

GROWER OVERVIEW OF REGIONAL VARIETY PERFORMANCE

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This Overview has been compiled after talking with a limited number of growers from most districts, and as could be expected there were some opposite opinions expressed. However I will talk about the most commonly expressed opinions and make brief comment about the opposite view where appropriate.

This year there have been very few growers who got a large percentage of their harvest complete before suffering very severe, and in some cases devastating damage from rain, flooding, and prolonged cloudy weather. Siokra has been the variety most affected by this adverse weather, and I would now like to talk about each variety commencing with the most popular.

**SIOKRA:** In spite of suffering very badly in the weather conditions this year Siokra will remain the most popular variety, although not by such a large margin.

By far the most popular feature is its tremendous yield potential and in the past two seasons it has outyielded the others by up to half a bale in some cases. The grade often does not quite come up to the same standard as DP90, however the superior yield more than makes up for any shortcomings in grade.

It is more susceptible to disease and will loose grade faster in adverse weather. 1988 was a real test and it was badly affected by a combination of diseases in many districts.

Alternaria was a problem in many crops depending on the stage of maturity when the rain started. The affect of this in severe cases was premature defoliation which meant a lot of the top bolls did not reach maturity. Verticillium also contributed to losses in the wet conditions.

Phytophthora also played its part with many green bolls opening up into the wet conditions becoming a grey hard unpickable lock.

As well as these disease problems I believe the bush became much more brittle, with many healthy bolls falling straight to the ground as soon as the picker hit the bush.

All these problems combined caused yield losses up to half a bale to the acre.

With regard to insect activity, when Siokra first became available it was a popular belief that it may require one to two less sprays. This no longer seems to be the case, except perhaps where mites are a problem, and it was suggested to me that when applying anti mite sprays it appears to be much more effective on Siokra, and could in fact save up to three sprays.

The usual comments from those who don't favour Siokra is that the bush is not strong enough, and it falls over into the furrow, or it is more susceptible to rot.

DP90: When 90 first became available several years ago it was almost considered the saviour of the Australian industry, because of its superior strength and good quality enabling us to hold and expand our position in world markets.

A couple of bad seasons with blight and the arrival of Siokra removed it from the No.1 position.

However many people still prefer 90, and the most often quoted reasons being, its strong upright bush, with the bolls clustered in close to the main stem, and its excellent quality.

Many people are also able to achieve a better yield and they will stick with 90 in spite of blight.

90 is the preferred variety in Central Queensland.

Blight is always a worry, but they still prefer 90 because it picks better and has better quality.

In the rapidly expanding rain grown areas of Central Queensland they like 90 because it seems to stand up to stress better, has a strong root system and seems to forage better, this can be very significant where most plantings are skip row. Siokra may have a place in later planting because of its faster maturity.

SICALA: With this being the first year of widespread use for this variety most people seem to want more experience in growing it before making a real commitment to it. The growth of the plant seems satisfactory, and a general comment was that it looked good all through the season, but didn't go any better in the end. Some people have put it in as their major variety, usually as a replacement for 90 because it is resistant to blight, and they are happy with its performance in other areas. It has been tried in all areas with everybody being reasonably happy with the results, and as cultural practices improve we should be able to achieve a better result.

SUMMARY: I think 1988 has shown how important it is to have available more than one variety, especially when the only certainty we have about the climate is that we know that next season will be different from the last. You never know when some new strain of some new disease may strike a single variety. On the other hand it is a quite remarkable feat to cover the geographical spread we have, from Trangie on latitude 32 degrees south to Emerald on the Tropic of Capricorn, with just three varieties. The North American equivalent of this is from El Paso in West Texas to about halfway down Mexico.

We must remember that it takes some time for farmers to learn to get the best out of a new variety, and also to establish it on the market. If we have available too many varieties it could be confusing for both farmer and spinner.

With the rapid expansion of rain grown cotton I think trialing varieties in these areas could be a good investment.

All things considered I think the industry has been well served by researchers and Cotton Seed Distributors and I would like to finish by congratulating them and at the same time remind them that disease resistance is a very important quality to strive for in a cotton plant.

