Season 2 Episode 12 – Peanut Pod Blasting

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Speaker 1:

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

Scott Graham:

Hey everybody. Welcome in to another episode of the Alabama Crops Report Podcast. Scott Graham and Katelyn Kesheimer behind the mics today. Katelyn, how's it going?

Katelyn Kesheimer:

It's good. Harvest season is upon us so lots of activity and lots of things to discuss today.

Scott Graham:

Yeah. So speaking of that, we've got Jimmy Jones on with us today. I'll let Jimmy introduce himself. He's a man that wears many hats for Alabama Extension, down in the wire grass. And he's going to come in, talk about the pod blasting workshops that they're having at the research station in Headland coming up soon. So Jimmy, how's it going?

Jimmy Jones:

Doing well, Scott. I'm county extension coordinator, Jimmy Jones, from Henry county. But moreover, I'm a county agent that works in peanut part of the world down in Southeast corner of the state. I have an agronomy and soils background and in a BS and a masters in weed science. But came to the Wiregrass and peanuts are king

down here, even though cotton's king as well. But peanuts and cotton go very well together as rotational crops and peanuts in the Wiregrass are our big commodity, along with cattle. We're in that time of the year though. It's best time of the year. It's peanut harvest season. And we've started our pod blast workshops at the Wiregrass Research and Extension Center on Tuesdays and Fridays from 8 to 12.

Scott Graham:

For you, Jimmy, this will be peanut harvest season number what?

Jimmy Jones:

Well, I've got 33 years with Extension and I started out running peanut samples when we used to lay them out on the tailgate of the truck and put them in pile, Scott. And this pod blast chart's been around for a long time. It's probably got two thousand tests from the peanut lab over in Dawson that put the color spectrums together for this chart. But then we've kind of morphed and meta morphed the process of scraping off that outer exocarp of the peanut, the outer hull. And we're looking at the saddle portion of the nut and we're putting it on a chart that tells us when, according to the color, in a certain area on that peanut saddle, where to place those peanuts for maturity purposes and optimal maturity is what we're looking for.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

So for those non peanut entomologists and non agronomists, so basically me, can we just recap what is pod blasting and why do we do it, Jimmy?

Jimmy Jones:

Well, peanuts, they're kind of an unusual crop. They do grow underground. And so we have to dig them. And how do we determine, Katelyn, when to dig them was we used this pod blast method. It used to be a knife and we just scraped the pod to get to the endocarp or the inner hull and see a little darkness in that saddle area in the little hump of the peanut. Well, pot blasting is basically trying to determine when the optimum maturity of a peanut is. And usually, the hull turns black in that little saddle area. And we also use the shell out method and we look for oil spots on the nut itself. So I'm kind of using both methods when I do the pod blast program. What we're trying to do is... Our peanuts are 135 to 145 days old, or that's the maturity of a peanut.

We plant most of them the 1st of May. But some growers plant back into April and we harvest about the 15th of September. So those April harvested... or April planted peanuts are ready to harvest now. So the days are there, but not always do we get rainfall exactly when we need it. So we do this pod blast determination. It's actually a research-based information chart called the pod blast chart. And we are trying to determine the optimum maturity of a peanut and tell the growers within three to five days when the optimum time to dig those peanuts are. And so what we do, Katelyn, is we run a sample of about 200 pods and that's been determined by science that, that's the right number of peanuts to run. And so they pick off every peanut on a vine and it usually comes from about three foot a row. We get two or three samples throughout the field, kind of like soil testing.

And we zigzag out through the field and we try to take into consideration soil types. Because you have some that have more clay and some that have less clay. And we're in that [inaudible 00:05:03] down here in the Wiregrass area, which is the right stuff for growing peanuts. This is just a method that is research-based that we have determined through years of research. But then we've got this chart developed that tells us when to dig a peanut. And we can determine within three to five days of optimum maturity. Now, why is that important? Because if you wait a week late and dig a peanut, they start coming off the vine. Peanuts are underground and they're on these little pins. Peanut blooms above ground and then it sends down a little pin into the dirt, where it collects calcium and forms the pod.

And then the calcium absorbs through the pod. And there, your nut grows. So we're trying to get that to go in a 25 to 35 day period to optimal maturity after that bloom. So we're trying to get that crop all to come together. And so we've found that we can sample across the field different soil types, kind of get a representative sample of those of the peanut vines in the field and get 200 pods off of individual plants from those samples. And we use a pressure washer in a basket. We take those pods and we put them in there. And it's kind of like a cone nozzle and it's actually a 1600 PSI pressure washer. We just don't blast them all the way through because I mean it will blast them to pieces. We blast off that outer exocarp and look for these colors. And the pod will physically change from yellow to kind of an orange, to a brown, as it moves across our chart.

And then, we want them to be black in the saddle area. The saddle area is a little area in the little... When you looking at the peanut, it's kind of like a little saddle area on the nut itself. And these are runner type peanuts that were talking about. There's three types of peanuts. There's runners. There's ballparks and there's the Spanish. Well, we grow runner type peanuts. And the buyers want a peanut to grade 72 before it's a perfect grade. You get deducts on each side of that... or well, excuse me, deducts on the lower side. So if you dig them a week early, you can get deducts, but we've got research to show that you lose 3 to 500 pounds by digging them a week early. So 7 days early, you lose 3 to 500 pounds.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

So that's what those workshops are for at the Wiregrass-

Jimmy Jones:

Exactly.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

...Station. Can you talk about those a little bit and what growers can expect in terms of information they'll be getting there?

Jimmy Jones:

Right. So we want to try to start about two weeks early doing these workshops. We started the day after labor day and we are on Tuesdays and Fridays. And the growers, they tend to come to the experiment station and do some self-service as well. So we leave this equipment out. It's just a pressure washer and a basket and our pod

blast charts, but Extension personnel, regional Extension agents, Chris Balcom, myself, experiment station director, Chris Parker, we all at this time of year develop a schedule. It's our pod blast schedule together at the Wiregrass and it's every Tuesday and Friday for the months of September and October. We have plannings starting the 1st of May that are optimum time. And we try to finish planting our peanuts the end of May, 1st of June. But they have some that plant real early, because they have a lot of acreage, Katelyn.

So we had to start a little earlier looking at those peanuts, but we try to start looking at these workshops two weeks before optimum maturity. So that's why we have kind of a wide range. And then we have some that plant late or different varieties. There's some varieties that are over 150-day varieties. So we have some of those that are planted mid season and they come off later in October. So that's why we have such a wide range of workshops. We have about 18 workshops and we take these... And what our goal is, is to just be in that three to five day range. But we try to get them to come once or twice and look at those samples one week and then the next week they should have moved seven days.

Scott Graham:

And so if a farmer wants to come, does he need to call and set up an appointment or...

Jimmy Jones:

There's no appointments. We do for them to call and tell us that they're coming if they're going to be later than that 8 to 12 timeframe that we kind of schedule at the station. Some days, we have to work the whole day, like tomorrow... When I say tomorrow, this will be Tuesday the 13th. This is going to be a huge day because a lot of growers will be starting to get within that week or 10-day timeframe of digging their first peanuts. We may have to work all day. When I say we, it'll be the regional Extension agents, specialist Chris Balcom, and myself. And I'm a coordinator, but I'm on the [inaudible 00:10:41] crops team. So this is one of my major programs that I work together with these guys. And the experiment station works great with us as well to host this event at the Headland experiment station.

But we also have some offsite sites that we do the pod blast. Today, they're doing Houston County and we're talking about the 12th of September. And they're doing Mondays for the rest of this month at Houston County Extension Office. The peanut producers kind of help sponsor a lot of this. They'll buy equipment for us, some pod... When I say pod blasters, just a pressure washer. But the baskets themself have to be manufactured out of expanded metal. And they've had some significant input in resources to buy those baskets that we're pressure washing them in. But the whole goal is not to be a week late because we can gain the grower three to five points on grade. And we can pick up 3 to 500 pounds if we dig them on time, but we're going to lose, we know by research, 500 pounds. We're going to lose them, if we're week late.

Peanuts, they'll continue to bloom a lot and they'll continue to put crops on. But the mature nut will only stay on about two weeks after it gets to optimum maturity. So we start losing poundage, which the growers sell the peanuts by the ton, so they start losing 500 pounds as they dig a week late, especially if we have conditions like we had the last weekend, heavy rains in certain spots. A leaf spot can come on, all the disease complexes and peanuts will start falling off.

Tomato spotted wilt has been an issue this year in Georgia-06G, which is one of our main varieties. Those peanuts will start coming off the vine. If you're a week late, you're going to lose 500 pounds. So the moral of the story is come to us two weeks early. We want to be on time digging to save that 3 to 500 pounds of gain. Plus, we can pick up three to five points on the grade, which is worth $8 a point. That's another gain. Again, 72 is what we're shooting for in our grades. But if they're dug too early, they can be in the 50s and that'll be a deduct in soybean terms. A lot of people, the grade is everything on peanuts and in our crops. But then we're losing poundage if we dig too late, especially, and we don't want to be a week too late. We want to try to be on time.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

So speaking of conditions, Jimmy, what kind of year have peanut growers down in the Wiregrass had to contend with? I know the summer of 2022 has been kind of a tale of two halves of a state with too much or two little rain. And so what can growers kind of expect in terms of yields based on this year?

Jimmy Jones:

That's very interesting, because we're a tale of almost two portions too. Around Headland, if you ask the growers in Headland, we've had a little micro climate or something. We've been one of the dry spots in the state of Alabama, especially in the Wiregrass, we were the driest spot. But then when you get outside of Headland, maybe south of Dothan, we would get maybe a couple tents in Headland of rainfall and they'd get four inches. So it's been some of that tale of two cities as well, outside around Houston County, which is the largest peanut producing county in the state. It goes Houston, Geneva, and then Henry, as far as the three largest peanut producing counties in the state. They've had good rainfall in some of those areas and it's been excessive rainfall in some areas.

So they've gotten a little bit behind, Scott, in their applications for leaf spot and we've had some insect issues. We've had spider mites. I had one grower dug 110 acres. My largest grower in the county got 2,000 acres of peanuts. He dug 110 acres because of spider mites. He was the first one to dig and pick his peanuts. So we've had a tale of two cities as well within the peanut belt. Hartford area, they've had some pretty decent rainfalls, but they've been dry at times as well. It affects our yield tremendously during peak bloom, of course, whether it's cotton, whether it's peanuts, we've yet to see. It looks like it's going to be a decent yield in the Wiregrass area on peanuts. But we grow peanuts in over 30 counties now in the state of Alabama. I think it's up to 37 or 39 counties. Basically, if you've got the right soil type... And those sandier soils is where the peanuts are being grown. Some of our yields are look looking to be pretty good this year.

I would say in the Wiregrass area, I'd be very surprised if we don't yield two tons, but that'd be 4,000 pounds. We were at 3,600, I think, last year. Too much rain pretty much last year. But this year, I think the yields should be up a little bit on peanuts. The cotton and corn were more heat sensitive. So it is yet to be seen. I know our corn yields, where you had irrigation, were in the 220, 30 range. Where you didn't have irrigation, it was poor. It was 30, 40 bushels. So the heat in June really affected them. Peanuts are a little more forgiving, Katelyn, in the Wiregrass. We can make a crop in September with tropical storms, but it looks like this year, we're kind of on track to be a decent yield.

Scott Graham:

Well, good. Well, Jimmy, we appreciate you coming on the Alabama Crop Support Podcast and giving us this update. So as you said, I'll just as a reminder, we're doing them every Tuesday and Friday from 8 to 12 at the research station in Headland in the month of September and October. So you don't have to necessarily register. Maybe call ahead. Give them a heads up. Let them know you're coming if you can. But you can bring your peanuts and there'll be somebody there. Or if you know what you're doing, you can do it yourself and check your grade and make sure you're digging on time.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

And you can find that chart that Jimmy mentioned with the different colored classes... Jimmy sent that out to us to put in our newsletter last week and it has all the different dates and times for the pod blasting. And we'll continue to publish those in the Alabama Crops Report Newsletter. So thanks for that, Jimmy. Anything else you want to leave our listeners with about pod blasting this year?

Jimmy Jones:

Well, we certainly appreciate the opportunity to get the word out that this is the most important thing when it comes to digging at the right time. We can lose so much harvest loss wise, but digging at the proper time can make the growers so much money. And then, let's don't rush through this harvest season. Let's take our time. Be safe. Try to get plenty of rest. I know that's hard to say for a farmer during harvest season. And then we like to make sure that our other folks watch out for the farmer this time of year, because this is their one paycheck for the year. They're on the roads with big, heavy equipment. We'd like for everyone to have a safe harvest season.

Katelyn Kesheimer:

It's a great reminder. Thanks for that.

Scott Graham:

All right. Well, Jimmy, thanks again. As always, we appreciate our listeners tuning in and listening each week. And if we can ever do anything to help any of us here at Alabama Extension, please don't hesitate to reach out and let us know.

Speaker 1:

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