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Because of rising technology fees and seed cost, we seem to have renewed interest in our work with conventional varieties. This year we will have small plot trials at Belle Mina, Prattville, and E.V. Smith as well as on-farm trials in Macon, Elmore, north Alabama, and likely a couple of other locations. I am neither promoting nor discouraging producers concerning conventional varieties but I am glad that we will have data for those interested through the support we get from the producers, Alabama Cotton Commission, and Cotton Incorporated. We will continue to work with seed

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**Alabama Cotton Picksack Newsletter**

May 2010

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*Cotton Planting Expectations for Alabama, 2010: Dale Monks
*Cotoran Herbicide (fluometuron) Use Banned in Five Northern Alabama Counties: Charles Burmester
*Seedling Insect Pests A Threat to Cotton Yields: Tim Reed/Barry Freeman
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When I first arrived as a cotton agronomist at AU in 1993, we typically averaged around 550,000 acres each year. However, approximately 3 years ago we dropped significantly to a low of 255,000 planted acres last year. This year everyone seems to agree that the outlook is for cotton acreage to be between 305,000 to 360,000 acres (as predicted by the USDA 2010 Spring Planting Intentions report). An increase in acres seems certain to come, especially given rainfall last week and early this week to keep things moving. Assuming that cotton price outlook remains strong, the race for acres will be between cotton and soybeans. My guess early on was that we would be near 325,000 acres by the time all was said and done but the prediction for a stronger market (see Dr. Goodman’s article below) may prove me wrong. Warmer temperatures this week should get the cotton that has already been planted off to a good start.

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companies to have their “technology” varieties in our on-farm large plot trials including some of the newer varieties. We appreciate the support we receive each year from Alabama cotton producers as well as Bayer, Phytogen, D&PL, Seed Tec, private breeders, and others. All information will be posted at www.alabamacrops.com as we make observations and record yield data later this fall.

* Cotoran Herbicide (fluometuron) Use Banned In Five Northern Alabama Counties. C. Burmester, Ext. Agronomist

A new label restriction on Cotoran (fluometuron) states that the product cannot be used in Limestone, Lawrence, Colbert, Madison and Tuscaloosa counties in Alabama. The product also is not for use in Sumter county Georgia. This herbicide has been used on many cotton acres in the past and its ban in these Alabama counties has come as a big surprise to all people involved in cotton production in the state. As weed resistance is becoming a bigger issue in Alabama, loss of this product in these counties means they have lost a valuable herbicide to fight resistance and also to use in growing conventional cotton.

We are currently investigating this issue and I will briefly tell you what I have learned so far. Makhteshim Agan of North America (MANA) bought the rights to Cotoran from DuPont in late 2007. Mana is now the sole supplier for fluometuron in the United States. Last year EPA expressed groundwater concerns from fluometuron to Mana and wanted additional research data. From what I can find, EPA’s concerns came from some individual groundwater samples taken by the US Geological Survey in 1999, 2000 and 2001. Some higher groundwater levels of fluometuron were found in some samples taken in these Alabama counties and Sumter county Georgia. Mana decided the additional research would be too expensive and this resulted in the counties being removed from the label. We will continue to check into this issue and keep you updated.

* Seedling Insect Pests A Threat to Cotton Yields. T. Reed & B. Freeman, Ext. Entomologists

There are several insect pests that attack seedling cotton plants. Thrips will attack all cotton fields each year and are capable of causing significant injury. As a result, virtually every field in the state receives a preventative treatment for thrips either as a seed treatment or an in-furrow granular insecticide application. Nevertheless, under poor growing conditions, an additional foliar application is sometimes required. To receive the most benefit, the foliar application should be made early—generally between the first and second true leaf stage. It is most unusual for cotton with four or five true leaves to profit from foliar sprays. Numerous inexpensive options are available
for foliar thrips control but these sprays can contribute to the flaring of other pests such as cotton aphids and spider mites.

The vegetable weevil is another early season pest of cotton that can reduce stands. The adult weevils frequently chew on the plant stem just below the cotyledons. In some cases they chew completely through the stem and in other cases they only eat partially through the stem. In both cases the plants will die. Vegetable weevils will also chew holes in the cotyledons. Damage caused by this pest could be easily mistaken for cutworm damage. The weevils can be found on the soil surface or on the plants feeding. They can also be found by digging up the soil around the plants. A light “worm rate” of a pyrethroid would be a good choice for control of vegetable weevil.

False chinch bugs (FCB) are another potential pest of seedling cotton. The FCB will suck juices from the plant and cause it to wilt. Close scouting will help ascertain the level of FCB damage and help determine if control measures are justified. FCB is very difficult to control with chemicals. FCB is often found in association with common groundsel, cutleaf evening primrose and other winter weeds.

Cutworms are also potential pests of seedling cotton and growers are advised to inspect fields closely for seedling mortality and if damage levels are sufficient control measures should be taken. Cotton planted into weedy fields, cotton produced under conservation tillage systems, and cotton produced on cool soils is most susceptible to cutworm infestations. Grasshoppers can also be pests in seedling cotton, especially in conservation tillage systems.

*2010 Cotton Scouting Schools Announced. R. Smith, Ext. Entomologist*

Cotton scouting schools will be held at the following three locations in 2010: June 8, Autauga County Extension Office, Autaugaville; June 9, Wiregrass Research and Extension Center, Headland; and June 15, Tennessee Valley Research and Extension Center, Belle Mina. There is no charge or preregistration required. Each session will begin at 8:30 am and end by 2:00 pm. Basic scouting information, management, and control of all insects will be covered. New stinkbug research information will be presented.

*Using Preemergence Herbicides in Cotton. M. Patterson, Ext. Weed Scientist*

Preemergence herbicides are applied to the soil surface after planting, but before the crop and weeds come up, as the name implies. These herbicides were some of the first developed for use in cotton. Diuron (Karmex, etc.) was first commercialized in the early 1950’s and is still useful today, nearly 60 years later. Fluometuron (Cotoran, etc.) followed in the early 1960’s. Norflurazon (Solicam) was developed in the early 1970’s and pyrithiobac (Staple) was developed in the early 1990’s. These herbicides can be used preemergence and all but norflurazon can be used postemergence in cotton to kill
emerged weeds after the crop comes up. The activity of all preemergence herbicides is dependent on rainfall or overhead, sprinkler irrigation to move the herbicide from the soil surface into the germination zone of weed seeds. This needs to happen within a week or 10 days following planting for optimum performance. The roots of germinating weed seeds will pick up the herbicide in soil solution and hopefully result in good control. If activating rain or irrigation does not occur for three weeks following planting, then a significant loss of herbicide activity will probably be noticed. All the preemergence herbicides listed above have activity on a wide spectrum of annual broadleaf weeds (including morningglory, sicklepod, teaweed, pigweed, etc.) and some annual grasses. Solicam also has significant nutsedge activity.

The commercialization of Roundup Ready cotton in 1997 has since kept many of these older preemergence herbicides from being used in Alabama cotton fields. However, the development of glyphosate-resistant weeds like marestail (horseweed) and Palmer amaranth has shown us that we will not be able to continue to use glyphosate only for weed management in cotton. These older preemergence herbicides along with newer products like Valor and Reflex will be more important than ever in our efforts to manage weeds in herbicide-resistant environments.

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I sent around a blurb I picked up on the Internet to our regional agents this week. The article was from China and it described a shortage situation that might be developing there. Earlier in the week, I received a call from someone who wanted to talk about the effect of cold planting conditions in a short-season production area. It all makes for a very interesting scenario. Bottom line, it’s not a good idea to plant cotton with nighttime temperatures in the ‘40’s. Also, according to the article I read, the Indian cotton situation is very tight. So tight in fact, that the author predicted that the price of cotton for September delivery on the Zhengzhou Commodity Exchange may perhaps reach the equivalent of 90 cents (about 18,000 yuan per ton, according to my calculations). The day I got the phone call was the day before the big move this week (later attributed to the action by
India to stop exporting cotton). I told John Everest, one of our senior agronomists, to buy cotton futures, but he didn’t. If he had followed my advice, he could have doubled his money in 24 hours. I guess agronomists don’t understand finances very well.

On another positive note, apparently we are selling and shipping cotton fast enough to meet USDA predictions for the crop year. If that happens, our ending stocks will be down around 3 million bales. Not that that’s such a big deal any more, but it’s still a positive factor in the market. There seems to be a lot of optimism in the cotton market right now, and we haven’t even got the crop in the ground yet. Yet to be determined is what happened on the corn/cotton decision. It’s all over now, but we don’t know if the tanking corn market and rising cotton market resulted in a significant acreage shift. If it didn’t, that might also be another positive for cotton. Beans are another factor. Whatever is driving the bean market the last two weeks is pushing the November contract up near $10. Ten-dollar beans might pull some late cotton ground into beans instead. In June, would you rather plant beans or cotton?

Continued high prices require continued high sales volume. News of slow sales will really drag on the market. I guess the only negative is that we have to guard against unbridled optimism. You got to take off the rose-colored glasses and look at what might happen instead of what you want to happen. Eighty-cent cotton sounds good. Dollar cotton sounds better. If you want to stay out of the market for a few weeks and let the situation develop, I won’t argue. I would argue against setting a hard price and refusing to market cotton into this rally. Nobody knows ahead of time what cotton prices are going to do. Maybe that’s why my buddy John didn’t buy and cotton futures. He knows I might be wrong. Some are saying to wait for higher prices. I say keep selling into the rally if you can lock in a profit.

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*Spring Nutrient Deficiencies in Cotton. Charles Mitchell, Ext. Agronomist*

(Excerpt from Extension Timely Information no. S-03-10; http://www.aces.edu/timelyinfo/Ag%20Soil/2010/April/S-03-10.pdf)

Every spring we can anticipate certain nutrient deficiencies to show up under certain conditions in corn and cotton on Alabama soils. Nutrient deficiencies are never widespread. They are usually spotty in fields and occur only in certain fields. Widespread problems across fields or in multiple fields on the same farm may represent weather-related issues or pesticide-residue issues. Crops tend to grow out of early spring nutrient deficiencies if the producer has taken care of the basics e.g., soil tested, applied recommended lime and fertilizers, etc. By far, the most common report of problems is related to low soil pH. Acid soils can create aluminum toxicity to roots of cotton and corn or manganese toxicity (crinkle-leaf) in cotton. Young crops can show symptoms of any number of abnormalities, all related to a low soil pH. Check pH problems first.
Unlike corn, cotton is usually planted into warm soils in late spring. Soil chemical processes such as phosphorus availability and sulfur mineralization occur faster. Roots also grow faster in these warmer soils so deficiencies are not seen as often. Cotton is also an indeterminate plant with the ability to compensate somewhat for stresses prior to fruiting. It also fruits over a longer period of time so a short-term drought or a temporary nutrient deficiency is not as devastating as it would be on corn.

**Nitrogen.** Nitrogen is always the most difficult nutrient to manage in cotton. While many growers apply all of the recommended N at or before planting (up to 120 lb. N/acre), this is not the most cost-effective way of managing N. We get by with this practice in most years because May and June are typically dry months in Alabama so all that preplant N remains in the root zone through flowering in July and August. However, records show that 1 year out of 3 we will have a wet May and/or June where preplant N could be lost to leaching rains or denitrified. Inadequate vegetative growth in May and June can lead to lower yields in the fall. Whereas starter fertilizers are not as predictable for cotton as they are for corn, they do provide some early season N that cotton needs for vegetative growth prior to flowering. Sidedress N can be applied anytime prior to flowering without loss of yield.

**Sulfur.** Because cotton is a taproot crop, sulfur deficiencies are not as likely to be observed on cotton compared to corn. However, in sandy soils, anything that prevents deep rooting can set the crop up for a S deficiency, e.g., a wet spring with shallow roots, a hardpan, a very acid subsoil. Leaf analysis is a quick way to positively identify S deficiency in cotton. An additional sidedress of
ammonium sulfate (21-0-0-24S) or liquid ammonium thiosulfate (12-0-0-26S) will correct the problem quickly. Including about 20 pounds of sulfate-S per acre in the preplant fertilizer on sandy soils will usually prevent this problem.

**Potassium.** You are not likely to see a K deficiency in cotton early in the season even on soils testing very low in soil K. Even a tissue analysis may fail to pick up on the situation. This is because the primary sink for K in the cotton plant is the boll. This is why deficiencies show up mainly after flowering when the bolls are developing. It is seen as a yellowing of the new growth as the bolls are developing. Classic K deficiency is marginal leaf burn of the older leaves as K is withdrawn from these leaves into the developing boll. The higher the yields, the greater the sink for K will be. Unfortunately, at this stage of growth (late flowering) absolutely nothing economical can be done to get K into the plant.

**Boron.** Boron is the only micronutrient we routinely recommend for cotton and the recommendation is mainly for cotton on sandy soils where boron is likely to leach. DON’T EXPECT TO SEE BORON DEFICIENCY SYMPTOMS. Photos of B deficiency are usually generated in greenhouse-cultured plants under very controlled conditions. Symptoms in the fields are almost never seen. Since B is associated with sugar transformations and cotton fibers are carbohydrates (cellulose), deficiencies usually show up in reduced lint yields. Rarely, will additional B increase yields more than 5 to 10%.

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**2010 Cotton Calendar.**  *D. Monks, Ext. Specialist*

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>June 8</td>
<td>Row Crops Scouting School, Autaugaville</td>
<td>L. Kuykendall</td>
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<td>June 9</td>
<td>Row Crops Scouting School, Wiregrass REC</td>
<td>B. Dillard, W. Birdsong</td>
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<td>June 15</td>
<td>Row Crops Scouting School, TN Valley REC</td>
<td>E. Schavey, T. Reed</td>
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<td>Aug 5-7</td>
<td>ALFA Commodity Tour and Conf., Columbus, GA</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)

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*Reference Number: PSK-5-10, 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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