



## **Episode 15— Crop Updates from Regional Extension Agents**

Announcer:

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

Amanda Scherer:

Hello everyone and welcome to the Alabama Crops Report Podcast. I'm Amanda Scherer, an extension plant pathologist with Alabama Cooperative Extension.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

And I'm Dr. Adam Rabinowitz, an agricultural economist 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. How are you doing today, Amanda?

Amanda Scherer:

Doing really good, just trying to take advantage of the rainy wet weather we've had the last couple of days and get caught up on stuff in the office. How about you?

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

That's exactly it then, writing some papers and working on some indoor meetings.

Amanda Scherer:

Yep. The tasks never stop. So, today we'll actually be joined by two of our regional extension agents, our REAs for short, that cover Agronomic Crops for central Alabama. First, we'll be talking with Andrew Sparks, our REA for east central Alabama. On today's episode, Andrew will be giving us an update on agronomic crops in his region and also talk about his role in Extension. How are you doing today, Andrew?

Andrew Sparks:

I'm doing great. How are y'all?

Amanda Scherer:

Doing good, we're happy to have you here. This is actually the first time that we've had an REA on the podcast. So, would you mind providing our listeners with a little bit of information on your background and how REAs can help producers on the farm?

Andrew Sparks:

Sure, I'd be glad to. So, as REA my goal and my job is to pretty much connect Auburn University and Extension to the field in Alabama and help farmers and producers grow the most efficient and the best crop they can in the state.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

That's great, Andrew. Can you talk a little bit about the services that you actually provide both REAs and Extension and why it's important for producers in Alabama?

Andrew Sparks:

Sure, Adam. So, some of the services we provide, we can [inaudible 00:02:03] soil samples for producers to help them make sure that their fertility levels in their soil are what they need to be to grow the crops and gain the yields that they want to make that bottom line and make the money they need to be a good producer and to keep the farm going. And we can also do, we do tissue samples, we can pull tissue samples to check, say nitrates in corn and just be there in case they have a problem that comes up that they don't have an answer to. And hopefully, we can find them an answer and solve a problem they have in the field.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

Can you elaborate a little bit on the soil samples or even the tissue samples? What actually is the process that a producer goes through?

Andrew Sparks:

Sure, Adam. So, what might happen, a producer if they call and they say they've got a spot in the field that just is not performing the way they want to, the colors off on the crop and they just need to find an answer to what's going on. Well, we can actually go out, take a sample and we'll bring it back to the university and send it through

the soil lab and we can get an analysis of the elements of that soil and see if it's lacking in a certain element that they can maybe go out there and apply that N, P or K or maybe just a minor element to maybe boost that part of the field and get it back up to the rest of the field.

Amanda Scherer:

Yes. Some of those testings, especially for the tissue samples are really helpful for producers and a lot of times when those samples come to the soil testing lab here at Auburn, they can also connect producers with some of the Extension specialists like Audrey Gamble and she can provide more insight and she'll work with you and the other REAs or if a plant sample comes into the diagnostic clinic, if it's with cotton or peanuts, Cassie Conner might connect the producers with me and stuff. So, there's a lot of support there for producers and REAs are a big part of that in connecting with all those services that are on Auburn. So, I'm really glad that you were able to give a good overview of that. So, just focusing more on your region, what are the main agronomic crops that producers have?

Andrew Sparks:

Yeah, sure. So, our region is pretty much a snapshot. I like to say east central is a snapshot of the whole state of Alabama, the northern part around Talladega Calhoun County, some heavier ground, mainly corn, soybeans and cotton and the southern part of my region down in Macon, Russell and Lee counties, a lot of sand in your soil and we grow corn, cotton, soybeans and have peanuts thrown into the rotation down there. So, in east central Alabama, there's pretty much every crop grown in Alabama is grown in our region.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah, so you have everything in the kitchen sink out there, basically. Just in general, just staying on the topic of crops, how are they looking so far this season?

Andrew Sparks:

The crops are off to a pretty good start. We had a stretch of really, we had a stretch of wet weather towards the early part of the spring and then, the water shut off and it gave us a chance to catch up planting but we got dry there towards the end of May. And like you alluded to towards the start of this podcast, we have finally got some rain the past couple of days, it's got us back on track for soil moisture and trying to finish up some light planting crops. And hopefully, we can get a stretch of dry weather, we've got some wheat that needs to be cut. So hopefully, it'll dry up and be able to get some wheat out of the field to get those light beans planted.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

That's great. One of the important things that Extension does with Auburn University involves different trials, not just in the research setting but also on the farm. In particular, trying to find out what's happening with different varieties or different techniques that researchers may be interested in that our farmers need to understand. Do you have any on-farm variety trials in your region or other research that you'd like to talk about?

Andrew Sparks:

Yeah, Adam, I do. I have a total of three cotton trials in my region spanning from the Shelby-Talladega county line over to Elmore-Macon county and then in Lee County. So, we have three cotton trials in this region. We have one peanut trial and we have two corn trials, one in the northern part region in Talladega County and then one in Lee County. So yeah, we have got a very good variety trials. Things are going to be good to see, hopefully we can have a rest of good season to see these new varieties so producer can see what they're doing on the farm. Hopefully, it'll transfer to their acre of ground.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

That's great, that's going to be really important to figure out which of those varieties are actually going to be best for producers in the coming years.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah, I think a lot of the variety trial research is really important because that's probably one of the biggest questions we get asked, "What variety is right for my area and region?" The only way we can really do that is by having all these variety trials located throughout the state. So, we really rely heavily on everyone in Extension, REAs and specialists to get that information out. And we've really enjoyed having you on the podcast, Andrew, but before we let you go, do you have any announcements on upcoming programs for producers in your area?

Andrew Sparks:

We do. We're going to have some on-farm tours here this summer. We'd love for producers to be able to show up, hope to have a couple of those where we can go around and actually see some crops in the field and have some specialists come out and be in the field, have producers to be able to actually ask specialists questions in the field and see those crops as they're growing off later on in the summertime and hopefully gain some knowledge from that. Other programs that we've got going on, we're going to have some pesticide license classes going on for these producers and hopefully, they can get a part of that. We're always looking for new demos that we can put on the field and hope to have some demo trials, as far as maybe cotton defoliation trials and things like that later on in the year.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

And Andrew, how would our listeners find out about when these different events are taking place?

Andrew Sparks:

We actually have a Facebook page so we have a central Alabama Agronomic Crops team Facebook page that they can go on. And we post to that very regularly and post flyers and agendas for these different meetings and events that we're having and that'd be a good place for them to come and see what's going on. They can also go on the Extension website and find me on there and all my information, email address and phone number and

everything is on the Extension website. I'd love to hear from the producers and other people that's in the state that need help.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah and just for our listeners, the main Extension website is [aces.edu](http://aces.edu) and you can easily look on our directory for everyone in Agronomic Crops, for the REAs in your region and we also have a calendar on there of a lot of events as well.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

This ends our time today with Andrew Sparks, our Regional Extension Agent for the east central Alabama area. We really appreciate your time, Andrew on the Alabama Crops Report Podcast.

Amanda Scherer:

Yes. Thank you, Andrew. We really enjoyed having you.

Andrew Sparks:

Thank y'all, I appreciate it.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

So, for the second half of this Alabama Crops Report Podcast episode, we have John Vanderford, Regional Extension Agent for Agronomic Crops in the west central Alabama area. On today's episode, John will be giving us an update about agronomic crops in his region and talk about his role in Extension. John, how are you doing today?

John Vanderford:

Good, Adam. I hope you're doing well and staying dry out there.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

Staying indoors to stay dry right now.

Amanda Scherer:

So John, you're actually pretty new to Extension. Would you mind talking a bit about your background before we get started?

John Vanderford:

Sure, Amanda, yes. So, I've been here for coming up on a year with Extension. So, I came more from a sports turf world, worked for a company for about eight years. Grew up in Alabama, I went to Auburn and then ended up

going to Mississippi State and found my way back home to Alabama. So, glad to be here with Extension for sure and helping serve and promote farmers in west central Alabama and really the whole state.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

Well, we're really glad to have you here as part of the ACES Team in Extension. So, can you tell us a little bit about the main agronomic crops in your region that you serve?

John Vanderford:

Yes sir, sure. So mainly, we got a good bit of corn, especially in the northern part of the region, Pickens County, Tuscaloosa County, really down into Dallas County, a lot of cotton, have some peanuts through Dallas County close to the river there, also have soybeans, we have some wheat, some grain sorghum. So, I guess a broad spectrum, a little bit of everything.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah. And considering that you have such a broad spectrum of crops in your area, what are some of the most common questions that you get asked from producers or things that you get called out for?

John Vanderford:

So recently, it's been more about timing-wise as far as maybe fertilizer applications. I had a question recently about planting cotton and what's the close, the too late date for that behind some wheat. So, it's mainly been more towards fertility type questions and a few weed type questions and what would you spray in the situation, those type questions, probably more than anything.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

That's great. Yeah, you mentioned some of the late plantings and when is that date too late? How are we looking right now in terms of some of the current planting activity and the dates that we're coming up to?

John Vanderford:

That's a good question, Adam. Like I said, I talked to a producer more in the central area that they were trying to get some wheat cut this week. Obviously, we've had rain here. I mean, I'll talk with counties today, we just had the cotton scouting school and we had a good bit of rain last night, a couple of inches so that wheat cut got put on pause for a little bit. So, most everybody that I've talked to is wrapping up and unless they're double-cropping behind the wheat with soybeans or something, they still have to get that in the ground. So, we're looking pretty good on that.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah. I know that we have a lot of late planted cotton or cotton that had to be replanted. We had quite a bit of rain as Andrew mentioned across the state then it dried out, are you seeing a lot of those issues in cotton there?

John Vanderford:

Not so much, Amanda with cotton, as far as replanting. I've heard a little bit, the corn in some areas that I've seen is a little bit, I would say behind schedule, especially in the lower fields that maybe stayed wet a little longer. But I haven't really heard of a lot of replanting in terms of cotton so far this year in the region.

Amanda Scherer:

Well, Steve Brown, our Cotton Agronomist will be happy to hear that. Shifting from cotton, how does corn just look in general in your area? Are you seeing a lot of disease or insect issues on corn? I think it's been pretty quiet the last couple of years.

John Vanderford:

Yeah, Amanda, I would say that's continuing this year. Thankfully, it's pretty quiet. Like I mentioned, just in some of those lower wet areas I have seen, I think it's a little bit behind but also talked to some producers today at the scouting school that their corn was tasseling. And so, I think we're in that window, if we can catch some timely rains. A lot of producers put some their last round in last week so hopefully, we'll catch these rains and that'll help everything out.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

That's great. Yeah. Being quiet from a production standpoint is certainly a good thing but your work is never quiet for sure, there's always lots of things that are going on. Some of that like we just talked with Andrew about is the on-farm variety trials and other research. So, what do you have going on in the west central Alabama area?

John Vanderford:

We have one corn trial right now in Chilton County, checked on that earlier or late last week, it looked pretty good. I've got a cotton trial with Andrew up in Shelby County. And then, I'm doing one also with Tyler Sandlin and Andy Page from Tennessee Valley area doing one in south Fayette, north Pickens and Tuscaloosa counties. So, I got two cotton ones and then there's also a peanut trial in Dallas County that we've got. So, that's what we've got going with on-farm variety trials.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

And those are variety trials as well?

John Vanderford:

Yes sir, that's correct.

Amanda Scherer:

So John, we've really enjoyed having you on the podcast but just like with Andrew, we'll put you on the spot before we let you go. Do you have any announcements for upcoming programs for producers in your area? I know you both mentioned you were at the scouting school this morning, but what else do you have on the horizon?

John Vanderford:

Yeah. So, we had a good turnout by the way. I think some really good information was given out to the producers and I hope they enjoyed it. But as far as upcoming classes, we'll mention, we do have a pesticide training coming up in Pickens County on June 23rd, that one's the only one scheduled right now. I'm working scheduling one in Dallas County as well. My information, like Andrew said is on the website if anybody needs to come to that and needs to get some points, I'd be glad to have them at those training.

Dr. Adam Rabinowitz:

That's great. I mean, these trainings are excellent opportunities for producers to get that up-to-date research information and also just the networking with other producers and try to get those answers that they need for their production activities. Well, that ends our time today with John Vanderford, Regional Extension Agent for Agronomic Crops in the west central Alabama area. John, we really appreciate your time on the Alabama Crops Report Podcast.

Amanda Scherer:

Yes John, thank you. We really enjoyed having you and Andrew. As always, if we can ever be of any help to anyone, then please don't hesitate to reach out.

John Vanderford:

Adam and Amanda, thank you for having me. It's been a pleasure and look forward to serving farmers in Alabama.

Announcer:

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