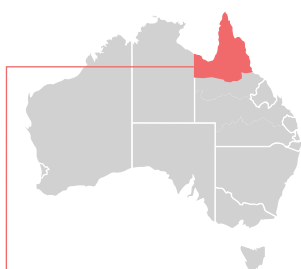


Regional Reports



FAR NORTH QLD

MAREEBA, DAINTREE, COOKTOWN

Far North Queensland:

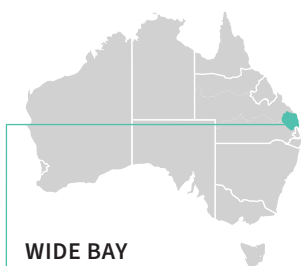
Cynthia Barbagallo, Packed with Passion

Hello from North Queensland! It seems we have not been alone in our growing struggles over the last year. Many growers across most horticultural crops, not just passionfruit, have been impacted by the extended wet season last year. And some growers are finding growing conditions continue to be less than favourable this season. Continuing wet and cold conditions are impacting on quality with less unblemished passionfruit and increasing vine deaths. Brown Spot and *Fusarium Solani* seem to be the two biggest growing concerns for passionfruit growers in our region at the moment.

Many of the growers I spoke to who are affected by *Fusarium Solani* have adopted crop rotation and spelling of their blocks. Growers are hopeful that spelling, cover cropping and crop rotation will reduce the impacts of *Fusarium Solani* the following season with some growers reporting that they are optimistic that they are already seeing success. Red Scale and Red Spider Mites also seem to be impacting growers in our region. It has been an interesting year for us here on our farm with weather, pest and disease pressures making it impossible to reap a return. It was disheartening to see our small orchard struggling despite our continuing best efforts. Nevertheless, we have our new seedlings happily growing in our shade house and we are in the process of preparing our orchard for the new growing season.

Our goal this season is to companion plant a selection of herbs, flowers and groundcovers around the base of each vine to create a happier, healthier ecosystem within our orchard. We are optimistic that by creating a biodiverse environment and mini habitats with food and shade, we can attract and establish more beneficial insects within our orchard earlier. We know that when we remove our vines to re-plant younger and more productive vines, we are also removing all of the colonies of beneficial insects that have taken up residence in the lush canopy cover. We are similarly removing the shelter that protects the now almost bare, moist soil that our worms and microbes are thriving in and exposing them to extreme harsh conditions. So while removing the old vines provides a fresh start for us by way of reducing any fungal issues the old vines posed, the now stark environment for our soil and beneficial insects are far more uninhabitable and pests love it!

We have also selected plants that will promote a richer, healthier soil. Some are nitrogen fixing while others are pioneer plants mining nutrients from deeper in our soil. And last but not least, our selection of ground covers will aid in weed control and moisture retention around each vine which should reduce the need to weed and spray, and cut down the costs of mulching and watering. Of course, our selection also includes herbs and flowers that we hope we can harvest to create a dollar return too. We want to be grass roots farmers, relying less on inputs while promoting sustainable soils by reviving the soil's fertility. And we have high hopes that we can establish this as our new platform for growing profitable crops on our farm. So, until next time, happy growing and we hope your Winter is Packed with Passion.



WIDE BAY

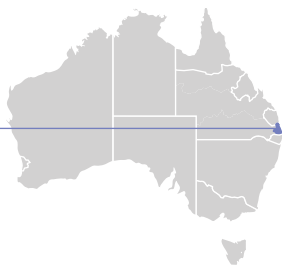
BUNDABERG

Wide Bay:

Sarah & Jason Meiers, Meiers Tropical Plantation

Hello everyone, it's winter already and what a year it has been! With a much cooler beginning to summer last year our crop picked all the way over Christmas and into the New Year keeping us busy through what is usually our only time of the year not picking. Other crops were affected by the cool start, like lychees which were around three weeks later than usual. By the time our old vines stopped, our young vines started so no breaks here.

Thankfully the Paradise Dam works have begun for it to be returned to its original height. With three of our four farms relying on water from the Paradise Dam this is great news for us and many surrounding farms. The past 12 months have been very kind to us with sensible amounts of rain to help replenish the ground water and dam storage helping to get our new farms' windbreaks established well after a three-year previous drought. We hope you all have a good season.



SUNSHINE COAST
GYMPIE TO GLASS HOUSE MOUNTAINS

Sunshine Coast:

Fill & Jim Gordon, Mandaramba Harvest

2022/23 has been the most unusual I have experienced in the past 40 years.

While there haven't been any extreme weather events in the Sunshine Coast area, abnormal patterns have been common.

Last spring was cooler and wetter than normal and this upset the fruit set for the summer crop. Less fruit and a much later crop was a common trend. We had a reasonable amount of fruit in February and March and since then, not much at all.

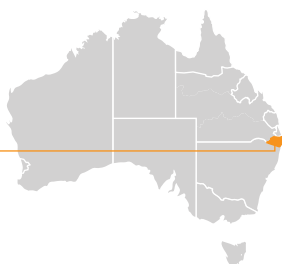
A very cool May has slowed down our winter crop. We expected to start getting busier by mid to late May, but it was well into June before there was any quantity.

Rainfall has been quite variable within the region. While at Yandina we were getting good regular showers most of autumn, just south and further north were complaining about it being so dry. (Of course farmers never whinge about the weather!) The rain was good but the Septoria that came with it wasn't so welcome.

I hope everyone else has had a more productive year than I have. There is always next year.

On a more positive note, the breeding program has been reinvigorated by Mo from the University of Queensland. He is very keen and energetic and despite a protracted transfer from Southern Cross Uni, Mo is doing his best to make up for lost time. He has spent many hours on Paxton's and our farms becoming familiar with passionfruit farming practices, what we are looking for in a variety and doing a number of crosses. We are ever hopeful of a few new varieties for the whole industry soon.

Good luck with the coming season.



NORTHERN NSW
TWEED VALLEY

Northern NSW:

Dennis Chant, AD & JL Chant

As growers have experienced across most of our production regions, the first half of 2023 has presented a variety of challenges for those of us in the Tweed Region and Northern NSW more generally.

Production for most growers is well below average as they contend with the lingering impacts of last year's prolonged and, in some cases, record wet season, together with the ongoing search for varieties that can adequately replace our former mainstays of *Sweetheart* and *Misty Gem*.

In our case, we have persisted with *Sweetheart* and the new vines are still standing up reasonably well compared to the extensive losses experienced with our second- and third-year vines. Production from the new vines has been slow but steady over the last few months with a good amount of fruit still hanging albeit very slow to colour up. We have had the benefit of a much drier first six months with 650mm of rain compared to more than 2200mm for the same period in 2022. Hopefully the survival rate will be greatly improved!

Market conditions have also been unpredictable with consumers seemingly more cost conscious under current economic conditions.

Unfortunately, the continued challenging conditions has taken a toll on the number of growers in our region with several long-standing growers leaving the industry. Hopefully this trend can be reversed with the development of new varieties and more favourable weather conditions.

Best of luck to all of our growers for the coming season.