

A Forgiving Crop

Cotton Withstands Stress Better Than Other Crops

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MidAmerica Farmer Grower

COMO, MISS.

“We’re committed to cotton,” said David Taylor, a fifth generation farmer who resides with his wife, Allison, and son, David Jr., in Como, Miss. “I moved back to Como to farm with my dad (William Sledge Tay-

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David is no stranger to quite a few of the states in the nation.

“I was actually born in Memphis, but I grew up in Como,” he explained. “I lived in Virginia, Idaho and Alabama at one point or another.”

The Taylors have two farming environments in northwest Mississippi: One is a hill farm east of Como that is mostly dryland, a lot of silt loam bottom land with some Grenada series loam hills. They practice no-till on the majority of the non-irrigated hill land, a practice necessary to conserve moisture and prevent erosion on that portion of the farm. They also have a farm about 20 miles west-southwest of Como around Sledge, Miss., a lot of which is irrigated.

“The last few years we have begun to invest in more grain equipment,” he said. “We installed grain bins with a loop system, and purchased some new grain harvesting and support equipment. We feel we’ve geared up for a good balance of cotton and grain. We’ve been that way for a couple of years. We have been putting most of our grain on our irrigated acres and have pretty respectable yields there, but we’ve grown corn in a rotation with cotton for several decades.”

David is in charge of variety selection on the farm, and he chooses a number of lines to scatter the risk.

“We like to plant a lot of different varieties on our farm based on performance in university trials, on-farm trials and trials from seed companies,” Taylor said. “We put all of that data together and decide which ones should work for us. If we find any that stand out, we’ll increase those acres the next year; but it’s pretty regular that we plant a number of varieties because there are many new varieties coming out every year. We believe that different varieties have different fits on our farm based on soil type and whether or not the field is irrigated. We think it is very important to stay on top of variety trials and see what works on our farm. This year, we found two or three varieties (both field scale and on our farm trials) that really stood up to the heat and drought stress, and two of them looked very good the past few years as well, so we may cut back on the overall number of varieties next year and plant more of those.”

Taylor and Sledge raise 3,000 acres of cotton, 1,200 acres of corn, 1,200 acres of soybeans and have 450 head of cattle in a cow/calf operation. They also raise 300-plus acres of Bermuda hay.

This year the Taylors planted two Deltapine

varieties, four Bayer varieties (three Stoneville and one Fibermax) and a Phytogen variety. Mostly they use early to early-mid varieties.

“We won’t go past midseason maturity, that works best for us” he said. “This year our cotton is 90 percent dryland. We look to average over two bales per acre over the whole crop, which is a blessing and a surprise given the extended

heat and lack of rain.”

The corn crop was down this year, about 15 percent. Taylor said, “I attribute this to nighttime temperatures in the mid to high 70s for most of the summer, record daytime highs, and lack of rains to help center pivots keep up with water demand. The soybeans were a surprise, they did quite well, better than expected, and they were only about 25 percent irrigated.”

The Taylors find cotton to be more resilient than other crops. Cotton has an innate ability to handle drought and stress better than grain crops.

“If you have a very dry June, which we had the past few years, cotton sends out a deep tap root and it has the ability to hang in there until we get a rain,” he said. “We feel like we come out better on paper with cotton; it is heavy on the inputs, but we’re fortunate that most of our cotton acres is on the hill farm and we don’t have a bad plant bug problem there like we do in the Delta. We average two to three plant bug insecticide applications in the hills and probably three times that many in the Delta. Growing up on the farm, I’ve seen time and again how cotton can come back and make a good crop after early season moisture stress; whereas, had soybeans or corn been planted in those fields, they would have lost tremendous yield potential. So I think we’ve got a pretty good distribution on our farm.”

This year’s cotton crop went through a lot of stress being 90 percent dryland. The crop received two nice rains in July but that was about it. There was maybe a quarter to half-inch shower in addition to that on some of the acres. Some of the worst cotton on finished hills looks to be picking in the 800 pound range. The best dryland picked around 1,375 pounds.

“Our stronger soil in the creek bottoms held up better, and I think we’ll do over 1,250 pounds, so for the most part, it will be a good crop,” Taylor added. “I’m very pleased with the crop, considering the conditions; and the grades look like they’re going to come back a lot better than they have in years past. Color and leaf grades are better this year. We have encountered some high micronaire though.”

The Taylor duo have a consultant, Tucker Miller of Drew, Miss., who monitors insects closely in their cotton crop. They use plant growth regulators and take it field by field, avoiding blanket applications. They rely largely on the recommendations of their consultant, and Taylor and Sledge are wise when considering inputs, but won’t “let a nickel stop a dollar” when deciding what to put on their crops.

David attended aviation school at Auburn University. Δ



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