

'93 - THE YEAR THAT WAS

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Birchip Cropping Demonstration Sites

For some, 1993 was the best year ever. For others a disaster caused by mice, frost and the decision to plant a majority of barley crops.

For the lucky ones, planting as late as July seemed a gamble. The extremely dry months of May and June seemed to indicate that a drought may be in the making. However, good general rains fell in the second week of July and continued for the remainder of the year.

As well as producing above average rainfall (see Figure 1), October and November proved to be several degrees cooler than average as measured by maximum day temperatures (see Figure 2).

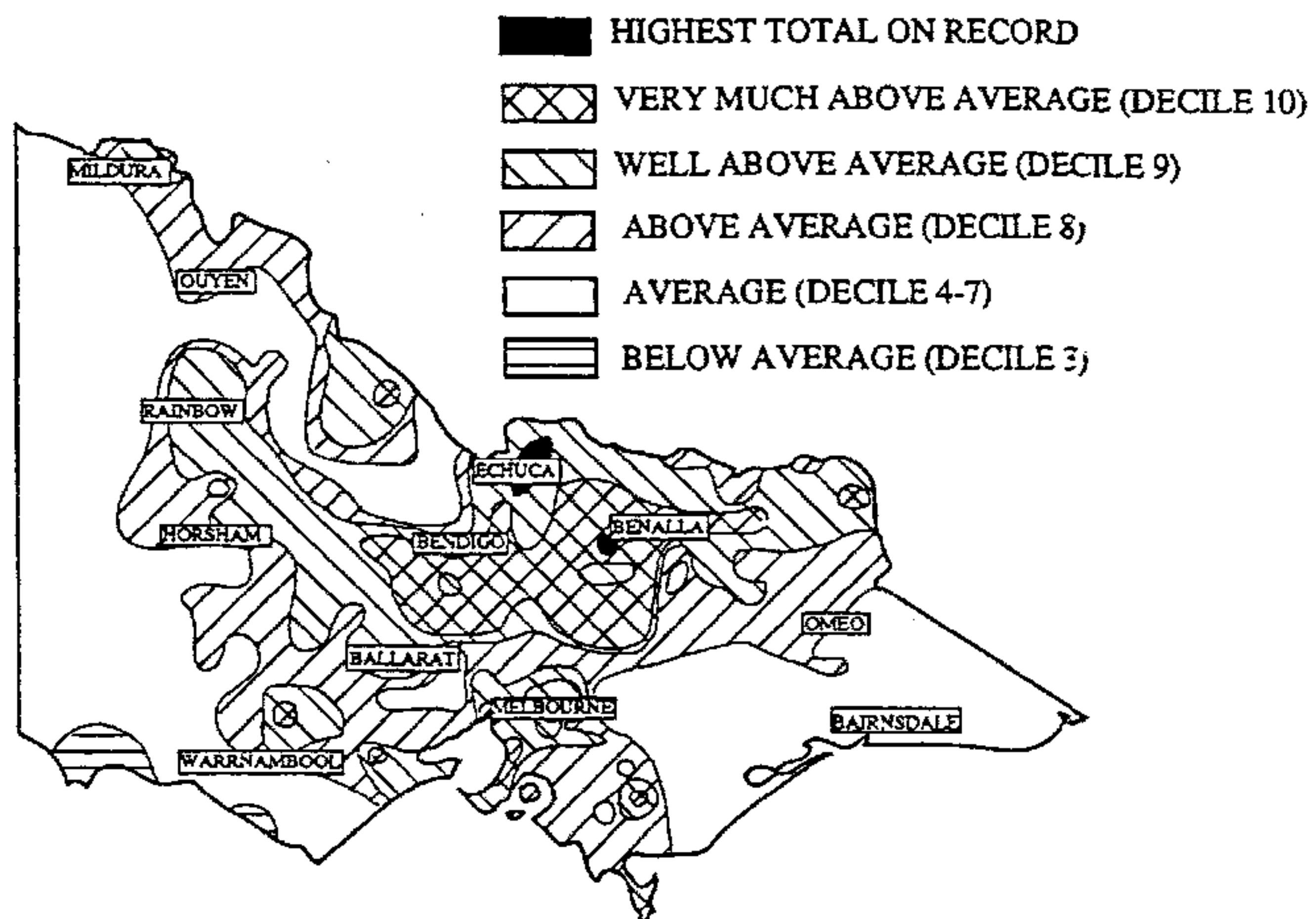


Figure 1. 1993 Rainfall Deciles

During October, over three days exceeded 25°C at Warracknabeal and only by as little as one and two degrees Celsius. The cool weather continued into mid-November which proved to be a bonanza for late-sown cereal crops, Canola and re-sown Chick peas.

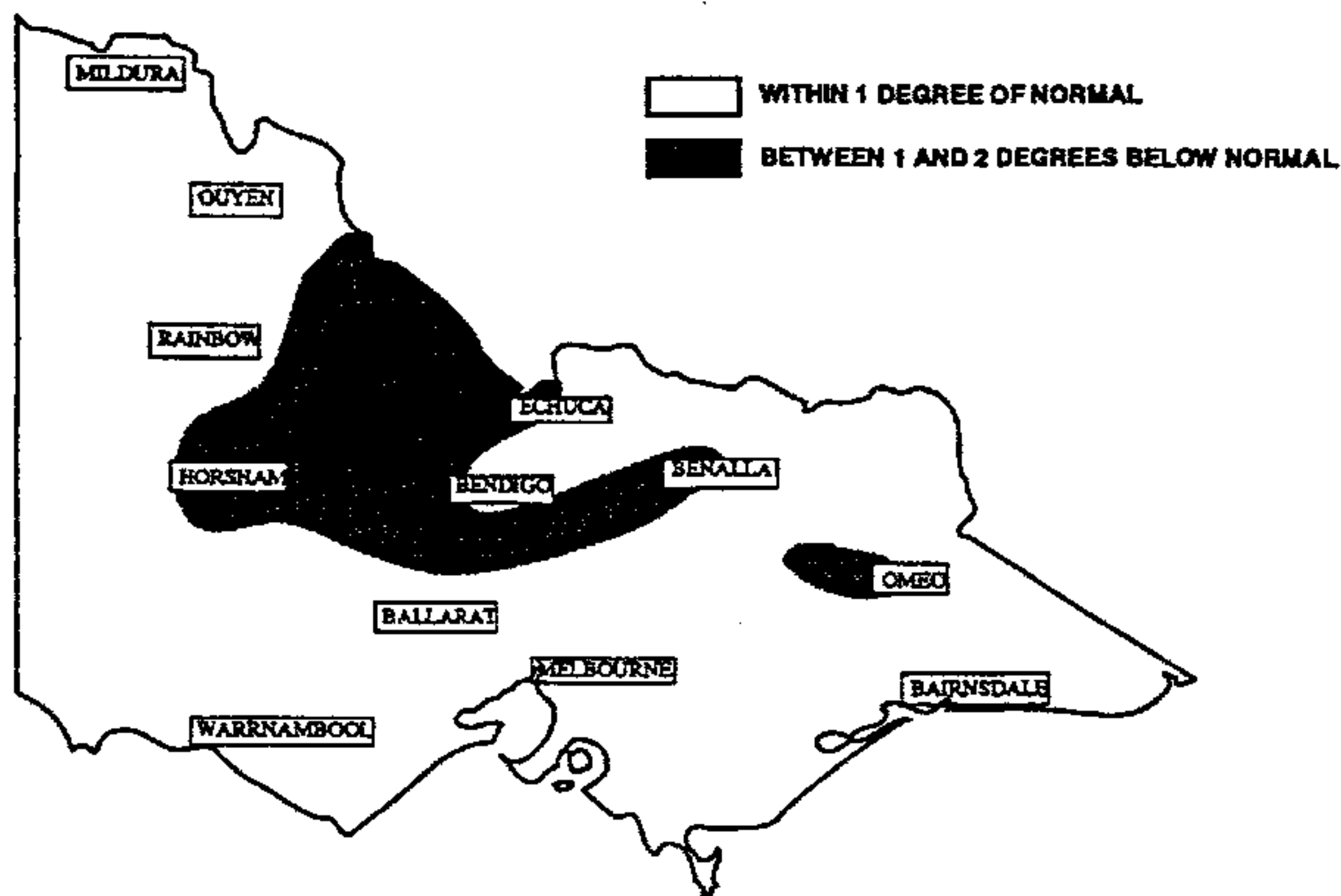


Figure 2. Maximum temperature departures - Spring 1993

Yields throughout the Wimmera and Mallee were 20 - 50% above average for cereals. Grain legume crops managed to achieve average yields which probably was a little disappointing considering the cool, wet finish.

The main negative factor for 1993 was mice, particularly in the Wimmera. They ate crops indiscriminately. Though Chick peas, Faba beans and Canola were the favoured meal, severe damage was inflicted on other crops as well. Many growers were forced to re-sow crops in July. The strychnine poisoning campaign was very successful in protecting the merging crops.

One other negative factor for some was a frost which occurred in many western areas on 11 October. Warracknabeal's minimum temperature on that day was 1°C, for Horsham 0°C and Swan Hill 3°C. Quite severe damage occurred in many field pea crops, and damage was also observed in some western Mallee and Wimmera areas.

Harvest is always a worrying time, but this was particularly so after the disastrous 1992 season. 1993 weather seemed dry and stable - at first. Farmers' main worry seemed to be the disastrously low price for malting and feed barley: \$70 - 80 on farm for malting and \$60 feed was considered little more than an insult.

Many farmers had a high proportion of their total area in to barley, so that the possibility of a reasonable profit, even though crops were, in general, excellent was slim.

Then on 11 December, as much as 100 mm of rain fell in some areas. Most farmers received at least 50 mm. This meant that farmers frantically, in reversal of the normal practice, turned to harvesting wheat before it was shot and sprung.

Fortunately, very little was downgraded due, primarily, to cool temperatures, low humidity and strong winds around the rainy periods.

The standing barley crops, however, were quite badly damaged by the severe winds. Some crops were affected by as much as 50%.

Overall, farmers could be well satisfied by the outcomes of '93, taking into account the mice and the very dubious start to the season. Prices for most grains have continued to firm since, especially for Chick peas and Canola.

We acknowledge the contributions from the Bureau of Meteorology for the figures used in this paper.

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REMEMBER: BCDS Field Day - 14 September