

Lower Inputs Equals Profit

Farm Focus Is On Efficiency, Less Seed, Maintaining Yields

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LEACHVILLE, ARK.

Planting a lower seed count has helped Phillip Lyerly, Jr., cotton farmer from Leachville, Ark., realize a bigger profit. Greg, as he's called to distinguish him from his father, Phillip Lyerly, Sr., plants 34,000 seeds to the acre, quite a bit less than the common 38,000 to 45,000 seeds other farmers in his area plant.

"We found that the yield does not drop but our profitability does increase because lower plant populations mean lower input costs," he said.

This fourth generation farmer grew up on the land and never left. He remembers raising mostly cotton, with some soybeans, wheat and a few watermelons too. The operation back then was about 1,300 to 1,500 acres, but today Greg manages 3,600 acres, all in cotton except for 20 acres of corn in a Mycogen seed breeder corn plot.

He works some of the sandiest soil you'll ever find. Nematodes are very high in spots, organic matter is very low. It's more like beach sand.

"Our soils will leach nitrogen out big time," Greg said. "We pulled some residual nitrogen samples last year and down deep we hardly had any nitrogen."

The sand depth changes depending on the location.

"We've got sand spurs that I don't think have a bottom," he said. "Then we've got other spots that are two or three inches. We've got sand spurs where the earthquake sand came up and it's just solid sand all the way down through them."

His yields run about two bales to the acre on average, however quite a few fields go above that. Then there's 10 percent of dryland cotton that typically goes well below that.

Greg feels the future of farming is in becoming more efficient.

"Efficiency is probably the most important thing I want to do, but at the same time, a few more acres wouldn't hurt my feelings either," he said. "At one time we were up to 5,600 acres, but I don't want to be there again. It wouldn't be as bad now because we have the baler pickers but when we were running module balers and needed so many people during the fall, it was just too much headache. I didn't like that."

Raising cotton after cotton does create a problem with weeds. Greg uses LibertyLink to combat the problem.

"Yes it is a problem with weeds. With LibertyLink, the yields are going to be a big key to keeping them beat down until something

else comes out, but it won't last long. At the same time, even cotton behind corn when people use the atrazine right, we have a big or even more problem with resistant weeds. A few farmers in this area call corn just a 'cover-up' crop. It keeps the weeds from being visible. They're still out there, still making seed, but you just don't see them."

The Lyerlys are actually the second farmers in this area to use RTK on the tractors,



adding that in 2001.

"We're running RTKs on all the tractors. Then we're running Greenstar on the hicycle for swath control and we're running John Deere yield monitors, fertilizer applicators, we're running GPS Viper for variable rate fertilizing, and our planters are running GPS for variable rate seeding."

The precision agriculture has greatly increased the efficiency on the farm, especially in seed placement and variable rate fertilizing.

He explained that with irrigation there was more yield potential so the additional nitrogen helped make a better yield.

Greg's goals are to be on the cutting edge and try the next new thing, whether it's seed, chemical, soil amendments or technology. He's always been that way on the technology side.

"The experimental side actually probably started about 2007," he said. "I picked up my first plots and loved it and I just haven't quit since." △

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