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**Cotton Delayed by the Wet Spring:** D. Monks, Extension Agronomist

We have finally gotten all of our plots planted at this point and the cotton in some areas is starting to grow and develop. Much of the cotton that we planted in research and demonstration plots early struggled to thrive in the wet, cooler conditions experienced much of May. I have heard of limited replanting but there is a lot of cotton that emerged and has waited on the sunshine and better soil conditions. The cotton that I have seen in this condition early was slightly off-green in color, compared to the deeper green we normally see when cotton is growing rapidly. Further examination of the root systems has indicated that the primary culprit is waterlogged soils with limited diseases in a few areas. The return of warm, dry conditions has been the primary cure for most of these situations. Reports from other cotton specialists across the southeast and mid-south indicate that they are in the same situation as we are at this point.

We are conducting the second year of a technology trial at the Tennessee Valley Research & Extension Center (Belle Mina) and E.V. Smith Research Center (Shorter) to compare the overall economics of stacked vs. insect technology (Widestrike) vs. conventional systems. One of the primary problems I experienced in my plots last year was the urge to wait on controlling small weeds in the conventional variety plots. I was never able to fully catch up after falling behind early so I treated very small grasses, pigweeds, and morning-glories this week. The cotton is still struggling a little so I am avoiding harsh treatments, especially given the calendar date and how far behind we
are already. We will keep you posted on how it’s looking through the season and have a report after everything is completed. This research is funded in part by the Alabama Cotton Commission and producer check-off funds.

Cotton and Other Row Crops Get A Late Start in North Alabama: Charles Burmester, Extension Agronomist

Many areas of northern Alabama received 10 to 12 inches of rain during the month of May. These heavy rains flooded fields and the soil stayed saturated with water for several days after each rain. This caused a substantial acreage of April-planted cotton to be replanted. Much of the cotton could not be replanted until late May and some even into the month of June. This replanted cotton still has time to mature in northern Alabama, but we must avoid anything that may delays this crop further, such as mis-application of herbicides and insect damage.

Some early soybean acreage was also replanted, but most plantings were delayed until mid- to late-May. Corn planting began in late March and was still continuing in some areas in early June. Side-dress nitrogen applications to corn were increased substantially due to the pre-plant nitrogen loss caused by the heavy rains.

The good news is that, with some soil drying, much of the yellow-looking corn has disappeared and soybeans and cotton are starting to grow rapidly. We are behind our normal schedule, but are still hopeful for a good growing season.

*Wet Spring Will Impact Insect Pests of Cotton: T. Reed & B. Freeman, Ext. Entomologists

After exceptional rainfall amounts over most of the state this spring, it might be useful to review how some of the cotton insect pests react to moisture extremes. Although slugs are not insects, the wet weather this spring may have allowed this pest to do more seedling damage to cotton than we normally see. Extended wet spring weather tends to reduce thrips populations as thrips have a pupal and pre-pupal stage in the soil. Abundant rains may have had a negative impact on three-cornered alfalfa hopper (3CAH) populations this year. This insect can girdle seedling plants and be an incidental pest of cotton. Observations at the Prattville Experiment Field and sweep net sampling in soybean fields in Lawrence County indicate much lower populations of 3CAH to date in comparison to last year. Cotton aphids may occur in horrendous numbers during dry or wet weather, but good moisture aids the cotton plant in withstanding their damage. Moisture and humid conditions will also enhance the activity of the aphid fungal pathogen Neogygites fresenii. Our worst plant bug seasons have occurred during years when June was wet and cool. These conditions increase the populations coming from wild hosts, extend the period of migration to cotton, and
increase survival on cotton. Wet weather also favors in-season plant bug problems, but
damage from plant bugs during July is normally much less threatening than pre-bloom
damage. Bollworms and budworms tend to be more prolific in 'good crop' years, but fall
armyworm problems are often associated with drought years. High stink bug
populations are strongly correlated with wet seasons. Spider mites are more often
problematic during drought years, but a wet year is no guarantee of mite-free cotton
production. The silverleaf whitefly, sometimes a problem in southeast Alabama, is
strongly allied with droughts.

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*Late May/Early June Insect Outlook: R. Smith, Extension Entomologist*

By late May we should have found that most of our seedling cotton insects such as
thrips are behind us. Also, the early season sporadic insects that have occurred in
2008, such as vegetable weevils, grasshoppers, three corner alfalfa hoppers, cut
worms, True armyworms, and false chinch bugs should be beyond the damaging
period. As we move into June, and as cotton approaches pinhead square, we should
be shifting our attention to plant bugs and percent square set. A somewhat different
spring weather pattern in 2008 may mean that plant bug movement into cotton is also
different than in 2005 and 2006. The impact of drought and/or rainfall on wild host
plants along field borders and roadsides will influence plant bug levels and movement
into cotton. The stage that cotton is in when migrating adults enter fields can also
influence the level of damage. In general, I feel that our cotton statewide was 7-14 days
later being planted in 2008. If this carries over and results in a similar delay in fruiting it
could mean that migrating adult plant bugs will be entering fields to find cotton still pre-
square or just at first square set. Cotton is somewhat more sensitive to plant bug injury
when at this stage. Another possible influence of rainfall patterns and plant bug
movement from wild host to cotton is that in dry springs most of the movement occurs in
a short window. However, in 2008, we may see a longer, more limited movement that
will begin in late May and extend over into July. These are the things entomologists,
Extension agents and consultants will be noting in the coming weeks. Regardless of
the conditions, we would like to see 80+% of the pinhead square during the pre-bloom
window.

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*Early Postemergence Weed Control: M. Patterson, Extension Weed Scientist*

Rain, rain, rain. I'm not complaining after three years of dry springs. Most farmers
would rather have this than the extremely dry conditions we have had in Alabama
during 2006 and 2007. However, lots of rain encourages the growth of lots of weeds.
Some of the planted and emerged cotton is water-logged and has not grown off well.
When we do get dry enough to spray herbicides, the weeds may be as big as or bigger
than the cotton. Fortunately, most of the cotton planted in Alabama is Roundup Ready
(RR) or Roundup Flex (RRF). This is a great tool to have in our situation. Glyphosate
is still an excellent herbicide regardless of the weed resistance problems we are seeing.
Glyphosate controls both annual and perennial grasses as good or better than any other
product available. Most annual broadleaf weeds can be controlled by one or two applications of glyphosate in RR or RRF cotton. Most formulations of glyphosate are rainfast in one hour or less. Best of all, the proper use of glyphosate in glyphosate-tolerant cotton will not injure the crop or cause yield reductions. In the days prior to RR there was always a trade off between obtaining weed control and tolerating a certain amount of herbicide injury.

If morningglory is a problem in young cotton, then Staple LX at the rate of 2.6 fluid ounces per acre with surfactant will provide control of 1-2 leaf morningglory and can be sprayed over-the-top of cotton from cotyledon stage onward to all cotton varieties. Staple at 1.7 oz + glyphosate (24-32 ounces for generic) can be sprayed over-the-top of RR and RRF cotton for broader spectrum weed control. Staple + Ignite may be applied over-the-top of young Liberty-Link cotton. Envoke 75DF at 0.1 ounce per acre can be applied over-the-top of all varieties once the crop reaches the six-leaf stage. Envoke has good activity on larger morningglory (except smallflower) and sicklepod. Envoke + Roundup may be post-directed on RR varieties after the six-leaf cotton stage. Envoke + Roundup may be sprayed over-the-top of RRF varieties after cotton reaches the six leaf stage.

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*World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates: Bob Goodman, Ext. Economist*

USDA’s initial look forward to the 09/10 crop year was released late last month, and the numbers may reflect a fundamental change in the cotton market. While it may not show up in prices for a while, the reduction in expected production, the small but significant increase in total use, and the roughly 10% reduction in world ending stocks are, I believe, important numbers. In the new world economy, cotton must compete for acreage on a global basis. However, it is essential in looking at these statistics that one include the dynamics of all major crops if one is to arrive at defensible predictions. On the other hand, you only need “defensible” predictions if you are wrong, so, since I am never wrong I guess that’s not important for me.

The wheat outlook for next year may not be as important as the coarse grain and soybean outlook, but it is still a factor. Larger wheat acreage in the cotton belt here in the US means lower cotton acreage, but the global impact of wheat on cotton acreage is not as important as, for example, corn. The global wheat situation can be summarized as one of “ample supplies”, forecasting a 15 MMT increase in stocks. Here in the US, a smaller crop is offset by a fairly large beginning stocks and lower exports. The result is ending stocks about a million metric tons lower than last year.

In corn (or coarse grains), USDA forecasts a slight decrease in ending stocks from last year, but still 10MMT below 07/08. The US forecast is for decreased production, increased exports and use, and a considerable reduction in stocks by the end of the marketing year. The corn market reacted to this news by a 10-cent increase on the September contract, putting corn for initially in the $4.40 range then retracting to around $4.36.
In oilseeds, USDA is looking for a 5% increase in production, 2% increase in trade, and a 3 ½ % increase in total use, with the year ending with about a 10% increase in stocks. Interestingly, these percentages hold pretty well for the US situation. Actually the percentages are not quite so favorable, and we end up with nearly a 50% increase in stocks, but that is only because our ending stocks are so low. The market doesn’t care, and is up strongly.

Finally, the cotton numbers are showing nearly a 5 million bale reduction in stocks on the basis of a smaller crop (by about a million bales) and more use (by 3 ½ million bales). Here in the US they are forecasting only a minor reduction in stocks as a larger crop based on higher yield is exacerbated by lower exports and use. However, our carryover is approaching about half what it was a few years ago. The problem in the US is that we have no domestic textile industry to speak of any more. The market reacted negatively to the news, with a sell—off of around 1000 points or so, with further declines on Wednesday down to around 60 cents on the December contract. Finally, Thursday morning I guess the market realized that the “World” numbers weren’t so bad, and the market has traded higher since then. Currently we are looking at about 61 cents on the December contract.

All of these numbers support at least the commodity prices we are seeing now, and maybe even higher prices. There is nothing that jumps out as being too expensive or cheap (other than cotton and peanuts), which means we probably won’t see big acreage shifts (acres of cotton and peanuts are relatively small). However, it is important to realize that these numbers alone do not drive commodity prices. There are other, potentially much stronger forces at work in the commodity markets. Even the most bullish statistics do not guarantee higher prices.

USDA’s Crop Production Report for last year’s crop also came out last month. While overall U.S. cotton yield was down last year, falling from 864 to 803 pounds per acre, here in Alabama we had a remarkable recovery from the droughts of ’06 and ’07. According to USDA, yield of upland cotton in Alabama improved from 519 to 787 pounds per acre. I think it was the drought. Of course, they say the new genetics are really impressive so it could be the varieties are getting better a lot faster than we anticipated here in Alabama. And if this trend continues and yield keeps going up 25-30% per year, in a few years we will be able to make money growing cotton.

So right now, and remember a lot can change between the time I write this and you read it, here are the markets. September corn is $4.58 on the board, with forward contracts around Alabama running even to 60 under. The corn market has been in a long slow up trend mode. November beans are down 4 cents on the day, at $10.82, with local Alabama contracts from $0.10 to $1.90 under. Beans have gone from $8 to $10.50 since March. July wheat is up about a dollar since mid-April, at $6.65 down 9 cents today, with local prices from $1.20 to $1.60 under. December cotton is right around 6250 and remains the only commodity (other than peanuts in some areas) with a farm price significantly under cost of production. But at least things are finally moving in the right direction with cotton, and we are in a long, strong, rally. We turned the
corner in early March just north of 46 cents so we are looking at a 15 cent move. Percentage-wise, that is a remarkable run-up – over 30% - for any commodity. Marketing advice to farmers: sell into this rally. It’s time to price some of this year’s production.

*2009 Cotton Calendar. D. Monks, Ext. Agronomist

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<th>Date</th>
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<td>June 16</td>
<td>Row Crops Scouting School, Belle Mina</td>
<td>E. Schavey, T. Reed</td>
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<td>Aug 9-11</td>
<td>ALFA Commodity Tour and Conf., Mobile</td>
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There are two websites that you may be interested in visiting:
Alabama cotton information: [www.alabamacrops.com](http://www.alabamacrops.com)

*Reference Number: PSK-6-09, D. Monks, C. Burmester, and B. Goodman, editors

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.

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