



Arkansas Cotton Update



July 3, 2008

Tom Barber - Editor

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Newsletter Archive: <http://www.aragriculture.org/News/cotton/default.htm>

Cotton Status, (Tom Barber - Cotton Specialist)

The crop progress report released on June 30th by the USDA Agricultural Statistics Service reported that Arkansas cotton was 62% good to excellent, 34% fair with only 4% being reported in poor or very poor condition. At the beginning of the week, approximately 78% of the crop was squaring. By the end of the week, 95% or more of the cotton in Arkansas will be squaring. This was behind last year at 92% of the crop squaring and the five-year average of 85%. One percent of the cotton was reported to be blooming, compared to 15% last season. Monday the USDA released a report on cotton acreage across Arkansas and the U.S. According to the USDA report, Arkansas' producers planted 700,000 acres of cotton this season. This is down 19% from last year's planting of 850,000 acres and the lowest acreage since 1989. However, poor weather conditions and numerous re-plants of cotton acres to soybean have decreased the cotton acreage that Arkansas will harvest. The Boll Weevil Eradication program recently certified all the cotton acres across the state, and the final acreage count totaled 606,000 acres.

Got Blooms? Count NAWF

Blooms are starting to show on the earlier planted cotton. By next week to a week and a half, a large percentage of the crop should be blooming. In many areas square retention at bloom remains fairly high. Once cotton begins to bloom the number of nodes present above the first position white flower (NAWF) will give you a good indication of the health and "horsepower" of your crop. To take this measurement, count the number of nodes down from the terminal (terminal is 0) to the first white flower. When cotton first begins to bloom it should be around 9 nodes above white flower. If the number of nodes is 7 or less, the cotton is under stress and actions should be taken to identify and if possible alleviate the stress. If NAWF is greater than 10 at first bloom, it is an indicator that the vegetative growth may be out of control. This could be due to factors including low square retention, variety, moisture, and fertility along with other weather factors. The square set above the first bloom should at least be around the 80% range, but we would like to see 90 – 95%. As the season progresses, the white flower will catch up with the terminal until the crop is at cutout. Cutout in Arkansas is the stage when there are 5 NAWF.



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what can we do? First, we need to look at the root system of the cotton plants in question. The wet and cool spring was conducive for seedling disease and residual effects of Pythium, black root rot or other seedling diseases that may be present causing decreased water uptake. If the roots look good, determine if they are finding the moisture from irrigation. Frank Groves and I looked at a couple of fields yesterday and determined that even though we are watering on a 7-day schedule, the water is not soaking through the beds very well, and if you dig 6 to 10 inches down, very little moisture is present. What can you do in these situations? In these problem fields, watering every row vs. every other row may help; however, shorter sets will probably be necessary to irrigate timely. Other options would be to shorten the intervals from 7 to 5 days, but if the water is not soaking this may not be the answer. One thing is for sure: if NAWF continues to decrease and blooms are catching the terminal, premature cutout may be imminent. I have seen this many times before, even though the cotton may not be 6 or 7 NAWF, we can maintain yield potential as long as we maintain a constant growth that will keep the NAWF count constant for the next three weeks. Increased or intensified irrigation management will be the best option to maintain a constant level of growth during bloom. Another point to remember is that most of these fields have a very high fruit retention (90% plus). Eventually, we will shed some of this fruit; when this happens, we may see an increase in growth. One thing is for sure, plant growth regulators will not be needed on these problem fields.

Many have asked if applying a dry fertilizer such as ammonium sulfate will help. In some cases where the roots are not farming the nitrogen deeper in the soil due to lack of moisture, an application of ammonium sulfate may help; however, the success of this application will be varied and may have no effect at all. It could help the plant maintain a constant NAWF for a couple of weeks, especially in fields where lower rates of nitrogen were applied. However, if nitrogen is not the limiting factor, then late applications of a dry fertilizer could cause complications at harvest from rank growth, fruit shed, boll rot and an expensive defoliation bill. I have recommended applications of ammonium sulfate on a couple of fields; however, in most cases water is the limiting factor.

Market Update - (Scott Stiles – Extension Economist)



Cotton: Monday, the USDA estimated 2008 planted acreage to be 9.25 million. That's down 15% from last year. Analysts were looking for a much bigger drop from the March 31 *Planting Intentions* number. The average pre-report guess was 8.89 million acres. According to Monday's estimate Arkansas growers planted 700,000 acres. Mississippi growers planted only 370,000 acres—the lowest ever.



As of Wednesday a.m. (7/2), December '08 cotton is lower for the third day in a row, losing 600 points since last Friday's close at 81.40. Technical or chart support for the December contract is now at 74.60 and 73.33.

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West Texas weather and crop development will play a continued role in cotton's price direction. The timing of the survey conducted for the June 30 *Planted Acreage* report discounted much of the impact that the weather has had on the Texas cotton crop. In the survey growers were asked "what was planted or *intended* to be planted as of June 1." Thus, the survey results wouldn't reveal what growers couldn't plant after that date or lost after planting. These losses will be accounted for in the August 1 crop production surveys. The August 12 USDA supply and demand numbers should provide a more realistic picture of the 2008 U.S. cotton crop.

Carl Anderson noted, in his June 30 *Cotton Market Comments*, that 3.67 million acres (78% of state total) of the Texas cotton crop is in four crop reporting districts located in West Texas and the Rolling Plains regions. It is likely that 1 million of these acres have been abandoned. The NASS *Crop Progress* report released Monday indicated that 39% of the Texas cotton crop is now rated "poor" or "very poor." Assuming 2008 cotton abandonment will be at least 1 million acres and national average yields drop 10% below last year's levels, a crop of only 13.5 million bales is very likely (current USDA estimate is 14.5 million). The next USDA supply and demand report will be released July 11 at 7:30 a.m. CST. Historically, there is little adjustment in the supply and demand figures from June to July.

In the near term, the market bears will focus on the fact that the macro-economy is struggling, U.S. cotton inventories are huge (10.2 million bales), and demand is weak. The bulls will focus on outside commodities and West Texas weather.

In case you haven't read it yet, Rabobank released an interesting report last week that provided a positive long-term outlook for the U.S. cotton industry. The excerpt below is a good summary of the report.

*Globally, the United States is in a strong position to maintain a viable cotton growing segment. Developing countries such as **China and India are likely to lose acreage to expanding food crops and urbanization.** Additionally issues of the **availability of water in places such as Australia, Uzbekistan and Africa,** place questions on the viability of their long-term crop.*

Link to article: <http://www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS128068+27-Jun-2008+PRN20080627>

Cotton Insects - (Scott Akin – Extension Entomologist)

Plant bugs. Southeast Arkansas is still sustaining relatively light pressure from plant bugs, although numbers are building in several areas. Heaviest areas I have heard thus far have received 3 – 4 insecticide applications—this may be close to being on pace with last year's situation, but the problem doesn't seem near as geographically widespread as last year at this time in terms of plant bug numbers and loss of square retention. Earlier this week, some consultants and growers in Woodruff and Monroe counties reported less than one spray on average for plant bugs thus far. I am still not catching near as many plant bugs in wild hosts as this time last year as well. That said—corn is starting to dry down, and nearby cotton should be monitored closely. We are still seeing primarily adults over nymphs, but that should change over the coming weeks. Remember to switch to the drop cloth for monitoring nymph numbers.

Bollworms. Bollworm moth flights are still active, and we are even receiving reports from various locations of higher numbers of tobacco budworm moths this season compared to recent seasons. Below are recent weekly moth trap counts from Gus Wilson, county agent in Chicot County.

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Bollworm (*H. zea*) and tobacco budworm (*H. virescens*) moth counts, Chicot County (Wilson).

Location	6/26, bollworm	6/26, budworm	7/2, bollworm	7/2, budworm
Bennett	7	3	58	11
Lakeport	32	19	160	9
Across Lake	182	22	488	2
Mencer	48	34	184	7
Adams	102	24	158	3

“Beneficials? Where?” Comments have been made in previous newsletters recommending some of the more beneficial-friendly chemistries early in the season. When the term “beneficials” comes to mind, most folks first think of natural enemies that are easily recognized—nabids, spiders, big-eyed bugs, etc. A field can, however, contain a significant number of natural enemies that are not easily seen or perhaps not even recognized as beneficials. Tachinid fly adults (see inset photo below), which resemble the common housefly, are a natural enemy of several insect pests including armyworms and loopers. Parasitic flies do not have a sharp ovipositor (in contrast to parasitic wasps that do) so the fly must “stick” the egg to its host. The immature will soon hatch, bore into the host, and eventually kill it by developing inside it. I was able to get the picture below when visiting with James “Wish” Patterson at Pickens & Co. last week near Dumas. The fields there were pretty clean overall, but I lucked up on finding this Tachinid-infested cabbage looper in some non-Bt refuge. Note the location of the egg, directly behind the head—this ovipositional behavior is an adaptation that keeps the host from turning around and removing the egg from its body. Also note the discoloration on the first abdominal segment—a symptom suggesting that this looper may already be infested with another Tachinid that had hatched previously. The main take-home message here—there may be more natural enemies than there appears at first glance in your cotton. Stick to the aforementioned beneficial-friendly insecticides during early-to-mid season if possible.



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