



Season 6 Episode 6—Corn 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. Simer, I guess we're going to talk a little corn today.

Simer Virk

Yeah. And I'm excited to be back in our studio. I guess,

Scott Graham

Been in the roaming studios for a little while here. Yeah, we're back on campus today.

Simer Virk

Exactly. I think we haven't done an episode here this year. Probably. I have not been on. Yeah, I haven't hosted.

Scott Graham

Yeah, you're probably right. So, anyway, we're kind of burying the lead there a little bit. So we've got Eros Francisco and David Russell on today to talk all things corn and corn. herbicide management, I guess. How's it going, guys?

David Russell

Doing well.

Eros Francisco
All right. Thank you.

Scott Graham
Eros, you start the mustache over?

Eros Francisco
Yeah, I shaved last week because I trimmed incorrectly. Yeah, I started over.

Scott Graham
Sawyer did that when we went to Australia. He texted me just so you know, I'm completely clean shaven. And we were like, okay. And he's like, yeah, I messed up trimming. Good thing about not being able to grow a beard. You can't mess up a beard.

Simer Virk
So have you planted any corn?

Eros Francisco
Not yet. We are about to plant this week.

Simer Virk
You told me that last week, but this week.

Eros Francisco
No, I did not tell you.

Simer Virk
Okay.

Scott Graham
Yeah. And then we got 20 degrees last week so.

Eros Francisco
Yeah, but, the planting is going on right now is, some fields back in the in south Alabama. They are already up and running. Central part of the state is going on the ground right now. And, I think this is about time.

Simer Virk
Yeah. I looked up the weather this morning for the next whatever Weather Channel tells you, ten days, every day looks good. So, let.

Scott Graham

Me let me plug. Today is, Monday, March 23rd.

Simer Virk

So. So hopefully we'll have a lot more plant rolling here within the next week.

Eros Francisco

Yeah, it is time. It's that time of the year that every everybody's busy and everybody's trying to put pieces together. And the last bag of seeds coming or fertilizer or tractor parts and planter parts, just getting warmed up and, it's every year is a new is a new challenge. Right now, what we see as you just commented, weather is looking okay.

Eros Francisco

I wouldn't say great, because parts of this day, they're still, missing one rain or two we're, still on their drought. But I think this is. Well, I hope this is going to be a way better season, than I wouldn't say the last year, but the 2 or 3 years before that, hopefully the weather is going to help.

Eros Francisco

And, because we do need help. The prices are not looking good. There's a lot of pressure coming from the oil prices raising, up to more than \$100 now. And the only thing I see, is that the prices are still going up because of what's going on.

Simer Virk

What's the I guess let's start there. What's the corn acreage going to do in the state of Alabama this year?

Eros Francisco

Okay. The expectation is about the same around 350,000 acres. What can prevent or put a dent on that is what's going to happen since too, since today or or next week is the oil prices to increase significantly more? Their nitrogen prices are going to keep rising. We have seen the change from ten days or the end of February to now.

Eros Francisco

The nitrogen prices are really different. Like urea, over \$700 a ton. UAN 28, almost \$500 a ton and so on. So, this is not good for whoever is excited to plant corn. But that's the name of the game. Challenge is the name of the game. So, the last, as these prices come down with bit, then we're going to see a scenario where corn is okay regarding weather and hopefully the spring is going to be a little bit drier than last spring.

Eros Francisco

So I'm, I'm a mixed bag. I'm excited. I'm excited for '26. I think we all should be excited for a new year. And, everything is going to be okay.

Scott Graham

David. Some positive notes. I talked to Blake Lanton this morning, and he said that he was starting to see cover crops dying from burn down.

David Russell

Yeah. That conversation this morning of cover crops, being burned down after that last cold front came through. What? A week and a half ago. So that's looking good. Unfortunately, I'm still hearing, getting calls about folks trying to control Italian ryegrass. So if, if we're in that boat still mid to late March, we're kind of behind the eight ball.

David Russell

Yeah.

Scott Graham

The, the below ground issues there last a long time, right?

David Russell

Oh, yeah. Well, you just got such a big root ball there in the big clumps that clethodim and even roundup this time of the year is not a good option. I can't say that paraquat is really a good option. At least not a one shot approach, but that's a perpetual conversation through the months of February and March every year.

Scott Graham

So is that something too late now? But that, like, a reason for a fall herbicide strategy, would be to try to mitigate that risk?

David Russell

Yeah. It is, fall is good. The only thing about, you know, we hear that conversation in the in the delta regions, West Tennessee, Mississippi Delta, Arkansas, Louisiana, where you've got posted zero grade. So you're not really that worried about, soil erosion. You know, you get up into the, upper half of Alabama, especially, and throughout it really depends on the region.

David Russell

But we can't just prescribe a blanket recommendation for fall applied residuals to to keep rye grass controlled just because you all have.

Scott Graham

Anything uncertain the upper part of the soil or something, I guess. Is that what you said?

David Russell

Well you do, but if you go into a winter fallow field, I mean, you're talking about, some erosion potential through the winter.

David Russell

Once and then. Yeah, your herbicides that wash down the hill. So we've got, we just got a lot of topography in the, in the state. And so it's not a one size fits all when it comes to fall programs. Although, we do have some, some options there. You know, your standard pre type options and, and our weed science colleagues in Mississippi and Tennessee have done a lot of work in that area.

David Russell

Just doesn't fit every acre for us in Alabama. So we often don't talk a lot about those. Fall pre residuals, although it would benefit us, especially on those troublesome areas where we've got glyphosate resistant populations to incorporate something. And there is some newer research out there right now talking about how competitive cover crops can be.

David Russell

It's just that our problem is the last few years, as y'all will know, we've gotten so dry late summer and into the fall that establishing anything from a cover crop standpoint has been really tough and that's emerging from the ground the same time ryegrass is so kind of couldn't control one, but, maintain the others is pretty difficult.

Simer Virk

I'm curious. I know when I was in Georgia Eric Roscoe used to talk about post-harvest weed control a good bit. How many growers are actually kind of doing it, or is it just like you harvest and just kind of let it because you don't want to waste a lot of inputs? And why not knowing what's going to happen over the last, next few months right before you get another crop season.

David Russell

Yeah, that's definitely a conversation that's easier said than done. Input prices. You hit the nail on the head. There is, I think, you know, corn, for example, once corn comes out of the ground, comes off the field and that crop is harvested. You know, a lot of growers are on to the next thing, and they're not throwing a lot of money and time into those acres again.

David Russell

And we've seen quite a bit of fields the last few years, get really weedy, because you've got two, three, sometimes four months between the time that corn's harvested until the first students.

Scott Graham

So you in peak plant growing can.

Simer Virk

Yeah, easily. I mean, what when is our most of our corn in mid-August. Harvested, I guess, or.

Eros Francisco

Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

Simer Virk

Right. Yeah. So you still have a whole fall loss January. February if not. Right. So there's almost close to six months and.

Eros Francisco

Yeah, I've I'd love to see more fields going in to cover crops up just after corn is harvested. I know it's a challenge with the, November frost, putting in, but, if we hurry, we could, like, have a grass, covering the ground from from corn through to November. Or any type of legume, like sun hemp would be great.

Eros Francisco

After after corn. Just give that 60 days something covering and roots growing in the ground. I mean, that's that's an option that we can, try to help farmers to achieve.

David Russell

Yeah. To Eros' point, it was pretty cool. You know, we recently took that trip, together to Brazil. And seeing that incorporating cover crops after a corn harvest, sun hemp, for example, or in their region, it fit really well to use, annual grass to graze, if you will. I know that doesn't fit every, every acre here in the state, but getting that on as soon as the crop comes off, not only can you take, you know, you get the soil benefits there too, but it covers the ground and it's very competitive, against a lot of weed competition.

Eros Francisco

Yeah. I'd like to point out that, as you said, it doesn't fit 100% of the acres. But if you can, you've got to take advantage of that. If you if you harvest corn very early in August, this girl grass and try to grazing, that's one option for another income, right.

Simer Virk

Yeah. Going back to you mentioned earlier on weed control, I know the stuff happening right now with the war and all that. The fertilizer prices are definitely going a lot of. Right. It's changing like every day. That same happening with the herbicides and all that too? Or is there a little bit less effect that.

David Russell

I'm not hearing those conversations. I'm not saying that's not going on.

Scott Graham

Some reason crop protection inputs are treated differently, right. Like you don't you can't just get on Google and find the prices of roundup, right? Yeah. Same for insecticides. So it's kind of hard to say really. You would assume there will be some increases if things, A.I.s that are made overseas and having to be shipped here and that kind of stuff.

Scott Graham

But it's not like, you know, when the economists give their talks, they can show you day by day how much urea cost or whatever and not say.

Eros Francisco

Well, the reason for that is because to make it to manufacture urea you depend on, gas, natural gas. And that's pretty much correlated to oil price. That's why all prices impact, nitrogen fertilizers.

Simer Virk

I've also heard maybe we don't need to go too much into this tangent, but it's not like a pause button. Right. It's not like we are, you know, like it's not like stuff's really changing day to day. It's just the market.

Scott Graham

Reacts, right?

Simer Virk

Yeah. They have all this stock or surplus or something to get to certain days or something. It's not like the stuff's coming straight from the on the barges or something and getting unloaded and going straight to, you know, the.

Scott Graham

Gas you put in your pickup truck. They didn't show up yesterday.

Simer Virk

Exactly. So there is that but it's just the market reacting to all this all. So I guess in essence, I was just trying to see is the market react time way even on the herbicide or something because in like two years ago, like roundup or all other, like they were almost twice or three times more because of some of the situation we were in back then.

David Russell

Well, we heard a lot of that in the Covid era. Yeah. You know, that was very responsive to the market. We don't I have not heard those conversations. Again, I know prices are high. Inputs are high. But I can't say that, it's as, it's, affected by what's going on now is the fertilizer and fuel prices are.

Eros Francisco

One hand, we have the fertilizer prices going up on the on the other hand, we have we just had 2025 a great season for corn yield. And and total production increased in the. Unfortunately, the U.S. is not exporting a lot of corn. So that's creating a lot of domestic or the demand for domestic use of corn.

Scott Graham

Got a surplus, right? Yeah.

Eros Francisco

We got a surplus. So that's putting pressure on price. So price is not going to change if the, if we have a stock a high stock of corn. So we got to deal in both ends. We got a deal in the input prices and in the corn prices. But is is the equation that we agronomists.

Eros Francisco
We are not going to solve that.

Simer Virk
But you know.

David Russell
What's the.

Scott Graham
What's our intended acres this year? Do you know?

Eros Francisco
350 ish around.

Scott Graham
That last year. 320?

Eros Francisco
340.

Simer Virk
Definitely need to cut that out. That's what he started with.

Eros Francisco
Yeah, he had the right to ask the, but anyway.

Simer Virk
I'm just messing with you. Let's talk about, you know, the stuff where I actually want to tell growers, I guess. What have we learned from the last 2 or 3 years? I guess going into 2026, some some things that you really kind of want to be sure, like hope our growers can take advantage of or should do this year to maybe make a good crop.

Eros Francisco
Okay, so, from a crop management standpoint,

Simer Virk
These planting.

Eros Francisco
From a crop management point of view, we saw 2025, being challenging with the with the ton of rain we got in May, ish and part of the state in, there was this big question. Everyone thinking that, oh, we lost 100% of our nitrogen because of leaching or runoff due to all the rain. And we do have a study in, live in E.V. Smith in Shorter.

Eros Francisco

And we did. We did see a response to the nitrogen apply, even though we had ten inches of rain in May, just after nitrogen was applied. And we did see a response to the nitrogen supply because we had a control to compare. So, I think the message is don't freak out if you, if we if we end up having rain after nitrogen applications, you're not going to lose 100% of nitrogen.

Eros Francisco

So, just calm down, evaluate the situation. Call us if needed. Let's discuss. There's no reason to apply 100% of the rate again. Or or 50% of the rate again. Let's discuss the situation. Perhaps you don't need more than 30 or 40 pounds extra. Considering potential leaching or runoff. I think that was one learning, lesson that we had, last year.

Eros Francisco

It's it's evident that weather is the most impacting factor in corn yield. And we saw that in 2024 due to the drought in 2022. If you see the average, yield for the state, it was pretty hit in 2022 and 2024 because of the weather in July, ish, early August. So if we do have better weather situations or conditions in July, I think we are.

Eros Francisco

We can expect of a good yield again in 2026. I was going to mention about linear, but I forgot to read about what's going on and which ones. Right now if you're moving from, like me, into a normal situation, but.

Simer Virk

Maybe maybe they follow Bob Kemerait.

David Russell

In you define a normal situation.

Eros Francisco

Yeah, yeah. Good question about normal situation.

Scott Graham

Range here and there and yonder.

Simer Virk

Timely rain throughout the year.

Simer Virk

What about weed control David?

David Russell

Similar to what Eros was just talking about. You know, I think from a weed control standpoint, considering the climate we're in, not actual climate, but also considering the, the, the market, economic climate.

David Russell

Is just to keep it simple. I tell growers all the time, you know, your fields and the history of weed populations better than anybody else. You know what to expect. If something went to seed last year, you're probably going to see it again. And using a crop in that rotation, or crops in new and changing areas to kind of combat that weed pressure.

David Russell

You know, if it's historically, a bad area with morning glory pressure and you're going you're committed to corn in that area, we'll be prepared to fight Morning Glory again this year. But I tend to take a page out of the dicamba playbook. Last year, when there was no dicamba. Over the top of dicamba tolerant soybeans and cotton.

David Russell

We're going back to the basics is what we were telling folks. You know, there's still a lot of chemistries, there's still a lot of weed management tactics that we can employ. And when it comes to corn this year, you know, there are there is no shortage of corn herbicide products. I mean, it's like the colors of the rainbow in a Skittles bag.

David Russell

There's more corn premixes, in a jug than there are any other crops, in my opinion. And what a lot of companies have done is they've taken a lot of the same type chemistries. You know, you're talking the atrazine and, acetochlor, s metolachlor, and all the HPPDs like mesotrione and tembotrione.

David Russell

And they're mixing and matching and changing up formulations, and it produces a lot of different products. And we have those labeled for us in our use in the South, but just because we have those doesn't necessarily we mean that we need those. I think the typical roundup atrazine programs in corn go a long way, and that's obviously the most economical.

David Russell

I think that's still a very good fit in a lot of cases, but I think, their use is heavily dependent on timely planning. So if you're in and corn is up on time and you've already got to leave four leaf corn up and go before you start to see that flush of warm season weeds, well, you're already ahead of the game, and you're not going to need a lot of those high dollar more, active ingredient type products.

David Russell

You can probably get away with your atrazine roundup and maybe a mesotrione type, Calisto type application that'll get you through to harvest relatively clean, assuming that your corn is is healthy and you've got a good stand and competitive canopy there. So that's really the approach we take. I mean,

it's it's relatively simple, or at least we try to make it simple that if you, are either following the planter with some sort of atrazine program, we're coming back early.

David Russell

Post. If you don't have a lot of weed pressures, then you'll probably do. Okay. You know, we've got the I think the season max of atrazine is like two and a half pounds. So what we typically do is split that application at planting or early post v2. And then come back right before v6 and put the rest of it right before canopy closure.

David Russell

So, and with timely rainfall, as we've already talked about, we can get those residuals activated, the canopy closed, and hopefully we're relatively weed free all the way through. That tends to be the where we get the biggest bang for our buck.

Simer Virk

What's the. I know there's a probably different type of issues you get calls about or you notice or maybe what is the most common thing that happens every year. And you wish like we have a control over you and growers could have done not made a mistake or done better. Yeah. Something that's consistent.

David Russell

A good question. I still keep going back to and, and I'm sure folks are tired of hearing this talk about ryegrass, but I mean, you think back we've other than a few here, you know, other than a few times through December and then January, we were relatively mild. I mean, we had some days where we were in the 70 degrees or touching 70 degrees in December and January and certainly parts of February before this last cold snap.

David Russell

They hit a week and a half ago where we had plenty of opportunity to treat seedling grass competition. And that, that, that was the optimal time to control those populations of ryegrass. Now that we're talking largely flag leaf stage or knee high, tall Italian ryegrass clumps, you know, it's simply too late to do that. So it's the same messaging every year.

David Russell

It's a cool season, grass. You anticipate that thing to germinate. And November, December every year, depending on where you are in latitude across the state. So earlier the better. Again, you know in the history of your fields and what you expect to be problematic, tackle that thing early. We are seeing an uptick in glyphosate resistant populations of ryegrass across the state, primarily in the Tennessee Valley.

David Russell

So that's a tool that we're seeing not as, active on those populations anymore. So, you know, what we're saying is if folks feel comfortable using a paraquat product, the mix that with the group fives

like atrazine ahead of corn or, or, you know, metribuzin and or some, some type chemistry like that, that synergism tends to work better on those troublesome populations.

David Russell

But getting that out of the equation before you're ever considering planting corn, is is always a perpetual problem. And then in crop, it's usually morning glory.

Scott Graham

Simer, what about planter set up and stuff?

Simer Virk

Well, that's like David said, I think we can emphasize we keep emphasizing it every year, you know, but then you still keep seeing issues with seeding rate and others. And I think it goes back to, I feel like everything we talk about goes back to input. Right. And then seed is one of the big inputs. And I still see we can do a lot better job of setting our planter properly.

Simer Virk

And, and I think even we as sometimes which we probably be a little ahead in a ways our planters are already, checked for what do we need to be doing all that. This was done back in February. I think that's the most important part. We can't wait until I'm going to plant tomorrow and today. This morning I'm like, well, let me to get my planter out of the shed and see.

Simer Virk

I think, and be a little bit more proactive, you know, on that in corn planter setup is probably most important. Among all the other crops was.

Scott Graham

Was the old adage you won't ever see they do a merge within 15 seconds of each other.

Simer Virk

Yeah. I think if we'll go look back, I think it even goes up to technically anything after 48 hours delay between to margins, I think it's going to have some sort of penalty down the road. But that's why they recommend doing flag testing. You can go every day and put a flag right next to, you know, a seed that emerges.

Simer Virk

And like I said, it all goes back to planter stuff, too. Yeah. Biggest bang for your buck is spending as much as time you can until planted to make sure it's dialed in. Get your seed meter's that are properly tested. Biggest thing we saw, even in our planters, we did a lot of on farm trial seeding rate issues in a way where you think you're putting out so many seeds per acre, but your planter over seeded

Simer Virk

I don't think that's just wasted money right there. So stuff like that for years like these goes a long ways, I think.

Eros Francisco

I think, we need to emphasize that because with the, with the variety of soil types that we have, within the field or a farm, one cannot start planting the same way that it ends. Got to check your planter every now and then, just to make sure that the soil moisture is the same. Or if it is varying you've got to you've got to adjust the planter because you've got to adjust the seeding depth, if the soil moisture changes, if the soil type changes, your planter is going to perform differently.

Eros Francisco

So we need to emphasize that. And if that's going to impact the way the seeds are going to emerge, and that's the way is going to impact your final yield.

David Russell

I'll say one more thing. Because this will probably air at the time, folks are getting ready to apply their first application or maybe close to their second application. I'm not sure. But, on the topic of morning glories, for those growers out there who have troublesome populations of morning glory, we've, conducted, quite a bit of research over the last couple of years, with the help of, wheat and feed grains, support on looking at, later timed, applications of some of that group 15 excuse me, group 27, herbicides those bleachers, if you will, the mesotrione, the tembotrione, the laudis type, or callisto type

David Russell

applications. A lot of those products that are meant for broadcast applications over the top, of corn, a lot of those have a V6 cutoff. So halix G2, for example, has got mesotrione in there, or Callisto, very good product, but one that we often refer to is sort of a standard in herbicide we control for corn, but that cutoff is going to be right at or around, the for v6 if I'm not mistaken.

David Russell

And so in troublesome morning glory populations, you're not going to be able to catch everything, with that application just because it's still so early. You've got a lot of growing time left between that application and the time it, that corn finishes up. And as you know, when the corn matures and that canopy dries down and the sunlight hits the soil, that's when those morning glory plants are going to pop up again.

David Russell

So trying to delay those applications of some of those have been it's kind of been the study of our focus. And we've found that some of those like impact or balance flexx or, callisto or even laudis, applied sort of in a banded type, application or through a labor, type rig or even with drop nozzles for those few growers out there that may have dropped nozzles to apply it underneath the canopy, what you're doing is minimizing crop injury.

David Russell

You're not using a broadcast over the top, but you're sort of delaying that application, closer to harvest. So assuming we get a timely incorporating rainfall, those type applications underneath the canopy, since it seems to last a little bit longer, into the growing season for a cleaner harvest.

Simer Virk

Anything else related to planting Eros?

Eros Francisco

We can talk about seeding rate. We can talk about row spacing.

Simer Virk

What's our optimal seeding rate across the state?

Eros Francisco

Across the state?

Eros Francisco

There's still much, you know, I think, take attention on on if you are dry land and irrigated, I think that's the most, diverse environments that we can, categorize, seeding rates, I would say between 24 to 28 ish dry land or dry land and 32 to 36 irrigated. We are having new trials going on.

Eros Francisco

And we are seeing that in some cases, depending on the soil type and if it is a high zone or a low zone, even 38,000 performed very well last year. There was another trial that we, we had 24.5 thousand and it did great as it is 26 or 27 depending on the soil type. So you've got to be you've got to be, between that range for dry land and in for irrigated.

Eros Francisco

Plus you've got to see what your organic matter, what is your soil type? Very sandy or not. Sandy. So we've got a tweak here and there just to be adjusted to whatever, or less seeds you need for the zone. Now, let's go back to the plant or keep an eye on the planter, because as you said, you think you are delivering such amount of seeds.

Eros Francisco

And if you are delivering less and your interpretation is a is based on a wrong figure. So you've got to go ahead. And after emergence counter plants counter stand, make sure you have exact number of plants. There. Do you run the conclusions after after the season in corn?

Simer Virk

It's so easy to check. If you're a planter, then what it's supposed to do is every plant should come up, right? So any mistakes that happen, technically it's a lot easier to see behind corn, whereas you go after soybeans or cotton. There's some seed that got planted but it don't emerge so like corn and corn emergence is a really good check of how well you're planters performing and all that.

Simer Virk

One thing I will also say, I think our growers can maybe benefit from those who already have technology on their planters. And this kind of goes to we always kind of like, hey, you gotta figure out

what works best on your farm. Going back to seeding rate technology has made it so easy that all you got to do is sit in the cab and do strip trials, or put some strip seeding rates on your farm.

Simer Virk

Right. And then we got a yield monitor on combine and work with your local county or extension agent, you know, to help check the yield at the end. Lot of seeding rate trials we do every year. It's amazing that 30,000 seeding rate versus 38,000. And they all end up building the same sometimes, you know, like, well, there's a missed opportunity to actually optimize your seeding rate and, and do and I think a lot of growers, they just back to back every year stuck on that thinking this is the this is the rate we have always used on our farm without changing it.

Simer Virk

And our varieties have evolved. Hybrids have evolved so much. They're a lot better. Our environment different every year and all. I think that's not all another opportunity that no everybody, every grower can benefit from easily.

Eros Francisco

I think absolutely it's you're dealing with something new, this season. Don't hesitate to call us to get in contact with the AU REAs, in your region or call us, here in Auburn. We're going to be glad to visit with you and and answer any questions that you may have.

Scott Graham

Or with that, I'll say, good, good conversation, guys. Enjoyed listening in And then, as always, is, as Eros said, if any of us can never be of any help, please don't hesitate to reach out and let us know. And we like to thank our listeners for listening, and we'll be back with another episode soon.

Announcer:

The Alabama Crops Report is a production of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.