

National estimate increases to 50mt

BY GREGOR HEARD

AUSTRALIA'S winter crop could go close to yielding 50 million tonnes, according to the latest estimate from Rural Bank and Rural Finance.

And RBRF agribusiness general manager Andrew Smith said there was potential for further upside from the forecast of 49mt.

"We are just being conservative until we see the extent of the water damage, principally in central west NSW," he said.

The big year-on-year gains will be in Vic, expected to have a crop double the size of last year's drought-impacted season, and Qld, which is forecast to rise 25 per cent, while SA is predicted to increase by 10-15pc.

The report also flags WA to still produce above-average yields, despite frost damage lowering total production expectations.

Mr Smith said although the spring rain caused isolated pockets of damage, in general it had been excellent for crop production.

"With a 15-year high in crop vegetation density during the growing season in most parts of Australia, the potential for a bumper season is certainly there this year," he said.

Wheat production is expected to rise 16pc to 28mt, barley will increase 11pc to 10mt, canola will be up 23pc

to 3.5mt and chickpeas up 21pc to 1.2mt.

Mr Smith would be watching the pulse production with interest.

"There has been crop abandoned but equally there have been some good yield reports in Qld where the crop did not get too wet," he said.

Mr Smith said canola and pulses would be success stories in yield gains and gross margins.

"Cereal prices aren't providing any great excitement but canola and pulses are at historically good levels," he said.

While cereal prices were low, Mr Smith expected growers to at least achieve milling grades with wheat.

"The early comments are that protein will be down, which is to be expected with such big yields about, but at this stage we don't expect there to be widespread downgrading in the cereal crop," he said.

Mr Smith said there had been strong demand earlier in the season for grain bags and silos.

"People have got as much cover as they can, so if they want to store grain on-farm in the hope of a price rise they can," he said.

"But it was more difficult to get any type of storage system late in the growing season so some farmers will have to deliver into the bulk handling system."



MALLEE READY: Taplan farmers Josh and Peri McIntosh, Border Park Organics, in their Yitpi crop, which they plan to start harvesting next week.

Breadwinning crops at Taplan

HARVEST started last week for Mallee organic farmers Josh and Peri McIntosh, who crop 800 hectares of wheat, rye, oats, barley, triticale and vetch at Taplan, via Loxton.

So far things are "looking very good", with 240 millimetres of growing season rainfall, compared to 124mm last year.

"Some paddocks of wheat were knocked about by Russian wheat aphid, but they eventually disappeared and the crop recovered, although thinner in some patches," Mr McIntosh said.

"The late start also made it hard to control weeds, so there is more ryegrass and barley grass in the crop than normal. But we have a Hanford screen on one header

to take out ryegrass and turnip seed if the screenings get too high."

The McIntoshes started harvesting Moby barley last week, and will go on to Yitpi wheat next week, weather permitting.

Their organic wheat yielded 0.8 tonnes/ha last year, while their rye went 0.5t/ha, but higher yields are expected this year with the extra rain.

"The typical yield reduction in an organic crop is offset by the grain premiums and reduced input costs," Mr McIntosh said.

"Last year's prices for wheat were more than \$800/t and rye was more than \$900/t."

All the seed is stored on-

farm and then sold to specialty customers.

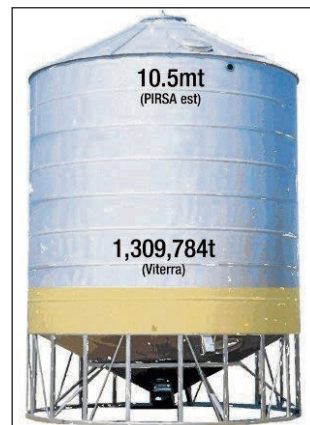
"Organic grain is very popular, particularly wheat and rye," Mr McIntosh said.

"Laucke Flour Mills have bought our wheat and rye for their bread mixes ever since the farm was certified organic in 1996, and have been very good to us.

"We also sell cleaned seed to home millers, other organic cereal farmers and organic/biodynamic orchards and vineyards for cover and green manure crops."

In an effort to increase yields and improve soils, the McIntoshes will consider Mace wheat and peas next year.

■ Border Park Organics p51
— ALISHA FOGDEN



RAMPING UP: Receipts of SA grain at Viterro sites has passed 1.3 million tonnes.

Harvest records break at SA silos

DESPITE the unpredictable spring weather, the SA harvest continues at a cracking pace, with Viterro reporting almost 700,000 tonnes were delivered into sites this week.

The deliveries doubled the total amount received for the year, to almost 1.31 million tonnes.

Two daily receipt records were set on the Eyre Peninsula at the weekend, with Lock taking in 7200t on Saturday, while more than 8300t was delivered to Rudall on Sunday – the largest daily intake since 2010-11.

The EP has received more than 943,000t of grain this harvest and Viterro loaded a third vessel of new season grain at Thevenard.

In the central region, deliveries were more than 210,000t for the week, taking its total to 331,802t.

The eastern region has only received 34,559t for the season, with wet weather delaying harvest, according to Viterro.

On Tuesday, Loxton and Renmark recorded about 10 millimetres, while Sandalwood received up to 5mm on Monday. Warmer weather is forecast this weekend.

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