

# Mississippi Farmer Markets

## Cotton In Cuba

### John Newcomb Hopes To Increase Market Share In Cuba

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MidAmerica Farmer Grower

**HAVANA, CUBA**

Mississippi cotton farmer John Newcomb's fifth trip to Cuba was made in the pursuit of selling cotton with Staplcotn as a supplier. Newcomb attended the recent International Trade Fair held in Havana, Cuba. On previous trips, Newcomb worked on the marketing of rice to Cuba.

Newcomb has been trying to market staple

Newcomb sent samples of Delta cotton to ALIMPORT trade officials in Havana with positive results. "They love what they have seen. Cuba would love to buy this cotton. Their problem with buying U.S. cotton is foreign exchange. They have got to have U.S. dollars to be able to purchase it. Right now they do not have the U.S. dollars."

U.S. cotton made it to Cuba last year through South America explained Newcomb, "I bid on it last year, we barely missed getting the award. It



**John Newcomb of Staplcotn and Lisa Barker, President of Delta Cotton Land Inc. at the recent FIHAV in Havana, Cuba.** Photo by John LaRose

cotton to Cuba for two years. "Staplcotn, right now, sells to Mexico and sells to China. They are our two biggest customers. Cuba is just the sort of market I am trying to develop."

Relationship building is essential in marketing products to Cuba. Newcomb said, "you have got to know the people, you have got to meet them face to face. We are selling to China, we are selling to Venezuela. We are selling to communist countries right now. Why not sell to Cuba?"

Born and raised in Osceola, Arkansas Newcomb leases out 4,000 acres in Northeast Arkansas. Owner of the Stonewall Plantation, Newcomb said, "it used to be a cotton farm, now it is a soybean farm but, I hope to go back to cotton real soon."

In his first visit to Cuba since 9/11, Newcomb is hoping to directly market cotton to Cuba. Currently, Cuba buys low-grade cotton, about four or five thousand tons a year, according to Newcomb. "It is way down but, it is a start. They buy low-grade cotton that they use to make their mops. They also buy nicer cotton that they make towels from." Newcomb said ALIMPORT officials stated they may be interested in purchasing U.S. cotton for 2009 soon. All U.S. imports to Cuba are handled by ALIMPORT trade officials.

The Office of Foreign Asset Control limits trade with Cuba. Food, medicine and fiber exports are allowed under certain guidelines. Cotton falls into the fiber category.

Newcomb is hopeful President-Elect Obama will ease restrictions and allow him to market more cotton directly to Cuba. "I am glad that since 2001 they allow food, medicine and fiber to come to Cuba. That is the first step but, they need to go further," he said.

ended up being U.S. cotton that was shipped. It was actually shipped through a South American company first and then shipped to Cuba."

Newcomb explained ALIMPORT is usually very conservative about their needs. "The last time, when we did the quote, ALIMPORT said 200 tons and it ended up being 800 tons that they wanted. Most of the time they buy, when they get the dollars, they buy a lot more than what they initially estimate."

Newcomb explained why he is focusing on cotton trade with Cuba, "I do enjoy coming to Cuba. I love the history. I like the people. There is such a misconception in the states about Cuba and the people of Cuba. The people of Cuba really love Americans, they are nice. Cuba was once the number one rice importer for rice grown in the U.S. It is a shame. The embargo has not worked in 40 years. It is penalizing the American farmer and the American businessman. People from all over the world are coming and selling to Cuba. It is a shame the American businessman is prevented from doing the same."

Newcomb is a one of Staplcotn's representatives based in Osceola, Arkansas. Staplcotn, of Greenville, Mississippi was formed in 1921 and provides members cost-effective marketing, warehousing, financing and other services according to [www.staplcotn.com](http://www.staplcotn.com).

Newcomb is a past director from Arkansas of Cotton Incorporated. Cotton Incorporated's, mission statement found at [www.cottoninc.com](http://www.cottoninc.com) is, "To increase the demand for and profitability of cotton through research and promotion."

Cotton Incorporated is a sponsor of the National Conservation Systems Cotton & Rice conference to be held January, 26 & 27, 2009 in Marksville, Louisiana. Δ



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