

For Some Farmers, The Harvest Of 2009 Continued Into 2010

PINE BLUFF, ARK.

For some Jefferson County farmers, the rain-soaked 2009 harvest didn't end until well into 2010, Don Plunkett, Jefferson County staff chair for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, said Thursday.

"I talked to one farmer who just finished his cotton harvest Jan. 12," Plunkett said, adding that many were able to use the recent sub-freezing weather to their advantage.

"The frozen ground was hard enough to run the pickers," he said.

However, much of what came out of the field during the January cotton harvest was going to be discounted due to stains and off-colors.

"We just didn't have enough sun to fluff out the bolls or make them turn white," he said.

January rain added to flooding left over from late 2009, causing problems in cotton already put into modules.

"Flooding on a county gin lot ruined some cotton that had already been harvested and brought to the gin for processing," Plunkett said. "The lower foot or so of a number of modules of cotton sat in water and the cotton lint rotted, caused the lint to discolor and turn brown and the seed to rot, thus depriving the gin of valuable lint and seed."

Right now, "farmers are keeping a wary eye on cotton prices and waiting to make decisions on whether to increase or decrease cotton acres," he said. "Only about 4,800 acres of cotton was planted in 2009 in Jefferson County."

According to figures from the National Agricultural Statistics Service, the peak acreage in the county was 102,100 acres in 1976. The statistics service did not record planted acres before 1972.

The statistics service issued a report Monday estimating production, yield and harvest for the 2009 growing season. It said that Arkansas cotton pro-

ducers harvested 500,000 acres, down from 615,000 acres during the previous year. Production was 830,000 bales in 2009, compared with nearly 1.3 million in 2008.

This is the lowest production in Arkansas since 1976, the statistics service said. Δ



Floodwaters from Bayou Bartholomew damaged a number of modules of cotton at the Bayou Gin near Pine Bluff. Leroy Collins directs the module truck driver as he backs into an affected module and shears off the best cotton for ginning.



Cotton farmers in some places had to harvest around low places in fields. Note the ruts cut where harvest was attempted but stopped to prevent picker from getting stuck in this very wet location.



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