



Season 5 Episode 17 — Peanut Harvest Update

September 25, 2025

Scott Graham

Hey, everybody, welcome into the Alabama Crops Report podcast. We are in the roaming studios today. Coming live from the Marriott in Prattville at the RTJ course.

Simer Virk

A fine location.

Scott Graham

A fine location, first class Simer, first class. So we just wrapped up our big, annual Ag Forestry natural resources extension team wide meeting. So, a good time for the crops folks to interact with other people. But we thought we'd maybe take advantage and sit down and talk about peanut pod blasting. And so we've got Mr. Peanut, Kris Balkcom, and Cade and Blake are in here with us too.

Scott Graham

And we're going to, I guess, give a peanut update and talk about what needs to be talked about.

Simer Virk

Yeah, I think this is very, timely in a way, because last week we had the peanut pod blasting with Blake, and, I thought it was very, useful for growers even, like, I think the biggest thing I learned from that was people who planted early crop first and then late, and they came in thinking that they're going to dig that one first.

Simer Virk

But after Chris' evaluation, all that was like it was totally in worse of that. So I think there was a lot of good things of that. And let's just have Kris come talk about that.

Kris Balkcom

Oh, yeah. It's good to be here with y'all. And, pod blasting certainly is, is a valued tool to be able to help determine when to dig. You know, a lot of guys, always go by the calendar, and you just can't do that. You know, there's too much money on the line. It's a very valuable to for us to be able to utilize and determine the optimum time to dig the peanuts, not only for, for the grate, \$5 a point, but also in tonnage, you know, pounds as pounds add up each day as those peanuts become more and more mature.

Kris Balkcom

So, it makes a big difference to the bottom line.

Scott Graham

Yeah. We were talking earlier. You take a couple minutes out of the day to go do it, and it might save you 30 bucks an acre.

Kris Balkcom

Yeah. And, you know, the other thing is you got those farms scattered all across, and you can try to plant them at a certain window and, and think that you're going to harvest around in that loop and, and make that work. But it's just best to go and pull those samples from those fields and try to help get a track of which way, in which direction they can go with those shakers and diggers, you know, peanut harvest is, it is a challenge any way being a two step process.

Kris Balkcom

So it's a lot of logistics moving around the equipment and, and, and all the things that goes with that and getting around these roads today across to Alabama. So, it's good to have a good look at the crop and be able to tell the best time to dig. And then they can plan that out ahead of time and move accordingly to maybe when traffic's down as well.

Simer Virk

Yeah. So I guess before we get into some of that, I know we had you back earlier when we were before planting even I guess, right. But can you give us a quick update on the crop for this year where we are in the season, what the crop looks like and...

Kris Balkcom

Sure, sure, we, yeah, we planted, yeah. That was before harvest there late winter when we were together. You know, we were guessing how many acres we would plant and so forth. And, we planned around 197,000 acres of peanuts this year in Alabama. They expect about 193,000 to be harvested. The crop is, you know, everybody to the north end of the state was really wet early on.

Kris Balkcom

And, you know, it's more marginal down our way in the, in the traditional belt. But as we progressed through the season and time went on, everybody kind of went to get in the right range the middle of July, on to the end of August. And that really turned the crop around. And had a lot of potential there.

Kris Balkcom

Since that time, we've begun to dry up, all across the state. And, we've experienced about, you know, three weeks without any rainfall. As we get close to digging time, that's a problem from the aspect of filling out those pods, getting them fully mature and then also coming in there and, and, trying to be able to physically dig those peanuts, you know, those peanuts being pegged down in the top, two, three inches of the soil, even though they're pretty shallow, still relatively hard to be able to get up out there and physically get those out without plowing them off or sharing them off for tearing

Kris Balkcom

up the equipment. You know, we need the right moisture there to be able to do a really good job of that and cut down our harvest losses there from digging.

Simer Virk

I guess it's also more losses when it's dry like that.

Kris Balkcom

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, yeah, there's a lot more losses and a lot more labor. You know, they're changing blades every five acres per two rows. So if you got a six row, you know, 15 acres is about what they are running right now before they are having to change blades. So that's pretty time consuming. And, pretty expensive changing those blades that quick.

Scott Graham

I know, I know, Blake was saying that in the black belt... I guess it's so dry they can't dig if they want to, right now.

Kris Balkcom

Yeah, we were there. What? Last week one day doing the pod blasting and it was, a lot of those peanuts that were planted at the end of April. They were time to be dug and, and looked pretty good on the board, looking at them. But, you know, with that being said, it's just too hard.

Kris Balkcom

So, you know, it's not to be alarmed from the aspect of the peanuts aren't going anywhere. They're not about to fall off. But, you know, what we need is just the right kind of weather to be able to get in there timely. So when we've been experiencing a long dry spell like this, and we can get a good shower, rain, even an inch or so, it soaks it up really quick and fast, and it doesn't hurt those peanuts that are there, mature, that are needing to be harvested, they'll hold on.

Kris Balkcom

They're fine and do not give us any trouble sprouting. It's when they stay in that when they're fully mature and they stay in that wet, moist, warm ground and then it causes them to sprout. So when you get those continued rains there after, they get mature, that's when we run into problems. So hopefully they're in that location.

Kris Balkcom

They can get, you know, a good timely rain to come through a little front pass by here soon. I think some of the chances are a little better next week. So, maybe they'll moisten the ground enough. They'll easily get in there and get those dug to get them out.

Simer Virk

Is there? I guess how long can they wait before it's like, okay, we're not getting any rain, but we still need to go out, like, because there's even a penalty for that, right? If you're already mature, you just let it sit for a while?

Kris Balkcom

Yeah. That they'll sit there and hold, like I say, without it being, without if it's just sitting there in dry ground. It's just like them being stored in a trailer. It's just dry. So they're not going to change any, but if they're in that wet ground, that's when it's going to create a problem.

Blake Lanton

Yeah. What can hurt us is, like he said, if we have a week of rain or of, you know, 4 to 5 inch event that we just we can't get in there fast enough because again, they're, they're going to get they'll all be ready. But you can't dig them all at the same time. So, you know, maybe those last ones you dig can have an effect.

Blake Lanton

But you know, going back to what you said about, you know, some of our first planted fields aren't the ones...

Simer Virk

That are ready.

Blake Lanton

That are ready. And that's kind of the story of up here is we had so much rain that I guess some of these that were planted and they struggled coming up, and it just set them back where the ones that were planted, you know, after those rain events and good moisture. But didn't sit there and they're about drowned out.

Blake Lanton

Just just caught up with everything.

Kris Balkcom

Yeah. Excellent point Blake. And saying we're kind of in the traditional belt down there around in the Wiregrass and around Headland, a lot those peanuts have been running a lot longer on the days. But I think they're due to that. They were not wet early, but they were planted there early and they were growing fine.

Kris Balkcom

But then as it became time for them to start fruiting and setting the crop, conditions just weren't favorable. So they just continued to sit there. So it was delayed before we started getting any rainfall that would turn that crop around to allow them to start fruiting and pegging. And so therefore that just adds days to the tail end of the crop.

Kris Balkcom

So more so in that Central Alabama area, more on time and even southwest and, a little north of Headland there that there they seem to be more on target and on track than compared to the traditional area.

Simer Virk

How many? I know we usually go by a lot of days after planting, I guess. Where are we in the season right now? Roughly.

Kris Balkcom

Yeah. So anybody, you know, they started planting in the latter part of April and, you know, peanuts are some of these are 150 something days old right now, that are trying to be dug or looking to be dug. And, you know, everybody's different. You know, we planted all the way through, in June, so.

Simer Virk

Yeah.

Kris Balkcom

Yeah.

Scott Graham

Which 100, 197,000 acres.

Kris Balkcom

That's right, that's right. Where. They expected the harvest to be around 193,800, is what the estimate is.

Simer Virk

What were we last year?

Kris Balkcom

180,000.

Simer Virk

Okay. So we have another 20,000 ish.

Scott Graham

What's, what's the tomato spot wilt virus look like this year?

Kris Balkcom

You know, we didn't see that much there early on, which is a, which was a good thing. And, and, but those areas that did struggle coming up that were wet like Blake mentioned, certainly there was virus there that was prevalent there in those areas. So, you know, those thrips are just attracted to that green foliage that's coming up and really slow.

Kris Balkcom

And we certainly saw a big difference there. For the most part across the state where they had moisture and they were planting and emerging, we didn't see any problems. Here lately, you see more viruses coming in and showing up. But I think it's also due to the fact that it's later season and you got more stress on the plant, more those things are going to be expressed throughout that characteristic wise.

Scott Graham

My understanding is that the first, what, about 50 to 60 days, is where the virus really hurts you the most. So if it's starting to show up now...

Kris Balkcom

It's not as big a deal.

Scott Graham

It's not as big of a deal.

Kris Balkcom

It's not going to make, you know, you can just see that discoloration in the leaves and stuff like that. It's not going to have a big impact on the yield because your plants are pretty good size and already got the crops set early on. When it happens you're going to have a, it's going to hold that plant back,

Kris Balkcom

keep it from pegging a lot and really decrease the yields there.

Simer Virk

Are most growers out of that last kind of fungicide application, or there may be few still a few?

Kris Balkcom

Well, certainly with the weather that we've been experiencing, only the irrigated guys really probably need to be worried about spraying. As we look to what the future forecast holds for us, we determine about spraying any other fungicides there. You know, the old leaf spot, leaf spot program would be one that I kind of go by,

Kris Balkcom

and it goes by that all the chances in the future and the weather that we've had since the last spraying. And so, according to it, you would not be spraying right now until you see a change in the weather.

Blake Lanton

Well, you know where we're at again, these peanuts are ready, they're dry, but we do have some bigger farms that's got probably over a thousand acres of peanuts. They probably got an idea of where they're going to start digging. So, you know, thinking about leaf spot, maybe some of those last ones. Would you try to do a little preventative there?

Kris Balkcom

I wouldn't for the fact, Blake, that if it hasn't rained in the last two, three weeks and looking at the forecast, you know, we still look open predominantly, I wouldn't spray those. If I was going to, if now, if we change the forecast and we see something coming or we see a storm, maybe that's coming across to coming up,

Kris Balkcom

absolutely, we'll try to go in there and spray those peanuts before, ahead of the storm, and we'll try to do it when they're not wilting. Maybe early in the morning, they won't be wilted as bad, that way we get a good coverage across the leaf surface there then.

Simer Virk

Digging wise, what are some of the big considerations right now for the growers to be thinking about?

Kris Balkcom

Well, obviously trying to get in the ground and trying to keep from tearing up everything because, just like you say, you know, you got bigger growers and you got a lot of acres to get around and to cover. And, even though they've got a lot more equipment, it's still a process, and it takes a lot of time to get through harvest and the amount of acres that you can harvest to get through.

Kris Balkcom

So and also, when it is hard and dry like this, we run a lot slower. You know, we may be going 1.7-1.8 miles an hour, digging. Compared to going 3-3.2 miles an hour.

Simer Virk

Wow.

Kris Balkcom

When we got the right moisture. So it really changes a lot, the speed of how fast we can go through this crop.

Kris Balkcom

So, you know, then you get later and later in the year and you've been dry so long, it's going to turn and go to raining sometime. You know, usually, you know, October is a dry month. It seems like September has turned into October with the weather that we've been having. You know, what is October going to look like?

Kris Balkcom

Is it going to look like November when it goes to raining or is it going to still be dry in October and not rain until November? You know, what's going to happen? So therefore we try to take advantage and try to go in there and

dig some of these fields when we can, according to the soil types and pick out those that we can feel like we can do a decent job in.

Kris Balkcom

And even though we're changing blades a lot and got a lot of expense there, just because we don't want to have so much at one time to do.

Scott Graham

Gotta start at some point.

Simer Virk

Yeah.

Kris Balkcom

That's right.

Cade Grace

Yeah. Speaking of the irrigation, if you have center pivot technology on your farm, can you put some water out and say hey, we can get these...

Kris Balkcom

Yes.

Cade Grace

These peanuts out. What kind of, I mean, you put an inch of water per acre or a quarter?

Kris Balkcom

Well, you know, I would look and see depending on how wet it has been, you know, if they're irrigated, they probably have been watering those peanuts, throughout the season anyway. And as you get close to the end, obviously they've kept moisture there to keep them maturing and got life in the vines. But yet it still may be hard out there.

Kris Balkcom

I know me and Blake were talking about a field like this, earlier, and, you know, you don't want to have it real soupy, wet it obviously here before harvest, but, you know, we don't care about trying to put on any more pods. You know, obviously they're not going to go in the basket. So, as you get closer to the harvest time, you know,

we kind of taper off on the water demand and just keep enough out there to keep them maturing and filling out, that way as we get really close to digging, if we need to put out a few tents just to moisten up that top where

Kris Balkcom

we can get in there and dig, it's good. A lot of times with these heavier soil types, we can do a better job with a little wet, than we can too dry. So it's better to be quicker behind some water and to dig those at that time than it is, to let it get too dry.

Simer Virk

What about since we've been so dry? Even the dug peanuts being out in the field, they're going to take less time right, before they got to go pick them up?

Kris Balkcom

Absolutely. Excellent point. But say you don't have near the life in the vine, so a lot of the moisture is dried out. They were probably already wilting during the day. Like I said, they might have a little life in them in the mornings early or something. So, it doesn't take near as many days, and the type of weather and temperatures that we've got, we're still in the 90s, lower humidity really dries those vines down.

Kris Balkcom

Like I said, they already had drained a lot of moisture out of the vines, trying to go transfer to the nuts to mature those. So, you know, in two days, they're pretty dry.

Scott Graham

Yeah.

Blake Lanton

So is there ever a point where you start worrying about vine strength? I mean, because we've been dry for a long time and we've got some places where leaves are, they are about defoliated.

Kris Balkcom

Well, they certainly will over time, over a longer period, you are going to see it just completely die and turn black, you know. You really get concerned then from the fact of holding those peanuts on to those vines as you dig them. But, as far as cutting them with the vine cutters and going through there, you know that it's not, it's not any different there.

Kris Balkcom

Trying to cut through there, but obviously, if you stay to an extended period of time, they will completely crash out and die.

Simer Virk

I guess, can you touch a little bit more on the pod blasting aspect again? Because I think something valuable I learned when we did it last week was that there were a couple growers, like we said earlier, that their late planted peanuts were actually closer, like only a week or so from digging than their earlier planted was still.

Simer Virk

So I think automatically a grower is going to think like, hey, my early plant crop is ready first and they might go there. But that is a very helpful thing that they need to be thinking about. Like taking those samples. Right?

Kris Balkcom

Right, right. So yeah, you know, we simply kind of think about it like soil sampling fields. You know, everybody knows there's different soil types all across the field. And you know, you're trying to pull all those random core samples out to try to get some uniformity out there and kind of see where we do it, where we do it by zones,

Simer Virk

Mhm.

Kris Balkcom

Or a smaller grid. So same way with the peanut pod blasting. We'll go out there and pull some samples of plants, just so we can pick off, you know, 125-50 peanuts there. That'll go. That'll be harvestable pods. And we can, if we want to take that field and split it up into a couple different samples to get an idea, like, hey, it's really sandy here.

Kris Balkcom

It's stiffer dirt on the top side. Just make two different samples and kind of get an idea in that field. And, you know, you may pull it in, you may pull a couple plants in three different spots in each one of those soil types. And that way you got a good average idea of what they look like. And, you know, blasting them on the board is a great way to see that maturity after you knock that outer layer of the holes off,

Kris Balkcom

so you can look at the color but and that and then that way you've got a pretty good sample from that number of pods across there to look at the color. But then to really fine tune it and look, you know, it's good to show them open and look on the inside and look for those oil spots.

Kris Balkcom

As that peanut matures, that oil content becomes higher and expresses itself in those oil spots getting darker. So you can be able to easily see that without showing them open because you can be falsified on some of that oil color on maturity. On a dry year, we stay like this, you know, the peanuts may turn loose inside the shell.

Kris Balkcom

So then they become more tan, copper colored and look mature, but yet they've just prematurely turned loose inside the shell. So, it's good to shell them open and look.

Scott Graham

You know, Simer, the Nematologists say don't guess soil tests, right?

Simer Virk

Yeah.

Scott Graham

Same type of deal here, Kris. So, so tell us, for the traditional Wiregrass area, what, what or when is pod blasting available. And then for the rest of the state is it kind of like call your agent and they'll come out and help or are there set days for there too?

Kris Balkcom

So in Headland at the Wiregrass Research Extension Center, we pod blast every Tuesday and Friday from 8 to 12, in the mornings, and then we...

Scott Graham

And that lasts for how long?

Kris Balkcom

Yeah, we'd do that until, you know, until.

Scott Graham

Til' we're done.

Kris Balkcom

Until we are there. You know, sometimes. So we started the 1st of September. We'll carry that on through probably the latter part of October. And most everybody's on track and know what they're going to do then. Other areas across the state, like I say, we did one there with Blake there in Central Alabama, back earlier. And we'll be in Society Hill tomorrow.

Kris Balkcom

There out from Auburn on Thursday from 10 to 12, there around the store and then and, Baldwin County next week at Gulf Coast Research Station will be there, I believe on Tuesday around 10 to 12.

Simer Virk

Next week?

Kris Balkcom

Next week.

Simer Virk

Okay. I remember when we were there last week. Now, are there also growers who kind of do their blasting and take pictures, send it to you or?

Kris Balkcom

Yeah. So sometimes they can do that and then they'll blast a sample and you know look at the color and shell open. And you know with the technology we got now, you can face time, and look at them there and talk through it. Other times, you know, we may have issues going on in the field and may want to go look at them physically in the field.

Kris Balkcom

And they, you know, they may be crashing out with leaf spot or disease or what have you. So, sometimes that may change it, you know, because your sample, that your pod blasting, is only as good as that sample, it goes back to the soil test, you know, that could be something else going on in the field or what have you.

Scott Graham

So let's say real quick tomorrow for the listeners is September 18th and Tuesday next week is September 23rd. So I don't know how quickly this will come out, but get those dates out there.

Simer Virk

Good to know. Yeah. What, what are yields expected to be this year?

Kris Balkcom

Well, you know, they're certainly being cut right now because of this extended dry time. You know, some of these earlier peanuts that we started digging on. It has been slower to mature, like I said, in those areas. So, you

know, being dry three weeks, I probably didn't hurt us that bad on some of those, maybe just a little bit, but certainly these later peanuts that was planted on out in May, later, May 1st to June planted.

Kris Balkcom

And from then on, we're certainly in jeopardy right there. Those yields are really being compromised due to this dry weather. And, because when you go three weeks dry and the forecast is looking open, we've really drained the life out of those vines and depleted all our subsoil moisture because a peanut can root really deep in the ground and pull that moisture from down deep.

Kris Balkcom

But, that's the reason why the ground is so hard. It's soaked every bit out. So, you know, so some of these early peanuts that's been picked. I know some of those are around two tons, but the problem is, and what I fear is we may be going down from there if the weather don't change.

Kris Balkcom

You know, last year we'd been really dry. August was a dry month. There wasn't very much rain throughout Alabama the month of August last year. The early crop, you know, suffered with that because it really needed that August rain to help fill it on out and get it mature to, to make that good yield.

Simer Virk

Mhm.

Kris Balkcom

So when we started there, I wasn't as alarmed because in September what did it do, it rained the whole month of September. We had 15in in places in September last year. Well, you know, that hadn't happened this year. But what that did last year, all that 50% of the crop got planted late due to some rains that we had at planting. So that 50% of that crop that was planted late last year benefited from all that rain in September and allowed that ground to get really wet, provide those peanuts through that length of time, and we continue to get a little bit there.

Kris Balkcom

Then earlier in October and finished out those peanuts. And, you know, we had some really good 5,000 pound peanuts last year, late season. That was really impressive. We won't see that this year if it doesn't hurry up and change and get to raining, for that late crop.

Simer Virk

I remember we were at Tennessee Valley earlier this, there was a scout school, I believe we had a podcast. You mentioned something about, I think, more peanuts and all that. And then comes harvest. There might be concerns of where we, where all this peanut crop is going to go. What is the situation?

Kris Balkcom

Yes. So the shellers have been pretty, alarmed with that and wondering, you know, since we've planted more acres not only in Alabama but in the tri state region. And that peanuts being a big thing in that area, wondering about storage and where to put them all and so forth. But, you know, we've kind of all experienced the same weather recently.

Kris Balkcom

So, I told them I wouldn't be too worried about that. I think we are taking care of the storage problem right now.

Simer Virk

They're being stored right now?

Scott Graham

Sometimes things work out.

Kris Balkcom

Yeah. May not be always for the best but they're working out.

Blake Lanton

Well, you may save on some drying costs this year.

Scott Graham

Well, Chris, anything else we need to cover?

Kris Balkcom

Hey, well look, good to be here with y'all. And hopefully, y'all can get that jassid bug straight in cotton.

Scott Graham

Scoffs I thought we were going to get away without talking about that.

Kris Balkcom

We won't have to worry about it for next year I hope.

Scott Graham

Yeah.

Simer Virk

No concerns for peanuts from that, right?

Scott Graham

Not as of now.

Simer Virk

Yeah. Is that going to, because I know I'm just speaking from, like, my Georgia account experience in a way, when cotton, some of the early cotton is usually ready in the peanuts and the growers usually go and pick cotton and then come back.

Scott Graham

It's the opposite in Alabama.

Simer Virk

Yeah. So is, well where the price is. It should be in a way. Peanut is a kind of priority right now, right?

Scott Graham and Kris Balkcom

Yeah.

Simer Virk

That's what pays the bills. So that's not going to affect our like.. down in the Wiregrass with all that.

Kris Balkcom

No.

Scott Graham

Well and the good thing with the weather we have, I don't think you're looking at much loss in cotton. It's not going, you're not going to have issues with grading or whatever. You're not going to fall out, so, and defoliation has been going beautifully.

Simer Virk

Yeah.

Scott Graham

By the way.

Blake Lanton

Yeah. I'm just hoping how long that's going to last. If we don't, I mean, if we don't get some rain soon, eventually it's not going to work as good. You know, two years ago you could go ride field to field that, you know, fields within two miles of each other have been sprayed the same day. One worked perfect and the others had leaves stuck everywhere.

Blake Lanton

So yeah, right now, if you can, if you can get in there, get after it.

Scott Graham

I tried my best to end on a on a up note, but then Blake brought it down.

(Laughs)

Simer Virk

Hey, we're going to have a good peanut year this year. Hope we get some rain soon here.

Scott Graham

Yeah.

Blake Lanton

I had to bring out my inner Steve Brown. If you can get in there.

Scott Graham

Do it.

Blake Lanton

Yeah.

Scott Graham

Go get them.

Blake Lanton

Yeah.

Scott Graham

All right, guys, we enjoyed it. Appreciate yall's time. Hanging around a little bit after our meeting today. Good conversation, good information. As always, if anybody with Alabama Extension can ever do anything to help, please don't hesitate to reach out and let us know. And we'll be back with another episode soon.