

The Cotton Field Report

An in-season, monthly agronomic report provided by the Americot, Inc. field team.

LUBBOCK, TEXAS

Midsouth/Southeast: Cool temperatures and excessive rainfall have made the 2013 planting season one of the most challenging many growers can remember. Planting cotton in a later-than-optimal situation is nothing new; most growers have a small proportion of acres planted late nearly every year. However, what makes 2013 somewhat unique is that a higher proportion of acres will be late-planted; additionally, many of the corn and soybean acres throughout the Midsouth and Southeast regions are in the same situation, which presents a more difficult scenario for growers who will be trying to manage late-planted crops of corn, soybeans, cotton, peanuts, and/or rice – all at the same time.

The Cotton Belt experienced a similar late-planted crop across the Midsouth and Southeast in 1991, when significant acreage was planted after May 26, according to USDA. Fortunately, there are management practices and guidelines that growers can follow to give their late-planted cotton the best chance to produce a profitable crop. The yields experienced in 1991 are proof that better-than-average cotton yields are possible even when you have late-planted fields. Nearly every state in the Midsouth/Southeast regions produced yields higher than the five-year average in 1991. The percent planted data for 2013 are remarkably similar to those in 1991 – the only difference is we have many more tools in our arsenal to manage late-planted cotton than we had in 1991. Among those tools available now are: 1) the boll weevil is eradicated in every Midsouth and Southeast state, so we don't have to battle maturity delay and yield reduction from that pest; 2) many high-yielding B.t. varieties are now widely available, nearly eliminating the risk of yield loss and maturity delay from lepidopterous insects; 3) several herbicide-tolerant genes that are now available have helped avoid post-emergence applications of herbicides that severely delayed maturity (admittedly, we are returning to some of the residuals that have the potential to delay maturity, due to herbicide resistance issues); and 4) plant growth regulators chemistries have improved, and university research has provided much information about how best to apply those products to enhance maturity without reducing yield.

Managing late-planted cotton. "Earliness" was a term coined in the 1980s as a means to develop as many bolls as possible before the insects of that era would reduce yield potential. The earliness effort brought about the development of plant growth regulators and earlier-maturing varieties. In our current situation in 2013, "earliness" really should translate to "timeliness". In order to mature a late-planted crop, growers should be diligent in every field operation:

Weed control

Use varieties with a herbicide-tolerant trait to maximize your weed control options.

Time over-the-top applications for the targeted weed species to ensure the best control; this will avoid maturity delay and reduction of yield potential.

Careful calibration of not only over-the-top chemistries, but also for any residual materials

applied post-direct or lay-by; again, the goal is to avoid delay in maturity.

Keep in mind that the ample moisture in the region will allow for very rapid growth for weeds; timeliness in herbicide applications will be very important.

Continued rainfall, if that should occur, will complicate field operations in terms of your ability to get equipment in the field, as well as avoiding washing materials off of leaf surfaces, thereby reducing weed control.

Insect control

Use B.t. varieties to avoid any damage from worms

Use seed-applied insecticides to protect against early-season Thrips damage, especially in light of not having Temik® available any longer.

Diligence in controlling plant bugs and stink bugs is a must to avoid maturity delay in a late-planted crop.

Plant growth control

Given that most areas of the Midsouth/Southeast have ample, if not excessive, moisture, early applications of mepiquat will be key; consult your local Extension recommendations for specific guidelines for your area, but maintain an aggressive approach season-long.

Continue to monitor plant growth, since a late-planted crop will typically require more PGRs than a more optimally-planted crop.

Fertility

With all nutrients except N, do not reduce the amounts applied for an optimally-planted crop. In particular, K fertility is key for enhancing earlier maturity.

Keep in mind that over-application of N can delay maturity by encouraging excessive vegetative growth. Because a late-planted crop generally does not have as much yield potential as an optimally-planted crop, consider either reducing your N fertility by 10 to 20 percent at sidedress to avoid excessive vegetative growth and delay in flowering; then consider an additional N application during early bloom if yield potential is good and plant growth has been adequately controlled.

Even though late-planting in 2013 presents significant challenges, there are some positive aspects that we can use to our advantage:

Since temperatures are no longer a concern, in general, germination, emergence and early season growth should be faster than in a more optimally-planted crop.

It may be possible to have cotton at first square in 30 to 35 days in a late-planted crop, rather than the normal 45 to 50 days.

Most areas of the Midsouth/Southeast have ample (if not excessive!) moisture. While this presents a difficult challenge for planting, having rainfall is much better than the alternative. Remember the adage, "you can make more cotton with water than without".

The bottom line is don't panic. The crop from 1991 gives us some assurance that better-than-average yields are possible even when a high proportion of the cotton is planted on May 35th, or even May 40th!

If you have any agronomic questions or would like any information on Americot or NexGen varieties, call Dr. Ken Legé at 806.773.7014. Δ



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