Season 6 Episode 14—Cotton Crop Conversation

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Announcer:

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

Scott Graham

Hey, everybody, welcome in to the Alabama Crops Report podcast. We'll talk about cotton today. How 'bout that? We've got Josh, Chandler, and Scott in here. How's it going, guys?

Josh Lee

It's going good. It's nice in this AC. I'll say that.

Scott Graham

Just don't go outside.

Chandler Gruener

Yeah. It's been a warm week for sure.

Scott Graham

So today is July 31st, the last day of the month. And we just wrapped up three consecutive days of field days/crop tours. And I think we were in Brewton on Tuesday. I told Brad, he picked the hottest day of the year. We're in Society Hill on Wednesday. I told Will. Yeah. He said he picked the most humid day of the year.

Scott Graham

It wasn't too bad at Tennessee Valley on Thursday.

Josh Lee

No. It wasn't bad.

Scott Graham

Comparatively speaking, anyway. It wasn’t bad.

Josh Lee

Right. It was a Goldilocks scenario, you know, one of those kinds of deals with these Goldilocks scenarios, with these field days, you know.

Scott Graham

What’s Goldilocks scenario?

Josh Lee

Just right. Too much a little bit, you know, too much, too little. Just right.

Scott Graham

Is that what Goldilocks was?

Chandler Gruener

Yeah. It's Goldilocks principle.

Scott Graham

Yeah, okay.

Josh Lee

You're going to have to, you don't know?

Scott Graham

I have a four-year-old little girl.

Josh Lee

That’s what I’m saying.

Scott Graham

I don't know.

Josh Lee

Oh my gosh Scott, you want to go back in your notes?

Scott Graham

People are going to think I'm making up my daughter. All right, let's get back on the road. All right, Josh, give us a cotton crop update.

Josh Lee

All right, so overall crops progressing pretty well across the state. We've been catching some timely rain in the state. Mainly in North Alabama. You know, when I look over the forecast and look at the radar, it seems like the northeast and northwest sections are catching pretty good rain. And it shows, right? You know, we were in Tennessee Valley at Belmont Station.

Josh Lee

That cotton was looking pretty dadgum good. Fruit was setting well; most of my cotton that I had was going into peak bloom, about third, fourth week of bloom. So, everything looked good up there. However, you know, got to be a Debbie Downer. There are some dry pockets around the state. Somewhere in the central part of Alabama are not catching as much timely rain.

Josh Lee

So, there is a little bit of drought stress as we go into that flowering period. And then, of course, we moved down to the south part of Alabama and of course into the central as well. We do still have that good bit of later planted cotton. I know I was spraying a trial this morning on farm, and, that cotton was still at match it, it was just about to start candling probably in the next few days.

Josh Lee

But we're still a couple days out from the first flower. So, we still have a good way to go. You know, the bottom line I would say is that we're sitting pretty good. We're catching rain. Hopefully that trend will continue. But we still got a long way to go in cotton. Cotton looks good.

Josh Lee

I'm saying it's looking nice now, but that doesn't mean anything until we pick it and take it to the gin. We'll make a decision there.

Scott Graham

You know, I see you on your little behind the baseball. But what's that saying?

Josh Lee

Inside baseball

Scott Graham

Well, inside baseball, for the listeners, whenever Doctor Josh Lee's on the podcast, he brings us a really nice handout with his notes, and an outline. And I see just looking at it, 57% setting bolls is what USDA said 90% square and 57% setting bolls.

Josh Lee

Yep. Correct.

Scott Graham

Which is right on the five-year average. It's kind of hard to believe.

Josh Lee

It is. I pulled that number today before we got over here, I looked at that and I was like, making sure I was reading everything right. But that was correct. I mean, we. Go ahead.

Scott Graham

Everybody you talked to in South Alabama talks about how late the crop is. Yeah, I guess I don't know what quote setting bolls, how they define that in the USDA report.

Josh Lee

That's true.

Scott Graham

I just mean first bloom or does that mean peak bloom or what is this what is setting bolls?

Josh Lee

Correct. That's going to be a little subjective. Where exactly how many data points are taken from each farm, like the farms in Alabama. Right. Well, where are they taking it from? So that's a little bit up for discussion. But just to give like a key point, do I think it's a little high? Probably so. Especially if you move into the more southern part of the state.

Josh Lee

Yeah, I agree with you, Scott. But overall, you know, as an Extension specialist you always get phone calls. Hey what's this, what's this looking like. And so, one of the calls I've been getting a few lately are about fungicide

applications. Since we are catching these timely rains and we are getting kind of, I've seen some areas of some rain cotton.

Josh Lee

We weren't timely on some PGR management. And we're getting a little bit concerned about fungicides. You know, do I have a target spot. Do I have something that I need to be aware of right. And so, you know, for example, I went out to a field the other week or last week, excuse me, went out there and tried to troubleshoot a thing if we needed to spray for target spot.

Josh Lee

Well went out there and kind of looked and it was Stemphylium, it wasn't the targeted spot. So that's one of the main things. You know we're thinking about fungicide applications to make sure we're identifying the correct target here. When we are thinking about spraying those fungicides and we're trying, you know, if they're needed, of course, but we need to like anything to do with insects, Scott, you know, you need to look at a threshold, right? We don't want to just throw money out there and not see a return. That doesn't make any kind of economic sense. So just to talk with, from doctor man to sheer stuff, you know, just to talk about two points. Our fungicide application should begin at the first sign and defoliation.

Josh Lee

So again, while you're scouting in there, kind of look at that crop's overall look and see what's going on. And then only apply those fungicides if the disease onset occurs prior to the sixth week of bloom, and weather conditions remain favorable for disease in the upcoming five-day forecast. So, if you get that upcoming forecast of real cloudy, rainy conditions along with rain, growth, cotton, all right, you're still going into bloom.

Josh Lee

That may be an option for you to do. If you want more information, and I highly suggest more information on this. Visit the ACES cotton IPM guide. It has product rates, use rates, and application timings as well. Right there.

Scott Graham

What a threshold that is.

Josh Lee

Did you see. Yeah.

Scott Graham

Read that again.

Josh Lee

What you got here.

Scott Graham

Only apply fungicide if disease onset occurs prior to the six weeks of bloom. And weather conditions remain favorable for disease during the next five days.

Josh Lee

Yeah.

Scott Graham

It's not research to figure that out.

Josh Lee

It is.

Scott Graham

You know what I mean.

Josh Lee

It's intense. And so, you know, I actually had Megan. You know, your previous student, she kind of walked plots with me. And we were kind of talking, and I talked with Amanda, and it's harder. It's hard to come up with this threshold. Yeah, it's not like in, you know, insects. You've got a certain number; they're going to have this amount of damage hopefully.

Josh Lee

And you know, that's what I'm going to do. But this is so dependent. It’s hard.

Scott Graham

Yeah, it's a hard call to make. It depends.

Josh Lee

Yeah, I think that's the best way to address it. But pretty wild. Yeah. But just be kind of on the lookout, that kind of stuff. Before you pull the trigger, make sure you know. And so, what I want to talk with Chandler here today is with potassium, nitrogen and that kind of stuff, foliar stuff.

Josh Lee

You know, we talked about Stemphylium, and I am seeing it already in some cotton fields. It's mainly being shown up in some drought-stressed, what I call hard areas to farm, on your fields, you know, clay pockets, areas that just don't perform as well as the rest of the field. They're kind of stressed and definitely maybe drought stressed.

Josh Lee

And in that case, they're going to really show those Stemphylium symptoms. So those are going to be those reddening of the leaves that kind of stuff. Cotton, and overall, it looks good. So, I'm going to kind of throw this off to Chandler because I've gotten several calls, and he has too about foliar feeding cotton. I've heard a lot about it, in terms of nitrogen, foliar feeding, as well as potassium.

Josh Lee

So, I'm going to kind of throw it into him and get his opinions and thoughts.

Chandler Gruener

Yeah. So, the potassium has been popping up a lot lately. It seems like a lot of questions I've been getting and hearing about a lot of potassium questions and kind of been interesting because, you know, sometimes people are wanting to do potassium, but they're not always sure what product. They're like well, I'm just going to go buy potassium.

Chandler Gruener

And so that's kind of one of the first things I start noting is like, well, first, do you need the potassium. And the second thing is, okay, we probably need potassium. We're probably low. You know, you've had historic issues with that field. You've got some Stemphylium showing up. That's a good sign. You need potassium.

Chandler Gruener

There're some other good indicators you need for potassium. And so, then they're like well I need to go buy a product. And they're not sure of the product and they're not sure of the rates. And they're like, is it worth the 2% or what are 2 pounds per acre or whatever you can get out there. And that's another thing I'd like to, you know, reminding people is there's different uptake efficiency.

Chandler Gruener

So not only are there different percentages, but you also get your NPK, so you're on 0-0-26 or 29 whatever and your foliar for potassium. But some of them have, you know, 15, 20% uptake, and some of them have like a 40, 45% uptake. So that's a big change. If you have two products that are, you know, 0-0-29 it wants 45% uptake; it wants 20% uptake.

Chandler Gruener

You know, it's going to be a big change every year, twice as much product in one product versus the other. So that's something you need to kind of keep in mind if you are going to go down that route of doing foliar, but ultimately foliar is going to be that little bump. They're going to play the biggest role in stress cotton and stuff that's, you know, having a hard time maybe getting a little pressure from different things, drought or disease or something.

Chandler Gruener

That's where it's going to make the biggest move on that potassium needle. It's not in your well-fertilized areas. And ultimately foliar feeding can be good, can be beneficial, and you can see a good benefit. But you're not always going to see a benefit, especially if you spray it too late. You know, you have to keep that in mind.

Chandler Gruener

So, once you get near that cut out time point, you start to get a little too late. A lot of times we want to see around, you know, the first flower of the peak blooms around that region right there. Then a couple of weeks in that middle right there. Once reproductive, but once you get in to cut out after that, usually economically it does not make sense.

Josh Lee

And so, this is just for foliar potassium.

Chandler Gruener

That's just for foliar potassium.

Josh Lee

So going out looking at your first flower to peak bloom and we're halting it at cut out cut out. Yeah. Okay.

Chandler Gruener

Correct. That's pretty much the optimal range. And that's also where you can take a tissue test and kind of get that estimation if you actually need a little bit of nutrients or not. So, if you pull tissue samples prior to that, when it's vegetative, the fluxes in the nutrients in the leaves are so much that you can't really get a good picture of how much is needed.

Chandler Gruener

And if you are going to pull tissue samples, remember, pull some from your good spot, some for your bad spot and use that as your comparison. Don't only pull from the bad spot and then also foliar aren't going to make up for if you don't have a solid plan in place for your actual granular applications or your pre-season applications.

Chandler Gruener

So, make sure you have a solid plan set up with that and then tying back over to nitrogen for foliar feeding so nitrogen can pump up the yield. You have got to watch to make sure you only start getting ranked growth and don't get things out of hand. So, keep the nitrogen in check a little bit. But also, really targeting the side dress and the granular and stuff like that.

Chandler Gruener

Priors real easier management strategy, I would say is the best way to put is an easier management strategy than kind of relying on foliar for at the end on nitrogen.

Josh Lee

Sure. And calls and comments that I was getting mainly are like, you know, I've gone out and side dress with a granular I will say we'll put out urea or something like that. And we had heavy rainfall. I've got a couple inches of rain. I'm on some sand; I think my nitrogen may or may not have gone, and I want to supplement it with foliar nitrogen. What would you say from that standpoint.

Chandler Gruener

So, in that scenario. So, like if you truly did lose it and you're actually out, you know you spray that a little bit of nitrogen potassium on there, you can actually see benefit. And you get that bump that you see advertised, and that that can be great. But you risk like if you put that granule around, you're not waiting enough time for it to actually convert over in the plant uptake and actually see that growth.

Chandler Gruener

And you start spraying too early. Suddenly, you have too much nitrogen. As you double down, you've doubled down. Whether you got your side dress and your foliar. So, leave a little bit of time, kind of make sure you truly have lost that, not just assuming you lost it.

Josh Lee

Okay. Just watching the crop, the crop will tell you what it needs right. All right, Scott, I'm going to throw it your way.

Scott Graham

Big bold words. It's like picks for cotton insects, right? It's been quiet.

Josh Lee

That's a good thing, right?

Scott Graham

It's a very good thing. I think we've earned that since last year. But, yeah, most of the phone calls are starting to hear a little bit more about Stinkbugs and some older cotton and plant bugs here and there that are almost just got scouts, like, whether they're ready to say, I'm good on this field.

Scott Graham

And they finally hit that do one more spot and they're like oh man. Yeah, I want to do another one. But mostly it's been hard to justify even throwing in some imidacloprid in a picks for people, which is a great thing. That's

awesome. Great thing. Yeah. And part of why I say that is, you know, the jassid is still very low, I think is probably tracking a lot like it did last year.

Scott Graham

But there's more people looking for it more intently at this point in the season. Right. Sure. And so, it is more if you look at the map on the stop two-spot cotton leaf hopper.org website, we have a map of everywhere that it was found last year. And then you can click find it in cotton, and it'll show you in 26 where it has been found in cotton.

Scott Graham

If you look at that map and if you have the knowledge that I do or the old pictures that I have, I know where it was on August the 8th of 2025 and we have it in more counties in Florida, Georgia, and Alabama this year than we did last year on August 8th. But again, we're looking for it a whole lot closer.

Scott Graham

So that kind of makes sense, right? I mean, we're just looking for more. But when I talk with my colleagues in Florida, Isaac Esquivel and Phillip Roberts at Georgia, they are noticing a lot of predations by beneficial insects. And so, I think our lack of plant bugs and stink bugs up until this point of the season has helped us preserve beneficial insects.

Scott Graham

And maybe at a certain point, you know, eventually beneficials will get overrun by pests. Sure, we'd never need insecticide, right? They could get us to the finish line, but I'm hoping maybe because we haven't been spraying as much up until this point, maybe they can get us a week farther than they did last year or two weeks further.

Scott Graham

That's my hope.

Josh Lee

Sure.

Scott Graham

It's there. Right now. I'm pretty optimistic about where we are. I will say that I'm starting to hear a little bit about whiteflies in Georgia. We've seen a few in southeast Alabama as well, and so, everybody who's been through whiteflies knows that for whatever reason, biodrin is the one insecticide that seems to be worse at flaring them than any of the others.

Scott Graham

Of course, biodrin provides good control of Cotton Jassid.

Scott Graham

Economical control of cotton jassid. Anyway, so be cognizant of that if you've got white flies in the field, that is a pest that we would rather avoid. It seems like from what Ron has told me, thankfully we've not had really a bad white fly year since I've been here, but we got about three weeks' notice when they start spraying in Georgia.

Scott Graham

We got about three weeks generally until we start seeing. So, if we start hearing about that, we might consider leaving the biodrin jug in the barn and pulling something else out if we need stinkbugs or jassids or whatever have you, but right now, like I said, I feel like we're really good shape on the insect front.

Josh Lee

That's always a good sign. I went out, you know, walking on farm today, and it was hard. Retention looks good. I saw maybe one plant bug. Yeah, that was nice.

Scott Graham

Yeah. So now that field you were in, partly it's so delayed because deer hammered it.

Josh Lee

Sure.

Scott Graham

But, for the late cotton we've got out there, that wasn't. It's not because of deer. Sure. How are you adjusting PGR management?

Josh Lee

Sure. So that's a great question. So, with these late planted cottons we do need to be a little bit more aggressive on our plant growth regulators. And one of the main reasons why is that PGR aggressiveness can increase our earliness. So, we're able to produce that crop for several days up to a week.

Josh Lee

If you're very aggressive. But we don't want to be too aggressive, but kind of up those rates just to be sure that we're actually setting fruit, holding fruit. And we're not producing just enough vegetative growth to set bolls immature out faster. And you know, we can get away with it more in south Alabama than north Alabama.

Josh Lee

Right. Because we've got a longer growing season period in the south part. And so, one of the big things to keep in mind is a term called effective bloom date. Right. And so that's the period that a white flower goes all the way to a harvestable boll okay.

Josh Lee

That's going to change due to the first frost date. So, the first frost date, it's going to be sooner in North Alabama than it is in central and south Alabama. So roughly I looked at some I loaded some data in the 90s. You know, I did a lot of cotton work in the 90s. And I feel like we revisit it a lot right now.

Josh Lee

It's kind of interesting what they did in the 90s and all the advancements, and we kind of look at it from a different angle, but it's pretty similar. And so, from mainly August is your last effective bloom date. It's early August in North Alabama. And then once you go and taper down, it's later into late August is your effective bloom day.

Josh Lee

It will probably go into September in some of these spots. And I'm going to caveat with this is the great answer was it depends. And it really does. It depends on the temperature fluctuation. Because if we have a period like we did last year when it was really really dry during harvest, as we went into August and September, that effective bloom date period was shortened because of the light intensity.

Josh Lee

Right? We had really good solar radiation that speeds up any kind of reproduction that speeds up our growth. So that's my caveat there. And that PGR aggressiveness kind of aids in that. Like let's say we get into more cloudy conditions, we turn a little bit cool that PGR can kind of help us increase our earliness and reduce those days to maturity.

Scott Graham

Generally speaking, how many days do you need from a white flower to a harvestable bulb?

Josh Lee

I think it's about 60 something.

Scott Graham

I was thinking was around 60.

Josh Lee

It's about 60 ish days. Of course, everything depends. But roughly yeah, we'll say roughly. So, I got a chart in my mind. That was a good one. I pulled it I was trying to remember exactly where it was

Scott Graham

60 so that’s two months.

Josh Lee

Yeah.

Scott Graham

So, that's all I remember asking Brad Meyer when I first started, I was trying to figure out what on my last bloom dates were cause you know sometimes that matters for sure. We protect those of course those squares, those flowers or not. Sure, I remember asking him. He said, well, just tell me when the first frost is, and I'll tell you what it is.

Josh Lee

Yeah, that's the best indicator. Usually. So, history, if you look at 25 and kind of look at that first frost date, you can count back and be like okay this is probably a good idea of where it is.

Chandler Gruener

You know, one more thing about the foliage I was thinking about just now is that I forgot to mention boron. Boron, normally common when we see this whole year and, you know, talk about harvesting and improving plants and stuff like that. And it's like boron is not one I've seen a lot. But, you know, we've seen some effective use of boron in the past.

Chandler Gruener

So, I just thought I'd throw that out there. So that would be something to look for people if they're having some more deficiencies.

Josh Lee

Yeah. Because boron is in you know, I haven't heard as many questions either about boron, but I have seen it around all the stations. They've got a case of it and everybody's putting it out, which is recommended, and it is needed for cotton development, cotton growth. But I haven't got as many questions as the foliar nitrogen and potassium.

Chandler Gruener

Yeah, I thought that was an interesting thing. I've been thinking about that. Some of the other crops. And so, for soybeans. You know, we've already missed the window for foliar feeding them. But you know there's some good finishing there some of them time so they can get a little bump with soybeans. We've missed the mark on that because that's typically an R1, R3 growth stage around that early reproductive.

Chandler Gruener

When the pods start to develop and start to fill. Corn, it's round around that reproductive period. So, most crops are smaller in that same window. So just covering a few of the other crops and peanuts, it kind of falls in that

maybe 60-90 days would be kind of the latest from after planting would be the good time to do the foliage on them too sometimes.

Chandler Gruener

If you're deficient and you're not always going to see a response. If you're not going to see a response, that's something to keep in mind is you got to know what you got the little bit to make that the most effective bang for the buck. But looking at corn, the corn crop's been looking good.

Chandler Gruener

I know we had a slow start this year, but everything's kind of finishing up nice right now. We got them good timely rains, just like the cotton is doing pretty good throughout the middle season. The corn's been doing pretty good here to finish up. And the soybeans are kind of in that same boat. I know we've seen a little bit of insect pressure from some beetles and stuff like that feeding, but not too bad.

Scott Graham

This says just 36 to 40 days. Flower to mature. I think that 60 sounded like a long time for cotton. Yeah, for Cotton boll.

Chandler Gruener

Have you seen any issues with soybean insects? I know we've seen a few little holes here and there.

Scott Graham

Yeah, there's some pockets and loopers, showing up in South Alabama and some places and some red band stink bugs that we've heard about too, which red bands are more damaging than our traditional species and require a little bit more attention. But generally, every peanut, cotton, soybean, it's all been pretty quiet overall.

Chandler Gruener

And all my soybeans and peanuts look pretty nice.

Scott Graham

Yeah, sometimes I wonder, you know, I always say, generally I only get a peanut question if somebody calls and asks about cotton and then they're like, oh, by the way, since I got you. And so, I wonder if I'm missing some stuff just because the cotton has been so quiet. But I think generally speaking we've been pretty fortunate this year and as far as major pests' outbreaks anyway.

Josh Lee

Nice. All right. I think that's got us wrapped up. And any last remarks?

Scott Graham

All right. Well enjoy it today guys. As always, if anybody has any topics that we'd like to discuss or anything, please let us know. And of course, if any of us with Alabama Extension could do anything to help, don't hesitate at all to reach out.

Announcer:

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