and contribute to screenings issues. Crops on ameliorated soils are showing the best yield potential, while crops on sandy soils have lost more yield potential than crops sown on the loamy soils.

Yield potential for barley crops have declined more than for wheat, perhaps due to the higher biomass and therefore moisture requirement for barley production. Barley crops on the poorer soils and/or shallow soils have burnt away and will produce small grain. Barley crops in the Moora district could still produce good yields, while crops sown west of Moora on the sandy soils, now have lower yield potential. Bass barley crops have been noticed in particular to be suffering from powdery mildew and barley leaf rust.

Insect damage to crops has been low with some DBM and budworm apparent. Pasture topping and croptopping in lupins is yet to be completed. Hay yields have been upwards of 6 tonnes per hectare indicating good biomass after the heavy July/August rainfall.

Kwinana east

In the east Kwinana zone, crops are holding maintaining good yield potential. However, later sown crops will suffer yield potential loss without any immediate rain. Crops sown on soil types with higher water holding capacity and deep rooting depth are holding potential best. Crops sown on sandy soils and very heavy clay soils are generally poor, while crops sown on soft loam soils are maintaining good yield potential. Grain quality will be affected by the dry finish with screenings and higher protein levels in barley likely to be an issue. Wheat quality should be good with perhaps slightly higher protein. Any late rains, if they come soon, may be useful on the later sown crops which are still at early grain fill.

Wheat crops in the Goodlands district may reach 3 tonnes per hectare after extensive autumn rains, while crops on the heavy soils east of Wubin will more likely achieve yields of 1.5 tonnes per hectare. Crops in the Merredin to Burracoppin districts are showing big contrasts in yield potential for late April sown compared to crops sown later in mid and late May. Wheat crop yield potential ranges from 2.5 tonnes per hectare for early sown crops through to 1 tonne per hectare for late sown crops whilst canola yield potential ranges from 1.3 tonnes per hectare for early sown crops through to 0.7 tonnes per hectare for late sown crops

Frost has not been a large issue this season, although isolated effects can be found.

Budworms have increasing in numbers but the expected finish may beat them and control may not be needed.

Corack wheat has been showing a high incidence of Stripe rust and this may affect its use in future seasons.

Kwinana west

Conditions and yield potential vary markedly. Time of sowing is showing big differences in yield potential with early sown crops having far better potential than crops sown in mid-May to early June. Overall, crops in the zone are expected to produce +/- 10% of average yields. However, there will be a large drop in yield potential for late sown crops where the yield decline could be as high as 30 to 40%.

Potential wheat, barley and canola crop yields in the Kwinana west districts are generally average. Crop yield potential in the Cunderdin to Bulyee, Corrigin to Dowerin districts are below average. Crops sown on sandy soils are faring worst.

Many crops in the York area have been badly hit by frost resulting in a significant area of wheat being cut for hay. The area of oats cut for hay has increased with some oat crops being cut from hay due to the spring drought increasing the risk of low grain quality. There have also been reports of significant frost damage in crops from Corrigin to Cunderdin.

Wheat protein levels should be average to slightly up. Screenings in barley will be a problem along with higher protein levels resulting in crops failing to make malt barley grade, with Scope barley crops particularly affected.

Albany Zone

South west

Crops across the south west of the zone are looking very good but sitting on limited moisture. Rainfall for September has been below average.

Wheat crops around Kojonup may achieve up to 3.5 tonnes per hectare, while crops east of Kojonup may only reach 2.5 tonnes per hectare. Wheat crops in the Boyup Brook, Kendenup and Frankland districts are in better condition with 3 to 4 tonnes per hectare potential. Crops in the Darkan and Arthur River districts are facing very dry conditions and will struggle to achieve 2 tonnes per hectare.

Some Stripe Rust is seen but it has been controlled where powdery mildew has been controlled in Mace and Calingiri wheat.

Barley yields are expected to be around 100 kilograms per hectare more than wheat. The Bass variety has suffered from Barley Leaf Rust and growers may look to replace it with the Grainger, La Trobe and Flinders varieties for next season.

Canola is at the pod fill stage for most crops in the south west with 80% of crops finished flowering. The wider Kojonup district should average around 1.6 tonnes per hectare while further east yields may be lower at 1.2 tonnes per hectare. Sclerotinia has been a problem, appearing late and looking aggressive, and needing one or two sprays for control. Yield losses could be as high as 0.5 tonnes per hectare across the south west of the zone. Canola yields at Kendenup have the potential to yield 2 tonnes per hectare but could lose 1 tonnes per hectare where Sclerotinia has not been controlled. Diamond Back Moth and budworm are also apparent.

Most Oat crops are at the watery ripe stage. Oats have suffered from Septoria and Rust but enthusiasm remains strong and the area sown to oats is expected to rise further in 2016 if the price holds up.

Lupin crops also look to have very good yield potential with large biomass, and yield potential ranging from 2 to 2.5+ tonnes per hectare. To date there is no Budworm issues to speak of, but the incidence of Bean Yellow Mosaic Virus in Jenabillup lupins looks to be higher than normal.

Lakes region

Crops are holding on well in the Lakes region of the Albany zone, particularly barley. Crops looked very good in July/August but the dry finish, isolated frosts, crop disease means 2015 will be an average season at best. As elsewhere, crops sown on shallow soils and sands are also showing stress.

Crops sown in the Lake Grace region are in good condition with crops sown in the Lake King and Mt Madden districts in particularly good shape. In the Kondinin and Kulin districts, paddocks with a reduced or low lime program are showing yield losses compared to well limed soils.

Overall an average season will result with uncertain rain events, disease and weeds all taking their toll.

Barley crops are likely to have higher screenings in this season.

Powdery mildew in wheat was monitored but widespread control has not been warranted. Some reduction in leaf area as a consequence may be important for grain quality.

Aphids are still causing concern in wheat and barley. The warm weather should see them disappear soon without further control necessary.

Frost has been seen in most paddocks but the effects are very small in global terms, maybe 10% in the worst case scenarios. Most ears only have the odd grain missing.

Desiccation will commence in canola starting next week, aiming to control July germinated grasses. Canola yields are expected to be around average.

Esperance Zone

The season has been excellent all year for the entire zone and this has continued through September. Average rainfall in the Esperance region for September has maintained the region's very high yield potential.

Wheat and Barley will deliver excellent yields, possibly record yields, with the currently good soil moisture levels.

With a record harvest tonnage very likely for the Esperance zone, growers will be utilising silo bags more than ever as storage and delivery logistics will be a challenge.

Desiccation of canola is starting this week but there are some concerns that sclerotinia may take the edge slightly of yields.

Sclerotinia is a concern in Lupins as much as canola, especially on the lighter country as it puts pressure on the broadleaf break options.

Geraldton Zone

Harvest is gathering pace in the Geraldton zone in the northern and eastern districts with canola first delivered to the Geraldton port in mid September. The warm to hot weather with no rain has hastened crop maturity and any further rain will be of no use to growers throughout the Geraldton zone. Harvesting of wheat and lupins crops is about to commence.

Overall, the zone will record an average season, balanced by good yields in inland districts (Yuna to Mullewa to Wubin) and below average yields in sand soils along the west coast inland to the Midlands road (Mingenew to Eneabba to Coorow). In a season where only three significant falls of rain have been recorded, crops on ameliorated soils with deep rooting depth potential and good water holding capacity will yield well. Crops on shallow soils and pale sand soils will produce generally poor yields.

Grain quality in the main will be good, with wheat protein likely to be average with above average yields. Early quality indications for canola show average oil content of 44% to 47%.

Season Outlook

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- High pressure systems are likely to dominate the weather patterns in October, effectively blocking any substantive cold frontal activity from reaching the south west of WA for the remainder of the season.
- Very warm Indian Ocean seawater temperatures to the south west are not conducive to building moisture for significant cold frontal rain.
- As the summer pattern establishes in November this warm body of water will likely see the development of thunderstorm activity during the harvest period from November to January.

Average rainfall and warm days for Western Australia- Courtesy BoM

- The current outlook reflects a combination of very warm sea surface temperatures in the Indian Ocean, and a mature El Niño in the Pacific.
- October to December is likely to be wetter than average in southwestern and central Australia; and drier than average in parts of the southeast and northeast.
- Warmer nights are likely for most of Australia; warmer days along parts of the southern and eastern coasts.
- Historical outlook accuracy for October to December is moderate over most of Australia.