



Dr. Chris Main explains some newer cotton germplasm doesn't have the stability and the performance in a low yield environment that the older varieties have. Photo by John LaRose

Newer Cottons On Horizon

*Bollgard, Wide Strike
Gene Technologies Will
Take Over Market*

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Some of this newer cotton germplasm under study doesn't have the stability and the performance in a low yield environment that the older more traditional varieties have, according to Dr. Chris Main, extension cotton and small grain specialist at the research station in Jackson, Tenn.

"Part of that is due to breeding for high performance," he explained. "We are trying to get cotton out of companies that promote high yield, have good stability in high yield environments, and have a good fiber package, and sometimes you have to give something up. That seems to be in the lower end environments with these newer varieties."

He further explained that, statistically speaking, there is no difference between the newer technologies and the older biotechnologies under study.

"However, there is anywhere from a 30- to 50-pound yield difference between the two with the new technologies being lower in lower end environments, but whenever you average that over multiple states or multiple locations within a state that number is non-significant."

Main said he expects that by 2010 everything will be Bollgard II or Wide Strike or some other form of a two gene technology.

"That kind of puts an end to a lot of the Roundup Ready as well, because that technology was paired together and we don't see Bollgard II stacked with old Roundup Ready," Main said. "It is all stacked with flex, so we are going to see practically every acre make that shift to the flex technology within the next two to three year period."

That change was not unexpected, however, Main believes that with the performance issues he's seeing some farmers will still like the option of using Bollgard Roundup Ready. He said he expects that not only in the north Delta but also in the southeast and Georgia.

"They would love to have 555 around forever," he said. "They have a 150-200 pound advantage using that variety over anything else they can get their hands on."

A lot of breeding is focusing on a late season variety that has a lot of steam behind it that will put pounds in the basket and really be able to take that market that 555 had, he said.

At the beginning of the year, Main felt that the cotton acreage in Tennessee would be close to the total 500,000 acres like last year.

"However, as time has progressed over the last six to eight weeks, I've drop about 200,000 acres from that estimate to where right now I really think we will be fortunate to have over 300,000 acres," he said.

"I think 350,000 will probably be the tops that we will see unless we run into an issue with some soybean seed supply to where we just have to have something to put on our acres," Main predicted. "Really the timing of when we find that out is going to be most important. If we think we have soybean seed and we pass our corn planting window in early April then we are going to have to go to cotton, but if we learn about our shortage of seed with soybeans before that time and we can plant corn that first or second week of April a lot of that acreage will still stay in corn, but we will see an increase in cotton acres regardless."

As far back as the late 1930s when everyone farmed five acres of cotton, the state averaged 1.2 million acres.

"In fact, that ranged throughout the state," he said. "That was in East Tennessee, up the Tennessee River valley, all they way up to Nashville and Franklin."

Most of that was being baled and marketed through the cotton exchange in Memphis or taken down into north Alabama or somewhere else to be marketed.

"Today, there is still tremendous demand for cotton worldwide, especially in emerging markets like India and China, where they are building new textile plants all the time," he said. "So there is a home for that cotton. The problem that we have right now is that there is just over supply."

One of things that really drives this global market is that India is now adopting technologies that have been common here for 10 years, so their average yields are going from 150-200 pounds per acre to 400 to 700 pounds.

"So that's really putting an oversupply of cotton in the market that is in that Asian area, and there are no transportation costs associated with it," he explained.

Some of the cotton produced here goes into Central America to textile mills there.

"However, the majority of our cotton goes overseas and once it gets parceled out from that point it is really hard to tell exactly where it goes," Main said. "Yet, a good portion of our cotton stays in Central and South America, but Brazil also has an emerging cotton market that is moving north in some markets as well."

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