



Season 2 Episode 9 – Alabama Corn & Soybean Update

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Speaker 1:

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

Speaker 2:

Hey everybody. Welcome in to another episode of the Alabama Crops Report podcast. Today's going to be a little bit different, just myself Scott Graham and Dr. Eros Francisco, in the studio today. We're going to give a little update on where we are right now with our corn and soybean situation. Eros, of course, a recurring guest on the podcast, is our extension grain crop specialist. He works corn, soybeans, wheat, and... I'm sure some other things as well. Eros, how's it going today?

Speaker 3:

Pretty good Scott. Glad to be here again and talk about crops.

Speaker 2:

Yeah. I know, I haven't got to catch up in a while, we've been passing each other on the interstate and highways riding around. I know you've been out and looking at things, and for the most part there's not a lot we can do for the corn crop at this point, but how's it looking in your estimation?

Speaker 3:

Well, corn is suffering in some parts of the State. I've been traveling all around and I check it on the Tennessee valley region. In last June they had a pretty bad drought by my data that I collect from the weather stations that we have. In Madison, they only got 0.4 inches in June, that's a big hit for corn when the corn is pollinizing, plus the temperature was very high in June as compared to last year. Just to give you a figure, last year the highest temperature was 92 degrees, and in June 2022 the highest was 100.5, plus the drought, the lack of soil moisture, the plant cannot process that kind of heat, so pollination was very much impacted. And what we see right now is a lack of kernels in most of the years.

And in some fields dry land corn is not looking good, and perhaps the yield is going to be very low. On the irrigated side, yields are going to be better, but not as good as compared to last year, because of the heat. The heat doesn't allow the plant to process itself, physiologically speaking.

Even though you have soil moisture, because you're irrigating the crop, the heat is going to damage the plant. All the carbohydrates will not be allowed to move all around the plant and be brought to the kernels to fill it properly. In other part of the states, corn is looking much better, like in the south, we always get rain in the Gulf Coast region, right?

Speaker 2:

Oh yeah.

Speaker 3:

So, over there, that's a different situation, the corn is looking much better. But with the lot of rains they have had in the last couple months, the problem now is diseases. I have seen some fields with Southern rust, pretty bad, and also diplodia, that's a different condition as compared to the North side. But yields going to be pretty much better in the South than in the North part of the State.

Speaker 2:

Yeah. When I talk with folks, and they call, whatever it is, one of the first thing I have to ask them is, "Now, what's the weather situation for you?" Because these rains have been, especially in the North have been so sporadic, they've been field by field, like you said, I've seen corn, I know on the research station at Belmont, I have regulated cotton trial that's surrounded by corn on three sides, that's just the farm's production corn. And it was looking really good early. And then on that farm, they went six weeks and got six tenths of an inch, from the last week of may through the first week of July. And so, I mean that corn is just wilted, as you can imagine, but you drive a couple miles down the road, and there's some beautiful fields. It's just been crazy how isolated these fields are. And so, a lot of times when I talk to folks and I say, "Well, what's the weather been like?" They say, "Well, which field you talking about?"

Speaker 3:

Pretty much, yes. Well, we were together yesterday for a field day. And when driving back to Auburn, I got two showers and they were like half a mile only.

Speaker 2:

Yeah.

Speaker 3:

So, pretty much isolated event. And this is not good for crops right now.

Speaker 2:

Yeah. And for whatever reason, it seems like the same fields are catching the rains and the same fields are missing the rains. And it's, we're just all over the board right now with everything. But hopefully, like you mentioned, I know historically most of our grain is in North Alabama and particularly in the Tennessee valley, hopefully our yields in the South Alabama can bring up our state average a little bit, because it's... There are some fields, I think, will be okay in North Alabama, but some fields are not looking good. When do you think we'll start harvesting?

Speaker 3:

Well, we are harvesting already. Yeah, some fields are being picked up. In some cases the yields are good. In some cases the yield is not. There are some predictions from farmers that I heard, about 50 bushels, 70 bushels, so pretty much low yield. In the Wiregrass region, I heard about an irrigated field being picked up at 250, and the farmer was not happy because last year it was 300 plus bushels per acre. But the thing is, even though it's irrigated the temperatures are pretty much the question here. So, if you have that kind of heat during pollination and during kernel's filling, you're going to be hit. Because, as I said, the plant cannot process that kind of situation.

Speaker 2:

And an irrigation is more meant to supplement, God's irrigation, not do it all itself. So it's really hard to try to completely grow a crop with no rain and just irrigate. And a lot of times some of these fields, particularly in the Wiregrass, that's what we're having to do. I mean, there's been pockets on the drought monitor report that basically been at least abnormally dry all year long. And in those situations, I just, and you may tell me I'm wrong as an agronomist, but I feel like, we can't just hundred percent irrigate it and expect to hit the same yields we do in a year when we get rains and supplement with irrigation.

Speaker 3:

Well, of course, water is a great input for crops, but it's not a hundred percent, it's not everything. We need to rely on soil fertility. And perhaps, soil fertility is not helping as much as we needed, plus the water. That kind of situation we have to manage year after year. But just to sound like a word of comfort, this is not the case of, the drought problem is not in Alabama. I've been hearing that most of the US is suffering with pockets of drought here and there. So, corn is a crop that is being, is going to be hit a lot in most of State.

We didn't need that for 2022, regarding all the conditions we have, globally speaking. That was a year to increase our storage worldwide, and we were expecting that to happen, but that's not what's going to happen. So, we are, we may see in the future, is still high prices and also high prices for inputs, for chemicals, for fertilizer, because commodity price is a big driven of prices. Let's hope for a good outcome out of this.

Speaker 2:

Yeah. Well, I tell you what, unless you got anything else from corn, let's move to soybeans now, maybe we can be a little bit more upbeat with the prospects from our bean crop.

Speaker 3:

You bet. Well, soybean is looking great in some of the fields. Of course, it was planted later than corn, so the drought of June didn't hit so much soybeans badly as it did with corn. Nowadays we have, in the North four point something to five point something growth maturity, maturity groups for soybeans, in the South five something to six, five or seven, so we have soybeans blooming right now, and soybeans filling pods. With the kind of rain that we have so far, it's been enough, but I'm considering that August is going to be the change maker for soybeans. If we do have some soil moisture in August, we are going to be good regarding soybean yield. If August is dry, then we are going to be seeing a problem with soybean yield. So, August is going to be a challenge for us.

Speaker 2:

Absolutely. And August is also typically the time when the phone starts ringing for me and folks are starting to say, "Hey, we're picking up caterpillars, we're picking up stink bugs. What do you think? Are you hearing and seeing much when you're out and the about, about insects right now?"

Speaker 3:

Hearing and seeing. Because I've been struggling with kudzu bugs in my trials in all the regions, not one specific but all the regions. It looks to be the insect of the year so far.

Speaker 2:

Yeah. They really bounced back this year for whatever reason. And we're seeing a lot of pictures and getting a lot of phone calls about [inaudible 00:10:14] numbers of kudzu bug. And the good thing about that one is, it's easy to control. Our thresholds are pretty high, once the plants get foot or so tall, threshold is one per plant with immatures. And so, really we just wait until we start seeing those eggs hatch and spray a pyrethroid and we knock them out. And the reason for that is they're moving in off of kudzu or whatever into the field, will feel like once they start laying eggs they feel like, "Okay, we're here now, this is where we're going to be." Those nymphs start hatching out, they obviously can't leave the field. Nymphs can't move back into another field, so we go ahead and time that spray, then we feel like we can make them a one spray pest, knock them out, we don't have to worry about them. But yeah, lot of kudzu bugs this year that we've been seeing and hearing about.

Speaker 3:

And also, I've seen a lot of Japanese beetles as well.

Speaker 2:

Yeah. Particularly, probably in North Alabama.

Speaker 3:

Yep.

Speaker 2:

Yeah.

Speaker 3:

And the threecornered alfalfa hopper.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, threecornered, Yeah. Starting to get a lot of pictures of plants that are lodging over, of course, that damage was done when those seedlings were, when the beans were seedling stage. So, nothing we can do about it now, but hope our scouts don't knock over a bunch of plants when they're scouting, or hope we don't get some lodging situations at harvest later in the year. Because typically if you got three corner damage, if you don't break the plants over, they yield pretty normally. But, you can't get a situation where storms or winds or whatever, and you get a lot of lodging, and you'd lose some yield that way. We're starting to hear about some defoliating caterpillars, our traps were up pretty big in Central Alabama this week, with the soybean looper in particular. So, that's something that folks need to be thinking about and looking for, I don't know what you're hearing on stink bugs so far this year.

Speaker 3:

They're coming. Yeah, they're coming because soybean is moving to setting pods and filling pods, so.

Speaker 2:

Right. Yep. And we're starting to hear more about, particularly in Black Belt region about redbanded stink bug, which that's a, I don't know if you're familiar with that one yet or not.

Speaker 3:

Oh yeah.

Speaker 2:

That's a different critter, completely from our traditional stink bugs. It's actually a little bit smaller, if you just look at the size of it, it's not as big as, say the Southern green or the green, but it's mouth part is a little bit bigger. It feeds a little bit more aggressively. It's got enzymes and it's saliva that spread a little bit further, so it's more damaging, so that's one we tell folks. Historically they don't make it all the way to Tennessee valley, the cold weather up there where further North kills them. They don't survive the winters as well.

And they normally just don't make it that far north, they can, but typically don't, but that's one we've got to be aggressive. Once we start getting the immatures in the fields, we've really got to go with tank mixtures of pyrethroids and acephate or with a neonicotinoid, like imidacloprid. Mixing these chemicals together to control these pests, because they are very damaging. They can be a bit of a budget buster if you're not planning on a couple of insecticides, but they can sure enough be a budget buster if you don't spray them or you let them go, and they just completely destroy your yields.

Speaker 3:

Oh yeah. The farmers must be attention and caution about this insect because it really hits yield and quality. So, scout your fields, go out, check your beans, if you find one or two, be prepared to spray if you hit the threshold. Don't play with this pest, don't play with this bug, this bug is a big concern for beans.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, absolutely. This is one I like to be a little aggressive on. Try to get them before they really get established and get going in the field. Because if there's any folks out there who are used to plant bugs in cotton, once you get a big population it's hard to get them out. And it's the same thing with these redbanded in soybeans, if you get an embedded population, and you've got all sizes of immatures in the field and the adults, it is hard to get them out. So, come out early, come out swinging hard, knock them back and let's try to alleviate that situation.

Speaker 3:

And if any farmer needs our assistance, please call us. We are here to help. If you see any bugs or any, perhaps diseases, diseases are not a big problem now in Alabama regarding soybeans. I've seen target spot, frogeyes, here and there but not a big problem. I would say that if you treated your soybeans with a blanket of fungicide, you're good so far, but the stink bug is a problem, is a concern. So, pay attention and be careful with this pest. Let's hope for August of rain to fill those pods and get those big beans. And if you can, watch the market, the market has chilled down a little bit regarding commodity prices, but with the uncertainty, the political uncertainty, and this is everywhere around the globe, what I have read and watching and hearing from specialists is that we are going to still have prices to pick a little bit more than they have done so far. So, we may see some concerns about storage of grain. The market is still uncertain, so the prices maybe to unfold in the near future.

Speaker 2:

All right. Like Eros said, if any of us can ever do anything to help, please don't hesitate to reach out and let us know, that's why we're here, so please do that. And also, as always, we'd like to thank our listeners for tuning in each week and listening and be looking for another episode of the Alabama Crops Report podcast coming soon.

Speaker 1:

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