

Persistent Rain Dampening Hopes For Arkansas Cotton Growers

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

More than a week of rain is dampening the hopes of Arkansas cotton farmers on the verge of harvest, said Tom Barber, extension cotton agronomist for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

Cotton growers were in need of a warm, sunny September and October to get the most from their crops.

"The weather just has not cooperated with cotton farmers for the most part of this year," he said Thursday. We have received anywhere from 4 to 10 inches, depending on location, in the last seven to eight days.

"We are losing yield every day that this rain continues," Barber said. "This is very disheartening, considering how difficult it was to plant and establish a crop this year, plus all the money that was invested into crop management."

Barber said there are several ways the rain cut yields. In fields where the bolls are open, rain can cause the lint, or fluff part of the boll, to become matted, hard and discolored, or can cause the lint to fall out completely.

"Another problem is seed germination inside the open bolls," he said. "Because of the rain, the seeds are already beginning to sprout inside the bolls, which will lead to decreased fiber quality and value of the crop at harvest."

In bolls that haven't fully opened, "water from frequent rainfall for downpours can infiltrate the small cracks in cotton bolls, causing them to 'hard lock.' This is a condition where the lint begins to rot inside the boll," Barber said. "Once the boll opens, the lint does not fluff out. Instead, it forms a hard mass and shatters to the ground when the picker runs through the field."

Many acres are late planted, thanks to a wet spring. Those plants are vulnerable to boll rot, a fungal disease that causes the boll to rot before it opens.

"The two times a year farmers don't want rain – planting and harvest – and they've had it during both stages," said Don Plunkett, Jefferson

County extension staff chair for the U of A Division of Agriculture. "This is just a nasty situation."

The low-pressure system that has been circulating moisture into Arkansas was expected to



Rain is ruining the cotton harvest for some Arkansas cotton growers, matting bolls or causing the lint to drop to the ground.

Division of Agriculture photo by Tom Barber

weaken, but linger over the state through the weekend, according to the National Weather Service at North Little Rock. A cold front was forecast to move into the state Monday afternoon to help push moisture out of the area.

According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, Arkansas growers planted 520,000 acres of cotton this year, down from 620,000 last year. The 2008 crop was valued at nearly \$349 million dollars. Δ

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