



Wide shot of defoliated cotton field in Lonoke County, Arkansas, 10.19.2011

Ark. Corn, Cotton Close In On 600K Acres – From Different Directions

JONESBORO, ARK.

2012 Corn and cotton acreage in Arkansas may converge on the 600,000-acre mark, but from different directions, according to Scott Stiles, extension economist for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

“The recent National Cotton Council survey indicated that Arkansas’ 2012 cotton acreage may dip to 619,000, down from 680,000 last year,” Stiles said. “Questions remain as to how many corn acres we will gain in the state. Last year, we had 560,000. The most recent high in corn acreage was 610,000 in 2007.”

USDA is currently surveying farmers to find out what their planting intentions are for 2012. Its Prospective Plantings report will be released March 30.

“Growers that have a few years’ experience with corn say it’s much easier to manage than cotton,” Stiles said.

Arkansas farmers may be seeing big dollar signs, thinking “the mild winter may be a precursor to heavy insect pressure in cotton,” Stiles said, adding “our budgets given today’s prices favor corn over competing crops.”

“Corn may also be picking up acres as a result of pigweed resistance,” he said. For decades there has been a broader array of herbicides for corn than cotton.

Stiles said there are indications from agronomists, agents and seed vendors that “we’ll exceed the 2007 modern-day high.

“We could hit 650,000,” he said. “If so, this year will be the first time since 1940 that corn acres exceeded cotton acres in Arkansas.”

Jason Kelley, extension wheat and feed grains agronomist for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, said he thinks Arkansas could hit that 650,000-acre mark.

“If we get a good planting window, we could,” he said. Issues with tight corn seed supplies this season shouldn’t be an impediment.

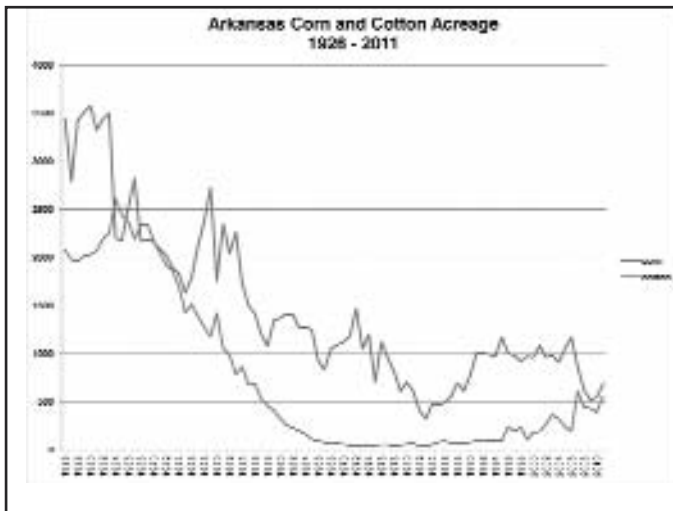
“Some farmers may not have gotten their first, second or third choice of seed, but we should have enough if we don’t have to replant,” he said. In 2011, May’s flooding washed out some cornfields, forcing farmers to plant again. That’s one reason he doesn’t want to see corn growers jump out too early, in case some big rain does come.

Arkansas has seen a steady drumbeat of rain-bearing fronts this mild winter, each preceded

by or followed by field-drying high winds. “One day it blows out of the north, and the next day it blows out of the south,” Kelley said. “That’s what it does in March.

“A lot of ground has been worked and needs rain to settle it back down,” he said. “A little bit of rain would be good, but we don’t need excessive rains like last spring.”

Most of the cotton-to-corn shift will be in the southern half of the state, while northern growers will likely stay with cotton, Stiles said. Some



Cotton and corn acres in Arkansas head toward convergence on this chart of acreage for both crops in Arkansas since 1926.

U of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture graphic by Scott Stiles

Planting corn in Chicot County, kicking off the 2012 spring crop growing season in Arkansas.

U of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture photo by Gus Wilson



of the decision to plant cotton is being influenced by landlords and gins and disappointing corn yields from 2011.

Corn planting in Arkansas kicked off in Chicot County at the end of February. Δ



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