



Episode 19—July Crop Update

July 16, 2021

Announcer:

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

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Hey, and welcome to another episode of the Alabama Crops Report Podcast. I'm Katelyn Kesheimer, field crops entomologist.

Scott Graham:

I'm Scott Graham, extension entomologist.

Amanda Scherer:

I'm Amanda Scherer, the only extension plant pathologist here today.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

That's why you're sitting on the other side of the room, Amanda.

Amanda Scherer:

Yes, they've kind of put me in a corner here. I feel very separated from the bug people right now.

Scott Graham:

Just a little behind baseball for our listeners out there. The way we're set up in our studio here is like a two by one triangle where typically we have our two guests on one side or our two hosts, excuse me, on one side and our one guest on the other side in what we call the hot seat. Today we've got our entomologist in the guest side and Amanda is in the hot seat. What we've been starting to do is asking for a fun fact from our guest, so give us a fun fact about yourself.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah. See, I listened to Eddie McGriff's one for last week, and he has a really good fun fact. I don't have that good of a fun fact, but I heard Audrey talk about her hobbies. One thing, I'm very crafty, and so I do like to learn new crafts so like Audrey, but instead of pottery, I do crocheting and I actually like to make little crochet animals that are called aragami. Instead of origami, it's aragami for little animals in crocheting.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Oh, I had no idea. I would never be able to do that because I am the most impatient person, so learning something like that, I've tried several times. I still have a crochet hook, but I don't use it.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah, probably the toughest part is just persevering through it, and your hands start to hurt really bad from using that one hook.

Scott Graham:

Crocheting is, for lack of a better term, knitting, right?

Katelyn Kesheimer:

There are different terms. Knitting, you have two knitting needles, Knit One, Purl Two, and then crochet hook is you just have one hook that you're constantly using.

Amanda Scherer:

If you were to say that probably in a different group of people that are in Michael's, they'd probably get really mad if you called crocheting knitting.

Scott Graham:

I'll keep that in mind the next time I'm in... You said, what was that place?

Amanda Scherer:

Michaels.

Scott Graham:

The next time I'm at Michael's, I'll make sure not to talk to him about that.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

It's like when we get mad when people say, I don't know, spiders are insects or something. It's a personal thing.

Scott Graham:

When I was little, we played croquet in my grandmother's backyard, but that's a completely different animal there.

Amanda Scherer:

And a little bit easier.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Well, so you can hear us chatting today, and you'll notice we haven't introduced any special guests because we are here to do a pest roundup and a crop update in the middle of July. We've had a lot of rain, and so we wanted to just talk about what we're seeing in terms of insects and diseases, Amanda, and then also what to expect in these coming weeks as we enter into late season for some of these crops.

Scott Graham:

All right. I'll throw out there that we start with corn. That's the crop that I don't have responsibilities in. I guess Amanda, you don't either, do you?

Katelyn Kesheimer:

That's why I'm here.

Scott Graham:

But that's the one that we're getting the closest to start harvesting and things, so what's going on with corn?

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah, a lot of our corn is ranging from, I have some later planted corn that's just now silking. We have some corn that's already reached dent stage. In terms of pest pressure, we're out of that danger zone of stink bugs, which were a problem in the central part of the state this year and wet weather.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

If we had, which we did, wet weather early in the season, we can see some issues with younger and seedling corn, but for the most part, as long as weather stays dry, once we start harvesting I wouldn't be too concerned about that affecting corn. We seem to be on par for acreage and timing with corn throughout the state, and so I anticipate we'll have similar yields and numbers that we had in 2020. All in all, this wet weather's not going to impact insect populations and insect damage in corn.

Scott Graham:

What about things like smut, and that is related to a lot of times stink bug damage, right?

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah. Things like fumonisin, which we will probably start seeing that as we get closer to harvest and start looking at that grain. With this wet weather too, as it splashes these pathogens around and through the fields, those wounds created by stink bugs that you may not even know they're there because they are incredibly sneaky. You may get docked when you take your grain to the grain, but at the end of the year.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

That's something to keep in mind. We've passed the window for fungicide applications. A lot of people were putting out fungicides along with some pyrethroids for stink bugs, but right now what's done is done. If you start seeing those banana ears in corn, then it's a little bit too late, but we certainly have time for more disease to accumulate in ears before we get completely dried out enough to harvest.

Scott Graham:

I've talked to some folks. I was actually talking to a guy today about... He was wanting to know what he could do in the soybeans to give his farmers an opportunity to harvest their corn in a couple of weeks without having to worry about stink bugs in the soybeans, give himself 10, 14 days. He was saying he thinks we're set up for some phenomenal corn yields with all the rain that we've gotten this year.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah, we've had rain at the right time and as long as you were able to get in the ground planted and up without too many issues, I know some growers had replants and floods and everything, but with this weather, yeah, we should see some really, really good yields to make up for some of the decrease we've seen over the last couple years.

Scott Graham:

Yeah. Hopefully we can just get a break in a lot of this weather we've been seeing across the state to actually get the combines in the field when it's time and get the corn out.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah, I think part of the issue is we may see increase in disease and insects, but a lot of it is just the ability to get into fields to make applications when we need them, whether it is weed control or insects or diseases.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah. That's probably the biggest thing just across all crops is the weather and the rain and trying to get in the fields between that. I know we're in our trials in the Southwest part of the state in Fairhope, they're under a flood advisory, and they've been under it, I think, for the last week or so and it's still going into this week, and it's just been a real challenge to get out there to control those early season weeds, especially in cotton.

Amanda Scherer:

Then, that's going to affect when you start having to make applications in peanuts. We're right at that window where we recommend producers starting between 30 and 45 days, and then trying to stay on that 14 day spray schedule but with these rain events, it's a real challenge for them.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

If I remember from a previous lifetime where I worked in cotton, weeds, for example, silverleaf nightshade, can host insects that can then move into cotton and be a problem and so it could be this trickle-down effect where you can't get in to get your herbicide applications in, and then it harbors more pests that can then damage cotton.

Scott Graham:

Yep. Absolutely. Pigweeds are one. They're a good host for plant bugs in cotton. There's some of these grasses are hosts and this we're thinking probably more in peanuts and soybeans, but some of these grass weeds that we have in the fields have fall armyworms, which you're familiar with, Katelyn, and they move in and thankfully most of the time that's the grass strain, and it's a little bit easier to control than the corn strain which is pyrethroids and things. We've heard some talk out of the mid-south about some failures earlier this summer with that. It seems like that talk's quieted down. Did you ever hear anything from pasture producers?

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah. We never had any issues here in Alabama that I'm aware of. That's not to say there aren't some, but I think the issue is you mentioned grasses and armyworms is we do know that fall armyworms are attracted to the most lush, irrigated hay fields, home lawns, if you're a homeowner, and you have armyworms in your nice green Bermuda grass. With all this rain, we end up with a lot of green pastures around the state and so people who are managing hay fields will need to make sure they're scouting and making applications because then those armyworms can file on through and move to other crops as well.

Scott Graham:

Well, it's good to hear from a professional. I don't have to worry about my yard.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

I already had spittlebugs tear up my yard earlier this year.

Scott Graham:

Yeah, I was talking with a scout yesterday who is in Monroe County, and he sent me some pictures, and it's unbelievable how much rain they've gotten down there. He said his farmer said you could find every stink bug in the world. We can't get in the field for a week, at least. We're at that time of the year where it's difficult to know when to pull the trigger on an insecticide application because even if you're not in these high rain situations it seems like there's just storms blowing up and how long was the insecticide there before it rained and things like that. It's just a tough time right now to farm.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah. It sounds like mother nature is making the decision for you, not allowing us to pull the trigger and then rain fastness too is important is getting out applications with enough time to do their jobs before they get washed away by what seems like several inches of rain in each of these events. I know down in Escambia County, we got some reports of six inches of rain in a really short period of time, and so that's not going to do anyone any good in terms of timely applications.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah. That's an issue also in the Wiregrass. Some of our peanut trials are in a good couple inches of water. They were last week in headland, and they got two inches just in one night, and then it was supposed to rain that afternoon after we left. Yeah, rain fastness with fungicides is critical too. When did you get that on, and then when did the rain come in?

Amanda Scherer:

We're already having a somewhat active hurricane season. We've already had a couple tropical storms come through. Luckily for Alabama, we missed most of the last one. I think we might've gotten some outer bands in the Southeast part of the state, but yeah, mother nature is definitely throwing at the farmers this year.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Amanda, my limited disease knowledge is that they thrive in this kind of hot, humid, moist environment so with all this weather, are we seeing increases in diseases? What do people need to look out for as we move through the rest of the season?

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah, basically, you hit the nail on the head there. With your foliar fungal diseases they're all driven by hot, humid, wet weather. Basically that is what all of Alabama is under right now, except maybe in Tennessee Valley. The main thing is for peanuts, we are starting to see some early incidences of early leaf spot. I've seen some

tomato spotted wilt virus also, which is not controlled by fungicides, but it is out there. Maybe Scott has some suggestions for thrips control for that.

Amanda Scherer:

In terms of the foliar fungal diseases, early leaf spot is starting right now and then that'll merge into late leaf spot a little bit later in the season. It can start showing up as early as late July to as late as mid-August but normally when late leaf spot comes in, if your peanuts do not have a good fungicide spray program, they can become severely defoliated. Pressure for this is only going to get worse and increase, and so one of the things I'm telling producers, definitely don't skip out on fungicide applications this year or cheap out on fungicide applications. Be aggressive in your management plans because it's only going to increase as we're coming into the summer for the pressure for these diseases.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

It's worth the money you're spending when you get your yield at the end of the season, is what you're saying.

Amanda Scherer:

For sure, especially with these high crop prices, definitely. Same thing with cotton, with target spot and areolate mildew. They're also humid, wet weather diseases and with those, especially if you're in the Southwest part of the state with all this rain, if your cotton's getting close to that first week of bloom, or is at that first week of bloom, definitely put out a preventative fungicide for target spot.

Scott Graham:

Amanda, you hit on something there that is really true in most of the state in that we've got cotton anywhere from pinhead square to the second, third week of bloom, and I even talked to a farmer yesterday who still has some cotton in the one to two true leaf stage. We've got just a big mix of cotton maturity out there right now. I know for stink bug or for insects, during the squaring season, we're really not concerned about stink bugs. We don't start worrying about them until we started getting some bolls in the field. So we're scouting differently. Sometimes we're spraying a little different based on that.

Scott Graham:

With diseases, we talk about the first week of bloom, is that based more on the calendar date or the stage of the crop and are we maybe not spraying a certain fungicide at cotton that's at pinhead square verse what we're spraying at the first week of bloom or second week of bloom?

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah, so for your foliar diseases of cotton, we just say the first week of bloom, just as a general gross stage as to when to start thinking about applying your fungicide. You can either start, especially in the Southwest part of the state, I definitely wouldn't base it on scouting just because conditions are so conducive right now to really

get preventative applications starting at either first or third week of bloom, depending where we are in the season. You have to judge it based on where your field is and what you're looking at.

Amanda Scherer:

So you get that first preventative fungicide application on it first or third week of bloom, and then follow up with a second one at either third or fifth week of bloom, depending on when you start. Now, if you're in other parts of the state, we can just do it based on scouting, and you really want to ramp up your scouting at first week of bloom because that's when the canopy has really started to close, especially between rows and your airflow movement isn't as good. That, coupled with the hot, humid weather, just makes it really conducive for both target spot and areolate mildew.

Scott Graham:

Yeah. That's when we talk to folks about scouting for insects, where every time we're walking through a field, we're always observing for other things and signs of diseases are just like that. We're looking for those symptoms while we're scouting through, and maybe we're scouting for diseases in a time like this, but we're always trying to be observant when we're walking through the field.

Scott Graham:

We are pretty behind. If you look at the USDA's, their report for last week, it says our five-year average is 30% of our crop is setting bolls so in that first, second, third week of bloom and right now they're saying only 17%. I don't know that I've really observed that much riding around the state the last week. We're pretty far behind right now, as far as cotton.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah, both cotton and peanut just got a late start just because we had... It was slow to warm up this year, and so that's just a general trend throughout the state. Plus, we had a lot of rain in spring as well and so that delayed plantings getting into the field, but at least for peanuts, even though we got that late start, I think we're still in a pretty good spot for peanuts.

Scott Graham:

If you remember, a lot of parts of the state, we went from too wet to plant to too dry to get emergence it seemed like overnight, almost. It was crazy.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah. This was my first experience with flash droughts here in Alabama, that can happen very, very quickly. You think you have a ton of rain, but then very quickly it turns too dry. I feel like this is a very depressing podcast. We're just talking about all this doom and gloom. Are there any good things to come of this rain, you guys?

Amanda Scherer:

I'll just say that the cotton that is getting a lot of rain looks really healthy and green right now, despite all the challenges, at least in my trials. It just might be a little hard to get out there to do some things, but for the most part, especially in Brewton, it's loving the rain down there.

Scott Graham:

I guess the farmers and scouts are going to spend a little more time with their family than they're used to this time of the year because they can't get in the fields. It's one of those things where I had a great uncle who farmed for 50, 60 years, and he always said, if it's raining we must need it, and you never wish away water. You hate to say you don't want the rain because there's going to be a point where you do need the rain. That's just kind of what I've always tried to say. If we're getting it, we must need it.

Amanda Scherer:

Yeah. It's too bad we don't have Dr. Brenda Ortiz on here to talk about irrigation because I'm sure that there's some producers saving on irrigation right now.

Scott Graham:

Yeah, absolutely. I'd like to talk about soybeans real quick. We got a lot of late beans out there, not just beans behind wheat. We've just got some beans that were planted late for whatever reason, and we thought we were going to get away from this redbanded stink bug this year with all the cold weather that we had last year, but I've been talking over the last couple weeks with several different folks in the Black Belt, and they're starting to pick up low numbers of redbanded stink bugs.

Scott Graham:

If you're not familiar with that insect, it's called Neotropical. It comes from Central America. It doesn't have a true hibernation period, if you will, like most of our insects do, so it's active all during the winter and the spring and being that it comes from warmer climates, it doesn't over winter very well here, except maybe on the coast but once we get very far off the coast really doesn't survive the winters very well. It got very cold this winter. I thought we killed the redbanded stink bug back, but it looks like we didn't. So if you've got late planted beans in particular, we really need to be out looking for those when it dries up.

Scott Graham:

Once we start putting on some small pods, those redbanded stink bugs are going to come in. I was talking to a guy today who was wanting to go ahead, as soon as it dries up, put a spray on. He's starting to find low numbers, but last year they had situations where the beans never would dry down. They stayed green forever because those red banded stinkbugs just kept feeding and kept doing damage and kept delaying the crops.

Scott Graham:

That's something we needed to think about. Not necessarily current weather-wise, but we had talked this winter and spring about, I don't think we got to worry about redbanded stink bugs. Well, there's another one where you ask your entomologist in the winter, what's the bugs going to be like, and he says, "I don't know." That's where we're at.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

We look into our crystal ball, and it's not always correct.

Scott Graham:

It's always cloudy.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah, that's true.

Amanda Scherer:

That ends our time today for the Alabama Crops Report Podcast. I really enjoyed talking with both of you guys, Katelyn and Scott, about just pest diseases and insects in the state.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

You did a great job in the hot seat today, Amanda.

Amanda Scherer:

Thank you, with my fun fact about myself.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Oh yeah, absolutely.

Scott Graham:

All right. Well, I enjoyed it guys and as always, we want to thank our listeners for tuning in and listening. We really appreciate you all for joining us every week and for the feedback that we've been getting over the last couple of weeks. As always, if any of us can ever be of any help, please don't hesitate to reach out and let us know.

Announcer:

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