

THE TURN ROW



MAY
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2020

FIELD DECISIONS 2020

By: Jeff Thompson & David Mullins



After months of penning rather disheartening market commentary, writing a newsletter focused on production is a welcomed relief. There is just something about science-based information that offers a sense of consistency and provides relative assurance that the desired outcome will hold true as opposed to trying to predict market movement greatly influenced by the vagaries of conflicting economic theories and outside forces. That's not to say cotton production doesn't have its trials, tribulations, and uncertainties at times. Mother Nature has a huge influence on the final outcome. Nonetheless, awareness and preparation will enable us to overcome these obstacles. In Turn Row Thoughts, we will address many of these as they unfold throughout the growing season to keep you informed.

When making field decisions for the 2020 cotton crop, I would ask you keep two thoughts at the forefront of your mind. First, every production practice should be aimed at earliness. This doesn't necessarily mean planting early as weather and soil conditions will not often allow this. Nevertheless, plant maturity can be enhanced in several ways such as effectively controlling insects, proper use of herbicides, plant growth regulator management, and correct timing of harvest aid materials to name just a few. The value of an early crop can be captured not only in yield but fiber quality, as well. To illustrate, 2019 cotton received by AQCA from August to October had an average loan value of 54.93 cents compare to cotton received from November on, which averaged 53.04 cents. An increase in bale value of nearly \$10-plus potentially adding 100 to 150 pound of extra yield is significant money.

This leads to my second thought. In a season when prices are so depressed, the natural tendency is trying to produce a crop as cheaply as possible. However, in doing so, one is apt to unintentionally sacrifice yield by not providing the plant all it needs. Instead, monitor plant growth carefully and proactively, and adjust to given growing conditions



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to ensure a return on every dollar spent.

SOUTHEAST CONDITIONS

Planters began to roll in earnest last week. Especially, south of a line drawn from Birmingham through Atlanta to the eastern shore. North of that line, planting preparations have been significantly delayed due to excessive rainfall. Some in this area are still applying their burndown applications. Obviously, soil moisture is good and soil temperatures are sufficient, though air temperatures have been rather cool up until this past weekend. Even so, conditions are very favorable for seedling emergence. The 10-day weather outlook shows little chance of rain, so look for a lot of progress to be made over the next week to ten days. Planting brings with it an air of excitement each year. This rings especially true this year with everything that's happening around us. Seeing seed enter the ground and



growers doing what they do best, nurturing a crop on faith and hope, gives me a renewed sense of normalcy.

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SOUTHWEST CONDITIONS

Where did all the moisture go? For many across the Southwest, conditions have once again turned dry. Two months ago, most areas were in “decent shape.” However, high winds and temperatures well into the 100’s have changed the narrative. Some producers on the High Plains started planting last week, mostly pivot-irrigated fields they’re able to water. However, the bulk of planting won’t begin until later this week and even next week. Overall, it is dry, but we know this every year. Last year taught us that it doesn’t matter how much moisture you have going into a crop year because it will still need rain along the way. Luckily, we still have time on our side, for the moment, and a slight chance for rain late next week.

THRIPS MANAGEMENT

Thrips are one of the first insect pests encountered each year. Because they are a routine pest, the first line of defense is normally a preventative seed treatment with a neonicotinoid insecticide. In recent years, insect resistance to this class of insecticide has become more prevalent thus reducing its effectiveness under heavy pressure. Also, the movement of thrips into cotton fields and their corresponding pressure is largely dictated by prevailing weather conditions. If cotton is still in the seedling stage (less than four true leaves) when thrips movement is at their peak, a supplemental foliar insecticide application will often be needed. Excessive thrips damage can significantly delay maturity. There are several inexpensive insecticides recommended for foliar applications.

The Thrips Prediction Model is a new tool now available that can greatly aid in the management of this pest. It is very effective in



Cotton plants damaged by thrips. The Thrips Prediction Model is a new tool now available that can greatly aid in the management of this pest.

predicting the movement of thrips in a given area based on climate data. By entering potential planting dates, the timing of thrips pressure versus the susceptibility of seedlings can be predicted. Because climate conditions vary, you should run this model within days of actual planting to get the most accurate reading. Dr. Ron Smith recently ran it using various projected planting dates for Alabama. The results show north of Birmingham peak thrips movement is expected to be in May. South of Birmingham movement peaked in April. Therefore, Tennessee Valley growers need to scout for thrips closely and be prepared to make a foliar application. Growers further south should continue to scout. However, by dodging the peak, seed treatments alone may provide adequate control. This model can be used through out the cotton belt. To access it, go to www.climate.ncsu.edu/cottontip

WEED MANAGEMENT

When looking to cut costs, the first items looked at are fertilizers and chemicals, most notably herbicides. With the introduction of new cotton varieties and their accompanying herbicide technology, the tendency is to forego the expense of traditional residual herbicides even though they've shown to effectively complement this new technology. In doing

so, one puts a great deal of pressure on the newer products leading to poor weed management and greater weed pressure in the years ahead. It is difficult to make a blanket weed management recommendation because weed populations vary, as do the specific weed species present.

Despite the herbicide technology chosen, I would strongly advise using herbicides with residual activity in combination. Below are some recommendations while also keeping cost in mind. Hopefully, burndown applications applied weeks ago have effectively eliminated any green vegetation at planting. As for a pre-application (three days before planting to three days after), your choices are Warrant at three pints per acre where pigweed and grass may be present. Where there are primarily broadleaf weeds, Cotoran at two pints per acre will provide control. Under heavy pigweed and grass pressure, add eight ounces of Reflex to the Warrant. If weeds have emerged at planting, add 1.5 to two pints of Gramoxone. We will talk about recommended post applications and layby treatments in future Turn Rows.

CFAP

Many have asked about the CFAP recently passed by Congress, which includes direct payments to growers designed to buffer market disruptions and resulting price declines brought about by COVID-19. We were promised program implementation details would be made known right away so producers could sign up in May and be paid as early as June. Here it is the first week in May and little to no details have been released. Questions remain as to the definition of unsold 2019 crop and when it was determined sold to apply loss calculations. In short, we know no more than we did when the program was announced. Currently, there is a ground swell by commodity organizations lobbying to have payment limitations lifted. This is greatly needed. Just like you, we eagerly await word from the USDA on this matter. We will keep you updated on this issue as more information becomes available.

Until next time,

Jeff Thompson

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