



Alabama Cotton Picksack Newsletter

April 2007

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***Discussion on Making Cotton More Profitable** *D. Monks, Extension Agronomist*

The prediction for the 2007 cotton crop in Alabama is for us to plant approximately 450,000 acres this year. This estimate is down over 100,000 from last year when we planted 575,000 acres, according to the USDA-NASS reports (http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Alabama/index.asp#.html). The crop that is primarily moving acres out of cotton seems to be corn, although we may see more soybean acres this year due to higher prices and dry/cold weather during the corn planting window. Planting intentions for corn are set at 300,000 acres (up from 200,000 in 2006) but are much more moderate for soybean with an increase of 30,000 acres predicted. It is still early in the cotton planting window so it remains to be seen what will ultimately happen with these acreage predictions.

A few weeks ago, we had an opportunity to go over cotton budgets and profitability with several experts in the field. The discussion centered around how to make more money: cut costs or increase yield? The way it works in my family is that we either have to spend less or make more and I think it is the same in farming. The idea that we can spend our way into a better crop only works if we are adding or replacing operations and inputs that have been limiting and if each additional input produces more value than it costs. Most of the cotton producers

that I have worked with over the past several years are very adept at cutting unnecessary costs, so there is probably not a lot of gain to be made on that end of the spectrum. Assuming that is the case, there remains the idea of making higher yields. The problem on this end is that the input suppliers have gotten real good at charging the farmer what their product is worth, so that even if yields are higher, profit remains about the same.

The investment that many growers have made in irrigation and conservation tillage has certainly paid off and will continue to help keep their operation strong. My primary concern at this point is another crop season that nets the farmer less than his input costs. I think the automobile industry calls this “negative equity”, which seems like a real oxymoron to me. The point of the discussion settled on conducting research and demonstrations targeted at making cotton more profitable whether the producer falls in the upper tier of production or somewhere in the middle where profit is more elusive. In other words, we decided we needed to work on what it would take to make it possible to profitably produce cotton with a realistic target yield of less than a bale and a half.

If there is anything that our regional or county agents and specialists can help you with this growing season, regardless of the crop, please call upon us.



***North Alabama Cotton Update:** *C. Burmester, Extension Agronomist*

This has been a very rough two weeks for many North Alabama row crop farmers. Three nights of temperatures in the lower 20's has greatly affected both the wheat and corn crops in this part of the state. At this writing many changes in the crop situation are still occurring. This is a brief summary of the current situation.

Wheat

A very promising wheat crop was about 3 weeks ahead of normal due to the warm temperatures in March. Much of the crop was heading when the cold night temperatures occurred. This wheat now has almost no yield potential. Seed formation has been stopped and the heads are turning yellow and drying down. Wheat that was in the boot stage or earlier seems to have less damage. However, in many of these fields we are seeing freeze damage on the stem which could also greatly affect yields. The extent of this freeze damage will not be known until this wheat is heading.

Farmers are being advised to check with their insurance providers before they make any management decisions concerning the wheat crop. Options appear to be using the wheat as a cover crop and planting either soybeans or cotton. Some farmers may want to graze or cut the wheat for hay. Check wheat herbicide labels for possible restrictions on grazing or cutting the wheat for hay. Also make

sure to take a sample of the wheat for nitrate testing. At this time we are unsure if nitrate toxicity will be a problem with the wheat or not.

Corn

Corn acreage increased dramatically in North Alabama in 2007. Planting began in early March and most emerged corn was between the 2nd and 5th leaf stage when the freeze occurred. Many corn fields were burned to the ground by the freeze. The growing point for corn was still below ground and we were hopeful the corn would recover. At 6-7 days after the freeze, cold wet conditions returned to the area and stressed the corn again. About two days after the second cold snap, reports of rotting corn started coming in. At this time, corn replanting is fairly widespread. Finding corn seed is also a problem. Most of the replanting is on the earliest corn that was planted in early March. Atrazine has been applied to many of these fields and replanting corn is about the only option available. If Atrazine has not been applied then planting cotton or soybeans is an option. It is too early to tell exactly how much corn will be replanted at this time.

Cotton

Very little cotton has been planted across North Alabama. The cold weather and wheat and corn problems have kept most cotton planters out of the fields. With cotton acreage expected to be down by close to 50% most farmers are not rushed to plant cotton. With warmer weather in the forecast I expect much cotton to be put in the ground this week.



Planting Time in the Wiregrass: *W. Birdsong, Regional Cotton Specialist

Cotton planting time is here and as always a farmer has a new sense of optimism for the upcoming crop year. With this in mind we must make sure that we have done what is required to produce a good crop. With this in mind let's look at a few things.

Soil Testing – This should already be done and a fertility plan should be in place. Remember the results from a research based lab will make you money, not to mention fertilizer is not cheap anymore. – Auburn, or another University is the ONLY lab that will provide you with research-based recommendations.

Soil Temperature – Watch soil temperature as well as the calendar date. Both need to be right before beginning to plant. Soil temperature should be from 60 to 65 degrees for three consecutive days and it should be at a time of the year that is usually conducive for planting. Currently conditions are favorable for planting.

Seeding Rate – From the research conducted at the Wiregrass Research Station, we need a plant stand between 2.5 and 3.0 plants per foot. Some farmers try to save on the seeding rate because of the technology cost associated with cotton seed. If you have a seeding rate in South Alabama less than 2.5 seed per foot then there is no doubt that you are “leaving money on the table”. Remember, the technology “cost cap” in S. Alabama is approximately 2.9 seed per foot.

Weather Outlook – I am optimistic about this year’s weather and like you, the Auburn Agronomy Team is planning and planting research test to better inform you about varieties, nematicides, and much more. Please stay in touch and we will be happy to share the information.



***Insect Situation Report: R. Smith, Extension Entomologist**

Several options are available for at-planting early season insect control. These include the seed treatments Cruiser and Gaucho Grande, as well as these same products combined with a nematode component (Cruiser as Avicta Complete Pak and Gaucho Grande as Aeris Seed Applied System). In addition we have Temik 15G as an in-furrow granule. I am sure each grower has already made the decision as to which of these they will use in 2007. In-furrow sprays with acephate or imidacloprid are also an option, but are not widely used.

Each of these options has pluses and minuses. The weather, and how rapidly the cotton grows off, has much to do with how effective these various treatments are. In springs like 2006, basically all at-planting options needed help in the form of a foliar overspray. Foliar spray options include acephate (Orthene and other generics), Bidrin, dimethoate, and Centric. Pyrethroids are effective on thrips if they are needed at this time for cutworm control. Just as with the at-planting treatments, each of these foliar options have their place. The decision to use a foliar spray should be based on several things. Planting date, time required for emergence, temperatures (especially night time), days or weeks post-planting, thrips numbers and visual appearance of the seedling plants.

In general, the seed treatments give 21-28 days thrips protection while Temik will last about one week longer. The clock begins on the planting date and not the emergence date. Most seasons, cotton is beyond thrips injury when it reaches about the fifth true leaf. The greatest benefit from a foliar spray comes when it is applied at the one to two true leaf stage, before the true leaves take on a crinkled or distorted appearance from thrips injury.



***Monitoring for Weed Resistance:** *M. Patterson, Extension Weed Scientist*

Herbicide resistant weeds are increasing rapidly around the world, and Alabama is not immune to this danger. Currently the international website that lists herbicide resistant weeds around the world shows that Alabama has at least three herbicide resistant weeds; common cocklebur resistant to MSMA/DSMA, goosegrass resistant to Prowl, Treflan, etc. and a bluegrass biotype resistant to simazine. Although not confirmed, glyphosate resistant horseweed (marestail) is reported in north Alabama fields, and glyphosate resistant palmer pigweed is reported on at least one south Alabama farm. We must do the best we can to limit the spread of these resistant weeds in our state and the first line of defense is for farmers to scout fields after the first foliar herbicide spray and determine if any weeds were not controlled that should have been controlled with the herbicide used.

Our Alabama Cooperative Extension System has a good network of specialized regional agents that are able to help determine if an uncontrolled weed is really resistant to the herbicide or if environmental or application factors may have resulted in poor herbicide performance. If you see a group of weeds that survived your foliar herbicide treatment, then make sure the surviving weeds are on the herbicide label and were no bigger than the size listed on the label for the specific weed when the application was made. Also make sure the amount of herbicide you mixed in the tank fits the area sprayed for the proper rate needed to control that weed. The standard procedure would be to re-spray the surviving weeds again as soon as you realize they were not controlled by the initial application.

Finally, if you feel that the application was made correctly using the proper rate and timing, then you may want to consider calling one of our regional agronomy agents. They can talk with you about the weed and collect information concerning the application and other factors. If necessary they can spray foliar herbicides at 2 times and 4 times the labeled rate and evaluate control from these higher rates. Plants surviving these higher rates are candidates for greenhouse studies that help confirm herbicide resistance. This monitoring system will help Alabama farmers identify the development of herbicide resistant weeds and hopefully prevent their spread.



***Market Report: B. Goodman, Extension Economist**

The graph below illustrates what has happened to the cotton market since the first of the year. December futures just touched 60 cents back a month ago, but in the past two weeks all those gains have been erased. However, all is not lost. Recent export volume numbers from USDA show remarkable increases in weekly sales – over half a million bales, mostly to China but also to Mexico, that might, if those sales are followed by actual shipments, indicate the world is ready to buy US cotton at last. That lack of interest in our product, demonstrated by the USDA prediction that US carryover for the coming year will be in excess of 9 million bales, has been in my opinion the big problem in the market so far this year. The latest market info indeed seems to indicate a turnaround, but we will see if the bounce you can see on the last day shown in the chart below is supported or not. In case you haven't heard, sales volume was about triple what it was expected to be on this last report from USDA.

Of course, there is certainly still a lot of negativity to be dealt with. The idea that we could actually have 9 million bales of carryover and perhaps more than a million bales in the loan abandoned is certainly a large negative that the market must somehow overcome or at least learn to live with. But it's early. Planting season is just now upon us. A lot of water will go under the bridge before I'm going to surrender my bullish outlook – long term – on cotton. While the 9 million bale carryover is a huge negative fundamental, the fact that world cotton demand is growing faster than the economy is a huge positive. It's not just the US market; it's the world that is demanding cotton textiles. Also, sooner or later the market has to deal with the fact that corn is worth twice what it was a year ago. The fact that farmers all around the world can participate in the current feeding frenzy for corn and soybeans must surely mean that the price of cotton will rise as the price of corn must fall. I just don't know when. And as always, the weather will play a major role and we could all get rich if we just knew what the weather was going to be ahead of time.



My market advice is to wait on pricing '07 cotton unless you want to take an option on whatever way you think futures are heading in the short run. You don't want to abandon the '06 crop to the loan yet, and I hope if you are still holding some old crop cotton you get a chance to move it soon. These export sales numbers might help. Watch the LDP and the market and if you can come out ahead go ahead and bite the bullet. "The

experts” say if you abandon it to the loan it will cost you 2-3 cents per pound. And of course, you should definitely have sold all your '07 corn and soybeans at least in my opinion you should have.



***Automated Sprayer Control Applications**

Amy Winstead & Shannon Norwood, ACES Precision Ag

Sprayers equipped with automatic boom-sensing technology are quickly becoming popular with growers across the state. This technology uses GPS location to turn boom sections and spray nozzles on or off based on previously applied areas. Individual boom sections are automatically controlled based on recorded spray application in the field, reducing skips and overlap and increasing spray efficiency.

Current products on the market include John Deere’s Swath Control Pro, the Trimble Ez-Boom, Rinex Autospray, and Raven’s AccuBoom. For more information on these systems contact us or visit the sites below:

John Deere

www.deere.com/en_US/ag/servicesupport/ams/GS2/GreenStar_2_Swath_Control_Pro.html

Trimble

http://www.trimble.com/aggps_ezboom.shtml

Rinex

http://www.rinextech.com/files/as4080_flyer.pdf

Raven

<http://www.ravenprecision.com/us/Products/category.jsp?Category=2>



***2007 Cotton Calendar.** *D. Monks, Extension Specialist*

Date	Event	Contact Person
Aug 9-11	ALFA Commodity Tour and Conf., Mobile	ALFA

There are two websites that you may be interested in visiting:

Weekly crop updates: www.nass.usda.gov/weather/cpcurr/al-crop-weather

Alabama cotton information: www.alabamacotton.com



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Use pesticides **only** according to the directions on the label. Follow all directions, precautions, and restrictions that are listed. Do not use pesticides on plants that are not listed on the label.

The pesticide rates in this publication are recommended **only** if they are registered with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries. If a registration is changed or cancelled, the rate listed here is no longer recommended. Before you apply any pesticide, fungicide or herbicide, check with your county Extension agent for the latest information.

Trade names are used **only** to give specific information. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System does not endorse or guarantee any product and does not recommend one product instead of another that might be similar.

For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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