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2007 Louisiana Cotton Acreage

Sandy Stewart, Ph.D.

One of the biggest stories thus far concerning the 2007 Louisiana cotton crop is the drastic reduction in acreage expected for the upcoming season. According to the National Cotton Council's planting intentions survey conducted in mid-December of 2006, Louisiana's projected 2007 acreage was 411,000 acres, which represented almost a 35% reduction from 2006. Following favorable conditions for planting the majority of corn acres, it is clear that cotton acres in Louisiana will be significantly less than the original estimate of 411,000 acres. How low will it go? The answer to this question is a moving target and seems to change every day. The one constant, however, is that cotton acreage projections have continually been revised downward and not upward. A Louisiana cotton crop of close to 300,000 acres is a very real possibility and less than 300,000 should not yet be ruled out.

To put this in some kind of historical perspective, Louisiana's 5-year average cotton acreage is 556,000 and the 10-year average is 614,000 acres. The smallest cotton crop on record in Louisiana was in 1975, when producers planted 306,000 acres. Conversely, records dating back to 1866 place the largest Louisiana crop of all time at 1,983,000 acres in 1930. Therefore, 2007 stands a good chance of setting a record for the fewest number of cotton acres planted in Louisiana since records were first kept in 1866.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 28, 1939 – In Spain, the Republican defenders of Madrid raised the white flag over the city, bringing an end to the bloody three-year Spanish Civil War.

There are a number of reasons for such a large reduction in cotton plantings and this column cannot possibly elaborate on all. Strong demand for corn, and large carryover stocks of cotton are among the reasons that the economics at the farm level currently favor crops other than cotton.

However, some cotton will be still be planted and we should recognize that fewer acres will present some opportunities and challenges for managing cotton in 2007. Some land that has been in continuous cotton for several years or even decades will be rotated into corn or some other crop which should help in managing nematode levels, organic matter, and other aspects of soil fertility. Additionally, a smaller cotton crop should allow some more precise management of planting dates, timing of herbicide applications, PGR management, etc. For example, a portion of this newsletter is dedicated to the current planting forecast. When managing larger acreages, some cotton is inevitably planted in less than optimal conditions due to time constraints; however, fewer acres should reduce the need for placing expensive seed and technology in a challenging environment for emergence. There will be some challenges associated with planting cotton in close proximity to such large corn acreage. Mid- and late-season insect pressure such as plant bugs and other pests that migrate out of corn will require frequent scouting of cotton and possibly result in higher overall insect pressure.

Soil Temperature Effects on Cotton Germination

Sandy Stewart, Ph.D.

Soil temperature is one of the main factors to consider when planting cotton, especially in early April. Planting forecasts routinely consider the 5-day forecast for temperature, expected accumulation of DD60s, rainfall, and potentially drying winds. The missing ingredient is usually soil temperature because it can vary from field to field based on soil texture, color, surface residue, bed preparation, and moisture. The following rules of thumb should be remembered:

- Finer textured soils will warm slower than coarse textured soils due to greater water holding capacity. Water has a high heat capacity and can act as a thermal buffer to daytime heating.
- Well-drained soils typically warm faster than poorly drained soils.
- Raised beds warm faster than flat ground because of greater internal drainage, more surface area exposed to the sun and more aeration. The higher the bed, the faster it will warm.
- Dark colored soils warm faster than lighter colored soils because they retain heat from sunlight better.
- Surface residue will tend to retain soil moisture and shade the soil surface resulting in slower warming.

So, what soil temperature should be acceptable for planting cotton? Soil temperature should be a minimum of 65°F when planting cotton. Soil temperature will fluctuate daily with sunlight availability, but 65° should be considered a minimum. Soil temperatures below 65° can lead to chilling injury and greater vulnerability to seedling disease pathogens. The key is to measure the soil temperature in the field in which you are considering planting. This advice may sound simple enough, but each field can be different due to soil type, surface residue, moisture, etc. Soil temperatures reported at various weather stations can be an indicator, but these values are usually measured on flat, bare ground and are accurate for only that specific location. The only way to know for sure and make the best decision is to take the temperature in the field that is being considered for planting. Accurately measuring soil temperature is a key component of deciding whether or not to plant and should factor into every decision for early-planted cotton.

Cotton Planting Forecast for March 28, 2007

Sandy Stewart, Ph.D.

In an effort to aid in making planting decisions, we will once again be offering a cotton planting forecast every 3-4 days in 2007. The planting forecast will consider the predicted temperatures, DD60 accumulation, rainfall, and potential for drying winds on the day in which the forecast is issued. The forecasts will consider the three major regions of cotton production in Louisiana – Northeast, Central, and Northwest. These forecasts are just that – they are forecasts obtained from the National Weather Service and are subject to the inaccuracies associated with trying to predict the weather. This information can be considered an outlook tool to consider and factor into a planting decision.

Future forecasts will most likely be included in an email format for ease of download. If you know of someone that wishes to be added to the email distribution list, please let me know at sstewart@agcenter.lsu.edu.

Cotton Planting Forecast for March 28, 2007

Northeast Louisiana

Predicted DD60 accumulation – 45 (Good)

Rainfall – 40-50% chance with the greatest chance on Friday and Saturday

Outlook – The planting forecast is favorable at this time; however temperatures are forecast to cool slightly during the upcoming weekend. Soil moisture is a limiting factor in many areas and given the fact that we are still in the final week of March, waiting on a replenishment of soil moisture from rainfall is generally advised.

Central Louisiana

Predicted DD60 accumulation – 46.5 (Good)

Rainfall – 40% chance with the greatest chance on Friday.

Outlook – The planting forecast is favorable at this time; however temperatures are forecast to cool slightly during the upcoming weekend. Soil moisture is a limiting factor in many areas and given the fact that we are still in the final week of March, waiting on a replenishment of soil moisture from rainfall is generally advised.

Northwest Louisiana

Predicted DD60 accumulation – 45 (Good)

Rainfall – 40-50% chance with the greatest chance on Friday and Saturday

Outlook – The planting forecast is favorable at this time; however temperatures are forecast to cool slightly during the upcoming weekend. Soil moisture is a limiting factor in many areas and given the fact that we are still in the final week of March, waiting on a replenishment of soil moisture from rainfall is generally advised.

Predicted DD60 accumulation for five days following planting	Outlook for planting
< 10	Very poor
11-15	Poor
16-25	Marginal
25-50	Good
>50	Very Good

New Extension Agent in Tensas Parish

The LSU AgCenter is pleased to announce the addition of Mr. Randy Smith to the staff in our Tensas Parish office. Randy will have agriculture and natural resources responsibilities for Tensas Parish, which will include conducting the cotton extension and education program. He brings a great deal of cotton experience to the job, having previously worked as an extension agent in Mississippi, and as a technical support or sales rep for several chemical and seed companies. Randy is a native Mississippian and has earned a B.S. in agronomy and a Masters in weed science from Mississippi State University. Randy can be reached at the Tensas Parish office at 318-766-3320 or on his cell phone at 318-267-6709. His email address is RASmith@agcenter.lsu.edu.



Below is a list of contacts, both agents and specialists, in Louisiana cotton-producing parishes. They are ready and willing to assist you in any way they can.

COTTON COUNTY AGENTS			
PARISH	AGENT	PHONE	EMAIL
Avoyelles	Carlos A. Smith Jr	318-253-7526	CSmith@agcenter.lsu.edu
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