June 2004

Don’t forget to mark the tour dates for north and south Alabama in your calendars. The northern tour date is July 20 and the southern tour date August 17.

* Early season growth and progress in 2004.  D. Monks
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* Early season growth and progress in 2004.  D. Monks

The 2004 crop has had some ups and downs so far this year but overall most areas seem to be on track with good potential. The north Alabama cotton that was planted early has had black root rot showing up in some isolated areas (see article below). We have had our share of replanted fields and rotary hoeing crusted fields in an attempt to get a stand in central and southern counties. We are now at the end of the planting season in southern counties and in need of rain in many areas. Weeds have also been growing well and need to be treated to reduce the effects of competition and ensure adequate control.

In areas that were planted on time and have had rain, cotton is growing rapidly and likely approaching the over-the-top label restriction for glyphosate. Just as a reminder when looking at fields that need to be treated with glyphosate, the general rule of thumb for plant development is 3 to 4 days per node. You can approximate how soon the crop will be at a certain “leaf” stage by counting the true leaves and then calculating how many days until the plant reaches the desired stage. There is not a good correlation between plant height and leaf number. Given the rainfall that we had last week and the high temperatures most of the state is experiencing, development is likely closest to the 3 days/node growth rate. It will be very rapid until moisture once again becomes limited.

Thrips pressure has been high this spring with many fields having to be retreated, regardless of the initial thrips control used at planting. We visited a field this week (last week of May) that was suffering from extreme drought stress, root disease, and two-spotted spider mite damage. Cotton was in the 3 to 4 leaf stage when the spider
mites were found. Cotton has also been damaged by grasshoppers and cutworms in conservation till fields.

* North Alabama reniform nematode update. C. Burmester

It appears that reniform nematodes may be beginning this season at some very high levels. Results from samples taken in March and April indicate that populations of reniform nematodes are already at levels we normally don’t expect until much later in the growing season. Several soil samples taken in March had levels of this nematode exceeding 6,000 per pint of soil. One sample taken at planting in April had over 20,000 nematodes per pint of soil. It appears the good growing season we had last year was also very good for growing reniform nematodes.

Normally early June is when stunting of the cotton has started becoming evident in north Alabama. I have already received a couple of calls this week on possible reniform stunting in Limestone County. Overall this May has been a much better growing season than the last two years. Hopefully a better root system on the cotton will allow it to better compensate for reniform damage.

We have very few bullets in our gun for fighting this pest at this stage in the season. I have had some good results with foliar Vydate applications applied at pinhead square to the 10th leaf stage. This treatment can be applied in two 8.5 ounce applications about two weeks apart or applied in a single 17 ounce application. Best results have been seen when there is sufficient leaf area to take in the Vydate and translocate it to the roots. This treatment can be banded over the row to reduce cost. Some areas of South Georgia have reported good results with side-dressing Temik and then applying irrigation. Presently, we do not have the equipment to test this in northern Alabama and irrigation is limited. We are testing many new products and strategies to control this pest and will keep you informed as we learn more.
* Black root rot identified in North Alabama cotton fields.

C. Burmester and K. Lawrence

Many of the cotton fields planted before April 10th in northern Alabama came up well and grew normally until about mid May. Then several complaints about poor growth and thrips damage began circulating. In most fields this damage was spotty; however, a few fields required replanting. Examination of the root system revealed a black root often dying a few inches below the soil line. Most of these plants had severe thrips damage because the systemic insecticide could not be taken up by the root system.

Lab analysis by Dr. Kathy Lawrence verified Thielaviopsis basicola spores just under the surface of the root. This is most commonly called Black Root Rot. This has been found only sporadically in northern Alabama and usually is not an economically important seedling disease. This disease requires cool soils and conditions must have been ideal for its growth during the early planting season before April 10th. Current fungicides being used on cotton will not control black root rot.

Normally this disease will not kill cotton because lateral roots develop above the damage. This root system however will be very shallow and very susceptible to drought. The cotton can also be delayed due to the thrips damage. The good new is that we have not seen this condition in cotton planted after April 10th.

* Cotton insects: Early square cotton insects. R. Smith

Insects encountered so far in 2004 are heavy thrips, grasshoppers in reduced tillage and sporadic spider mites. When cotton reaches the 6-8 true leaf stage, thrips should be of little concern. We must now shift our attention to insects that occur during the early square period. The primary economic insect during the month of June will be the tarnished plant bug. These bugs are present now on wild host plants along roadsides and field borders. On May 25, in one central Alabama location, tremendous numbers were present on daisy fleabane, one of the best hosts. About 40% of the population was light colored adults (young) while the remainder was about mid-sized immatures which will grow into adults in about 10-14 days. As these wild hosts dry down, cotton will become about the best host plant available for the next 4-6 weeks. This movement to cotton will begin shortly after June 1 and continue for 2-3 weeks or longer. In cotton, the adults will feed on small pin head (match head) sized squares and to some degree in the tender plant terminals. It is not easy to survey or quantify adult tpb’s in cotton so treatment decisions should be made on the percent pin head squares that are retained (undamaged). Plant bug feeding will cause these small squares to turn yellow, brown, black and abort from the plant, leaving behind a scar at the fruiting site. We would like to have 80% or better square retention during the month of June. If controls are warranted, chemical choices are
list in ACES Publication 2004 IPM-415, available in all county Extension offices. Growers in North Alabama should consult with Barry Freeman at Belle Mina, AL. Barry is one of the most experienced cotton entomologists in the U.S. on plant bug damage and controls.

* Envoke herbicide use in cotton. M. Patterson

After talking with a couple of farmers around the state I get the impression that Envoke will be used a good bit in Alabama. I believe it will be a good tool to help us manage weeds in cotton, including Roundup Ready, Liberty Link, and conventional varieties. It will be important to use Envoke properly in order to get the maximum benefit from this product.

First, DO NOT apply Envoke until the cotton has a minimum of 6 true leaves, and if possible wait until 7 or 8 leaves have developed. Don’t add any other material to the spray tank with Envoke except a good quality non-ionic surfactant (80% active or more). I know you will be tempted to add insecticide or growth regulator in the tank, but until we have more information on these mixes and the label allows it, just don’t add anything. It looks like we are past the cool, wet conditions that can cause problems with Envoke treatments, but obeying the label concerning timing and tank mixing is imperative. Use the low rate (0.1 ounce of product per acre) when spraying over the top. This rate can provide good activity on sicklepod, annual morningglory (except smallflower), pigweed, nutsedge, and several other broadleaf weeds.

Envoke can be directed at rates up to 0.25 ounce of product and is sold in a mix with prometryn under the trade name Suprend. This mix will provide control of several weed species and, when mixed with either glyphosate or MSMA, will control most of the weeds and grasses in the field. Cotton should be a minimum of 10 inches tall for directed applications of these mixes.

* Cotton market update: June 2004. B. Goodman

Who Said It?
There is a big prize if you can guess the country of origin for the quote below without looking at the end of this update. It’s just too ironic for words.

"Of course we are worried about China. We know they have cheaper labor than ours, so it's unbalanced competition. We are in favor of relations with China, but this country has to protect our labor laws. We don't want to be importing (goods) made by people earning $2 a day."

It’s been a tough month in all the commodities markets, but especially in cotton. The market has reacted strongly to every single piece of bad news and has shrugged off
anything that could be considered positive at all. I think the latest action resulted from
the stock market decline and the panic in the financial markets over the political situation
and Iraq. December cotton, as of this writing, seems to be stuck in a 58 – 62 cent trading
range. All the bad news is on demand side, which we as farmers can do little about.
After all these years, farmers are still “price takers”. If we choose to produce at all, we
have to take what the market offers. You would think something better would come
along, but so far it hasn’t. Once the crop is in the ground we are pretty much at the
mercy of the market.

All the commodities are down. It seems to be an amazing coincidence that corn, cotton,
and soybeans are all down 11-12% from their highs. New crop corn is down about 45 -
50 cents, November soybeans have dropped about a dollar. I hope farmers who planted
corn and beans locked in those high prices this spring. We expected corn and beans to
come down, but we thought cotton had some real potential. I know it’s time to face up to
the fact that circumstances have changed, but in my gut I still feel like the supply and
demand situation still supports a higher price of cotton, maybe as much as a dime higher.
The trouble is it is hard to distinguish what I feel in my gut from wishful thinking.

I looked on the chart, and since the first of the year December cotton has dropped about
10 cents or so. Currently it is hovering just at the 60 cent level, which has often been
considered the “normal” price of cotton over the past couple of decades. Actually, the
average annual price of cotton received by farmers since 1980 works out to be right at 56
cents per pound, and the price trend, although statistically insignificant, is downward. On
average, since 1980, the price of cotton has fallen about 8 tenths of a cent every year –
about 1.44%. The average trend in yield is up, but not as rapidly as prices are falling.
The yield of cotton trends up at the rate of about 6.75 pounds per year. Because price has
dropped at a faster rate than yield has increased, cotton revenue has declined at about a
third of a percent per year. That’s not a big decline, only about $1.25 per year, but when
you look at the increases in prices of inputs like seed, fertilizer, machinery, fuel, labor,
and chemicals, you can see why nobody is getting rich growing cotton, and why all this
payment limitation talk is a bunch of hooey. If they really want the American farmer to
stop producing food and fiber, just tell us, we’ll stop. I wish they would just quit trying
to starve us out. Somebody else can grow it. We can treat our food supply like we treat
our oil supply. That’s worked out real great, hasn’t it? The fact is that to compete in the
world cotton market, we must produce cotton to sell at the world price. To do so, we
must compete with farmers in other parts of the world who operate under a very different
cost structure. The subsidies they receive are difficult to quantify, but they are very real
and substantial. Things like no minimum wage, no worker safety, no regard for patents,
no environmental regulations. I wonder what would happen if I went down to Brazil and
hired a Brazilian family to come up here and grow cotton. I would provide the land and
machinery, and he could bring the labor, seed, and chemicals with him. I could pay him
twice what he makes in Brazil, and he could send his kids to public school during the
winter so it would be a really good deal for him. Of course, he would still be getting way
under the minimum wage, and Monsanto may get a little hot under the collar when he
planted all the bootleg seed, but I bet I could sell some low-cost cotton. I think this is a
good idea that needs further development. We might even bring up some folks to run the
old textile mills too. I better stop before I say something that might get me in trouble.

Anyway, the point I wanted to make about the cost–price squeeze is that, even if prices have fallen out of bed, somebody is still going to grow cotton and make money doing it. They are the low cost producers. It’s time to forget about the low price of cotton and the high cost of growing it. It’s time (for most of us) to forget about payment limitations, the new farm bill, NAFTA and free trade zones, the World Trade Organization, Senator Grassley, and any other distraction you can think of. Now it is time to concentrate on putting yourself in position to be a low cost producer. Sometimes in the lull after planting you can get kind of “caught”. After planting is done you seem to have a little breather then you wake up one day and you are somehow way behind. Playing catch up with a crop is not the way to be a low cost producer. To quote a farmer I respect very much, “Time is your most valuable input - use it wisely”. I know he is concentrating on getting this crop up and growing strong, cleaned up, and in good shape. He is not agonizing over things he can’t control. He is committed to this crop and he will make sure it is a good one by attention to every detail. Of course, weather may not cooperate, but if he doesn’t make a good crop, it will be because of something outside his control. He is a real craftsman of cotton growing, which means he pays attention to detail, lays the groundwork, makes sure the essentials are covered, and gets the job done on time. He also makes informed decisions by spending a good bit of time in the field looking at cotton. He doesn’t buy too much snake oil and he doesn’t do anything fancy. He just grows good cotton and he grows it very cheaply on a per-pound basis.

To wind up on a marketing note, I guess the same advice from the last few weeks still holds. I feel like December futures are just too close to the loan to attract my business. It’s too early in the season to hit the panic sell button, and surely, someday the market will react to some of the positive news that we still get from time to time. With old crop, the AWP is down a little, so the POP is also lower as well as the price so it’s not a good time to move old crop either, but I sure hope there’s not much of that left out there.

The quote is from Jorge Luis Martins, director of a shoemakers union in Franca, a city in Sao Paulo state (Brazil) noted for its handmade shoes who would favor raising the cost of cheap Chinese imports by imposing stiff tariffs. Just goes to show how level a playing field they want down there in Brazil.
2004 Cotton Calendar. D. Monks

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Contact Person</th>
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<tr>
<td>June 9</td>
<td>Cotton Scout School, Headland (WGREC)</td>
<td>Ron Smith, W. Birdsong</td>
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<td>June 10</td>
<td>Cotton Scout Sch., Autaugaville</td>
<td>Ron Smith, L. Kuykendall</td>
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<td>June 15</td>
<td>Cotton Scout Sch., Belle Mina (TVREC)</td>
<td>Barry Freeman, C. Burmester</td>
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<td>July 20</td>
<td>North Alabama Precision Ag</td>
<td>S. Norwood, C. Burmester</td>
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<td>and Commodity Tour, Servico Gin, Courtland</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 17</td>
<td>South Alabama Precision Ag</td>
<td>S. Norwood, W. Birdsong</td>
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<td>and Commodity Tour, WGREC, Headland</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 29-31</td>
<td>ALFA Commodity Conf., Birmingham</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 27</td>
<td>East Alabama Cotton Tour</td>
<td>Jeff Clary, CA*</td>
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*CA- county agent.

For more information on cotton scout schools, call Ron Smith (334.844.6394), Barry Freeman (256.353.8702), or Leisha McDaniel (334.844.6394).

There are two websites that you may be interested in visiting:
Alabama cotton information: [www.alabamacotton.com](http://www.alabamacotton.com)

Reference Number: PSK-6-04, D. Monks and C. Burmester, editors

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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.

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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