

Planting Season Near For Arkansas Cotton Farmers

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

Farmers in Arkansas are ready to begin planting an estimated 520,000 acres of cotton. The only problem is that recent rains have hindered farmers in their field preparations.

"The best bet is to leave the seed in the bag until conditions improve," says Dr. Tom Barber, extension cotton specialist with the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

Barber offered a checklist of important factors for farmers to consider as they wait for planting:

- Seed quality: Minimum of 80 percent warm seed germination rate and 60 percent cool germination
- Planter calibration: May vary with soil type and seed size
- Soil moisture: Place seed in moisture but not too deep (0.75-1.25in)
- Soil temperature: 65 degrees Fahrenheit at 2-inch depth
- Seed protection: Protection against diseases and insect pests

Five-day weather forecast: Minimum of 30 DD60s in five days with no cool fronts in sight. Optimum conditions occur when 50 DD60s can be accumulated within five days after planting.

"Today's cotton growers know these fundamentals well, but there may still be a few fundamentals that are overlooked, or not given enough consideration," he said.

Proper planter calibration, for instance, is one thing that needs to be looked at more carefully. Consistent seed placement depth is crucial for timely, even cotton emergence and desirable stand, he noted.

Operating a planter too fast, at 8 to 10 mph, will usually nullify the trouble you went to in calibrating the planter. Slow down, he advised.

While seeds should be planted into moisture, farmers shouldn't go too deep, he warned. Deep-planted cotton, in most cases, will take longer to emerge, struggle more to make a stand, and most of the time may have to be re-planted.

"We have data that suggests yields can be reduced if seed germinates but does not emerge within five days after planting," Barber said.

The planter should also be checked or re-calibrated if varieties are switched because of differences in seed size, he said.

"Seeding rates continue to be a main discussion topic because it's a fairly easy way to reduce costs early in the season," Barber said.

Plant enough seed to get a stand, he advised. High yields can be achieved with plant populations as low as 20,000 plants per acre, as long as the stand is uniform.

However, seeding lower populations may decrease stand and increase occurrence of long skips (greater than 3 feet). Plant at least three to three and a half seeds per row foot, or about 40,000 to 48,000 seeds per acre, for an even stand and to optimize yields.

"Costs related to cotton planting have increased the last several years because of technology fees associated with transgenic cultivars," Barber said. "The only thing more expensive than planting the first time is having to re-plant. Since reduced seeding rates are becoming more popular, protection with a seed treatment or in-furrow insecticide/fungicide is crucial, especially if planting early. Δ

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