



Foreign Agricultural Service

Global Market Analysis

International Production Assessment Division

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Commodity Intelligence Report

AUSTRALIA: 2020/21 COTTON PRODUCTION REBOUNDS

Australia 2020/21 cotton production is estimated at 2.5 million 480-pound bales (0.544 million metric tons), unchanged from last month but up 1.9 million bales or 300 percent from last year. Harvested area is estimated at 275,000 hectares, unchanged from last month, but up nearly 360 percent from last year. Yield is currently estimated at 1,979 kilograms per hectare, unchanged from last month, but 10 percent above the 5-year average.

The sharp rise in production this season is associated with the significant increase in planted area. More area was planted as a result of above-average rainfall in the drought affected cotton-growing states of New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland (QLD) in early 2020 prior to the sowing of the 2020/21 crop. In addition, Central and Southern Queensland received abundant tropical wet season rains. These rains markedly improved soil moisture content and produced water runoff into rivers and catchments, thus bolstering irrigation water availability for irrigated cotton and provided adequate soil moisture in many dryland cotton areas. Dryland planting was remarkably low in 2019/20, but a significant area was planted to dryland cotton this season. Harvesting is currently underway for the 2020/21 crop which was sown October to November 2020. Cotton harvest began in April and will continue through June.

The area, yield, and production of cotton have fluctuated widely over the years (see Figure 1). This is a result of variations in rainfall amounts, irrigation availability, and prices of cotton and sorghum. Sorghum and cotton are the two dominant summer crops in eastern Australia and compete for the same land. When cotton prices are high, sorghum area decreases. Irrigated cotton comprises about 90 percent of Australia's total cotton production, the remaining 10 percent is produced by rainfed operations. Irrigated cotton yields are substantially higher than dryland yields, and the difference widens in low-rainfall years. Dryland cotton planting tends to vary with the seasonal weather forecast and prices at sowing.

NSW produces about two-thirds of Australia's cotton, with QLD accounting for the remainder (see Figure 2). Most cropping regions of Australia are only able to produce one crop per year, but areas of Darling Downs (southern QLD) and the Liverpool Plains (northern NSW) can produce a summer and winter crop each year. This is due to their favorable soils and climate.

Australia is a relatively minor cotton producer on the global scale, but typically ranks as the world’s third-to-sixth largest exporter depending on the season. Improved conditions this year will increase export availability. Major Australia summer crops include cotton, sorghum, rice, and sunflowers. Planting of the 2021/22 Australia cotton crop will begin October 2021.

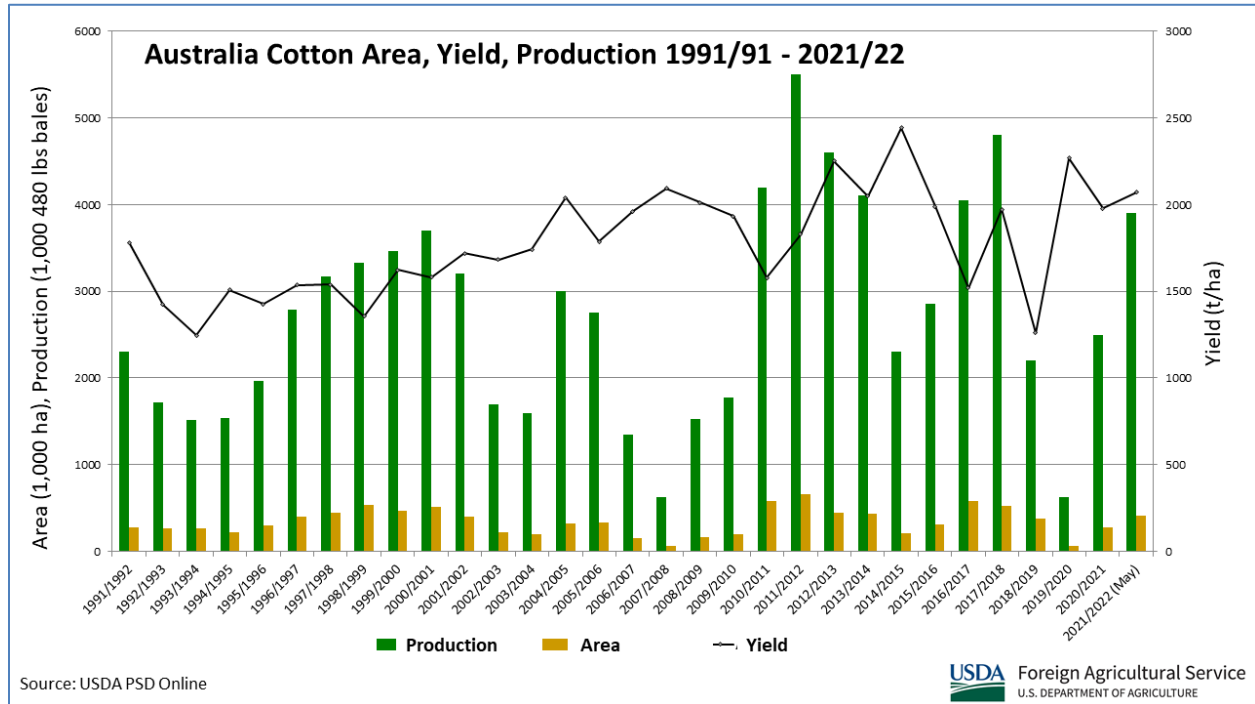
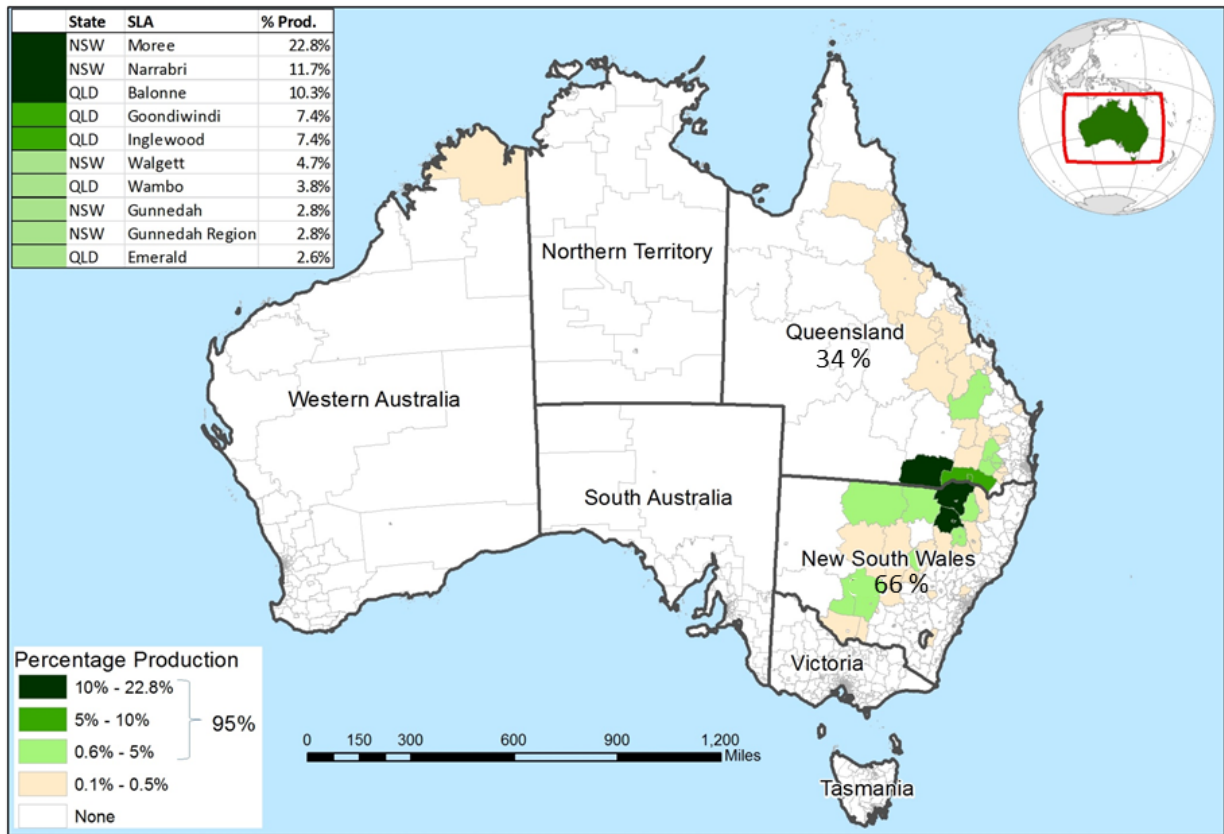


Figure 1. Australia Cotton Area, Yield, and Production time series chart. Source USDA PSD.

Australia Cotton Production Distribution Map



SOURCE: ABS Ag Census with 2016 Boundaries (SA2)
 Average percent production of 20005/2006, 2010/11, and 2015/16
 Map last updated 2/5/2018

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Figure 2. Map depicting production distribution of cotton across Australia. Source is three years of Census data from Australia Bureau of Statistics. State percentage based on recent 5 year average from ABARES.

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