

# THE TURN ROW



JULY  
9  
2020

## SOCIAL DISTANCING IN A COTTON FIELD

By: Jeff Thompson & David Mullins

It's a crazy world in which we live. Every time it appears the worst is over and a new normalcy is near, we're dealt another blow. COVID-19, COVID-19 round 2, civil unrest, racial divide, a very contentious Presidential election, strained relationship with China, Saharan dust...what's next? A swarm of locust? Overwhelming to say the least and certainly enough to try our soul, it's times like these everyone needs an escape to a place where things make sense and the mind can focus on the task at hand. Walking cotton fields has always been my escape. Going back to when I first scouted cotton in the mid 70's to supervising scouts as a county agent to sharing such walks with many of you over the past 40 years, time spent in a cotton field is my getaway. There is an allure with cotton in that no two growing seasons are ever alike. With so much to observe, you quickly get lost in the wonders of nature. A lot will happen over the next three months so what better place to watch it unfold than in a cotton field. Not to mention we'll be abiding by the social distancing rule, a practice I think cotton scouts invented.

### SOUTHEAST CONDITIONS

Cotton in the Southeast encompasses a wide range of maturity. But I've never seen a crop improve as much as this one has in the past month. Besieged by terrible growing conditions all of May, June brought with it the perfect combination of heat and rainfall. Looking more like cotton, the crop is in high gear putting a strain on getting things done in a timely manner. Layby applications are being made on the older cotton while fertilizer is being applied to the younger. In addition, auxin herbicide applications are going out in between. In turn, the burst of vegetative growth has created a need for plant growth regulators. If this isn't enough, tarnished plant bugs have been migrating into cotton thus challenging economic threshold levels. The Southeast crop is off to a great start and has the potential for above-average yield. If there is a



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 **AUTAUGA**  
QUALITY COTTON

  
**CHOICE**  
COTTON

weak area, it would be the Carolinas which had such a poor start. Below is the percentage rated good to excellent by state in USDA's latest crop conditions report.

Alabama	83%
Georgia	69%
N. Carolina	63%
S. Carolina	62%
Virginia	96%

### **SOUTHWEST CONDITIONS**

Though parts of West Texas did receive rainfall last week, it came too late for most of the dryland crop. Very little dryland cotton remains on the High Plains, and a sizeable amount across the Rolling Plains will likely be abandoned as well. The early planted irrigated cotton has started to bloom and a lot of it looks good. It just needs a rain. The recent rains have been spotty and many of the same areas continue getting the rain while others haven't seen rain in quite some time. Looking ahead, the forecast shows little chance for rain and temperatures over 105°F for the next several days. But



*Pinhead square damage on cotton.*

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cotton is a resilient plant. A widespread rain at the end of July could still turn things around for what cotton is left standing.

### **PLANT BUG MANAGEMENT**

Managing plant bugs this year has been made a little more difficult. Routinely, adult plant bugs leave wild host plants for the more attractive cotton. This year, sustained by June rains, host plants have remained lush thus slowing the insect's migration. Such a prolonged migration often leads to adults being present in cotton but at sub-economic threshold levels. Herein lies the difficulty. In addition to feeding on squares, these adults are laying eggs in the stems, so if untreated, heavy pressure from the second-generation immatures can be expected at first bloom. To minimize this, the recommended treatment threshold for adults in pre-bloom is eight per 100 sweeps or when pinhead square retention falls below 80 percent. Considering the recent wet weather, I would be very liberal with my threshold if the numbers are even close to the recommendation. I would piggyback an insecticide with other over-the-top applications.

Once cotton begins to bloom, pinhead square retention is no longer a useful scouting method because insects will move deeper into the plant canopy. Instead, use a threshold of three immatures per five feet of row when using a shake cloth. The product, Diamond, is an excellent material for control of immature plant bugs. When applied at a rate of six to nine ounces per acre, expect control for up to two to three





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weeks. If a high number of adults are present as well, an adulticide, such as Bidrin, Centric, Admire Pro, a pyrethroid, or Transform, can be added. Depending on the degree of earlier control, a mixed population of eggs, immatures, and adults may be present in the field as the season progresses. Heavy pressure may require multiple applications.

### PLANT GROWTH REGULATOR USE

You've heard me say more than once that the proper use of PGR's is more of an art than science. Even though its science-based, a host of factors influence the plant's response. Therefore, one must get creative with rates and timing. History has proven timing is most critical as rates of subsequent applications can always be adjusted to enhance effectiveness. I prefer initial applications at first bloom rather than earlier low-dose multiple applications. In doing so, we first obtain a stalk before putting on the brakes. Since the plant's response to a PGR is directly influenced by the concentration of it in the

plant, be aggressive with initial application rates when applying at first bloom, that is if growing conditions are favorable. Factors to consider when determining PGR rates include current weather, expected weather, field history, plant growth, variety, and fertility. Given current conditions, 12 to 16 ounces per acre for an initial application would be my recommendation. Two weeks later, monitor plant growth and weigh the factors above to determine if additional applications are needed and at what rate. When monitoring plant growth for follow up applications, measure the length between the fourth and fifth node from the terminal. If it exceeds 2.5 to 3 inches (three fingers width), then another application is justified.

### DICAMBA USE

I'm sure everyone is aware of the bombshell ruling handed down by the 9th Circuit Court last month vacating three dicamba EPA registrations, XtendMaxi, Engenia, and FeXapan. Fortunately, an appeal by the EPA was approved thus allowing the use of these products if already purchased by growers and applied by July 31st of this year. This timing should get most growers to layby. If not and you are having issues with pigweeds, Liberty herbicide could aid control, though not as effective as Dicamba. This ruling is a minor reprieve, so rest assured these materials will be reviewed very closely going forward. Their future could very much be in jeopardy. I mention this to encourage everyone when using this product to abide by all label directions and requirements. We can't afford to have a host of drift complaints when environmental groups are actively seeking to ban these products, and possibly others such as Enlist technology which also finds itself in the court system now. We must be stewards of these much-needed products.

Until next time,

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