



## Cutout Cotton—What to do Next?—Sandy

Stewart, Ph.D.

Cotton fields that are ‘blooming out the top’ with nodes above white flower (NAWF) of 3 or less are a common site in many areas of Louisiana. Whatever your definition of cutout, it is safe to say that many fields have reached that point.

Having cutout cotton in Louisiana on July 21 is not normally what we expect. When it happens this early, you can usually say yields are reduced and we’ll be picking ‘bumblebee cotton’ with only a few bolls on very short plants. Certainly, that is the case in areas that have received very little rain, particularly on clay soils. However, the yield potential of many of these fields is still decent, with 10-12 bolls per plant. A lack of moisture has been a factor, but the decline in

NAWF and onset of cutout is also partly a function of high fruit retention and a good overall boll load.

There still will be some management challenges with cotton that is cutout so early. Most of these challenges will revolve around residual nitrogen that we can assume is still in the soil. Even in fields with a good boll load, there is probably some residual nitrogen left as a result of droughty conditions.

### What to Expect

There are two main things to expect will happen in these fields that are at or passed cutout. The first is that when rainfall occurs, there will be some regrowth of plants due to moisture and residual nitrogen.

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## Louisiana Cotton Acres Higher Than Expected—

Sandy Stewart, Ph.D.

At one time, the expected cotton acreage in Louisiana for 2008 was around 280,000 acres. The actual number of acres is still not completely known. The USDA June estimate was 290,000 acres. However, according to Boll Weevil Eradication Program mapping and county agent surveys, the final number is likely to be slightly greater than 300,000 acres. At least some of the increase over previous surveys seems to be due to greater than expected acreage of cotton planted following wheat.

The top ten cotton producing parishes in Louisiana in 2008, in order from highest to lowest, will be Tensas, Catahoula, Madison, Concordia, Franklin, Caddo, East Carroll, Avoyelles, Rapides, and Morehouse.

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### Upcoming Dates:

Dean Lee Field Day, Alexandria—Aug. 21  
Beltwide Cotton Conferences, San Antonio, Jan. 5-8, 2008

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## Cutout Cotton (cont'd from Page 1)

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Older bolls become progressively weaker sinks, or draws, on water and photosynthate. We are currently adding very little additional fruit load to these plants, so as bolls mature there is progressively less draw on the plant's energy.

Cotton, being the perennial that it is, will likely resume some sort of terminal growth with adequate moisture and the expected residual fertility. It should be remembered that these new squares added to the plant with regrowth in the terminal are of little value and are likely to create the 'phantom bolls' that are not worth waiting to mature.

The second thing to expect is that the bolls on these plants are likely to mature quickly. Some fields in Louisiana should have a first cracked boll within a week's time. As high as early retention has been and as compact as the fruiting nodes with harvestable bolls are, these fields are likely to open very quickly. In many of these cutout fields in Louisiana, it will be an early crop that matures and opens rapidly.

### **Management Options**

Management options for these fields are limited. However, the situation most growers will want to avoid is the extreme terminal growth and buggy whipping that can occur following some rainfall events. Several questions have come up about the use of mepiquat to control this expected regrowth.

Admittedly, there are very little data on which to

make a good recommendation for PGRs in these situations. With no rainfall, there will be no need to make any PGR applications. However, assuming there is some rainfall, growers may want to make a high rate application of mepiquat to limit regrowth in the terminal.



The highest labeled rate for Pentia, Mepex, and other generic mepiquat chloride formulations is 24 oz in one application and 48 total for the year. The highest labeled rate for Stance is 4 oz, not to exceed 22 oz in one year.

Prior experience with cutout applications indicates that 1) the highest labeled rate is needed, 2) no yield response should be expected, and 3) some reductions in terminal regrowth can be achieved, but a complete reduction is not a realistic expectation.

Terminating irrigation, if available, is not an exact science. A rule of thumb is to irrigate until a cracked boll appears. Continuing to irrigate too late can increase regrowth potential.

### **Thoughts on Defoliation**

It is not too early to begin considering when fields that are well-cutout will need to be defoliated. Some fields in Louisiana will have a cracked boll within 7 days. In most years, the crop we actually harvest comes from a range of 12 nodes from the oldest to the youngest harvestable boll on the plant. In many of the well-

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cutout situations, this range is only 10 nodes.

A range of 10 nodes from the oldest to the youngest boll in Louisiana is a very compact crop. Retention has been high enough that we have probably retained more second- and third-position bolls than most years, so yield potential is still good. However, once the bolls begin to open, it can be expected that things will happen relatively fast. For first position bolls, there may be as little as 30 days from the opening of the first boll to the opening of the top boll.

Defoliation timing on such a compact crop can be very important for preserving fiber quality. Allowing a compact crop to open to 90% before defoliation can lead to high micronaire cotton. With such a small age difference from the oldest to the youngest boll, consider using a boll opener and beginning defoliation as early as 60% open boll. In all cases, use a sharp knife to slice bolls and assess maturity.

No recommendation will be correct for every field, but a compact crop dictates that boll maturity and defoliation timing should receive a lot of attention.



*Cutout cotton that likely has residual nitrogen and potential for regrowth.*

Due to the expected earliness of much of the crop and regrowth potential, defoliation is likely to take place in hot weather. Tankmixes with thidiazuron (Dropp, Freefall, Ginstar, others) will likely serve as the basis for most tankmixes. It may seem early to begin considering defoliation, but in the well-cutout fields being discussed here, maturity will happen fast and some consideration now is prudent.

## Plant Growth Regulator Management in Double-Cropped

### Cotton — Sandy Stewart, Ph.D.

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At the opposite end of the spectrum from well-cutout cotton is the later planted cotton following wheat. Some of these fields have begun to flower, while other will within the next 10-14 days. Some considerations for PGR management follow.

In most double-cropped situations, initial applications should be timed to first bloom. Management of rank growth through the use of mepiquat usually does not need to be as aggressive as with earlier planted cotton. With good boll retention on the first five nodes, the fruit load on the plant will serve as the best regulator of rank growth.

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## PGR Management in Double-Cropped Cotton (cont'd from Page 3)

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Double-cropped cotton can be slow to reach full canopy. In some fields, full canopy closure may not occur. Lack of canopy closure can increase weed pressure, particularly in mid- or late-season. Overly aggressive PGR applications can slow canopy closure in double-crop cotton, and lead to more weed germination. The idea is to allow the plant get as much size as possible prior to bloom and then use mepiquat as tool to enhance earliness.



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## Dr. Bill Williams Accepts Weed Science Position

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Dr. Bill Williams has accepted the Weed Specialist position located at the Scott Center in Winnsboro. The appointment was effective July 1, 2008 and is 75% extension and 25% research. Dr. Williams will have statewide extension responsibilities for developing, coordinating and conducting weed management education programs in agricultural crops including cotton, soybean, corn, small grains, and forages. His office will be located at the Scott Center in Winnsboro, and he can be contacted at (318) 334-3360 or [bwilliams@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:bwilliams@agcenter.lsu.edu).

Dr. Williams received his Ph.D. in Agronomy with an emphasis on weed science in 1996 from the University of Wisconsin. He has served the AgCenter as the project leader for corn, rice, grain sorghum, and small grains weed management research at the Northeast Research Station since December of 1996.

The LSU AgCenter is pleased that Dr. Williams has agreed to assume these extension respon-

sibilities. With the threat of herbicide resistance and the complexities of all of the herbicide traits currently on the market, we are fortunate to have an extension weed specialist located at the Scott Center. He will coordinate weed control education programs with Dr. Daniel Stephenson of the Dean Lee Research Station.



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## Support Cotton With What You Wear-Sandy Stewart, Ph.D.

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*The following is an editorial I wrote as the Extension Cotton Specialist in Louisiana to share with you a small way we can support the cotton industry.*

The demand for cotton fiber in the United States and worldwide is one of the success stories of cotton promotion organizations like Cotton Incorporated. Competition from synthetic fibers has been and always will be of great interest to the cotton industry.

For that reason, those of us involved in the cotton industry need to support our own product by wearing 100% cotton in our everyday lives. This includes growers, county agents, consultants, seed and chemical company reps, and others.

Many of the popular work pants and shirts may appear to be made of 100% cotton when, in fact, they are not. Work shirts that advertise UPF30, UPF40, etc. sunblock are made of 100% nylon, polyester, or

contain very little cotton. One company that supplies these types of shirts even advertises that “cotton is the enemy.”

It would be presumptuous of me to tell you what and what not to wear. If you ask my wife, you will find quickly that I am also in no way a fashion consultant. But I do work in the cotton industry and have great interest in its fortunes. Subscribers to this newsletter do as well. Therefore, I have no interest in wearing less than 100% cotton to work.

If its 100% cotton, companies usually advertise it as such. At the very least, read the label. It’s almost impossible to find one that reads “Made in the U.S.A.” But, with a little diligence cotton folks can ensure that they are supporting the industry on which they depend by finding labels that say “100% Cotton.”





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