

HOW THE COTTON CROP GROWS

Cotton prefers a short humid spring to aid germination, followed by a long hot summer. The plant thrives in a mean daily maximum temperature in excess of 90deg. F.

The plant grows from 2ft. 6in. to 4ft. tall and plants are set out in rows 40 inches apart. Spacing between plants is about 4in. to 8in.

From planting to picking, the duration is approximately 200 days, and it is essential that the growing period be frost-free.

Plants commence to flower in approximately 70 to 80 days, and the flowering period may extend over 60 days.

A cotton boll forms at the base of the flower, and grows until it reaches the size of a small egg.

After maturing the boll cracks open, exposing the dry "seed cotton."

As many as 150 bolls have been known to form on one plant, and each boll contains about 35 seeds.

Yield can be roughly estimated by counting the number of bolls per foot of row.

Approximately 10 bolls per foot indicate a crop which will yield one bale per acre, 20 bolls, two bales and so on.

The cotton fibre, or lint, represents about one third of the weight of seed cotton harvested.

Better variety

A variety known as Empire was grown in the early years, but this has given way to the Delta Pine Smooth-leaf type, which is now grown almost exclusively in the Namoi Valley.

It would be true to say that growers attempt to supply the type of

cotton most suitable to the needs of the Australian spinning industry.

Local growers aim to produce a fibre of 1.1/32in to 1.1/16in. length.

Cotton is essentially a deep-rooted plant, and as such, prefers a type of soil which is permeable to a depth of about five feet.

The plant is quite adaptable, and under irrigation, will produce well in soil types which vary from light sandy to heavy clay.

The practice of local growers is to rip the soil to a depth of 18 to 24 inches or plough from 10 to 12 inches.

Correct gradient of the irrigation furrows is most important.

In the Namoi Valley, the natural fall is about three feet per mile. A steeper plane would cause a run-off of irrigation waters to occur before each plant had received sufficient application, and a lesser plane could cause water-logging.

Minor irregularities in gradient are removed by land-planing.

THE PICTURESQUE NAMOI



The Namoi River flows lazily from its source in the Moonbi Ranges near Tamworth, to where it joins the Barwon near Walgett. Keepit Dam, constructed across the Namoi between Tamworth and Gunnedah, traps a total of 345,000 acre feet of water. Cotton growers draw their water from the Namoi River, and the flow from the dam is regulated to comply with demands placed by irrigators.

