

THE TURN ROW



By: Jeff Thompson & David Mullins



March 2024 Edition

The excitement and anticipation normally associated with planting season is shrouded with apprehension this spring. Not at all surprising, with high production costs and less than favorable commodity prices making it difficult to turn a profit. Worse yet, programs we have relied on to provide safety nets now find themselves outdated and obsolete. Nonetheless, despite all this, growers will do what they always do: roll up their sleeves and work tirelessly to maximize yields. It is such fierce determination and perseverance that sets American Agriculture apart, and why I am proud to be a part of it. Our fervent hope is that everyone will have a safe growing season and bountiful crop.

Southeast Conditions

March came roaring in like a lion, but with it came an abundance of rain. Presently, soil moisture is good across the Southeast. Despite a few short-lived freezes, temperatures have not been as bitterly cold as we experienced last year. With Easter only a week away, I suspect the last hard freeze is behind us. Current soil temperatures in Central Alabama remain cool at 61 degrees, some three degrees below the ten-year average. Absent any more severe cold, we should see a great deal of April-planted cotton. As for planting intentions, it appears Southeast cotton acres will remain fairly unchanged to slightly higher, no more than five or ten percent above last year. The biggest decline will be in corn; the question becomes whether these acres will switch to cotton, peanuts, or soybeans. Sadly, in areas that have seen consecutive poor crops, we hear lenders will play a large role in planting decisions.

Southwest Conditions

As we step into the heart of the 2024 season, Southwest conditions present a mixed bag of challenges and opportunities. Unlike the fleeting showers of the previous year, the early part of this season has seen a significant uptick in precipitation across West

A SUCCESSFUL

WEED PROGRAM

SHOULD BE BUILT

AROUND RESIDUAL

HERBICIDES



Texas. Sporadic thunderstorms, coupled with periods of sustained rainfall, have replenished soil moisture levels to some extent, offering a hopeful outset compared to the drier spells of yesteryears. Yet, the unpredictability of weather patterns looms large, reminding us of the ever-present challenge of adapting to the whims of nature.

The lingering effects of La Niña have tapered off, leading to expectations of a more neutral weather pattern. This shift brings with it cautious optimism but also a keen awareness that conditions could change rapidly, impacting planting and early crop development stages. As the soil warms and farmers ready their fields, the importance of strategic planning and resource allocation has never been more critical.

Planting Considerations

By now, variety selections have been made, and seed most likely ordered. A recent Federal Court ruling, though it may not change your choice of varieties, will certainly alter production practices. The 2020 registrations of XtendiMax, Engenia, and Tavium herbicide products containing dicamba for applications to Xtend and Xtendflex cotton varieties were vacated. Subsequently, the EPA has thrown us a bone, allowing the use of these products if packaged, labeled, and released for shipment prior to the ruling. Faced with limited supplies, growers will be forced to seek other weed control options. Refer to the section “Managing Weeds Without Dicamba” for some of these.

If we had a clue about what the weather would be like next fall, we would know exactly when to plant. But unknown to us, and with weather experts about as accurate as a blind hog, we advise planting as early as soil conditions permit for several reasons. Obviously, the longer the growing season, the more margin for error if there is a hiccup along the way. Also, with today's more indeterminate varieties, a lengthier growing season allows for greater yield potential. Most importantly, this year as we transition into a La Niña weather pattern, a more active hurricane season is projected. Thus, the quicker we can get a crop made and out, the better. Across most

of the Cotton Belt, soil moisture is usually the limiting factor more so than soil temperatures when deciding to plant. So, as soon as soils warm, take advantage of April soil moisture for May is historically drier.

In keeping with this, once planted, prevent delays in maturity. A seeding rate of two to three seeds per foot of row should provide optimum stands, as thicker stands will slow growth. Control early-season insects such as thrips. Those not using the ThryvOn technology be prepared to apply foliar insecticide applications at the first true leaf stage if necessary for thrips. As for plant bugs, insecticide treatments are warranted if pinhead square retention falls below 80 percent. Doing so will not only prevent delays in maturity but will greatly reduce egg lay and take pressure off in-season controls. Finally, limit weed competition. Since our over-the-top weed control arsenal is restricted this year, the use of residual herbicides will be key to successfully controlling weeds. Be mindful that the effectiveness of these herbicides is largely dependent on application timing, weed size, and soil moisture conditions, so we must be proactive.

Cover Crop Termination

Since cotton is more sensitive to early-season stress than any other crop, killing cover crops and natural winter vegetation is critical. A burndown herbicide application should be applied at least two to three weeks prior to planting. This will avoid losing soil moisture to these plants, allow soils to warm quicker, reduce cutworm damage, and allow time for additional treatments, if needed. A burndown application should consist of either Roundup or Paraquat mixed with 2,4-D. The addition of a residual material such as Valor is recommended to relieve pressure on residual herbicides used later and provide added pigweed control. In addition, apply either Roundup or Paraquat behind the planter to control any weeds emerging after the earlier burndown.

Managing weeds in Cotton Without Dicamba

As mentioned, a recent Federal Court ruling threw a massive wrench into weed control programs at the last hour. Though EPA

did subsequently authorize an existing stocks order, it is my understanding supplies of usable Dicamba vary greatly amongst distributors with most if not all certainly spoken for. So, what are our options in the absence of Dicamba? First, since there is no restriction on over the top use of Enlist One, a switch to Enlist varieties could be made. However, it could mean sacrificing yield potential in some instances. With the majority of cotton acreage planted to Xtend and Xtendflex cotton varieties the next best option requires building a weed control program around residual herbicides. Thankfully, we have an arsenal of very effective products which can provide control. However, the timing of their application is very important because they are not as forgiving as Dicamba when it comes to weed size.

Below is a suggested program that could be used if planting either Xtendflex, Enlist, Glytol +Liberty Link, or Widestrike varieties:

Preemerge behind planter

Paraquat or Roundup

+Cotoran and Prowl

1st Post over the top

Liberty or Roundup

+ Group 15 herbicide (e.g., Dual Magnum, Warrant, or others)

2nd Post over the top

If needed.

Post Direct

Liberty or Roundup

+Caparol and MSMA

This should get us to Lay-By.

In the absence of Dicamba, Liberty will play an integral role in a weed control program. Since supplies of Liberty are likely to become short obtain sufficient quantities ahead of time. Keep in mind, Liberty is not as effective on large weeds. Plan to target those less than three inches, anything bigger will require a second treatment. Also, it is best to spray in full sunlight under humid conditions with at least 15 gallons of water per acre. As always before using any of these herbicides check labels for spray intervals or other restrictions. Better yet consult your crop advisor. I will address using formulations of

Dicamba off label only to say they are extremely volatile of which anti volatility agents are available for tank mixing possibly reducing this effect.

Market Outlook

New crop prices continue to find support in the low to mid 80's. A gift when considering how weak the demand for cotton is at present. Managed funds, now long the market, are responsible for keeping prices propped up. They are very fickle, more concerned with making profits than cotton fundamentals. So, they could take their money and run at any time and with that prices could collapse. The last couple of weeks we've seen a move in that direction as they've reduced their net long position. A negative vibe is settling over this market that only unforeseeable positive news can reverse. Currently, with 85 cents providing stiff resistance pricing a portion of your crop just under this level is strongly recommended.

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