



Tailgate Talk

By: Jeff Thompson

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There is no better cure for a 2018 crop hangover than to have planters in the field putting a new crop in the ground. This time of year is always special as we start with a clean slate and every field has two bale plus potential. Better yet, compared to last year soil moisture conditions are much improved as are prices. As we look ahead to an excellent crop season, I am initiating a new commentary called "Tailgate Talk." As I speak with producers every day, this will be an attempt to pass along many of the topics being discussed throughout the cotton belt. Though most of these conversations will focus on production, as everyone knows when talking from a tailgate no topic or subject is off limits. Let me encourage you to take an active part in this, as if on the back of the truck with me, by sharing your comments or offer up topics for discussion. To do so, send an email to jthompson@choicecotton.com.

Earliness

Every year I reflect on the previous crop season in hopes of learning something to aid us going forward. Though the 2018 crop had many twists

and turns, the biggest take away, in my opinion, is the importance of EARLINESS. Getting a crop made and getting it the heck out of the field. The longer a crop stays in the field the more vulnerable it becomes to yield and fiber quality losses, last year being a prime example. There are several factors which play a role in crop maturity. Though we will talk about some of these in more detail as the season progresses, here is a brief list.

Variety Selection

In reality, there is only maybe a week or two difference in maturity between today's early varieties and full season varieties. At this stage of planting choose varieties based on yield performance rather than maturity. Today's varieties fruit much faster than those before and offer greater yield potential because of superior genetics. Now If we get out to late May and June still planting cotton then an early maturing variety would be recommended.

Nitrogen Fertility

Research has shown yield increases in cotton level out at around 100 pounds of N per acre. Rates more than this amount provide little yield advantage but can promote excessive vegetative growth which in turn will

hinder insect control, promote boll rot, and delay cut out. The optimum range for N fertilization should be 80 to 100 pounds per acre.

Plant Growth Regulators

Though some might tell you otherwise, the use of PGRs does not increase yield directly. Instead, it shortens plant height and encourages fruit retention. The latter being very important in enhancing maturity. Genetically, some varieties have a much more aggressive growth habit than others. When applying PGRs to these varieties match their aggressiveness by beginning early with liberal rates.

Insect Management

Insect control may be the most important factor to consider when trying to get a crop made in a timely manner. Fruit loss to insects not only reduces yields but will stimulate vegetative growth thus delaying maturity. Do all that's necessary to keep insect pests below economic threshold levels with special emphasis on early season plant bug control. A few dollars saved on insect control in June and July could cost you much more come harvest.

Cotton Thrips Control

Thrips are the only cotton pest we can say with certainty will be present in cotton fields every year. For this reason, it's the only cotton pest wherein preventative insecticidal treatments are recommended. In recent years, the most common control option for thrips have been commercial seed treatments with either Cruiser, Avicta or Gaucho,

Aeris. Gaucho and Aeris are the most commonly used and are recommended since resistance in thrips to Cruiser and Avicta has been increasing. Being of similar chemistry it's likely resistance will occur to Gaucho and Aeris in time, as some entomologists have already detected.

Therefore, be prepared to supplement seed treatments with a foliar insecticide application such as Dimethoate or Orthene if thrips are present on young seedlings. But be mindful foliar treatments can trigger secondary pests, such as spider mites if conditions are conducive. The optimum time for a foliar application is at the 1 to 2 true leaf stage. Those of you set up to apply in furrow insecticides have another option either a granular formulation of aldicarb or a liquid formulation of imidacloprid or acephate. In furrow applications will provide longer, residual control.

Most susceptible to thrips damage is cotton planted prior to May 10th. However, this date can vary because the movement of thrips into cotton can be influenced by late winter and early spring weather. In minimum tillage systems and where cover crop residue is plentiful look for thrips pressure to be lighter. Once a cotton seedling gets to the 4th leaf stage and growing off well, thrips should no longer be an economic concern.

Grasshopper Control

I hesitated even mentioning grasshopper control since they are such

a sporadic pest in cotton. However, Ron Smith has indicated immature grasshoppers are being seen in large numbers in certain areas this spring. Also, this pest was a significant problem throughout the Southeast last year. Grasshoppers damage cotton by feeding on the seedling stem resulting in stand losses. Since pressure from this insect varies year to year there is no economic threshold to base treatment decisions upon. Instead, one must decide on how much risk one is willing to take if grasshoppers are present in high numbers while cotton is in the seedling stage. Outside of preventative treatments where insecticides are added to the burndown application, a producer has two options. An insecticide growth regulator such as Dimilin has shown to be most effective on the immature stages of this insect. This material provides residual control which could be very beneficial since grasshoppers may move into fields over a long period of time. This material has no effect on adult grasshoppers, however. Lastly, Orthene applied at 0.6 pounds per acre offers excellent control of the adults. Keep in mind, also, grasshoppers tend to be worse in sandier soils.

Until next time,

“Agriculture is the most healthful, most useful and most noble employment of man.”
George Washington

