TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

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FORT BEND COUNTY

Agriculture Newsletter

County Updates and 2016 Preview

John Gordy, CEA-Agriculture and Natural Resources, Fort Bend County

2015 Result Demonstrations and Applied Research Plot Results: If you were at the Winter Row Crops meeting in January, we had hard copies of the Fort Bend County Result Demonstration and Applied Research Handbook—they are now available on-line. We have information on yield data from the county Corn, Sorghum, and Cotton plots, fertility results, corn-aflatoxin results, sugarcane aphid management in sorghum, cotton defoliation, and pasture weed management. To find electronic copies of these reports, please go to:
http://fortbend.agrilife.org/agriculture-natural-resources

Fort Bend County Weather Station Back On-Line: The Fort Bend County Weather Station is back on-line after a long break from reporting. It can be accessed at: http://fortbend.agrilife.org/agriculture-natural-resources/fbc-weather-station/ The soil temperature needs to be calibrated, but all other data—wind speed and direction, air temperature, and humidity are working and will be accessible for your reference for recordkeeping or other needs.

2016 is Upon Us: With a relatively mild winter and reasonable soil moisture many were able to start planting corn beginning mid-February, with the county corn plot being planted on February 18. Recent rains will help to ensure good moisture when planting resumes and will be beneficial as producers transition to, or begin planting sorghum. As the season progresses, we will be performing a number of result demonstrations and applied research plots in an attempt to continue addressing the needs of local producers.

As it warms up, winter forages will begin to play out and warm-season grasses will break dormancy and begin to dominate pastures. This is a good time to test your soil to see if you can improve production through fertility management. Links to information on soil testing and recommendations can be found on page 3 of this newsletter. This time of year is also when warm-season weeds may germinate or begin to break dormancy and grow. The best time to treat pastures for weeds is when the weeds are actively growing, before they get too big—typically between March and May. There is a link to a publication covering Management of Weeds in Pastures and Forages at the Fort Bend Agriculture and Natural Resources webpage referenced in the first paragraph. We also have hard copies of publications available at the extension office.

Inside this issue:

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Tips For Remaining Profitable When Commodity Prices are Low

Dr. Ronnie Schnell (ronschnell@tamu.edu) – AgriLife Extension Specialist—Cropping Systems, College Station, TX
Dr. Gaylon Morgan (gdmorgan@tamu.edu)– AgriLife Extension State Cotton Specialist, College Station, TX

Low commodity prices often results in a shift in acreage from one crop to another. However, when crop prices are low across the board, growers must look for alternative ways to remain profitable. Crop inputs are naturally the first place many will look. Will reducing input costs increase net returns? The wrong cuts could result in yield reductions and/or detrimental impacts over the next several years, such as with poor weed management. Increasing efficiency may be a more viable option. Below are several tips for becoming more efficient.


Adult cotton fleahopper on cotton

Pest Control: Pest control inputs for cotton, corn and grain sorghum may include weed, insect and disease control. Weed control is one area that should not be sacrificed. Most herbicide programs are designed to address very specific weed issues, including herbicide resistant weeds. Starting the season weed free, using residual herbicides, and postemergence herbicides with different modes/sites of action will be essential for managing resistant weeds now and moving forward. Allowing resistant weeds to produce seed could drastically increase cost of weed control and reduce yields of future crops. Also remember that early season weed competition can reduce yield significantly. For example, cotton needs to remain weed-free for 6 weeks after planting to minimize yield loss from weed competition. The bottom line, weed management programs should not be adjusted to compensate for lower crop prices.

Insect and disease control will remain important to maintain yield. Economic thresholds have been established for major crops and pests in Texas. Take advantage of the tools, apps and calculators that are available. For example, sorghum headworm, stinkbug and midge calculators are available through the Department of Entomology at: http://entomology.tamu.edu/extension/apps/. These calculators take into consideration grain value and the cost of application to determine when insecticide applications are economical. Economic injury levels should also be applied for management of crop diseases. Preemptive fungicide applications may contribute to improved plant health but may not contribute to higher yields or a positive return on investment.

Additional sources of information for pest control:
http://lubbock.tamu.edu/files/2011/11/Corn_Guide_2010.pdf
http://lubbock.tamu.edu/files/2011/10/b1220_1.pdf
http://plantpathology.tamu.edu/people/isakeit-dr-thomas

Seed: Seed costs differ proportionally by crop depending on production cost and technologies contained within the seed. The first decision for planting is which variety or hybrid to select. Consistent yield performance should always be the first criteria. Selecting the wrong variety or hybrid can result in yield losses greater than 10%. Information on statewide yield performance for cotton, corn and grain sorghum can be found at http://fortbend.agrilife.org/agriculture-natural-resources under result demonstrations. Following yield, other characteristics should be considered, such as herbicide tolerance and insect protectants.

After the seed is selected, the next decision is seeding rate. Some crops can compensate for changes in population by adjusting yield components. Grain sorghum can compensate by adjusting head size and tiller number per plant to maintain grain yield per acre. Cotton can compensate by adjusting the boll size and number of fruit per plant. Therefore, minor reductions of seeding rates could be implemented with minimal impact on yield. Uniform stands (no long skips) may be just as important as final plant populations. Additionally, with lower seeding rates, seed quality becomes more important, and more attention should be paid to germination rates and varieties or hybrids with better seedling vigor.

Corn can compensate for changes in plant population to some degree. This is often referred to as "flex" versus "fixed" hybrids. All corn hybrids will respond to changes in plant population by adjusting the number of kernel rows and/or the kernels per row. The larger issue when deciding if corn-seeding rates can be reduced is the yield potential of your environment. In high yielding environments (irrigated corn), reduction of seeding rates may not be justified. Yield reduction from small changes in seeding rate would likely exceed savings on seed costs. In low yield environments, small reductions to seeding rates may be economically justified. Planter maintenance and setting is critical for efficiency with seed. It is necessary for achieving the target population with uniform spacing. Maintenance goes beyond routine cleaning and lubrication. Ensure that all row cleaners, coulters, opening disks, seed meters, closing wheels, etc. are properly adjusted and replaced if worn as recommended by the manufacture. Next, calibrate seed drop using seed that you will be planting. Check again if changing to seed of a different size. Look for doubles or triples and within row spacing and make adjustments if necessary to achieve uniformity. Always dig and ensure proper seed depth as well and repeat when moving to new fields. Uniformity and precision will save seed cost and optimize yield.

Fertilizer: There are many options for becoming more efficient with fertilizer. This includes subsurface banding, variable rate applications, etc. Yet, the basics are the best place to start. Fertilizer applications should always be based on soil test results. Soil nutrient levels could be higher than you expect which may enable you to reduce or eliminate unneeded applications. Soil submittal forms and nutrient recommendations can be found at the links below.

In addition to routine 6-inch depth soil samples, soil sampled to a depth of 12", 18" or 24" can be submitted and credit given for residual nitrate-nitrogen (NO3-N). Use the form and the instruction found on the link below. Studies across Texas have demonstrated the ability of crops to recover NO3-N to depths of 2 ft and 100% credit can be given to nitrate-nitrogen found in the soil samples. The amount of residual N found in soils is uncertain but the economic value could be substantial. Additional fertility information can be found at the links below:

Soil core sampler and trowel used for gathering soil samples

http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/recscalc/recscalc.htm
http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/files/soilwebform.pdf
http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/files/profilesoil.pdf
http://cotton.tamu.edu/Fertility/Nitrogen%20Management%20in%20Cotton%20SCS-2009-2.pdf

Seed Treatment Fungicides for Cotton

Dr. Thomas Isakeit, Professor and Extension Plant Pathologist, College Station, Texas

Following a very wet and slow start in 2015 and some seedling disease issues, there is more interest in seed treatments to minimize seedling losses and get the crop off to a good start. On the other hand, farmers are looking for ways to cut input cost and are curious about the value of the seed treatments. To address some of these questions, I have updated a listing of fungicides labeled for seedling diseases of cotton, which can be found in three tables in my factsheet, "Managing Seedling Diseases of Cotton", which can be found at: http://cotton.tamu.edu/NematodesAndDisease.html. The factsheet gives the rationale for making fungicides choices.

Figure 1. Post-emergence damping-off.

Cotton Prices Projected to Remain Range-Bound in Near Term

Blair Fannin, College Station, TX; Contact: Dr. John Robinson, 979-845-8011, jrcr@tamu.edu

Cotton prices are projected to remain range-bound in the near term due to large stocks held by China, coupled with depressed prices among all agricultural commodities.

"We've been stuck in the 60-cent to 67-cent (per pound) range for a while now," said Dr. John Robinson, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service cotton marketing economist at College Station. "In fact, futures have dipped to 58 cents. There are a lot of similar things that were going on in 2015 that are repeating in 2016." Robinson said in 2015, wet conditions prevailed for the start of the year, much like what has occurred in 2016.

"And demand was weak in 2015 and that continues to be the case for 2016," he said.
The Cotton Council projects some 9.1 million acres of cotton to be planted this season, Robinson said, "and it could be higher than that."

"If we have 9.1 million acres and start wet, then conditions remain dry, that makes one wonder: will we have a short crop or not?" Robinson said.

There's potential for the highest prices for 2016 to occur during summer, depending on how dry and hot conditions are in Texas and the southwest, he said. That could trigger a price rally temporarily, propping up prices into the 60-70 cent range.

"Otherwise, up until harvest we will see prices where they are now," Robinson said. Other market conditions include the demand for sportswear items that include more polyester than cotton. See the link below for more information on the 2016 Cotton Outlook.
https://youtu.be/X7eZHtP3PPA

"Polyester is considerably cheaper than cotton; it's made from an oil extract," he said. "The sportswear demand has been due to the fact that there is a less-cotton blend. The clothing has gotten lighter and you see women ages 25-40 favoring these athletic sportswear items (with less cotton)."

China continues to hold more than 60 million bales of cotton and could be unloading some of that surplus, further depressing current market prices, Robinson said. Overall for 2016, cotton farmers will have to maximize yields and make as many bales to the acre as possible to compensate for depressed prices.

Cost of production is in the 70-cent range, yet it is still rational to plant and produce cotton, providing they keep a sharp eye on fixed expenses, Robinson said.

"Crop insurance kicks in when the price declines below the cost of production, plus a 25 plus percent deductible," he said. "Overall, the market is not very cheery right now. A farmer will have to have a perfect year where they produce lots and lots of pounds to compensate for prices in the 60s."

Texas Horse Owners Encouraged to Vaccinate in Preventing Mosquito-Borne Neurologic Diseases

By: Blair Fannin, College Station, TX
Contact: Dr. Terry Hensley,979-862-3202, thensley@tvmdl.tamu.edu

Texas horse owners are urged to have their animals vaccinated to fend off the threat of West Nile virus and eastern equine encephalitis. Dr. Terry Hensley, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service veterinarian and Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory assistant agency director in College Station, said horse owners can easily unintentionally overlook annual vaccinations.

"Some don't realize the importance of vaccinations," Hensley said. "We all get busy and sometimes simply forget to have them vaccinated, or some horse owners are looking to save a few dollars and fail to have it done. However, for these diseases there's no cure. You can treat the symptoms, but there's no cure. Mosquitoes are transmitting these diseases. You can be 10 miles from the nearest other horse, but it's the mosquitoes that are moving it."

Dr. Terry Hensley advises horse owners to work with their veterinarians and vaccinate against the core diseases: West Nile virus, eastern equine encephalitis and western equine encephalitis. Hensley said the American Association of Equine Practitioners recommends vaccinating for these three diseases along with rabies and tetanus. Hensley advises horse owners to work with their veterinarians and vaccinate against the core diseases: West Nile virus, eastern equine encephalitis and western equine encephalitis. Hensley said the American Association of Equine Practitioners recommends vaccinating for these three diseases along with rabies and tetanus.

"A proper vaccination program is one of the most cost effective preventative health measures that an owner can do," Hensley said.

In 2015, he said, Texas experienced a high number of West Nile cases in the western part of the state as well as the Panhandle and Gulf Coast regions. Cases of eastern equine encephalitis were reported in Southeast Texas, particularly in bayou areas where there are large amounts of standing water that can harbor mosquito populations.

"Overall, we are simply advising horse owners to work with a veterinarian to develop a health program that includes the core vaccines," he said. "A few dollars spent on vaccines are the best dollars spent in health prevention."

For more information on the laboratory's neurologic testing, visit http://tvmdl.tamu.edu or phone 888-646-5623.

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DATES TO REMEMBER

USDA Farm Service Agency Deadlines
ARC/PLC–March 31st
Corn and Grain Sorghum Acreage Certification–April 15th
Cotton Acreage Certification–May 15th
Rice Acreage Certification–May 31st
Soybean Acreage Certification–June 15th

April 19th
Agriculture Symposium
Fort Bend County Extension Office

May 17th
Private Applicator Training
Registration 12:30 p.m., Training 1:00 p.m.
Fort Bend County Extension Office

June 18th & 19th
Bernie Traurig Jumping Clinic
Fort Bend County Fairgrounds Arena

June 22nd & 23rd
Texas A&M Summer Horsemanship School
Fort Bend County Fairgrounds Arena