

## Sweet start for sowing

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ANOTHER wave of rain across most of NSW this week has put the last piece of icing on the cake for farmers as they prepare to sow winter crops.

Coming on top of previous good falls, the rain is perfectly timed to top up soil moisture profiles for the traditional target date for sowing canola in the south on Anzac Day, April 25.

It will also encourage farmers to get stuck into main season sowing of winter cereals and pulses in May.

In parts of the North West, however, where falls of up to 60 millimetres were received in the week to yesterday morning, it will delay the drying out of paddocks saturated with flood rains since late December.

Top falls in the past week included 68mm at Coonamble, 56mm at Narromine, 49mm at Brewarrina, 39mm at Bourke, 35mm at Dubbo, 33mm at Walgett and Trangie, 39mm at Armidale, 37mm at Scone, and 35mm at Hillston.

In the south of the State the rain was lighter, but that should be rectified with falls predicted for the coming week.

The Bureau of Meteorology is forecasting anything from 15mm to 50mm across all of the State except the central and southern coasts and adjacent tablelands.

Mediocre prices for wheat and other cereals, and to a lesser extent canola, have created a dilemma for many farmers as to what to plant this year.

AWB Ltd in its latest 2009-10 wheat pool update this week dropped its prices by \$6 a tonne across the board, following falls of \$8/t two weeks ago.

Industry and Investment (I and I) NSW program leader farming systems, John Kneipp, Tamworth, said northern grain areas were in "very good shape" with conditions for sowing as good as they had been for "many many years".

He added however: "It's going to be pretty damp in a lot of places for a considerable time.

"Everybody will be looking for a bit of sunshine for a while."

But northern farmers able to do so would start sowing canola from now on and he expected "massive" chickpea sowings in western areas later.

I and I NSW district agronomist at Coonamble, Rohan Brill, said the latest rain would mean most farmers would not be able to get onto their paddocks for the next two weeks.

"They are really keen to make use of the full profiles they have," he said.

Darling Livestock Health and Pest Authority senior ranger at Brewarrina, Colin Betts, said the region had received falls of from 25mm to 60mm since Monday week.

"At this stage it's too wet for farmers to go on (their paddocks), but I think they have the grease gun out and are underneath their tractors and testing all their equipment," he said.

"They still have a bit of time up their sleeves."

I and I NSW technical specialist for oilseeds and pulses, Don McCaffery, Orange, said some farmers on the upper slopes, in the south particularly, were "straining at the bit" to sow canola early as a dual-purpose crop.

"This is shaping to be the best year for a decade," he said.

"This is just fabulous rain – bloody brilliant."

Mr McCaffery said with soils in many areas saturated there could be some run-off this time into major dams.

Meanwhile, a Victorian agronomist, Andy Newall, of NewAg at Horsham, has warned farmers in drier areas to be aware that dry sowing of winter crops could lead to "false germination" where plants came up on moisture already in the ground, but did not have enough reserves to get them through a dry late autumn.

He said pulses in particular could be prone to uneven germination on a light break.

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