

# Southern Researchers Form Professional Field Crop Alliance

REGINA LAROSE

MidAmerica Farmer Grower

PERRYVILLE, MO.

There is a novel agriculture professional organization that is in the developmental stages for Southern field crops. The proposed name of this group is the Southern Field Crop Alliance (SFCA). The goals of this group are to 1) provide a forum to discuss issues that cut across crops and agricultural disciplines; 2) develop an avenue for all segments of the Southern ag industries to come together and for education and shared learning exercises and 3) a need to organize smaller professional meetings into one event.

The idea for SFCA came about recently. "Several entomologists were kicking around the idea at a regional entomology meeting in 2008. We were looking for an outlet to get information out to the stakeholders- information applied in nature and all-inclusive from a commodity and discipline standpoint and which pertains to the Southern-belt due to the unique crop and pest complexes this region shares," explained Dr. Angus Catchot, Extension Entomologist, Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology Mississippi State. Catchot is one of the many organizers involved in SFCA.

"It is absolutely critical to be engaged with colleagues of other disciplines and commodities who share the common goal of working on current, pressing grower issues. The ultimate goal is to "put the puzzle together" for the benefit of the producer. Every discipline out there is just one piece of the puzzle, when we work together it strengthens relationships and the puzzle becomes complete to the benefit of the producer. This has become even more important to crop consultants. With huge shifts in crop acres, consultants are looking at as many as four to five different crops on individual farms. Some may not have even been grown in that area before. It is critical that there is an outlet to provide current information to the end user in a time where crop diversity is the norm."

One meeting is the difference between SFCA and other commodity and research discipline organizations. According to Catchot, "there are several commodity specific organizations, discipline specific organizations or annual meetings out there but, no place where a grower, academic, consultant, or industry representative can go and get up-to-date applied information on a diverse number of topics across commodities and disciplines. The SFCA will bring all this into one meeting where decision makers can get current information on nearly every aspect of their business."

Dr. B. Rogers Leonard, LSU Agcenter, said, "It is a hope that the agricultural industries will see the opportunity for a one-stop type shopping for information, updates and interactions with clientele and professional associations." Leonard is on the SFCA organizational team along with other agriculture professionals.

"Name any professional or public stakeholder from Virginia to Texas with a concern involved in all field crops and we want them to be a part of this activity," added Leonard.

Catchot stated, "whether you are a producer, consultant, academic or industry you have likely witnessed a tremendous amount of change over the last several years. Many in this group are responsible for working a number of crops and across disciplines already. The SFCA will bring together expertise in all these areas. SFCA will provide opportunities to work and network with a large number of people with similar interests. With the number of applied scientists shrinking every year, this will be the one place where we come together as a group with a central theme of "Southern Field Crops" being the driver rather than any particular commodity or discipline."

"The SFCA will represent Southern states from Texas to Virginia across all field crops," stated Catchot. "There will be a place for all stakeholders to participate. We hope that some

of the struggling commodity organizations will be able to revive their base through the umbrella of the SFCA."

Corporate America is also involved. Representatives from Monsanto, RiceTec, Dow, Syngenta, Bayer CropScience and Agrithority have been involved in the SFCA development.



A few of the SFCA steering committee members met recently in Memphis, TN to discuss the Southern Field Crop Alliance and National Conservation Systems Cotton and Rice Conference collaboration. Left to right seated: John LaRose, Publisher, MidAmerica Farm Publications; Dr. Angus Catchot, Mississippi State and Dr. B. Rogers Leonard, LSU Agcenter. Standing: Walt Mullins, Monsanto; Dr. Bill C. Robertson, National Cotton Council and Dr. Boyd Padgett, LSU Agcenter.

"We have 'pitched' the idea to many in the industry already and have received extremely positive feedback. Most in the industry work across disciplines and commodities. The SFCA will allow industry the opportunity to be involved in a meeting and organization that touches every side of their business and interact with a wide variety of stakeholders at one meeting," said Catchot.

The Southern Field Crop Alliance will hold their first annual meeting and conference in conjunction with the 13th Annual National Conservation Systems Cotton and Rice Conference (NCSCRC), Southern Corn and Soybean Conference and the Southern Precision Agriculture Conference. The Southern Field Crop Alliance Conference will begin immediately following the NCSCRC. The conferences will be held in Tunica, Mississippi on January 12-14, 2010.

"NCSCRC sponsors; Cotton Incorporated, Director of Research, Dr. Jeanne Reeves and Dwight Roberts, President and CEO of the US Rice Producers Association, are very supportive and excited about the creation of SFCA and its initial affiliation with NCSCRC," stated John LaRose, Publisher, MidAmerica Farm Publications and NCSCRC organizer.

"The NCSCRC has a great place to meet in 2010 for a meeting of this type. The model for breakout sessions has been successful with stakeholder involvement. It already involves multiple disciplines and commodities. It is likely that many participants will attend both," stated Leonard.

"The NCSCRC speakers are the nation's leading agriculture producers and researchers in cotton, rice, corn, soybeans and precision agriculture. Each year over 90 speakers, half of which are recognized as the nation's most innovative producers, share their stories of successful production practices. Producers speak at the NCSCRC and present their practical applications and hands-on experiences of crop production. The NCSCRC provides an atmosphere that is conducive to a healthy exchange between growers and researchers. The SFCA will add additional agriculture professionals to the lineup," said LaRose.

For more information on SFCA contact Dr. Angus Catchot at [acatchot@entomology.msstate.edu](mailto:acatchot@entomology.msstate.edu) or Dr. B. Rogers Leonard at [rleonard@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:rleonard@agcenter.lsu.edu).

Details for the four conferences can be viewed at [www.mafg.net](http://www.mafg.net). Details will be added as they become available. △

REGINA LAROSE: Associate Editor, MidAmerica Farmer Grower