



Season 4 Episode 4 — Corn & Soybean Harvest Update

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Announcer

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

Scott Graham

Hey, everybody, welcome to the Alabama Crops Report podcast. Today, we're going to talk a little bit about corn and soybean harvest, kind of you know what the season looks like. Maybe we'll talk a little bit about cover crop planting considerations. But it's a good topic today, I think, so I'm Scott Graham and entomologist. Dr. Simer Virk, Dr. Eros Francisco, and Dr. David Russell.

Scott Graham

How's it going, guys? Good. Glad to be here. Glad to be here to get to have you guys for this today. Well, let's talk about, corn, soybeans and a little bit wheat.

Simer Virk

Yeah, let's do it. Okay, so Eros, why don't you also give us a little bit of how the season looks this year for corn and beans across this state.

Eros Francisco

Okay. And so let's start looking at 2023 acreage for corn and soybeans and wheat. So last year we had 330 ish thousand, acres of corn, about 350,000 acres of soybeans and close to 200,000 acres of wheat. We have seen a major decrease in acreage for, for wheat, going down to close to 100,000 acres.

Eros Francisco

Corn was down, to 280 and soybeans up a little bit to 360. So that was not this year. 2024 was not a good year. Regarding perspective of profitability for corn, although the season started very well, I think the spring was good. We had soil moisture, we had nice temperatures. And then things had started to fall apart in June and July and most of August without significant rain all over the state.

Eros Francisco

I think that was when corn perspective was really damaged. Pollination and then filling the kernels was pretty hit by, by drought. Then, but and I was frustrated because I was seeing the, the potential yield, being built in the spring for corn, everything was, was looking good so far. So we can say drought being the number one factor this year that affected our corn crop.

Eros Francisco

Yes. I like, I like to show you slide that doctor below from Illinois. He puts together the seven wonders of the corn world. And number one is weather with 27% of of yield participation and absolutely, we can see that happening not only this year, but last year, year two, and also a little bit in 2022. If you remember, parts of the state, especially the North was pretty, pretty bad hit by the weather.

Eros Francisco

So there's not much that we can do about managing weather, unless we have some kind of irrigation. And we could see that this year 24, even though with irrigation, some folks could not keep up with the drought, even trying to run the pivot many times. And you cannot keep up with the soil moisture that the plant needs to, function.

Eros Francisco

Well and set the yields. So that was a frustration for us because water capacity is also our limitation in the state. Yes. Yes, absolutely. And also the evapotranspiration is too high when you have high temperatures and very low humidity. Without rain, without the help of, a weekly rain or ten days, in between rains, it's hard to keep up with only irrigation.

Eros Francisco

And I remember driving, to a to a meeting in South Carolina. I drove through all the north of Georgia, and I remember seeing cotton fields suffering. Even though they had irrigation, they didn't they could not keep up with soil moisture, even, even there. So it was rough for, for us. Regarding corn. So and now we are hearing, numbers all over the place, I have seen and I have heard people saying 20 bushel corn up to 160, 180 bushel corn.

Eros Francisco

So it depends where, in the state. It depends. The, the soil management, the soil fertility, the type of hybrid that they grew, by. The yields are all over the place. So this is not good for for our economy, and it's not good for farming. We need, need to, to hope for a better rain next year.

Eros Francisco

Now, shifting to soybeans. Soybeans were also looking good in the beginning. Plant stand was very nice. Plant height was very nice. Added weight. It was, setting pods were were good, but then just feeling the pods were the problem. That's where the weather started to play a role. And the drought and also some, some diseases start to show up.

Eros Francisco

We have seen aerial blight, rust in parts of the state, even in the central part of the state. And we could see some rust. And then stinkbugs started to show up. So that was a chaotic scenario for, grain quality. And now we are hearing from many parts of the state farmers complaining about grain quality in soybeans.

Eros Francisco

So that was a hurricane that came for for soybean, not a hurricane. I mean, I don't I don't mean the weather on an actual literal hurricane of bad, but just a domino of events, the drought, the diseases and the and the insect, not to mention poor prices, not to mention prices. Now you need to.

Eros Francisco

You need to deal. We need to try to sell a poor quality grain and low yield with soybeans under \$10 a bushel with high input costs. But, so, it's going to be interesting, to see how we are going to do in 2025 regarding what type of crop management practices we are going to adopt and how the prices are going to be, have been looking the, the prices and I don't think we're going to we're going to see a rebound in prices.

Eros Francisco

Not significantly. We may go up a little bit and then stabilize, in soybeans close to 1011, the most corn around 5550, perhaps. And wheat is going to be low too. So commodity prices don't look good now. And I don't know if I'm not sure they're going to be looking good in 25. So that's why we decided to, go ahead and set a good agenda for the for the next edition of the crop short course, focusing on managing the risk.

Eros Francisco

Farming in 25. So we are going to have good speakers talking about financial situation, commodity prices and also agronomic tips for managing the crops in 25 for our audience. Yes. So the next edition is going to be in Huntsville this year, in North Alabama, January 21st and 22nd, 21st, starting at 1 p.m.

Scott Graham

And that's in conjunction kind of with the, corn and soybean meeting they're already having. Yes. We are going to have the, the, they're going to have the Alabama Corn and Soybean Association meeting in the morning at the 21st, and then we're going to follow up with them on, on in the afternoon. So that's going to be a very nice, partnership with the association.

Eros Francisco

And also, try to gather as many farmers as we can so everyone is invited and registration is open. Look for the link in acs.edu. Just Google up Alabama road crops your course and you're going to see the link. And please register and attend the meeting.

Scott Graham

What do you think about Eros's next year? My guess is probably more soybeans, less corn, maybe less cotton to, you know, soybeans tends to be a crop where your floor is the highest.

Scott Graham

If you will shoot less inputs than most everything else. So, so maybe, you know, it's a little bit, a little bit easier economically to do. And then, David, if that's true, how does that impact maybe plant back restrictions. Are there any with that. If you're, you know, maybe moving some ground that you weren't planning on moving you know, with, with weed control carry over or, you know, maybe some, some, post-harvest burn down or stuff like that. Probably not a lot of that happening, but any thoughts there?

Eros Francisco

Well, before David touching on the weave management, I think yes. Soybean. We'll take some of the, corn acreage, if prices remain the same. I think it's hard to make a good yield. Corn, if you don't have a good perspective with profitability.

Eros Francisco

Soybean is. I like to say that soybean is more rustic than corn. It takes less inputs and yields better without much of the inputs, than corn. So I think soybean may take some of the corn acreage next year. And, and to increase even more soybean acreage, the point will be how good cotton prices are for 25.

Eros Francisco

If cotton prices remain poor or low, then soybean will take some of the cotton acreage. Perhaps that's my that's my view.

David Russell

Yeah. I think folks are going to have to make some hard decisions and probably take a good, hard look at what may be what they would consider a nonessential, you know, so are they going to start kind of cutting off of, of weed management or is it going to be insect management or fertility?

David Russell

So just to just to break even and think about making profits. And I think soybeans as you mentioned, is a good way to do that from the start. Not to add insult to injury, but there is talk of dicamba possibly not returning next year too. So that's probably going to play a huge part in their decisions next year.

David Russell

The trade platforms are still going to be there in the key technology. But there's, you know, there's some talk of the actual product not being, labeled and available. So that could call some issues there. Hopefully this year. I guess the latest news was that use whatever is in stock is that can you. That's right.

David Russell

Yeah. Back early in the season, there was, an order, telling folks just to use the rest of existing stocks, there was going to be no more production of the dicamba products. And so, and that kind of all coincides with the Endangered Species Act in the EASA, work plan that's been working through the EPA. They're going back and looking at those pesticides that are up for reregistration, and they're reworking a lot of those labels to meet those EPA, ERISA requirements.

David Russell

And even though this may sound like a far off idea, it is coming home to really impact us locally on the farm in how we use, pesticides and other products for crop protection. Now and in the future, it's it's really going to, to impact us, I think. And so we're beginning to see that with the talk of dicamba possibly not returning for next season, I'm not saying that's going to be the fact, because we've got several months before next season, but it's not looking promising for that to return, as a tool over the top of those dicamba tolerant cotton and soybean crops.

David Russell

So in thinking about weed control, you know, folks have to know the history of their their fields and what they expect to be problematic past in in the form of weeds. And so think proactively using those soil residuals, taking advantage of the early season moisture to activate some of those soil residual for longer season weed control, rather than relying on mid-season over the top post emergent treatments when we historically have turned dry.

David Russell

You know, those just simply don't work, and we don't want folks throwing their money away for something that's not going to work.

Simer Virk

So considering the weed control situation, crop prices situation, we are here 1st of November. When do growers start thinking about all this to make sure that they have a plan for next year before it's too late for them to, you know, move some stuff around crop acreage wise.

David Russell

Yeah. I mean, I think, now obviously would be a good time to begin thinking of that. You know, I know I'm thinking about the high profile weeds like ryegrass. We don't want annual ryegrass or Italian ryegrass to be a big competitor, going into a crop, if somebody is especially for somebody is considering corn next spring, take advantage of controlling that now through the winter months and early spring months, before we get close to the time of corn planning or even soybean planning.

David Russell

Goose grass was also a big one in season. And crops and corn. Excuse me, cotton and peanuts. Last year, where we just could not control that specific species. So thinking about, what may be in the future, what some of those big ticket, high profile weed species and other parts may be. I think now is a good time to begin thinking about that.

Eros Francisco

Well, following up, with that perspective to now is the time to select your varieties. And for both corn and soybeans varieties, the top 2 or 3 factors impacting yield. So I would say search your your next variety. Don't try to test new varieties that you are not you are not used to. You don't know how they perform in your fields.

Eros Francisco

Stick with the varieties that you know. If you need further information, visit, Auburn University variety testing website. Check the performance of the varieties. Don't try new stuff if you don't know how they perform in your field. Put a very small acreage at the test block or something. Yeah. Just to. Well, I would, I wouldn't say too many.

Eros Francisco

If the prices remain as they are, don't don't even. You were saying don't test don't don't try. That's not the year for test, right. That's the year to be consistent. And consistency is, you do your homework, you know what you, what you can do in your field. So stick with that. If I, if I may suggest some other, tips would be soil fertility for soybean if you if you know your soil fertility is good, I, I would, perhaps try to cut back on phosphorus if you have high levels in your soil.

Eros Francisco

But I would not suggest potassium cutbacks, but because potassium is essential for disease control as well. There is a good correlation with potassium levels in the plant in and plant in, disease. Tolerance. So I would stick with a good rate of potassium if that is, possible. For corn, nitrogen is the nutrient to, to carry a lot of yield.

Eros Francisco

So do what you can regarding that nitrogen application. If you know your fields, make sure that you do have a good response to nitrogen in some of them. If you know that you have a good history of soil organic matter working and being mineralized, perhaps adjust the rate in those fields. But don't try to don't try to change much of your, your management next year.

Eros Francisco

Be consistent with the one you know that works. Follow the basic follow the basics. We're going to have that's the forecast right now. We are going to have a warmer winter. That means, some diseases are going to find a bridge over the winter, perhaps an insect as well. So, we may start seeing diseases earlier next year and insects as well, showing up earlier next year.

Scott Graham

I hope not. That's not what I hope. But that's what a warmer winter means, right? Well, you know, areas outside of the red banded stinkbug, I don't know that weather plays much of a role for us. And insects, most of the bugs that we deal with, they're pretty well adapted to our environment anyway. Right. You know, we get asked a lot.

Scott Graham

Oh cold winter. We're going to have less bugs and it really doesn't. There's not much correlation. So I don't know that that will be as big of an issue except for red bandage which, which we certainly had out there in some places up through central Alabama. And that that was a big deal. And the people who are used to fighting, getting it, they think we know what we're doing, but it's very challenging.

Scott Graham

But I wanted to ask you about trying to alter our planting dates specifically for soybeans to maximize our yield potential. You know, we're back home in the Mid-South. They really pushed the early soybean production system here. Soybeans are traditionally kind of, overall a lighter planted thing. Right? We get our corn in, we get our cotton in peanuts, and then and then soybean.

Scott Graham

So should we prioritize maybe those earlier planting windows for soybeans this year to try to, maximize that because it's all about getting rainfall, right. When you're filling pods, developing seed, you do, you spread it out a little bit, spread your risk out. What do you think there? Well, there's different strategies that we can follow.

Eros Francisco

If we get all the, the literature and the data that we have, it's good to plant early corn and soybeans. If you're doing soybeans, you can manage, the maturity group. So if you're going to plant early, it's good to stick with the early maturity group. If you're if you have to plant a little bit ahead of the planting, early time, then change to something more late.

Eros Francisco

And so if you're if you're sticking with a 3.8 or a five point, a 4.2 variety and you need to plant late in April or May, you can, progress to a 4 or 5 or a five and five to you, depending where you are in, in the state. There are very good data set from North Carolina.

Eros Francisco

Show me the early maturity groups. The yield better when planted early. And if you progress in the calendar, then you switch to a five or a six. So they perform better when planted late. For corn kind of doesn't matter much about the, the maturity group. So if you can't start planting in March, early March into late March, but everything is going to be, decided in, in July, June when the weather starts to play the effect.

Eros Francisco

So even though you have a very good planting date and you have a very good stand and you have all the plants performing very well in the spring, then when summer comes, that's that's when you, you have the trouble. But if you if you can manage the maturity group in soybeans that what I would do I would do a if you can a early planting with maturity groups low like fours and then progress if you have to progress to to another variety, try to progress to later maturity groups.

Scott Graham

Yeah, I mean that that, you know, that's good advice. I think, you know, with, with cotton, coming out of 23 kind of my advice, which is always free, especially I cannot make advice from an entomologist, is certainly free. But my advice was try to spread your risk out, you know, plant, you know, you can plant cotton over a pretty wide window.

Eros Francisco

And if you do that, you're lowering your risk of devastation across the crop. You're also lowering your ceiling. Right. But you're certainly moving the floor up. And there's something to that. And so maybe, maybe that's on the corn, obviously is, is we kind of know when corn needs to be planted. But beans, we've got the opportunity to spread it out there.

Scott Graham

And, and we know we're going to hit a dry patch. We know I think, Blake Blanton told me he went to a meeting, earlier this week with, in our case, and they said that 7% of our harvested row crops were irrigated in 2022. And so we know 93% of our crop is highly susceptible to a drought that is going to come at some point during the season, and you just don't want it to be during that critical period, whatever your crop is.

Scott Graham

So the more you have out there at varying levels, the more that risk is spread out. Yeah, absolutely. I didn't mean to, plant all the soybeans. Oh, yeah. Yeah. We can't you can't do that. Because if you plant all your soybeans in the week, you're going to harvest in in a week. Nobody can do that. Yeah.

Scott Graham

Yeah. And I wasn't saying you were saying that. That was kind of late. That was my. The point of my question was just about. Yeah, I feel like most of our soybeans are probably planted in May. But let's try and maybe get some out there in April and maybe still do some late later beans. Even if we're not double cropping them spread risk out.

Simer Virk

So I'm just following something on Twitter. I think Ohio State's looking at and I think there was even a question, or because they got two specialists competing against each other, should corn go first or beans go first or last so that just I was just saying when you're saying that, is that a possibility here for us to put even plant beans before corn?

Eros Francisco

Yeah. Well, it, it, it is a possibility. I myself don't have the experience with that to to say do it. Well, my guess would be in our environment being a week late on corn is probably a lot bigger penalty than it is in their. Yes. Yeah. Absolutely. You brought you brought up a very good point.

Scott Graham

Being late with corn is, it hits your field more than it hits being early with soybeans. And when you hit a certain date. Right. And you're losing three or 4 or 5 bushels a day. Yeah. And so if you're five days late, you're 20 bushels off just from planting day. Well, that's interesting.

Eros Francisco

Scott, we just had some data showing that if you lose plant stand, in corn, you are not going to be losing yield as much as you do if you start having late planting dates. So you may lose plants, but you you are going to be, damaging your yield more if you plant late. So penalty for planting late is higher than having a little less than a little less than. Yeah. That's it. So in in soybeans you need to you need to use different varieties with different maturity groups to spread out your, your harvesting time.

Scott Graham

Right. And that's how you manage your risk as well.

Simer Virk

David, I see you got some topics. What else do you think for in this time of, at this point in the season or where we are.

David Russell

Well, these are just my scratch notes for active ingredients going into wheat. But if folks are, not planting as many acres of wheat, the herbicides over here may not be that important.

David Russell

But no, I was just thinking, in reference to my notes over here. If we did get on the conversation of wheat, you know, I was thinking of the high priority weeds, the high profile weeds and the biggest competitors out there. Number one, as we've mentioned, being Italian ryegrass weather going into the spring, planted crops or especially the fall planted crops, the small grains.

David Russell

That was one of our biggest ones that we absolutely need to put some effort in controlling, because if we don't get that specific species under control, then it could be detrimental. So again, it goes back to the history of, of our fields, what we expect to be out there and being proactive in timing, putting something like the Z2 or peroxide.

David Russell

So for home based products out there, fortunately for us in Alabama this past season, we've been successful at getting a 24 C supplemental label, allowing us to use Anthem Flex, apply Pre-emergent to wheat. That's the first one we've had to coincide with other states who have already had this label. Peroxide, is the backbone of, a lot of this grass residual weed control.

David Russell

Especially for small grain, just also available for us in soybeans, too. So, if we're trying to control grasses, I'd say that is, a product that's probably most successful for that control. But again, it needs to be out there early prior to see germination of, of that Italian ryegrass weed. And so, the anthem flex pre or residual early post or

delayed pre I think right now with the drought conditions, you know, I don't know how many acres are being planted in wheat right now, but I would feel pretty safe that if they can find any moisture for wheat seed germination and then the residual is applied or any

David Russell

other proxies for farm based products are applied, we're generally safe as far as crop safety, I think the biggest risk for wheat injury, is when we get, rainfall right after herbicide application as that seed is imbibing water and starting to germinate. If the first drink of that, seed intake is, is high concentration of herbicide, that's when we get the biggest risks.

David Russell

So if we can get seed germination and then activation of herbicide in that order, that's when we see the best. Weed control and crop safety.

David Russell

And I think I do think we got a little bit of rain across the state yesterday. I don't know North Alabama how much or where if it was enough to, to help or not. But yeah, I was really jealous of our friends in Mississippi. I looked at the radar yesterday afternoon as I was going out trick or treat with my kids.

Scott Graham

And the whole state of Mississippi is green. Yeah. So, yeah, my dad said back home, or my granddad told me that the mayor had moved Halloween for the kids to Wednesday night instead of Thursday because of the threat of rain. So yeah. Yeah, we need I've kept telling them not to hog it all to send some over here, but, I don't know how much made it.

Scott Graham

All right, guys. Well, enjoyed it today. Good conversation. Appreciate our listeners, tuning in every week, as always, if any of us can ever be of any help, please don't hesitate to reach out and let us know.

Simer Virk

And, also want to mention that if you guys want any certain topics to be covered, please let us know. So that way we can bring the right person, you know, or a team of people here to answer those questions. Absolutely.

Announcer

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