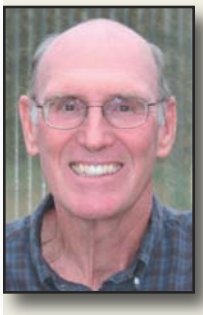
Texas Rice Crop 2010



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Texas rice acreage in 2010 was about 175,000. Main crop yields are down about 10 percent compared to 2009. This is partly due to panicle blight which is associated with certain environmental conditions. This summer was very hot with high night temperatures which is conducive to the development of panicle blight. In fact, in 2010, the city of Houston recorded the highest night temperatures for August on record. The last severe outbreak of panicle blight in Texas occurred in 1995 – the summer of 1995 also was abnormally hot – when Cypress was a popular variety. Unfortunately, Cypress proved to be very susceptible to panicle blight. The lesson to be gained from these experiences is not "put all your eggs in one basket". In other words, plant more than a single variety to spread your risk. Panicle blight also can be caused by bacteria which are seed-borne. Currently, no effective treatments for bacterial panicle blight exist. Another possible cause of lower main crop yields in Texas in 2010 is untimely rainfall during flowering which can lead to poor pollination. On the positive side, the ratoon crop generally looks good. About 40 percent of Texas rice acreage is ratooned. Furthermore, panicle blight on the main crop should not carry over to the ratoon crop.

In general, Texas rice farmers did a good job controlling weeds and insects in 2010. Farmers are becoming more aware of the benefits of timely applications of effective pest management tools. Pest management technology in rice has improved dramatically in the past several years. For instance, in 2010, Texas rice farmers could select from an array of insecticides to control a key pest of rice – the rice water weevil. These labeled insecticides include 2 seed treatments, 3 pyrethroids and 1 insect growth regulator (all have specific requirements for effective use). The economic injury level for this pest is very low (Texas data show 1 larva per core – 4 inch diameter by 4 inch deep plug of soil containing at least 1 plant – reduces yield about 75 lb/acre, given all plants in the field harbor this infestation density). In addition, Texas rice farmers were able to use Tenchu 20SG in 2010 to control rice stink bug which is another key pest of Texas rice. The Texas Department of Agriculture and the US Environmental Protection Agency approved an Emergency Exemption Section 18 for this insecticide which has a relatively long residual period of activity. Reports from the field in 2010 indicate all the above insect pest management tools performed well. Registration of pesticides is a complex, expensive and time-consuming process which requires cooperation among university/USDA scientists, private agricultural research contractors, agrichemical businesses, state and federal regulatory agencies and farmer clientele. Thus, providing new tools to manage pests is a continual challenge because agronomic practices change, new pests are introduced or emerge and regulatory policies evolve. Farmers must have an array of tools to manage pests because reliance on a single tool can lead to development of resistance. Pesticides with different modes of action can reduce the likelihood of resistance development.

In conclusion, 2010 has been a tough year for Texas rice farmers due to reduced yields and less than desired rice prices, but a high yielding ratoon crop could help matters. Farmers already are planning for next year, but many questions remain unanswered. The single constant in Texas rice production is: every year is different climatically, economically and biologically. Managing this risk is crucial to profitable rice production. Δ

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