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*Optimistic for the 2008 Cotton Season
D. Monks, Extension Agronomist

Cotton acreage in Alabama is currently predicted to be down to around 300,000 acres this year. This is the lowest it has been since I arrived in 1993. Rainfall received over the winter and early this spring has many producers optimistic for a reasonable growing season. This is especially important since cotton prices have reluctantly followed wheat, corn, and soybean prices upward over the past few months. Given the trouble that some producers are having procuring soybean seed, we may see a few more acres revert back to cotton. It is during times like these when we should be able to rotate to high value row crops and break the pest complexes that follow continuous cropping patterns.

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System will be adding a new regional extension agent (REA) to help producers in north Alabama. Eric Schavey began working as an Agronomic Crops REA on April 14. He is housed at the Tennessee Valley Research and Extension Center in Belle Mina and will work from Decatur to the western end of the Tennessee Valley. His office phone number is 256-353-3978 extension 11. We will provide additional contact information for Eric in our next Picksack issue. If you have any questions, concerns, or areas where we can help, please do not hesitate to contact us. You can locate the REAs that serve your area by visiting the ACES website at: http://www.aces.edu/counties/
Farmers have been busy with applying burndown applications getting ready for spring planting. Most farmers have taken advantage of applying Valor with the 2 oz / acre recommendation for the $5.50 / acre rebate. This is a no lose situation and I highly recommend it. One ounce will cost around $3.75 / acre and two ounces with the rebate will only leave you with $2.00 per acre in the Valor. Valor certainly improves the burn down of winter weeds and will give some residual control of problem weeds such as pigweed. We must be mindful of resistant pigweed!!

The moisture has been good and farmers are trying to find all the poultry litter that they can to circumvent the high fertilizer cost. Soil testing is now a must and adhering to Auburn’s calibrated lab is the only way to farm. Planting will begin soon and farmers should be patient to not start too early. Remember earliness is important but here in South Alabama, planting too early can cause two potential problems. One problem is replanting due to seedling disease losses. The other problem occurs when bolls that mature and open in August are subjected to an increased risk of boll rot.

In any case, I am excited about this year. The price of cotton is up and we hope that two bad crops over the past two years will increase the odds of this year being good, or at least much better!

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. In-furrow sprays with acephate or imidacloprid are also an option if planting late, 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 recent springs, 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 has 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. In 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 leaf stage, before the true leaves take on a crinkled or distorted appearance from thrips injury.

*Herbicide Price and Burndown Options for Cotton
M. Patterson, Extension Weed Scientist

The cost of glyphosate herbicide has increased significantly over last year at this time. Glyphosate in its many forms is one of the primary herbicides used for burndown (preplant foliar) applications in our reduced tillage production systems. Other herbicides are often mixed with glyphosate to increase weed spectrum and/or manage hard to kill or herbicide resistant weeds (i.e. glyphosate resistant horseweed). Apparently the world demand for glyphosate has outstripped the production this year and this has resulted in higher prices. Another reason may be the increased price of crude oil that drives our economy. What options can you consider in this situation to get optimum results in a burndown spray?

First, there are different formulations and concentrations of glyphosate products being sold. Comparing different glyphosate formulations can be confusing. One rule to remember in comparing these products is to look at the active ingredient on the product label and especially look at the pounds acid equivalent (ae) in each gallon of material. For example, a high-end glyphosate product like Roundup Power Max contains 4.5 lbs ae per gallon. Most generics contain 3.0 lbs ae per gallon. The standard or X rate of Power Max is 21 fluid ounces per acre. The standard rate of a 3.0 lb ae generic is 32 fluid ounces per acre. Power Max has about 50% more active ingredient per gallon than the generic. Another point to compare is the surfactant load in the product. Power Max, Weathermax, Touchdown Total, and other name brand glyphosate products have excellent surfactant systems in the jug and no other surfactants are needed. Generics may or may not have good surfactant systems in the jug. Always ask the person you are buying from if the product has a good surfactant. If they don’t know, then adding additional non-ionic surfactant at 1 quart per 100 gallons of spray mix is a good idea.

Regardless of the glyphosate formulation you use for burndown, adding additional herbicides like 2,4-D (one pint or less) or Clarity (8 fluid ounces), applied 30 and 21 days ahead of cotton, respectively, can increase the control of weeds like cutleaf evening primrose and horseweed. Aim, ET, and Resource can be added to increase activity on certain broadleaf weeds without a waiting period for planting. These products along with the 2, 4-D and Clarity do not offer any residual activity on future germinating weeds. Harmony Extra with glyphosate provides increased activity on several winter annual broadleaf weeds and has a 14 day planting restriction. Harmony Extra works slower than most herbicides and may require 3 to 4 weeks for optimum control. Valor (1.5 – 2 oz), diuron (1.5 pt), and Caparol (1.5 pt) all provide residual activity in addition to increasing the foliar activity of glyphosate in burndown. These materials at the rates listed require a 14 waiting period to planting cotton.
Paraquat (Gramoxone, etc.) operates on a different mode of action than glyphosate. This can be good if you know how to use this product. On the weeds it controls, paraquat kills quickly. Primrose and horseweed are tolerant of paraquat alone, but adding a little Valor (excluding horseweed), Caparol or diuron with paraquat significantly increases the activity on these weeds. Adding 2, 4-D or Clarity with the paraquat and either Valor, Caparol or diuron and you have a very good burndown mixture. Unlike glyphosate that can be sprayed in as little as 5 gallons of solution per acre, paraquat must cover the plant to obtain optimum activity and therefore should be sprayed in a minimum of 15 gallons of solution per acre.

Finally, Ignite herbicide can be used in place of glyphosate or paraquat in burndown mixtures. Ignite has good activity alone on primrose and horseweed (including glyphosate resistant horseweed). Adding additional products mentioned above can increase both foliar and/or residual activity of these mixes. Ignite alone is weak on grass cover crops like wheat, etc. and glyphosate should be mixed with Ignite if these grasses need to be killed prior to planting.

*Market Report, Week 2, April 2008: Bob Goodman, Extension Economist*

Apparently, the futures market is at risk. Buyers and sellers of cotton are at risk of no longer being able to use the futures market to hedge sales or purchases. If farmers can get quotes from merchants for fall delivery at all, the basis on those contracts is very wide. Merchants are unwilling to assume the risk of another 20 cent run-up on large volumes of cotton sold short on the futures market, and who can blame them. This risk is even reflected in options prices.

There are several reasons for this situation, centering on the switch from “open outcry” on the floor of the NYBOT to computer trading on the ICE, which facilitated the influx of huge amounts on speculative money controlled by computer-generated signals. Later this month there will be a hearing in Washington to discuss the situation. I don’t have any answers and I am certainly not in favor, in general, of rampant market regulation or even interference. But the way we have been accustomed to doing business in the cotton market is going to have to change. At least I do know whose side I am on. I am on the side of the farmer/merchant. The futures market has been our risk-sharing mechanism for many years and if it no longer works we are going to have to find a new way of doing business pronto. My first thought is that we need some computer signals of our own. Maybe we do, but that’s a game I don’t really want to play. I’m not smart enough and you only have to be wrong once to lose.

During the craziness, most merchants left the market. The result of this inactivity has apparently been a return to “normal”, and there is some purchasing going on now. But there is nothing to prevent the same thing from happening again. A month ago December cotton hit the peak at just over 98 cents. Right now it’s at 83 and change.
The good news is that the long term price trend is up. The contract is a nickel higher than it was before the spike. The world-wide competition for cropland is real. Eighty cent cotton cannot compete forever with $6 corn and $12 soybeans. The bad news is that there is still too much cotton out there.

As the December contract continues to edge higher, it is entering the range where I think farmers must consider fixing a portion of their expected production. We can all hope for a return to 90 cent cotton, but it is still a long shot. If you can get a decent basis I would sign some contracts soon. If you think that the chances for higher prices are good, buy a Call option to go along with your contract. You can select the strike price that reflects your optimism and your pocketbook.

And if the hedge funds strike again, sell it all. Sell next year’s too.

*2008 Cotton Calendar.  D. Monks, Extension Agronomist*

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<td>July 10</td>
<td>Northwest AL Precision Ag Field Tour</td>
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<td>ALFA Commodity Tour and Conf., Birmingham</td>
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<td>Aug 28</td>
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There are two websites that you may be interested in visiting:
Alabama cotton information: [www.alabamacotton.com](http://www.alabamacotton.com)

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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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