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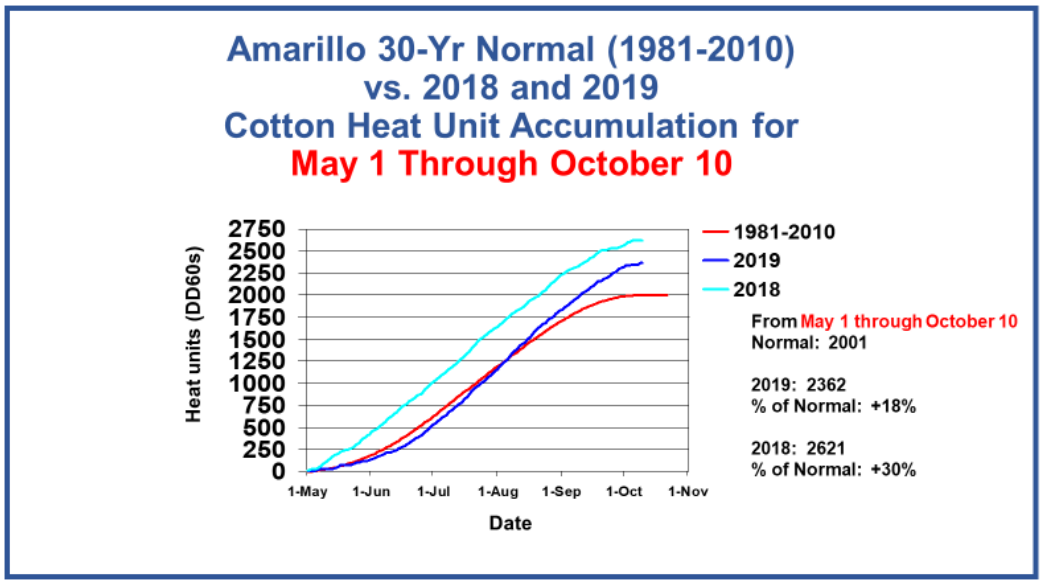
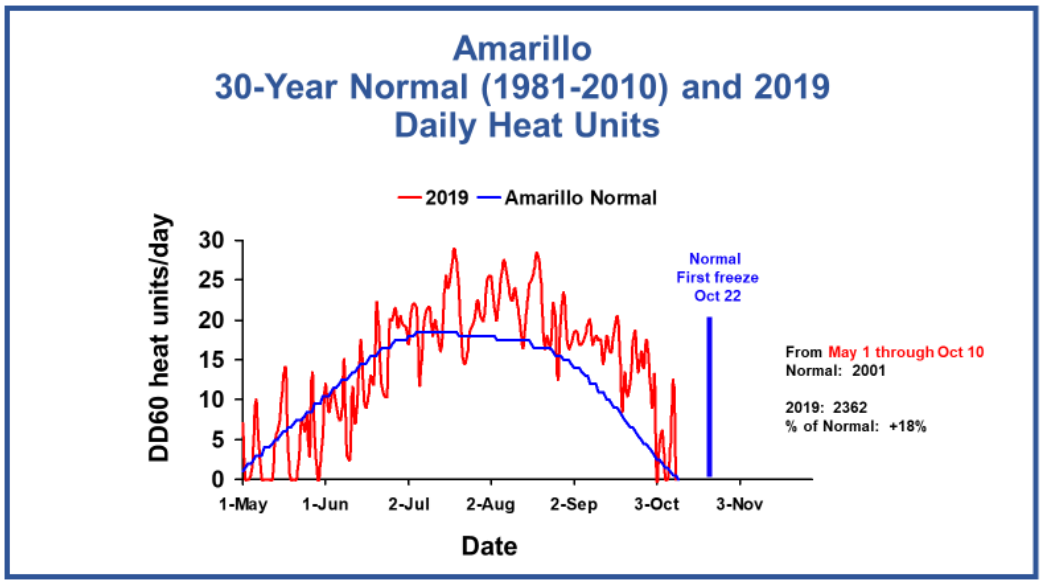
Crop Update

Freeze effects have been the main topic of discussion over the past couple of weeks. Seemingly out of nowhere, the freeze popped up in the forecast, and this time the weathermen were right. After traveling from the northern Panhandle through the Plainview area and observing various fields across the region, it appears that from about Amarillo north the temperatures were low enough and sustained enough to pretty much take out nearly all of the above ground growth. From Tulia toward Plainview, it was less lethal, and many fields had remaining green bolls and leaves near the base of the plants. This is both good and bad. The juvenile growth that had appeared in the tops of plants after the rainfall and warm temperatures several weeks ago was going to be a challenge to bring down, and the freeze pretty much took care of that. The bad news is that in some areas although the upper canopy was taken down, there were quite a few green bolls and leaves remaining on the plants. Growers with substantial green, living bolls have many times opted to run ethephon on those fields. Many dryland fields which were very moisture stressed during the boll set period had adequate boll maturity and had shed some mature leaves. Therefore, the freeze pretty much finished off these fields. There are some fields that are “on the bubble” with excessive green bolls remaining, thus preventing stripper harvesting. I don’t think anyone would disagree that what we need right now is a real “door slamming freeze” to finish off the remaining green tissue in a lot of fields. This would in turn save growers the expense of running paraquat in an attempt to take out the remaining green bolls, and honestly that might or might not work. The one thing we have NOT been extremely concerned about is boll maturity in most fields. September 2019 was the hottest on record going back to at least 2000, and was just short of 500 heat units. 2019 is a unique year in that the month of May was the coldest since 2000, and September was the hottest since 2000. I doubt that will align very many times. The growing season ended with 2362 heat units. This can be seen in the graphs below.





Color Grade Degradation

Other issues we have seen out there is some lint staining arising from the early freeze in spite of good boll maturity. Some growers were able to get ethephon products out in plenty of time to get great boll opening action and results prior to the freeze. Unless the boll opening process was very far along, it appears that there is lot of lint staining occurring in bolls that were closed going into the freeze.

The Lubbock Classing Office data is indicating that about 21,000 bales were classed during the week ending October 18th. These early bales were classed as 20% color grade 22 (light spot) and an additional 33% were 32 (light spot), for a total of 55%. So what caused this light spot issue? This is very likely due to the mature but unopened bolls that encountered the freeze a bit early. I have included some photos below to help everyone visualize this. The bolls immediately below are upper canopy bolls that are fluffy but exhibiting lint staining issues.

The bolls below were likely open or opening prior to the freeze and are nice and white.

Some of these bolls are contrasted in a side-by-side photo below.

A close-up of a stained boll is below.

- One of the questions I have received has been “will this bleach out if given time”? I think the answer to this is yes, if given enough time and sunshine.
- However, a lot of fields with “looser varieties” are needing to be harvested as soon as possible in order to minimize preharvest losses.
- Another factor that we need to remember that a boll’s quality is never higher than the day it opens. So, once again, we have a bit of a conundrum.
- Overall, in my opinion it is still important to stay on track and get this crop harvested with a minimum of weathering of other fiber properties.
- If extreme weather rears its ugly head, this may result in more weathered fiber which can mean shorter staple, lower uniformity, reduced strength, and perhaps more leaf and bark contamination.