

THE TURN ROW



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POST HURRICANE MANAGEMENT

By: Jeff Thompson



Almost a week has passed since Hurricane Sally slammed into the Gulf Coast between Gulf Shores, Alabama, and Pensacola, Florida. The aftermath is disheartening with heavy rains and winds decimating the area. Despite only being a Category 2, its intensity was magnified by its slow movement causing some to compare the damage to that of Category 4 Hurricane Frederick which devastated the same area in 1979. Over a half a million acres of cotton found itself in the path of Sally, all within days or weeks of being defoliated. Initial reports have damage to the crop ranging from severe to very little. Obviously, crop losses are worse in the coastal counties where an estimated 75 to 80 percent of the crop is destroyed. Moreover, the accompanying heavy rains impacted inland cotton, the degree of which may not be known until harvest.

Needless to say, managing post hurricane cotton will require some careful attention. One area of the country quite familiar with this is the Carolinas. As a result, I would like to borrow and share some thoughts from two of their Extension Cotton Specialists, Keith Edmisten and Guy Collins, who have dealt with such conditions repeatedly over the past few years thus gaining valuable experience.

WIND DEFOLIATION

Unlike Hurricanes Ivan and Dennis, the winds from Sally blew in one direction so there wasn't a wringing effect on the stalk as there were with those two. I've been told north and south planted rows fared better than those running east and west. As is usually the case, older leaves were shed in the winds, while some remaining leaves may begin to turn reddish and defoliate themselves in the days following. This self-defoliation is beneficial in that it will allow air and sunlight to penetrate the canopy thus



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speeding up the drying out of both open and unopen bolls. However, this wind-induced shedding will not eliminate the need for defoliants.

REGROWTH

Even before the hurricane, we were seeing some regrowth as a result of recent rains. This will become much more prevalent with high moisture levels in the soil. Be sure to include thidiazuron containing materials such as Dropp in your defoliant tank mixes while careful not to cut corners on rates to most effectively inhibit regrowth.

SEED SPROUTING

Some seed sprouting is almost inevitable after a hurricane. Hopefully, this will be limited to a small percentage of the crop. Worse under prolonged wet conditions and warm temperatures, dry sunny weather going forward will lessen its occurrence. Seed sprouting results in higher trash content, seed coat fragments, and lint discoloration. Additionally, if fields

Shedding of older leaves.



Boll Rot

are harvested before sprouted seeds have dried down, it could result in higher moisture content in modules or rolls leading to further lint discoloration. About the only thing a grower can do about this, aside from pray for sunny weather, is be certain to wait until these germinated seed completely dry out before harvesting. Also, since harvested seed cotton could be higher in moisture, monitor modules and rolls for any increases in temperatures which will lead to further quality concerns.

UNOPENED BOLLS

Dry weather and sunshine are the best thing for bolls not yet open. Though protected from the storm, they are now susceptible to hard lock and boll rot, especially where stalks have been blown down and are now in direct contact with the soil and other plant material. Often when thrashed around by the wind, plants will naturally produce more ethylene. Therefore, bolls close to maturity will likely open soon.



Reddening of leaves

High moisture conditions occurring when these bolls first pop open may result in increased hard lock. Quick defoliation (using a tank mixture that includes an ethephon containing product) as soon as fields are passable may help minimize rotting. However, dry conditions and sunshine are our best remedies. Defoliation will also help lodged plants stand up reducing contact with the ground or other plants.

Historically, we've just passed the peak of hurricane season. However, 2020 is becoming a historic hurricane season just as it has in so many other arenas. The tropics remain active as we've exhausted our list of storm names and have begun the Greek alphabet for the first time since 2005. So, keep a constant eye over your shoulder and take all precautions necessary to maximize yield and quality no matter the weather conditions we're given.

Until next time,

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