

Rain Helps Cotton, But At A Price

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

The rain that fell earlier this month has been a saving grace for cotton in parts of Arkansas, but has also come at a price, said Tom Barber, extension cotton agronomist and associate professor for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

Rainfall from storms in the first half of July ranged from nothing in parts of central and northeastern Arkansas to more than 8 inches in the southeastern counties. Last week's U.S. Drought Monitor shows drought worsening in parts of Arkansas, with extreme drought covering parts of Arkansas north of I-40 and severe and moderate drought covering the southern Delta.

Barber said in looking at on-farm demonstration plots, "The extended period of cloudy conditions and rain has brought new life to many of these fields. However, this 'new life,' has not come without cost: we have shed many cotton flower buds and flowers as a result of the cloudy conditions and rainfall."

The flowers are important: they form the cotton bolls.

Growers have been calling Barber concerned about the loss of blooms and buds, "but we all know that it happens every year, and this year we were particularly set up to shed because we have successfully retained 95 percent of all fruit

to this point," he said.

Cotton producers are doing battle with tarnished plant bugs and spider mites, with the plant bug numbers really jumping in the last 10-14 days. In some places, the numbers are two to three times the threshold density that cues producers to spray for these pests.

"We've been spraying a lot for those two pests and in some areas, we have pretty high egg numbers for bollworms, but those are a lot more scattered," he said.

Barber said that like other crops, cotton was developing two to three weeks ahead of the norm, allowing the plants to develop faster than the usual pest invasion times. "The insect pests hadn't been too bad up until now," he said Monday.

The 2012 crop is better than average, Barber said.

"We'll be defoliating in August," he said. Defoliation is a key step toward harvest. "This will be the best cotton we've ever defoliated in August."

For more information on coping with drought, visit Arkansas Drought Resources at

<http://arkansasdroughtresourcecenter.wordpress.com/> or the shortlink, <http://wp.me/2zudK>, or contact your county extension office. △



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