



Season 6 Episode 17 — Cotton Updates and Cover Crop Considerations

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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. Got, Scott, Josh and Chandler here today. And we're going to talk about cotton and cover crops. So how's it going guys? That's right. It's going good. How are you Scott? Doing good. Doing good as well. Wow. What a what's the crop looking like Joshua. Start there. All right.

Scott Graham

So the cotton crop in the state is it's going to vary where you're at in the state. Talked about that earlier today at the cotton specialist and agronomist. Favorite thing to say. It's how he starts it off. Chandler Well, it depends. It does. Sure does. It's like my go-to, right. You know. So we'll start north and then we'll work our way south.

Josh Lee

So north Alabama shaped up pretty dang good. I know you saw that text from Cade a couple days ago or whatever from the gym. They got some numbers. Dry land numbers, early stuff. They were picking around three bale, 1,500 pounds. So they're looking really pretty jam up up there. Up in north part of Alabama. They were pretty fortunate this season.

Josh Lee

They got a good bit of rain. Just looking at my stuff up in Bell Mina, the dry land. I've gotten probably over 25in since I planted that on May the 14th. So really timely rainfall. We did have some real significant rains. And, you know, some guys couldn't get in to put out PGR applications as timely as I wanted, myself included.

Josh Lee

I got a PGR study. But, you know, that's one of the limitations, but overall it looks pretty good. We got good fruit retention, across the state and especially up there with all this rain. So fruits setting pretty good. I haven't seen a little bit of bowl rot. But not too much to be alarming. So hopefully we can continue a trend of just dry weather to harvest and get this out of the crop, get this crop out of the field.

Josh Lee

And hopefully we'll be good from there as we move to that central part and in a talk county and, surrounding areas and that kind of stuff, they just didn't get as much rain, unfortunately. They, they caught some really dry spells. And you can see I can I walked the field the other week, I was in Lee County.

Josh Lee

How to Garret in Lee County. And man, it was it was a lot of fruit thrown off the top. Yeah. I mean, it was so dead gum dry. They definitely needed a few more rains to make it really good, but unfortunately they didn't get that rain, that nice rain. So that crop is maturing very, very fast with it being dry.

Josh Lee

It's I mean, it's probably about ready to eat now. I know we're going to do some on farm picking this week in central Alabama. So I mean we're already getting after it down this way as we move further south in south Alabama. We did have a good bit of plant of cotton this season, but overall, I mean temperatures were pretty hot.

Josh Lee

I know we're in the truck. The other day, you know, Ron was asking me about temperature, what I thought he said, I think it's hotter this year and we all agree, you know, kind of agreed. But he looked at intensity and that kind of stuff. I mean, it was pretty hot. And that crop shows it. I mean, it developed pretty dad gum fast even had this late June.

Josh Lee

I did hear a few July plants. But anyway, this really late planted stuff. It's sped it up really fast.

Scott Graham

It's incredible how quickly the late, the late planted stuff caught up to even the late planting stuff, if that makes sense.

Josh Lee

That's true.

Scott Graham

Yeah. I mean, like, you can't really tell big difference in what was planted first five, ten days of June in the last 5 or 10 days of June. It all.

Josh Lee

Know.

Scott Graham

It was up quick.

Josh Lee

Yeah. It was, it was pretty gum rapid. So, we're shaping up pretty good. I did see several fields when we were down there in the South Park. Scott. Need to be picked. Yeah, that was stuff is ready. Yeah, it needed to get out of that field. So I think that's one of the biggest driving points of the day is timely harvest.

Josh Lee

Timely defoliation leads to timely harvest.

Scott Graham

Right. Well, and I was going to ask you we both talk to somebody the other day and I saw some cotton driving. South Alabama this morning. That about as green as I've seen this time of the year, with open bowls all the way up to the top. Well, how do you address? I know there's no one size fits all, but what are the what are the things that you're thinking about that might impact what you're going to use for defoliation in a situation like that?

Josh Lee

Sure. So that's a great point Scott. So about a even this week and like last week or two weeks ago, we had a we had some pretty large rainfall events across the state. Some of these some of these places got a couple inches of drop. And so when you have all that rainfall, you know, it kind of gives cotton what I wrote in the newsletter.

Josh Lee

It kind of gives cotton new life. You know, you got this really flush of green vegetation, all these juvenile leaves, you know, and like you said, Scott, and I've got pictures sent to me. You've got this green cotton, but yet almost all of its opened up. So what do you really do there? So with that definitely going to have to change the defoliation strategy there.

Josh Lee

We're going to have to switch to some heavier use on some products like that Astron that are going to be able to control that regrowth and that juvenile growth. And for right now, kind of what I was recommended, the temperatures are still pretty hot. We're still right today. We're still in the 90s. It did look like it's going to cool off a little bit to go into the 80s, but it's still going to remain relatively hot here for the next week or so.

Scott Graham

And today is September 21st.

Josh Lee

Correct. Thank you. But yeah, I would definitely look it up in that. Right. I thought as are on just to control that new juvenile growth and prevent regrowth. That's one of that's going to be our main concerns here. Looks like bowl opening. We could drop off a little bit on the on just because we've got so much sunlight.

Josh Lee

And so sunlight is the best ingredient for a good day. Foliation right.

Scott Graham

And this hot weather you're a little bit more concerned about sticking or not necessarily.

Josh Lee

Yes. We can be concerned about, sticking. You know, if we're using products, you know, that have that tendency to stick. And that's why I kind of recommending this thought Astron product here. And that's, that's a different bunch of different trade names, bold TD, Z, that kind of thing. Those work better in warmer conditions. Whereas you've got other products.

Josh Lee

I know guys sometimes complain maybe, maybe stick a little bit. It has a little bit different mechanism that works better on those more mature leaves instead of those juvenile leaves. Yeah. So the best thing to do for me is kind of when I'm thinking about, well, what tank mix should I put, what product should I use? Number one, I always use your always look at your, you know, container on your on your spray container, your defoliant.

Josh Lee

It'll tell you the rates there. Another really good tool to use as the Mid-South defoliation guide that we've got, we've got in conjunction with the other cotton specialist in the Mid-South, and we put together this document and it's a it's a really useful tool, right. There's in the back of it, there's like a whole, strategy, like a strategy that you can kind of pick and choose based on your weather conditions and what kind of products that you prefer to use for your defoliation.

Josh Lee

You can kind of pick and choose, you know, a strategy that would best fit for you. And I was looking at it this morning, and I think a lot of folks are going to be in what they call the category two. The category two is going to be, high temperatures and high growth potential. So that's where we're going to bump up our thought Astron, maybe lower on a legs a little bit and then put, you know, quarter or so of ethephon, you know, bold something like that.

Scott Graham

Yeah. Maybe in the past in the pre jassid era, if you will. Yeah. I didn't really pay that much attention. Right. Sure. What time. You know we're 1 or 2 nodes above white flower. I'm done anyway so I'm not. But I have noticed this year because I am no matter what stage the field is that if it's still green, I'm looking for the hot spots from the highway.

Scott Graham

Right? Sure. And I just feel like there's a lot more of this young. Growth out there. Sure. Juvenile leaves, I think you call. Yeah. We're normally out of the cotton. Looks ugly. And, you know, like you want it to correct. And I guess it's just the weather that we've had is just. It's just for that.

Josh Lee

Yep. Anytime you've got, you give that crop a little bit of moisture and you've got high temps like this. You're going to have regrowth because it's a perennial crop. That's just how it behaves right.

Scott Graham

Yeah. Yeah. So I'm sure the people have dealt with this before. But to me it just seems a little unusual.

Josh Lee

Sure. Well we probably haven't seen it in a while and it's something you don't really want to see. Yeah. If you can avoid it. But. So you made a you made a really good point. You know, talking about the jassid and that kind of stuff. So what does that mean in terms of this juvenile regrowth. Do you think there'd be attracted to it or you think there's anything to it or what have you seen?

Scott Graham

I think they probably would be attracted to it, which might not be a bad thing if you get a little free help. Defoliation. Sure. You know, I mean, but overall the numbers that just across the landscape have been so low that, I mean, we flipped 1900 leaves this morning in headland and we found 37 jackets, which was, excuse me, 67, 67, which was a three fold increase, three times as many as we found last week.

Scott Graham

Okay. So the numbers are just so low out there that you knock on wood. Is that a knock on my hard head? But I just don't think we're I think we're totally through the woods now.

Josh Lee

That's awesome.

Scott Graham

I think okay.

Josh Lee

Even in that late planted stuff down in South Alabama.

Scott Graham

I think so. Okay.

Josh Lee

That's good. Yeah. Again, this is a blessing. You know, we all as researchers, we always want to find out what's doing this. And we talked I talked about this with camp.

Scott Graham

And so now you know the question is was last year just an anomaly. Is this year in anomaly because we got 30 degrees in Miami. Yeah, right. I mean that beat that sucker way for South if it doesn't get that cold and this upcoming winter, will it show up like it did in 25?

Chandler Gruener

Yeah. That's some of the thoughts that I've been having with being on the cover crop side is, you know, last year we didn't have anything over winter on the cover crops and we had sticky traps out monitoring, much like you were been monitoring them. We've been talking about this. They didn't really show up until later. So we never really got any correlation.

Chandler Gruener

Did they overwinter on cover crops in Alabama? Currently? The answer is no. They didn't make it, but was that the temperature was at the crop. And so we're going to look at it again this year. But yeah that's interesting to think about Florida. And so that'd be the kind of thing as climate we need to apparently pay attention highly to climate.

Scott Graham

Yeah. And not just where we are. You know we know it's cold here, but, how cold is it south of us? Because the further, the further south it gets really cold. I think the further south that Jess is going to be beat back. And then it's just a it's just a game of can we get it in and out before it really establishes.

Chandler Gruener

Yeah, that's another thing. It's like the last two years. The one kind of similarity is if we didn't have any hurricanes push air into us. Too bad. For the most part, the hurricanes kind of move from west to east, and they didn't really open to Alabama like previous years. So the last two years we've been in anomaly like that.

Scott Graham

Was this the first year we didn't have one anywhere? I see that on the internet.

Josh Lee

You talked about for 26.

Scott Graham

Yeah.

Josh Lee

Oh, I.

Scott Graham

Don't know. We didn't have a single hurricane. Right.

Chandler Gruener

I think they're just tropical storms.

Scott Graham

Yeah.

Josh Lee

Well, we need to keep that. Keep that true until we get until we get on out of this. So, Chandler, you were talking about some cover crop species and all that kind of stuff. So we got folks, you know, harvesting, getting cotton out of there and thinking about, you know, putting in some cover crop species. So I was just going to throw it over to you and get your thoughts and opinions as guys get going.

Chandler Gruener

Yes. A lot of people have been reaching out and, you know, looking at cover crop species. And I think there's some that are, you know, considering different options. And so some questions like mentioned about insects, is there any concern for overwintering. And so with dresses we didn't see anything. There are other insects that could overwinter on cover crops.

Chandler Gruener

I know that's a concern. You know getting them out timely in the springtime, picking one that matures quick enough so you get the benefit of the cover crop, but then also you can get it terminated and get it out of there. So you get that little bit of a break window so you don't have that. Green bridge is another key element.

Chandler Gruener

So with all cover crops I kind of like to set forward with kind of like have a plan in place. Like what is your goal? Are you trying to fix nitrogen or are you trying to cover the ground? What are you trying to do? Once you know your goal? That kind of helps determine a little bit more of your methodology if and how you're going to get A to B, because if you're working on fixing nitrogen, you're going to look at a species, you're going to look at an early maturing variety, like a sunrise would be a good crimson clover early maturing variety.

Chandler Gruener

But if you're looking at something a little bit later, you know you have a little bit bigger window. So maybe your next crop is you're not going to put it until late soybean, maybe you're going to go with a little bit later mature item. And you're not worried about nitrogen fixation because you're going to soybean. So you're going to look at like a later maturing like a Florida 401 zero rye.

Chandler Gruener

But if you're going to get a little bit cooler sooner, or maybe you're going to look at it. Right. And so it kind of depends on what your goal is and what your timing is. It kind of which cover crop species. I also know that a lot of dealers have also spoke about there's a little bit earlier or not earlier, but more varieties of.

Chandler Gruener

So that's opting up some earlier maturity varieties that were available. And there's been some seed increases for different varieties that have kind of shown up in different markets. So people are starting to explore some other options. I would like to recommend stick with something you're kind of comfortable with, but then explore on some of your fields with them, maybe a new variety that matures at different timing.

Chandler Gruener

That way you can kind of get a little bit feel for it and see if that's what you want to do your whole farm on next year or not. Also exploring the payment options. I know that with all the prices and everything right now, maybe

cover crops is something you're not considering because of the price, but there are some different options out there for payments and stuff like that, for soil health measurements and stuff like that.

Chandler Gruener

And so some of them might be available. So I would always check into that system to, to see if you can qualify for something like that to help offset some of them. Cost for putting the seeds in the ground.

Scott Graham

Those tend to be blends, right. Mixture.

Chandler Gruener

So yeah, there's a lot of blends that can be come into that. Some of them do specify blends and some just funding sources do not specify the blends. But if you are doing a blend, kind of the simple way to do a blend would be have like a brassica, like a radish or a canola, and then having a legume fixings thing like a clover, and then having like a cereal in there.

Chandler Gruener

That's kind of like your basic. And then if you put a warm in a cool season grass in there. So if you get a little bit of growth in the fall, a little bit of growth in the spring, that's kind of like the thing if they let you specify a blend them are kind of the main elements I look for as a warm season in a cool season, grass brassica and then a lagoon nitrogen fixing broadleaf.

Scott Graham

So I've never thought about this before. If I'm going to do that. Do I get to pick what specific varieties or to those tend to come in like a pre package blend and you just kind of get what you get. If you're if you're doing a blend.

Chandler Gruener

There's kind of two different options there. There are blends available at most seed stores. They do have, you know two way, three way, five way, ten way, 12 way, 13 way blends that are available sitting in the shop.

Josh Lee

Those 13 way blends I will have to take my.

Scott Graham

Shoes off to.

Josh Lee

Count that. Yeah. You didn't start counting toes.

Chandler Gruener

I've seen some different ones advertised, and some people put a sprinkle of everything in there and kind of what it comes out to being, and there's pros and cons to doing them higher blends. A lot of times when you have higher blends, what with any blend you can run into an issue is if it's done by weight. As you think about Clover seed, it's only 5 pounds to the acre.

Chandler Gruener

But if we do equal clover to equal cereal rye, you're gonna put a whole bunch of clover seed and very few cereal right now. If you're wanting a 7330 split, then doing it by weight works 5050 weight works. But if you're not wanting that 7330 plant coverage area split, you're need to think about it by plant population. So that's a lot of things we don't think about when we're buying cover crop seed is we don't talk about on plant population.

Chandler Gruener

We usually talk about it in pounds per acre because that's what you're required to drill it in. If you're getting some of them cost share programs, as they say, how many pounds? And they give you a list of species and you pick from there, and then they come out and verify that you did them species or whatever, and they check your receipts and everything.

Chandler Gruener

So a lot of people are looking at pounds, but remember that pounds, how it translates to population. And clover is especially important because some seeds are so small that if it's coated and uncoated, will really vary the weight. And so that'll greatly impact your population.

Scott Graham

Has never really thought about that before.

Chandler Gruener

Yeah, that's a it's a common thing that doesn't always happen. And then sometimes in the springtime someone will call out like, why do you call me out there? And I'll look at it and be like, oh, why do you think this or this didn't happen? And we'll usually go back to the receipts of what they bought, and it's usually tied back to what they bought.

Scott Graham

So you said clover is typically 5 pounds per acre.

Chandler Gruener

If it's, like a Duran, a white clover would be 5 or 8 pounds a year. White clover.

Scott Graham

And that's by itself. Yep. So do you. I mean, you gotta naturally cut that back a little bit, right? Yes. Because you're also planting 10 pounds of rye. Whatever. Is that how that works? Not necessarily. I assume, but if you. I'm just. Again, I'm just a dirt kicking in, Amalia. Just. But I assume if I plant crimson clover cereal.

Scott Graham

Right. And, tillage radish at the same time, they're not all going to emerge the same time.

Chandler Gruener

That is correct. They want all emergence time. And that's a debate. As if you want to have a merchant, different timings or layers. But a lot of times if you have a cereal crop in there, a lot of times they'll get up and they'll start taking away a lot of that sunlight. Yeah. And then it'll make it really hard for your brass.

Josh Lee

But I.

Chandler Gruener

Think your clovers that you just mentioned, so a lot of times I like to pull my cereals down a little bit more. So instead of being a third or third or third in your mix, for example, three way instead of doing it even thirds, I try to pull the cereal down just a little bit more, unless we're doing it based on cost, and then we'll just keep this here up a little bit.

Chandler Gruener

If we don't want to invest as much in clover seed, that might be a little more expensive. But if we're sticking with the third or third, a third. And so we'll cut down that first third. And so we'll get to maybe we'll do 20% for that. Take the other 80%. So it'll be 40 and 40 and then 20%.

Chandler Gruener

So 40 for the clover and 44 year brassica. And that way they get a little bit more opportunity to grow up in the springtime.

Scott Graham

Because you got three plants there that are all competing for the exact same resource in the in a time of the year where resources are not abundant, right. Whether that's rainfall or too much rain or, you know, temperatures and all that kind of stuff. So I, you know, I know I've had complications and heartburn and headaches. I'm all of my own trying to get cover crops established for research plots.

Scott Graham

And to be honest, I never just really thought about that, of how complicated that could be, of trying to get Clover, Christian, Clover and cereal to come up and have good emergence of both when you're playing them out at the same time, because if you're drilling them and they just coming out of a little tube.

Chandler Gruener

Yeah. So if you're using a drill so you have that box in the back seat, pour it in there. And a lot of people.

Scott Graham

Well you don't have see it's just dribbling in.

Chandler Gruener

Yeah. It's just drilling.

Scott Graham

Yeah. So you're not getting you're getting highly variable seeds for contact. And once been put away under the other one and.

Chandler Gruener

And that's another you bring up another point in debate is how deep do you put them in the ground. Because if you're mixing like I for a summer cover crop on some land, that was prevent plant, we put out a sorghum and then, iron and clay piece iron clay peas is much larger than a sorghum seed. So it brings in that seed difference in size.

Chandler Gruener

And so I balanced it out to make the plant population similar. And I know sorghum fills in a little bit, and the ironclad peas can fill in gaps pretty nicely and they'll climb up it. So I want pretty close to level population. So I did it based on population not actually based on seed weight that blend between it.

Chandler Gruener

Yeah. And so I ended up balancing it that way. But what happened is, is yeah, you get to do that debate. Do you want to put a quarter inch down or do you want to go an inch and a half? Some of it depends on how much moisture we have and how soon do we think we're going to get a rain.

Chandler Gruener

If we think we're going to get a rain, like, let's say there's a rain forecast for the next day, you can drill a little bit shallower and get away with it. But if you don't think you're gonna get rained for a while or you know there's moisture down below, drill it in deeper. Now the clovers are going to struggle if you go too deep.

Chandler Gruener

So you got to keep that in mind. So go the maybe the highest depth of your clover. Depends on what clover species we were talking about. How deep to go to lowest depth of that and then go to the shallowest. You can put your cereal rye or your other grass growing.

Scott Graham

Josh, we're not even going to do the calculus on how do you figure out what your how many seeds you need breaker for clover to try to get I.

Josh Lee

I just work cotton.

Chandler Gruener

Yeah that's it. Yeah. If you do need assistance, reach out to me and I can balance that out quick.

Josh Lee

Chandler. Be glad to help.

Scott Graham

Yeah, I may have to give a little bit more credit to these, these cover crop type folks, I don't know.

Josh Lee

Yeah, there's a lot going on.

Scott Graham

Yeah.

Josh Lee

A lot going on. A lot to consider. So one last thing I do want to talk about, just real fast, is just on farm safety. When we get into harvest and picking, there's a lot of stuff that's moving around. Tractor pickers, boll buggies, just folks moving around in general to and from the gin.

Scott Graham

Or digging peanuts.

Josh Lee

Digging peanuts.

Scott Graham

Corns, probably about all out.

Josh Lee

Corn should be some beans.

Scott Graham

You know, growing. Yeah. There's a lot of a lot of moving parts out there right now.

Chandler Gruener

Yeah.

Josh Lee

So big thing, you know, make sure if you do have like a planter or not planer but a harvester checklist, you know, that kind of thing. Just kind of check and make sure everything is good to go and all that before you get out there and just take your time. I know everybody likes getting a hurry and everybody wants to get it done, but, you know, just take a second, make sure everybody's good to go.

Josh Lee

I know I'm guilty of it, too. We like to get in a hurry and go and want to be done. But just be safe out there as we go on.

Scott Graham

There's one more thing. We can't let our cotton agronomists get out of here without giving us a yield projection. Alright, so tell us what you say says right now, and then tell us what it's actually going to be.

Josh Lee

All right. So the USDA has got it. Alabama estimated it went up since August. Now in September they've got it at 986 986 pounds.

Chandler Gruener

Which.

Scott Graham

Would be pretty good.

Josh Lee

I. I, I'd be very happy with.

Scott Graham

That for 90% job land. That'd be.

Josh Lee

Pretty good and late planted stuff and a good bit of light blind stuff that would be really good. So I don't know what. I think we're going to be lower than that, unfortunately. How low? I'm not really sure, but I'm hoping we're hopefully close to that.

Chandler Gruener

None that.

Josh Lee

None standpoint. What I say in the truck, I think. 925.

Scott Graham

Yeah.

Josh Lee

Something like that. Yeah. We had a bit in the truck 20 several of seeing who was going to be it. Yeah, I did write it down by the way. We did, I did, I got it I don't know what the prize is, but we do have it on record.

Scott Graham

Depends on if all winter.

Josh Lee

Is that. Oh okay. Okay.

Scott Graham

If you win, the winner buys everybody ice cream. If I win, then whoever was the furthest off buys everybody ice cream.

Josh Lee

Gelato, gelato gelato.

Scott Graham

That's right.

Josh Lee

Do we know what the prices are currently right now? Is there any fluctuation on that with. Yeah fuel changing price right now. Yeah. So it's kind of been a whirlwind of pricing. You know a couple of weeks ago we were up in the 90s. We peaked at about 93 something \$0.93. And now it's really it's been on the downhill here the past over the week I think we're down.

Josh Lee

We're down in the 80s. And I know for a fact we're down in the 80s. Let me tell you an exact number for today. Yeah. They're the 26 futures or December or \$0.83. So we went all the way from a peak at 93. Now we're back down into the 80s. So, hopefully it should come back up. It's kind of it's been kind of variable.

Josh Lee

So I know a bunch of guys and you know, they've already got them in, you know, with staple and other places, you know, book and cotton. So hopefully guys were able to take advantage of that and book a book a decent amount of cotton. I know a lot of guys wanted to wait, kind of see what this crop was doing, and that I think when that 90 mark hit, it was a good opportunity for a lot of growers to kind of they had a good sense of what their crop was going to produce, and they went ahead and took advantage of that.

Josh Lee

It's probably why it didn't stay there for a real time. Oh, no. Look out in 90, 91, 92, 93. Yeah, I hope so. Anyway. I sure hope so. What happened? I sure hope so. That's the best case scenario with diesel the way it is. I hope they did. Boy, I ain't kidding. That's that's one last very one last thing.

Josh Lee

Then we're going to get out of here. But one last thing is like when we're looking at defoliation you know, a one versus a two pass system. Guys, if we can utilize that one pass system, there's a few growers and a few places, and I see some instances where it could possibly be used for a two part system.

Josh Lee

But man, if we can get away with that one pass system, we're saving time, we're saving money, we're saving product. Yeah.

Scott Graham

We didn't really think about that or mentioned that. But this all this juvenile growth we have out there might.

Josh Lee

Yes.,

Scott Graham

Might cause that. And I'm with you in that. I would do my bag on best on the first pass. Yes. And if I gotta come back, I know I can, but I would, I wouldn't just playing for two.

Josh Lee

No. At six plus a gallon diesel. No. Yeah. Don't do it.

Scott Graham

629 at the Hobo Pantry. And you follow it. Yeah.

Josh Lee

It's a little higher going towards Montgomery. I seen on Sunday about 670. Whoa. The world is that off the interstate? Yeah. Oh my gosh. We man. Hey. Want to get the electric rig? I guess so. And yeah, that's.

Scott Graham

All right. Well, guys enjoyed it. Good. Good information. I learned something today from both of yours, I appreciate that. Oh, as always, if any of us at Alabama Extension can do anything to help, or if there's a something that we need to talk about, please don't hesitate to reach out and let us know.

Announcer:

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