



Season 2 Episode 3 – Spring Planting Update

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Announcer:

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

Scott Graham:

Hey everybody. Welcome into another episode of the Alabama Crops Report Podcast. Scott Graham and Katelyn Kesheimer behind the mics today. Got Dr. Eros Francisco with us today. Eros, you've been on the podcast before, so a recurring guest. But Eros, why don't you remind the folks of your responsibilities?

Eros Francisco:

My pleasure to be here and be a part of this podcast. Well, I'm the new guy for grain crops in Auburn University. I'm going to do corn, wheat, soybeans and all their crops as well as grain. And I'm really happy to be here today.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah, we're super excited to have you. You've been on the podcast before when you first started, but it was on Zoom. This was last year, and now you're officially in the hot seat in our Alabama Crops Report Podcast studio.

Eros Francisco:

Good. It's good to be here, yeah.

Scott Graham:

Well Eros, It's been, I guess, about six months or so since we had you on the podcast. You're approaching your first summer now here in Alabama. You've been settling in pretty good and stuff?

Eros Francisco:

Oh yes. It's been fun being here in Auburn. My kids are in school learning English very fast. I got my program already running. I got funded by the commissions, the Wheat and Feed Grain and Soybean Commissions. I'll be doing several research projects for the benefit of the growers. So we are gearing up.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah. You certainly hit the ground running. And I know you've made the rounds at grower meetings this winter at extension meetings. Have you been able to meet a lot of people around the state?

Eros Francisco:

Oh yeah, it was fun. I met a lot of people, collected a lot of information through a survey, so I'm getting to know the crop management practices that farmers are doing, what is missing there. So it's good for my program to put up new research next year.

Scott Graham:

I guess folks can probably tell from your accent, you're not from south Alabama. So I'm sure it's been good to try to get out and meet with folks. Like you said, you've been doing surveys asking really good, meaningful questions to help you get an idea of the differences of production practices and strategies here of versus Brazil where you're from.

Eros Francisco:

Oh yeah. Well, pretty much the standard package is the same. There are some differences regarding climate and type of soils. What I could learn from of these surveys is that there are some differences regarding regions within Alabama.

Scott Graham:

Yep.

Eros Francisco:

For instance, I noticed that farmers in, and I can't recall right now, the specific region or county, they tend not to test their seeds for germination and bigger. While in other parts, I get more response of growers testing their seeds. And also regarding seed treatment as well. So there are some pockets here and there that they use different management practices, but basically the package is all the same.

Scott Graham:

And you would think maybe the further north you go in Alabama, the more important things like that are. And seed treatments of course, with Katelyn and her responsibilities with insect management and corn. So with that, let's talk about folks are planting, probably starting to plant in south Alabama, I assume. We're getting ready to start rolling in central and north Alabama over the coming weeks. So what do folks need to be thinking about right now?

Eros Francisco:

Yeah, this is a crucial moment of the year. We are getting more and more heat. Temperatures are rising. It's about to start corn planting season. It's kind of wet this last week, a little bit of cold because of that last front that came in. But now with the temperatures rising, we are going to see more people planting corn next week all over the state. Well, mainly in the south basically, but moving north.

Scott Graham:

And I'll just mention as we're recording today, it's March the 18th, so just to give you an idea of some of the weather that you're talking about.

Eros Francisco:

Right. We are about to start planting our research projects as well. I just finished planting my planting date. My first planting date down is in the south in Fairhope yesterday. Next month it'll be in Belle Mina starting a new project. And then moving around in the state just to collect information and see how folks are doing regarding planting.

Eros Francisco:

So temperatures are rising all over the state and people in the south of the state are starting to plant corn. Moving north, so growers are still waiting for a little bit of more heat to start planting corn. So as soon as the temperature reaches 75 and steady around 70, it's going to be awesome to put that grain or the seed in the ground and kick off the season.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Can you talk a little bit more about those temperatures and what they mean for germinating seed? Because I know we have our targeted planting date, but then weather or equipment or something gets in the way and we might be delayed in some respects. So can you talk about, if you went in a little bit early and it is still cold or late and it started to heat up a little bit too much?

Eros Francisco:

Well, the minimum temperature for seed germination for corn is 50 degrees. Basically, we are seeing temperatures above that already and we are getting warmer and warmer. So it's about time. We are ready to

start seeding corn if conditions allow. What conditions? In parts of the state, the soil is a bit wet yet. And as soon as the soil dry out a little bit and you can run your machinery over the soil, that's a goal.

Scott Graham:

And I guess another thing to think about too, I don't know that I know the answer to this, but I know if we're behind cover crops, we tend to have better soil moisture. Are those soils also a little bit cooler?

Eros Francisco:

Probably yes, because the cover will retain the cold in soil and not allow the heat to go in. So you got to be careful while trying the moisture of the soil, testing the moisture and also the temperature.

Scott Graham:

So Katelyn, for you with the seed treatment packages and things like that, when you're talking with folks and thinking about things, do you recommend a different seed treatment package, insecticide seed treatment package behind the cover crop, versus if it's not a cover or burn down timings?

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah. So I think seed treatments are going to be great insurance following a cover crop because cover crops make the soil healthy, but they also make a great environment for insects to hang out. And that first couple weeks after planting is going to be really vulnerable to any insects. And if you do have cooler temperatures in the air or the soil, it can delay germination a little bit and make that vulnerable stage just extend a little bit. And so, seed treatments, if you're in those situations or planting a little bit early that might still be cold, then absolutely. And I go with a higher rate of seed treatments.

Scott Graham:

Of a seed treatment.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah.

Scott Graham:

In cotton or soybeans, we recommend if your burn down isn't within a month before planting or so, throw out a pyrethroid something, plus or minus seven days of planning just to give that added protection. Is that similar for corn?

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah, absolutely. And any of the pyrethroids will work. If you are in one of those high risk scenarios, which includes not burning down a month or so before planting, but sometimes it's just, we don't have the capabilities to reach those timelines. Yeah.

Scott Graham:

Or your program is set up for weed suppression and you want to push that. Maybe weeds are, it kills me to say it, maybe they're a little bit more of an issue than insects are. So you-

Katelyn Kesheimer:

I don't know what you're talking about. That's not true. But also, this time last year was when it started raining and it just didn't stop for months. So growers may get into an instance where they can't plant or they have to replant. Eros, can you talk a little bit about replanting decisions?

Eros Francisco:

Yes, replanting is a tough decision. It's very hard to stand out in the field and try to count your population and try to make up your mind whether or not to replant. We are going to start a project, and we have started a project in Auburn, to define the yield loss associated with the lower population, and as well as with the late planting date. We are going to have these results by the end of the year.

Eros Francisco:

While we can look for those type of information in other websites, in other universities, I know that Illinois has some. Kentucky and other states, they developed this chart and they know how much you lose in yield if you plant late with the lower population as compared to the target population. It is a tough decision right now because the prices are really high for inputs. The seed is going to be the point whether or not to try to replant based on the type of hybrid. We are talking about corn, right? So the type of hybrid you choose to grow, so it's a tough decision. And if you get less than 50% of your population, well that's going to be very easy to decide. But if you are in a range of between 50% to 100% of your targeted population, then it's a tough decision to make.

Scott Graham:

Then you've even got on top of that, if it's a late replanting decision, what herbicides have you already put down? Maybe you can't plant soybeans or something in behind that too. So it's a very complicated system. And particularly this year where maybe we put out some fertilizer and stuff already for the corn, hopefully we won't run into any replant. I know there will be some fields, but hopefully we won't have a lot of replant decisions this year.

Eros Francisco:

Yeah. Sometimes growers, they tend to apply a pre-treatment herbicide management. And if you delay, you're going to see some weeds coming up after you try the first time. So that's another point in the question is about

weeds. If the weeds start to germinate and appear, you're going to have to apply a post germination type of treatment. So that's another cost associated with the decision.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

And I won't concede that weeds are more important than insects, but I will give them some level of importance. Because we had an episode last year where Dr. David Russell talked about plant back restrictions in corn, depending on what herbicides you put in. So it sounds like it's going to be a case by case decision for a lot of these replanting decisions. And you're here to help if anyone has any questions.

Eros Francisco:

Yes, sure. I'm here. If anyone have questions, then just give us a call or email us. And we are going to meet people in the field.

Eros Francisco:

So weeds are important in the beginning of the season. They tend to compete and steal yield from the crop in the beginning, while the insect can damage the plant any time of a year. So not only in the beginning, but also in the end. So I would say that insect is at the same level of yield or of weed or even higher. Do you agree with me? Or just-

Katelyn Kesheimer:

I think what I'm hearing is that you're agreeing insects are the best. Yes?

Scott Graham:

Or the worst.

Eros Francisco:

The worst as compared to weed. Yeah.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

The worst, okay. Yeah. Sure. Yeah, no, I'll take that. Yeah.

Scott Graham:

It's just nice to hear an agronomist to admit insects are part of the system.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah.

Eros Francisco:

Yeah, definitely. Well, the good insects are part of the system. The bad ones are the tough ones to manage.

Scott Graham:

One thing you said there, Eros, that I think is good, and I want to get some of Katelyn's thoughts on it, is you mentioned insects can damage corn all year long. And one insect in particular kind of does that, and that's stink bugs. So Katelyn, what do we need to be thinking about in terms of stink bug management and seedling corn? Because they can be close to impossible to find, but that doesn't mean they're not in the field.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yeah. You can't see me, but I'm nodding excessively. Yes. So stink bugs are from early, early season, all the way to our early reproductive stages. Stink bugs are a giant headache here in Alabama. And we have several species like we do in cotton and soybean. Especially in early corn right now, we have wheat and stink bugs are hanging out as a non pest in wheat. But then once that starts to dry down or gets harvested, they'll be looking for a new home. And I think Scott, you said this before. Stink bugs are lazy and they don't like to move long distances. And so if you have wheat near your young corn, I would certainly plan on going out with an insecticide treatment within a week or so of that wheat's harvest, because they're going to start moving. And if you wait five, six, seven days, you can usually catch them when they've all moved over and get them. Any of our pyrethroids will take care of them. But stink bugs, yeah. We need to keep our eyes out for those all the way through later in the season.

Scott Graham:

They're highly mobile, but they're lazy flyers. So they're dip difficult to find walking down the row, but they're not going to fly any further than they have to eat. Yep.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Yep.

Scott Graham:

So that's what we like to call them in the cotton world. Well, this was some good information, even for a non corn fellow like myself to learn some stuff. Is there anything else we may talk about or any other topics before we...

Eros Francisco:

I would like to address something to that's very questionable right now. It's regarding fertilizer prices. We have seen fertilizer prices going through the roof. There is a big question mark in the world right now if the supply is going to be okay for the whole season and even for next year. As the prices are very high, we may use it efficiently and wisely. So my suggestion would be, try to define your nitrogen rate for corn based on your cost,

how much you can pay for it. Or even if you try to replace mineral fertilizers with poultry litter, that's okay. We have pretty consistent results showing that this is good to do and can be done. But what I would suggest is regarding being timely to this application. So at least 30% to 50% of your rate at planting and up to V6 and other site dressing application, try to be very early in the season. Don't do any late nitrogen application. We have literature showing that this is not good for your yield. So let's be timely regarding nitrogen application.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

Thanks, Eros. That's great advice. And I know we've talked in a previous episode with Dr. [Rishi Presad 00:14:34] on poultry litter and how to be efficient and effective with those applications. And our friend of the pod, dirt doctor Audrey Gamble has some great data advice on nitrogen applications and corn. So Eros, thanks so much for coming and we hope to see more of you on this podcast and out in the field this summer.

Eros Francisco:

Welcome. It's my pleasure to be here.

Scott Graham:

Well Eros, we appreciate you being on today. Why don't you let the folks know where you put out information. I know you do on our ACES website, but I know you have a Twitter and stuff like that.

Eros Francisco:

Yeah, Scott. I have a Twitter account. It's @Eabfranc. It's hard, but if you type "Eros Francisco" it's going to show up very easily. But anyways, thank you.

Scott Graham:

Well, great. Thanks Eros. And as always, thanks to our listeners. We appreciate y'all spending time with us here on the Alabama Crops Report Podcast. And as always, if we can ever be of any help, please let us know.

Announcer:

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