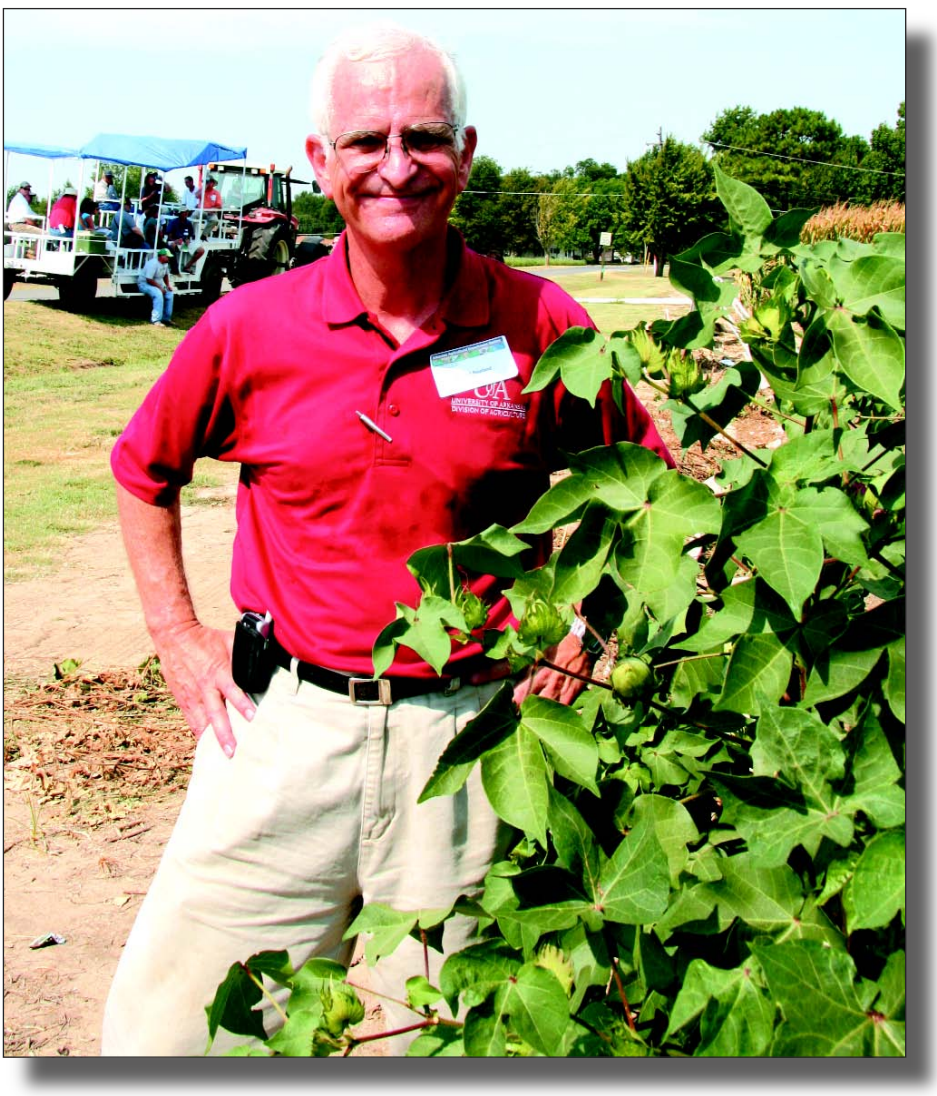
Irrigate Cotton Early

Suggestions For Coming Season Could Spur Better Harvest Next Fall

BETTY VALLE GEGG
MidAmerica Farmer Grower

KEISER, ARK.

Don't be afraid to get out there and irrigate early. That's one of the things Dr. Tom Barber, University of Arkansas Extension cotton specialist, learned last year while tracking the progress of the cotton crop as it was stressed from high temperatures and drought.



FRED BOURLAND
Director at the University of Arkansas Northeast Research and Extension Center

"Being on a timely schedule is very important," he said. "Also, with some of the insect pressures that we have had I think we have to take another look at early burndown programs. We need to burn our winter vegetation down early, hopefully to reduce early pest problems, especially with spider mites. Plant bugs continue to be our number one pest, and with the increase in corn acres, plant bug populations especially in Southeast Arkansas this year were terrible. We have to intensify our plant bug management, especially where we have cotton fields that border corn.

"We are going to have to do something for the pigweed control," Barber added. "We have had a lot of escapes last year, be it from tolerance to Roundup or just application error. For some reason there was a lot of pigweed growing out the top of the cotton canopy in many places. So we have to take another look this year at how we do our weed control."

Barber was one of the speakers at the Northeast Research and Extension Center Field Day, last fall, at Keiser, Ark. He added that many farmers who are using the flex cotton and paying the extra tech fees for that are reluctant to add the cost of a residual to the mix.

"I think we are at the point now where we are going to have to add residuals if we want to keep the crop weed free and not build up the pigweed populations."

It was the 50th annual field day, according to University of Arkansas Northeast Research and Extension Center Director Dr. Fred Bourland. Bourland also is director of the Lon Mann Cotton Research Station at Marianna and coordinates re-search at the Judd Hill station as well.

"The co-operative effort at Judd Hill is a little bit different," he explained. "We do cooperative work there with Arkansas State University and with Dr. Greg Phillips, the dean and director there."

In the cotton industry Bourland agreed with Barber that the hottest word in production is plant bugs.

"With the transgenics and boll weevil eradication, we have taken care of some of our traditional insect pests, and that has really opened the door for plant bugs," he said. "From a research standpoint, we are looking at thresholds and resistance, and ways that we can better manage this plant bug complex which has become a major problem."

He said another aspect of the plant bug problem in cotton is the corn acreage. Plant bugs are not a pest of corn but they reside in corn, build up there, then as corn starts drying, they move over to cotton.

"With the increase in corn acres, we have heard real horror stories in trying to control plant bugs, particularly further south," Bourland said. "Plant bugs are a perennial problem generally. They have been a secondary pest, but now they have moved up in rank."

Last fall's program included more rice topics and Bourland explained that there were separate tours last year for corn, cotton, soybeans and rice.

"That has allowed us to give a little more emphasis on rice and also on corn, a couple of crops that need more attention," he said.

There were a few more acres in corn research last year than in the past. The corn variety test was up a bit and the station added a little more emphasis on corn nutrition and weed control.

"I suspect we will probably start really feeling the increase with the corn acreage in 2008," he said.

The Northeast Research and Extension Center includes 750 acres at the facility, about 700 of which are in cultivation. Nearly every field is either in research or a rotation.

"Many times we will put it in rotate research acreage with a production crop for a year to rotate it out," Bourland explained. "Almost every field is irrigated."

The center's researchers include those from the university as well as extension specialists out of Little Rock. There are four faculty members at Keiser, one of whom is Bourland himself. In addition to being center director, he also has the cotton breeding program and heads up the cotton variety testing program. The other researchers include Dr. Glenn Studebaker, extension entomologist; Dr. Rob Hogan is an extension ag-economist, and Dr. Daniel Stephenson, who has a weed science background, is a system agronomist. All four project leaders have joint appointments with extension and the experiment station. Δ