

In General:

Some of you are still struggling with late cotton; but thankfully most of the crop was out of the field before rains arrived last week. It's discouraging to look at those last few fields as they sit out in the rain; but we will likely get another window or two when we can wrap these up as well. Considering all the challenges we've had, things have turned out better than many of us had expected. We have a lot of reasons to be thankful on Thanksgiving this year.

Cotton:

Let's begin with cotton, since it is the crop that is on the minds of most of who are still trying to finish the harvest. The same old fact that we are growing this perennial as an annual came back to haunt us this year. Early planted fields reached cutout during the midsummer drought, then produced almost an entire new plant in regrowth during and following the hurricane season. Late planted fields actually had as much or even more potential; but then the late October frosts proved most of that optimism false.

In central Mississippi, something like a third of our cotton was planted during the last week of May and the first week of June. We knew this was risky; but now we are paying for our gamble. The combination of late planting and early maturing varieties have produce some respectable yields; but mid to late maturing varieties have been hurt both in yield and likely in quality as well. Sometimes we forget basic facts; but we have been reminded this year that full season varieties should not be planted near the end of the planting season.

My main cotton variety trial is still waiting for the picker; but we harvested a conventional variety trial. The results of this trial are included below. Among the 20 B2RF varieties in my trial, boll retention ratings have ranged from 48% to 88%, with the main effect being earliness. Yields will almost certainly be correlated with earliness as well.

There are still a lot of negative feelings about cotton for 2009. Contract prices have fallen to very low levels. I am still optimistic that demand will increase; but then my ideas (and hopes) may be wrong. We have time for a lot of things to happen before next spring; and from the way things look, change is in the air.

Soybeans:

The late soybean plantings were generally our most productive this year. It's difficult to believe that beans planted after wheat could produce the yields we have seen. A double cropped trial near Kilmichael produced yields ranging from 49

to 65 bushels per acre; and quality was excellent. I think we all know this is not something to depend upon in the future.

Soybean plantings will almost certainly expand next year if present market conditions continue. Not only do prices remain attractive; but the other big incentive is that soybeans provide their own nitrogen. However, we must recognize that soybeans draw large amounts of phosphorus and potassium from the soil that must be replaced. Another factor that is often overlooked is that soybeans reduce soil pH levels in accordance with the amount of N fixed from the atmosphere by direct exudation of organic acids and hydrogen ions into the soil. Many producers have deceived themselves into believing that soybeans can be grown without the attention to soil fertility and pH that are accepted for crops like cotton and corn. This could not be further from the truth. Soybeans do not offer a "free ride" on soil fertility. They will deplete soil nutrients and drive down soil pH at least as rapidly as other crops. This is the reason growers have seen dramatic declines in soybean yields during past soybean planting booms when these issues have not been correctly addressed.

Rotation is at least as important for soybeans as for other crops like cotton and corn. Alternation of herbicide systems, breaking the disease and insect cycles associated with each crop, and varying the systems by which each crop removes soil nutrients offer advantages within a well managed rotation system. I know we have to grow the crops demanded by market factors; but we need to maintain a rotation system as best we can. Ideally, cotton should follow corn, and soybean should follow cotton. Corn does well following either cotton or soybean.

A very big problem many producers have experienced this year has been "stay-green" syndrome. Beans may dry down enough for the combine; but stalks and in some cases all the leaves, remain active and green. Treatment with paraquat may dry the leaves; but stalks stay green after the application. This leads to difficult harvesting; and reaching moisture levels suitable for delivery to elevators is difficult. This problem seems to be getting worse each year.

Drs. Koger, Catchot, and others recently prepared a list of soybean varieties that are produced and sold by multiple seed companies. This document has simplified the selection of varieties by informing producers which varieties are duplicated by two or more companies. It also identifies production characteristics favorable for many of the varieties that are planted, such as soil type preference, adaptability for irrigation, herbicide tolerance, and others. It is too large to include here; but we can send copies on request.

Corn:

We've seen a large variation in corn yields this year, depending upon variety, planting date, rainfall, field history, tillage system, and other factors. Yields below 50 bushels per acre were experienced on soils with pH and fertility problems; and drought effects were compounded on these fields as well. Generally, yields were somewhat below last year; however with good soil fertility and management we maintained dryland yield levels in the 130 bushels per acre or better category. Areas blessed with a little more rain achieved dryland yields above 150 bushels per acre. Irrigated corn yields commonly ranged from 225 to 275; but there were isolated yields even higher. We can grow corn very well; but there is no substitute for water. There is little doubt that some varieties have more drought tolerance than others; and we need to expand our plantings of these.

The question for corn in 2009 is: "Can we afford to grow it, considering costs and expected returns?" At the moment, I feel that most producers will answer negatively; but a lot can happen between now and planting time.

Wheat:

I understand that wheat seed are being sold, but at a much slower pace than last year. Several producers who had expressed plans to grow wheat have backed away from it within the last few days, stating high costs for all inputs and reduced grain prices as reasons for their change in plans. Another major factor mentioned by most of the growers I have talked with has been the high basis charges being taken by elevators. Basis levels above \$2 per bushel were severe last spring when wheat was at the highest price levels in history; but since prices have been reduce almost by half these charges are not acceptable at all, and will prevent the planting of another big wheat crop unless something is changed very quickly.

Those brave souls who go ahead with wheat planting may be in good shape when the market "sees" that a major acreage drop is a reality; but this is a gamble. Carryover supplies of wheat are not in much better shape than they were last year at this time; but the small safety margin could disappear quickly after only one or two yield reductions in major wheat producing areas. Planting wheat may still be as good a bet as any of the other crops we grow; but I can't suggest that anyone take the risk based on present information.

Soil:

Maintaining soil fertility levels has proven to be one of the biggest challenges for everyone growing crops. Since fertilizer prices reached the extremes of last season, lots of people have been drawing on reserves accumulated through years of soil testing and over-application. These reserves are being depleted now more rapidly than most people realize; and we will soon be at a point where yields will begin to drop noticeably. This may begin in 2009 if current trends continue in fertilizers. Through the years, we have advocated soil

testing and the application of fertilizers to meet actual crop needs; but only recently have many producers initiated strict programs driven by soil tests, yield maps, and yield goals. As usual, we have waited until economic realities have forced the issue.

A lot of attention has been given to the application of animal manures and other organic waste products. Prices for these materials have risen along with other nutrient supplies; however in most cases they are still economically viable alternatives to conventional fertilizers. The problem with organic materials like poultry litter is that their nutrient content is variable; and plant nutrients contained in these products become available slowly. Demand has already increased beyond the supply; and some poultry growers are beginning to grow crops rather than allow the value in this resource to escape them. All crops seem to do well following years of poultry litter application; and this is a good means to draw down the levels of nutrients, especially phosphorus, that have reach extremely high levels on many of these farms.

Soil testing is still, and always will be, the critical first step in determining soil nutrient needs. I have been amazed at how hard some people work at avoiding this simple task; but without it we are in a guessing game. Soil testing, combined with yield maps and variable rate application can target soil nutrient needs well and actually reduce the amount of fertilizer needed in many situations.

In Conclusion:

One of my most faithful readers commented to me recently that my articles and letters have taken on a negative flavor that has not been a part of my work in the past. I realize that he is correct; and I need to qualify my statements by saying that I have faith that we will somehow deal with present problems and remain strong; however we have to face the challenges we have with the full knowledge that they will not solve themselves. It seems today that suppliers are trying to see just how much more they can extract from the system. Farmers are caught between consumers who are in a financial squeeze and product suppliers who are trying to satisfy demanding stockholders and boards of directors. Many of our best farmers are at retirement age, and many of them have "had enough" of this rat race. If we want agriculture to remain viable, farmers must be allowed to be profitable so that their sons and daughters will keep farming. Thanks for your time.

Sincerely,



Ernest H. Flint, Ph.D., CCA

Area Agent – Agronomic Crops

Events: Cotton Short Course – Dec. 1, 2. Bost Extension Center - MSU
Registration begins 8:30, Program starts at 10AM on Dec. 1. \$80
preregistration, \$100 at the door. Info: 662-325-2701

Figure 1. Conventional cotton variety trial - Carter Farm at Walnut Grove, MS

Variety	SC/Ac.	38% Lint (Est.)
All Tex TopPick	2112	802
All Tex AW 102	2666	1013
CT 110	2673	1015
CT 210	2142	814
CT 211	2045	777
CT 212	2231	848
CT 310	2369	900
CT Linwood	2343	890
Carter	2264	860

Figure 2. Preferred Soybean Variety List for 2009 (Extract from original document available on msucares.com)

Roundup Ready Maturity Group III's					
Hornbeck 3927 Asgrow 3803**	NK 539-A3 Progeny 3906**	Armor 39-K4	Asgrow 3905	Asgrow 3906	
Roundup Ready Maturity Group IV's (Early)					
Asgrow DK4866-51 ¹ Pioneer 94B73 Schillinger 457**	NK 546-U6 DynaGro 33Y45 DK 4867	Asgrow 4403 Morsoy 4556**	Hornbeck 4527 Asgrow 4605	NK 544-D5** Asgrow 4703	Progeny 4206 Terral 46R15
Roundup Ready Maturity Group IV's (Late)					
Asgrow DK4866 ¹ Schillinger 495 Delta Grow 4975	Hornbeck 4924 Progeny 4906 Stine 4782-4**	Asgrow 4503 Delta King 4966 Dyna-Gro 37P49	Asgrow DP4888 ¹ Terral 47R18**	Delta Grow 4970 AgVenture 49X9** Terral 49R17	
Roundup Ready Maturity Group V's (Early)					
Pioneer 95M50 Asgrow DK5068 ¹ Hornbeck 5226 NK 552-F2** Progeny 5650	NK 556-D7 Hornbeck 5525 Terral 55R15 Pioneer 95B43 Asgrow DP5634 ¹	Asgrow DP5335 ¹ FFR 5663 Progeny 4949 Armor GP-500** Dyna-Gro 35F55**	Delta Grow 5555 Terral 54R25** Armor GP-533 Dyna-Gro 33B52 AgVenture 54X4**	AgVenture 51X5** Dyna-Gro 32A53** AgVenture 50X6** Delta King 52K6	
Roundup Ready Maturity Group V's (Late)					
Terral 59R16 Terral 57R16	Progeny 5706 Asgrow 5905	Dyna-Gro 33C59	Asgrow DP5808 ¹	Delta Grow 5970	
Conventional varieties					
Maturity Group IV's Hornbeck 4926	Maturity Group V's (Early) Hornbeck C5025 USG 5002T Hutcheson	Maturity Group V's (Late) Jake Stoddard	Maturity Group V's (Late) Osage		

*Promising new variety, not widely grown in production fields; but performed well in trials.

Figure 3. MSU Corn Demonstration Program – 2008 Yield Summary for dryland Locations

Brand	Hybrid	Trait(s)	Schlater	Valden	Raymond	Magee - Fallow	Magee - Ryegrass	Eupora	West Point	Potts Camp*	Average
Crow's	5304	VT3	118.6	197.4	109.1	114.5	104.2	121.1	140.1	213.9	129.3
DEKALB	DK051-19	VT3	--	170.2	131.1	114.2	115.1	123.1	149.6	226.9	--
DEKALB	DK052-99	RR2/YGCB	115.1	163.4	142.8	123.5	105.6	128.2	148.7	216.9	132.5
DEKALB	DK053-42	VT3	94.4	153.3	106.1	106.5	96.5	104.3	123.7	210.9	112.1
DEKALB	DK057-23	RR2/YGCB	131.5	147.5	92.1	96.7	52.4	135.4	135.1	246.0	113.0
DEKALB	DK057-87	RR2/YGCB	103.1	177.2	90.1	103.3	62.5	142.3	134.3	250.6	116.1
Dyna Gro	57V05	VT3	112.9	184.6	111.5	97.6	88.5	129.9	141.9	218.3	123.8
NK	N77-P5	CBLL	--	175.7	--	100.3	93.6	90.1	139.8	--	--
Pioneer	31G71	Hx/LL/RR2	117.9	163.6	99.6	89.2	67.1	139.1	142.6	233.9	117.0
Pioneer	31G96	Hx/LL/RR2	134.8	185.3	79.0	104.1	80.0	134.2	138.3	238.6	122.2
Pioneer	31P40	RR2	122.4	--	122.5	98.6	96.2	96.7	137.8	237.3	--
Pioneer	31P42	Hx/LL/RR2	115.8	179.1	155.7	100.4	91.7	115.1	140.9	243.4	128.4
Pioneer	33N58	Hx/LL/RR2	103.7	196.9	138.6	119.5	81.4	142.1	128.9	231.6	130.2
Terral	TV25BR23	RR2/YGCB	117.0	178.5	125.8	113.9	98.0	111.7	140.0	198.1	126.4
Terral	TV25R31	RR2	104.3	166.1	102.4	103.1	65.5	118.6	139.9	217.3	114.3
Terral	TV26TR41	VT3	111.7	170.2	114.7	113.1	70.5	138.8	133.6	219.0	121.8
Terral	TV26BR61	RR2/YGCB	103.9	175.8	105.0	110.7	100.1	107.3	121.7	204.3	117.8
Location Average			114.7	174.2	114.7	105.7	86.6	122.1	138.8	227.4	122.1

*The Potts Camp location was irrigated. Thus, yield data from this location are not included in the dryland average.

Figure 4. Dryland corn variety suggestions for 2009

Hybrid	Technology Trait(s)*	Genetic Isoline(s)	Maturity (Days)
Standards (tested multiple years)			
Pioneer 31G96	Hx/LL/RR2	31G97, 31G98	117
Golden Acres 2831RRB	RR2/YGCB	--	115
Terral TV26BR61	RR2/YGCB	--	115
Pioneer 33N58	Hx/LL/RR2	33N56	114
Terral TV25R31	RR2	--	115
Pioneer 31G71	Hx/LL/RR2	31G66	119
DEKALB DKC67-87	RR2/YGCB	--	117
Terral TV25BR23	RR2/YGCB	--	115
Terral TV26BR41	RR2/YGCB	--	115
Dyna Gro 57K58	RR2	58P59	115
Dyna Gro 57K33	RR2	57N96, 57P12	114
Terral TV25BR71	RR/YGCB	--	115
New (first year tested)			
AgriGold A6489VT3	VT3	--	112
Terral TV24R83	RR2	--	114
Pioneer 31P42	Hx/LL/RR2	31P41	119
Northrup King N77P	GT/CB/LL	--	112
USG 80B00	Conventional	--	116
USG 82C00	Conventional	--	115

Figure 5. DAP price graph 1990 to 2008

