

Farmers Respond To Need For Crop Advice After '09

MISSISSIPPI STATE, MISS.

Mississippi agriculture has changed a great deal in the last 25 years, and the challenges of 2009 reminded many farmers that there is still much to learn.

To address the growing needs of the state's farmers, the Mississippi State University Extension Service redesigned its 25-year-old annual cotton short course and offered a two-and-a-half day meeting dedicated to all state row crops instead. The expansion to other crops and the recent historic losses helped triple attendance numbers over recent years.

Extension soybean specialist Trey Koger helped organize this December's program, which attracted more than 300 growers, consultants, and industry and retail distribution representatives from across the state. The short course addressed issues related to cotton, corn and soybeans.

Koger described this meeting as one that allowed farmers the opportunity to reflect on the past seasons and learn about ongoing research efforts.

"Cotton acreage has been declining in Mississippi, and other crops have been filling in that part of our agricultural landscape," Koger said. "We wanted to expand from the cotton short course to include other row crops and reflect the need for diversity and crop rotation."

In addition to the traditional presentations, Koger said the new program gave growers some hands-on opportunities, including a grain inspection clinic. These sessions reviewed some material covered in summer clinics on how soy-

beans are graded at the elevators and what growers can do if they have a discrepancy with the elevator.

"Sessions were organized by disciplines more than by commodity. Those areas included insect and disease control, weed management, agronomics and soil fertility," he said. "Another change this year was videotaping sessions to make them available on the Internet."

Grower Jimmy Sneed of Senatobia said combining row crops into one meeting and offering the video aspect are good examples of Extension's efforts to address growers' needs.

"Growers relied on the cotton short course; it always took place when the past season was fresh on their minds. They were looking ahead, and it was helpful information," Sneed said. "Evolving to the row-crop format is the right response to the ag production systems on farms today. It's a logical adaptation to the current production needs of the growers."

Sneed said growers in the past struggled to find time to attend separate meetings.

"Making videos of the meeting available on the Internet gives farmers the opportunity to go online on their own schedule. They can see it when they need it," he said. "Extension is putting forth the effort to figure out the best way to communicate using the electronic resources we have. As more people get access to high-speed connections, Extension is responding."

Go online to <http://msucares.com/crops/cotton/short-course09/> to see the short course materials. Δ



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