Episode —Peanut Update

Podcast Recorded late March 2021 and Released April 15, 2021

Announcer:

The Alabama Crops Report podcast, your trusted information source for Alabama agriculture.

Adam Rabinowitz:

Hello everyone and welcome to the Alabama Crops Report podcast. I'm Adam Rabinowitz, an assistant professor and extension economist with Auburn University.

Amanda Scherer:

And I'm Dr. Amanda Scherer, extension plant pathologist with Alabama Cooperative Extension. We are excited to be releasing regularly scheduled podcast episodes with up-to-date information about Alabama crops throughout the year. You'll be hearing from extension personnel from all over the state with the latest research and management recommendations. So how are you doing today, Adam?

Adam Rabinowitz:

I'm doing really well, Amanda, thank you. How are you?

Amanda Scherer:

I'm doing good. I'm excited to be hosting the episode today with you. It's been a couple of weeks since we got on.

Adam Rabinowitz:

It has been, and we've got a really exciting guest today that we're going to focus on a lot of peanuts. We'll be joined by Dr. Kris Balkcom, extension peanut specialist with statewide responsibilities. In today's episode, Kris will be giving us a 2020 crop update for peanuts. He'll talk about seed quality, seed treatments, variety selection. So, Kris, how are you doing today?

Kris Balkcom:

I'm doing good. How about y'all today?

Adam Rabinowitz:

Very well. Thank you. So let's get right into some of these questions here and see what's happening in terms of the peanut crops. Thinking about, we've seen prices certainly increase on a number of row crops, but let's talk about 2020, just for a moment. What were the final numbers for that 2020 peanut crop?

Kris Balkcom:

For Alabama in 2020, we had 182,000 acres of peanuts planted, that we harvested 3,500 pounds per acre for the crop last year. That was a little shy of what we anticipated and were hoping to harvest, however, just conditions. We had a lot of rain last year, we had hurricane Sally came through, just a number of showers that continued throughout the fall, the harvest season, that hindered us from being as timely as what we wanted to be there harvesting the crop. So we had a lot of delays, peanuts ran a lot more on the days than what we anticipated and that cut our yields there some.

Amanda Scherer:

One of the things, while we're still talking about 2020, probably the biggest issue that peanuts producers had to deal with last year was seed quality. That really resulted in poor stands. So how does the seed quality outlook look for the 2021 crop versus last year?

Kris Balkcom:

Thankfully, we look a lot better than we did last year. We knew going into 2020 that we were going to have some seed issues, quality wise, just because of the harvest season that we had in 2019, that would carry over into our seed and go in and give us some quality issues. It was just as bad as what we anticipated it being last year at planting time, we had lousy stands, we had to go back in and patch plant some more. However, this year for the 2021 crop, everything that I've seen germination wise from the samples that we've sent off, that farmers have sent off and shared with me, the other sellers, we look like we have excellent quality this time. Everything's been 85% and higher on germination rates. And most everything, I would say, has been in the low nineties as a good average. So I'm really excited and hope we have a good start as we get into planting season.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah, I know producers are going to be happy to hear some of those numbers. And just kind of as a funny side note, coming from a research standpoint, we're trying to put a seedling disease trial in Headland this year with one of our cooperators. And we actually are trying very hard to find some stressed seed with poor germination and it's actually been very hard for us to find this year. So just from a goofy standpoint, when you're looking from researchers, we want to see the opposite sometimes just for our stuff, but happy for producers.

Amanda Scherer:

So just sticking on the topic of seed quality and seed rots and seedling diseases, in terms of seed treatments, we often recommend that to producers. What are some of your thoughts on the ones that are available and what would be your recommendations?

Kris Balkcom:

For years, the industry standard has been Dynasty PD has been the seed treatment for quite a number of years there now. And now we have a newer product that's come on board is [Rankona 00:04:20]. And we started using that there and looking at it last year. Even when we were having those germination issues and we knew we had

some seed quality problems, as we would treat the seed with that and send it off for germination tests, we would see higher germination rates with the Rankona treatment, typically.

Kris Balkcom:

So with that being said, we had a seed treatment test there last year where we had an early planting, followed by a second planning there at a later date. And we saw the Rankona perform a little better than the Dynasty PD did, pretty good numerical difference, advantage to the Rankona treatment. And especially too, when we still added in an in-furrow treatment of a fungicide, such as an Abound or something of that nature, just to help them give it just even a little more additive, their in-furrow.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah. And that actually kind of led into my next question about in-furrow applications. There's some good options for producers with Velum with the fluopyram material, or an azoxystrobin in Abound. So what are your kind of thoughts on in-furrow treatments and how would you compare those to seed treatments? Would you ever go without one or the other?

Kris Balkcom:

Probably early on, I would probably recommend using the, like a Velum treatment or an Abound. Be sure to have a fungicide in-furrow in addition to your seed treatment. I think it would be beneficial there to do that early on in a planting season. As planting season progresses and we get later in the year and soil temperatures are even hotter and warmer and temperatures are warmer and conditions are even better and more favorable, we probably don't need to apply that in-furrow treatment in addition to our seed treatment. I think just our seed treatment alone would probably be fine at that time. But definitely early on, cooler temperatures, wetter soil conditions, I would think we would see an advantage consistently by adding that in for a fungicide treatment.

Adam Rabinowitz:

There are a lot of different practices that that producers need to think about when choosing their seed variety and all of these different varieties that are out there as well. We've seen for many years, Georgia-06G certainly has a hold in terms of the market and the number of acres. There's also breeds though that have come right out of Auburn. So with all these different varieties available, how do you determine which variety to plant where?

Kris Balkcom:

Yeah, that's an excellent point there, Adam, as far as when we think about 06G and as long as it's been around and the number of acres that it has maintained over the years, it's been 90% of the acres in probably Georgia and Alabama, as well as Florida there for a number of years. And we do have a lot more options out there now as more varieties have been released by these breeders from all the universities. And I certainly think, well, we don't have a silver bullet variety that's going to take over the acreage like what 06G has done in the past years. Currently, I don't see that variety out there right now, to be just one dominant variety, that's just perfect one that we need. But we do have a lot of advantages to some of these other varieties that are out there, and we've been able to consistently out yield 06G in a lot of different situations.

Kris Balkcom:

So I think we have to look at those varieties and take advantage of the attributes that they have for us and put them in those places where they can benefit us. Number one, we start looking at variety trial data from the universities, all the different research stations that are close to us and scattered about the state. And then we look at own farm variety trials and look into different growing regions and see how they perform on a larger scale. And it gives us an advantage to be able to look and see, do we see a variety that stands out at all the locations, or is it just one variety in a certain location and it varies between places? Obviously, one that stands out at all the

locations is going to be one like what that O6G has been, just a dominant variety and fits a lot of different situations.

Kris Balkcom:

The disease packages vary so much in these varieties that we have a lot of diversity across the state when you think about rainfall and disease pressure, and that really hinges a lot, a different on these varieties. So we have to look at those areas and see where they fail at, how much disease pressure can they handle, and then that way we can decide and split up our varieties across our farm by maybe the different rotations that we have, maybe where we've got a long rotation, we'll use a variety that's not as strong as far as disease package. But we can put a good spray program together for it and stay on schedule and be very timely with that in comparison to one that's got a great disease package and doesn't have a top-notch program on it.

Kris Balkcom:

We can save a little bit money there on our fungicides because it can handle so much disease pressure, and strong leaf spot resistance, and white mold, and so forth. I think that's what we've got to look at. And tomato spotted wilt, when we got 06G, we forgot about tomato spotted wilt. But it's certainly still out there and it's prevalent and we've seen more and more of it here the last few years. So we certainly look at these varieties and see how much resistance they have to tomato spotted wilt. And we don't want to plant one of those real susceptible varieties first. We need to wait to later in the planting season and have some other varieties up. Something else for the three ups to go to versus that variety that's very susceptible early. We don't want to do that. We don't want to set it up for failure.

Adam Rabinowitz:

That is a lot of great information and great advice for producers in terms of things to think about for selecting their varieties. One thing that I question though, is in terms of the availability, because we have had such a large number of acreage over the years for 06G, do we have really the availability of seed for some of these other varieties?

Kris Balkcom:

Well, that's a good question and it's certainly a good point. It's kind of hard for some to start changing. 06G has been so good to many farmers for a number of years, it seems like a lot of want to keep planting it until it just goes out on them or turns into a train wreck. And I encourage them to try to be looking at some of these other varieties, so that's also sparked the interest of these seed producers and caused them to go ahead and be planting some more acres or some these other varieties to allow these other producers to be able to split up their acreage better and not have so many eggs in one basket with one variety. So we certainly have been increased in the seed of these other newer varieties coming on board and something we'll get more and more into, obviously.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah, I definitely agree with you on that, Kris. Diversification, planting a wide variety of these different peanut cultivars is a good way to go. And one good resource for producers is the peanut RX guide that's put up by the University of Georgia, but several different universities contributed to it, including Auburn, Mississippi State, Florida, Clemson. And we actually use all of our research trials to create a point system for these varieties in terms of how they're going to respond to tomato spotted wilt, leaf spot, and white mold. And that's easy to find just by Googling peanut RX. And they have a new interactive webpage that I think is going to be a lot more useful to producers going forward.

Amanda Scherer:

And just to kind of continue on some of the other things you said, probably one of the biggest questions I imagine

that you get asked is when should producers plant. So if you just kind want to give a quick wrap up on some of your thoughts on that.

Kris Balkcom:

Sure. And I think there's been a lot of research and time and effort going into that peanut RX program. It's been going on for a number of years and I certainly think it's very beneficial for farmers to take a look at and continue to look at and manage if they have been using it because it's all about risk management. Splitting up these varieties and knowing which one to use and pick, and having a scale, a point scale for these to be able to allow them to see what we're looking at there with them, with all of our different experiments and so forth, I think is a great opportunity for them to help lower their risk there. So yeah, as we look in and think about when to plant and timing, obviously, we're looking at soil temperatures. There for years, we were at 65 degrees at four inches deep for three days in a row and being able to maintain that with the forecast that we're given in the days to come to not see any variation in that or any weather event that's going to cause us to go below that.

Kris Balkcom:

And only in the past few years, we've raised that temperature up to 68 degrees just because it increases germination so much by just those other three degrees from 65 to 68 degrees really makes a huge difference in germination. So that's what our standard is there now. And obviously, we just don't have a set date on the calendar of when that is. It varies from year to year, just like you never know what's around the corner. But I've seen them start planting around April the 10th before, and I've seen it be the 25th of April before we can start planting. A lot of farmers and old timers, they always are thinking about that cold snap around Easter.

Kris Balkcom:

So when it's as early as it is like this year being the first part of April, more than likely that the end of the month is going to look really good for planting, I supposed, just guessing and thinking about that. And we're 85 degrees right here today, and I'll guarantee you that the planters will be moving in late April this year. I think we'll have an early start this year, and you never know what kind of spring you're going to have, so when the temperatures get right and you've got moisture, look, we got to go to moving. Plant one of those varieties right there early on that has a high resistance to tomato spotted wilt and let's get that crop in the ground. Let's get started there as early as we can.

Kris Balkcom:

Our research has showed us the last few years that the more and more that we've got back out there in April and started back planting, that's been our highest yield in peanuts. And look, it gives us the longest best opportunity to make some when you've got a peanut variety that's such as an indeterminate, as peanuts are, that can vary on fruiting on the conditions that they have, that gives us a longer window and more opportunity to make them than earlier we plant them. If it's, if we get behind and we're relaxed and we don't start planning until the 1st of June, well, we've narrowed our own growing season there then, and we don't have near as long and many opportunities to produce that crop. So certainly our best peanuts have been the end of April planting.

Adam Rabinowitz:

You've really given some excellent advice there for producers. And focusing on the current year, if you will, I mean, as an economist, I always kind of really focus in on risk management with respect to prices and different production practices. And on the price side, we certainly don't know from year to year, but also not knowing from year to year when those specific dates will be for planting and needing to take in the variables for what's actually happening this year is absolutely important. So just kind of on that point though, about prices, what are your thoughts about just prices for this 2021 crop at this point and what producers should be looking at, or just in general about the upcoming year?

Kris Balkcom:

Yeah. It looks like the market's pretty strong, that the peanuts [inaudible 00:15:41], all the commodities have been up in price this year so far. And peanuts appear, they started out a little lower, but they've kind of been around $500 is kind of where a lot of the contracts have been.

Kris Balkcom:

Really, that kind of seems like the floor right now. Cotton's still 80 something cent plus. With that being said, I don't see any reason for peanuts to fall off there from that price. I think they have an opportunity to be the 500 and up. Certainly, [Howel X 00:16:09] would get a premium above the $500 because, as we talked about that, that's just the normal [inaudible 00:16:14] chemistry varieties that are at 500 and they would be a little premium there for Howel X. So I think it's a great opportunity for the farmers and hopefully they can make a crop because really, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what the price is. If we can't produce it, it doesn't matter what the price is. So hopefully we can have a good growing season and have a good yield, and people can get that ... capture that good price there this year, hopefully.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah, definitely fingers crossed on that one. You never know what's going to happen. But Kris, we really appreciate your time today. And as always, if we can ever be of any help to any of our listeners, please don't hesitate to reach out. Adam and Kris, I appreciate your time today and really enjoy talking with both of you.

Kris Balkcom:

Thank you, Amanda. I appreciate it.

Adam Rabinowitz:

Thank you, Kris.

Announcer:

The Alabama Crops Report is a production of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and is sponsored by Alabama Ag Credit.