

More Mississippi producers are growing peanuts as global demand remains steady and new marketing opportunities open up in the state.

Photo by MSU Ag Communications/Kat Lawrence



## Peanuts Gain Popularity As State Ag Commodity

**HATTIESBURG MISS.**

**M**ississippi producers expect peanuts to remain a strong commodity in years to come with a steady global demand and new marketing opportunities.

“The demand for peanuts will stay in place because of global economics and population,” said Mike Phillips, plant and soil sciences department head at Mississippi State University. “International markets rely on the United States for this product. And a global population that is expected to exceed 9 billion by 2050 will drive this commodity to be successful.”

Since 2008, peanut production in the state has increased steadily; Mississippi became the No. 7 peanut-producing state in 2012. Mississippi producers grew 47,000 acres in 2012, up from 14,000 acres in 2011. Peanut production is expanding in the Delta due to good prices and the need for crop rotation. Existing irrigation systems in the Delta ensure peanuts get enough moisture and at the right intervals. North Mississippi farmers are also adding the crop.

Their surge in popularity has scientists at MSU busy studying the latest research to improve crop characteristics and production methods.

MSU researchers performed five variety trials across the state in 2012 with a combine and digger donated by The National Peanut Lab and Kelly Manufacturing Company. Brad Burgess, director of peanut variety testing at MSU, said five test plots are planned for this year and will include commercially available varieties, as well as some experimental varieties.

Alan Henn, a plant pathologist in MSU’s Department of Biochemistry, Molecular Biology, Entomology and Plant Pathology, said he doesn’t expect to see any new pressures from disease in 2013.

“Crop rotation is the best defense against early and late leaf spot and southern stem rot, the most prevalent diseases for Mississippi-grown peanuts,” Henn said. “Chemical controls do exist, and they are successful. But the frequent

spraying that peanuts require can add a huge amount of expense. So I hope our growers will continue to do good crop rotation that will help Mississippi remain competitive.”

Growers in southeast Mississippi have grown peanuts for many years as a rotation crop. Other producers are adding peanuts to help diversify crop rotation and increase their profits.

Peanuts are drought-tolerant and resistant to nematodes common in the state’s soil, which makes them compatible for alternating with corn and cotton. Peanuts are also unlikely to suffer hurricane damage because they grow low to the ground.

“Peanuts are a good fit for growers down here,” said Joe H. Morgan, a Forrest County producer who has grown peanuts for 22 years. “Peanuts are good for keeping the soil healthy, and they can have a high profit potential. But each farmer has to consider his or her individual farm and how or if peanuts will fit.”

Although growing peanuts requires expensive specialized equipment and more maintenance than traditional Mississippi crops, many producers understand the value peanuts add to a farming operation.

Stone County growers Dale Parden and his son, Arizona, produced their first crop of peanuts in 2012. They grow soybeans and wheat and added peanuts as a rotation crop.

“We had a really good experience,” Arizona Parden said. “We didn’t have any problems, but it was a little challenging. Learning to run the digger was the most difficult.”

Industry leaders do not expect another record-breaking year for 2013, but anticipate a solid demand that will lead to an increase in peanut production over the next several years.

“Three large buying and shelling companies have established four buying points in the state,” said Malcolm Broome, executive director of the Mississippi Peanut Growers Association. “We may also get a shelling plant in the future. That would be great for Mississippi’s economy and the growers.” △