UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA EXTENSION

UGA Cotton Team Newsletter
May 2025

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Initial fertilizer application considerations in cotton (*Henry Sintim*): As the cotton production season is underway this year, it is important to ensure that we follow fertilizer recommendations. Unfortunately, cotton prices are down, and typically, our natural reaction is to look at ways to cut down production costs. However, applying fertilizer below the recommended rates is ironically more costly, due to a disproportionate reduction of yield potential and other fixed production costs that have already been incurred during the season. Thus, I strongly urge that we conduct soil tests and follow the fertilizer recommendations.

The University of Georgia Extension fertilizer recommendations for cotton are based on yield goals and soil test reports of analyses with the Mehlich I extraction method. UGFERTEX is a Windows-based online system for formulating prescription lime and nutrient guidelines for agronomic crops in the state. UGFertex can be accessed on the UGA-AESL website (https://aesl.ces.uga.edu/calculators/ugfertex/). As already mentioned, the recommendations are based on Mehlich I extraction so do not follow the recommendations if your soil was analyzed with other methods, such as Mehlich III, which is becoming popular among neighboring states. Note that, routine soil test analyses do not measure the total amount of nutrients in the soil but provide an index of the nutrient-supplying capacity of the soil. In other words, a soil test predicts the amount of nutrients that will be made available from the soil by using soil test extractants intended to mimic the actions of roots in plant nutrient uptake. Below is a table showing the nutrient values for Mehlich-1 extraction and nitric acid-hydrogen peroxide digestion of soils sampled from Sumter and Tift Counties in Georgia. As can be seen, nutrient values after soil digestion are consistently greater than Mehlich-1 for both soil samples. However, **the amount of nutrients extracted by a particular soil test extractant is not as important as its ability to provide a reliable index of nutrient availability.**

Nutrient values of soils sampled from Sumter and Tift Counties in Georgia

Extraction Method	P lbs/ac	K lbs/ac	Mg lbs/ac	Ca lbs/ac	B lbs/ac	Zn lbs/ac	Mn lbs/ac	Fe lbs/ac	Cu lbs/ac
	Tift County soil								
Mehlich-1	55.7	103	105	1,038	0.40	4.07	103	44.0	0.57
Digested	338	352	342	1,233	6.30	15.9	675	9,430	4.87
	Sumter County soil								
Mehlich-1	31.0	122	217	964	0.90	3.87	196	53.0	0.63
Digested	621	608	732	1,260	3.94	43.2	1,124	44,762	13.6

I highly encourage the use of poultry litter (manure mixed with bedding material) to augment inorganic fertilizer application in cotton. In fact, poultry litter is arguably a cheaper, yet effective, source of nutrients. Assuming a typical poultry litter with 3% N, 3% P_2O_5, and 2% K_2O (fertilizer value of 3-3-2), urea price of $572/ton; DAP price of $777/ton; and KCl price of $467/ton, the fertilizer value of the poultry litter can estimated to be $79.85, which is lower than what poultry litter is currently being sold for (about $40-65, including application costs). Besides, poultry litter is replete with several secondary and micronutrients, some of which, we do not routinely apply and are therefore technically mined from the field by continual farming. The use of poultry litter helps to replenish the soil with these nutrients. Below is the results of a soil health study conducted in Midville, GA. The RT+CC+PL plots received 2 tons/ac of poultry litter without any inorganic fertilizer application because the recommended fertilizer rates (75 lbs/ac N, 40 lbs/ac P_2O_5, 70 lbs/ac K_2O, 10 lb/ac S, and 0.5 lbs/ac B) were satisfied from the poultry litter. A fair assessment of the value of poultry litter is to compare the yields of treatments RT+CC and RT+CC+PL, where the RT+CC treatment received the full recommended fertilizer rates, using only inorganic sources of fertilizers. As can be seen, the yields of RT+CC+PL are consistently higher than those of RT+CC, although the differences were not statistically significant at the threshold of P=0.05.

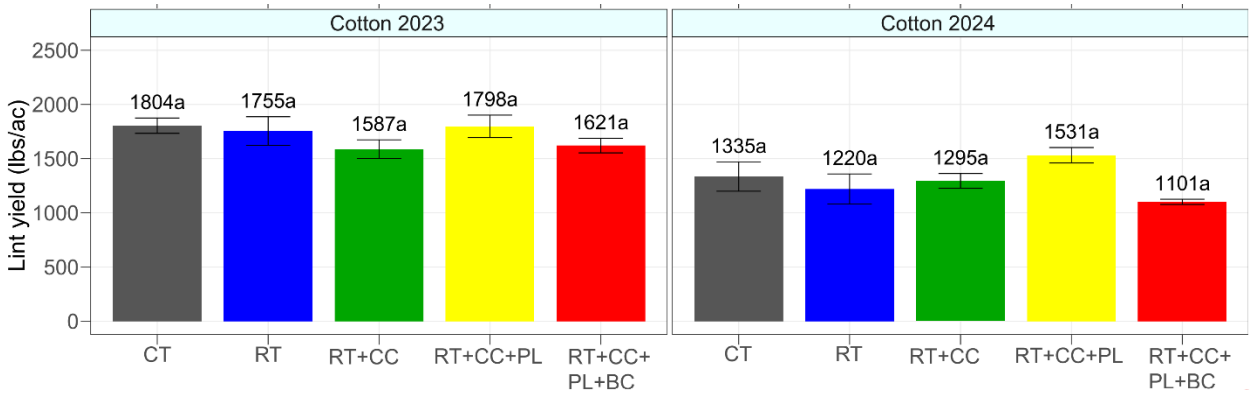


Figure: Effects of soil health management practices on cotton lint yield in 2023 and 2024 in Midville, GA. The management systems are (a) conventional tillage (abbreviated as CT), (b) strip tillage (abbreviated as RT), (c) strip tillage under cover crop (abbreviated as RT+CC), (d) strip tillage under cover crop and with poultry litter as the organic amendment (abbreviated as RT+CC+PL), and (e) strip tillage under cover crop

and with poultry litter and biochar as the organic amendments (abbreviated as RT+CC+PL+BC). Rye was used as the cover crop in the study.

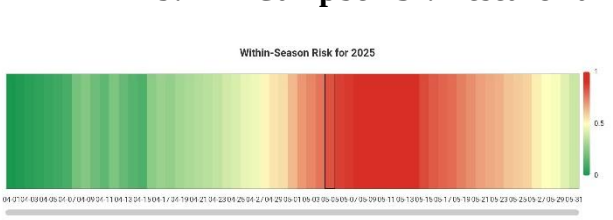
The nutrient content of litter varies significantly depending on moisture content, type of bird, feed ration, and especially storage and handling methods. Therefore, it is highly recommended that litter be analyzed for nutrients by a reputable laboratory before determining application rates and value. Also, consider applying poultry litter as pre-plant incorporated, and closer to the planting season, to get the most value and reduce nutrient losses. The UGA-AESL broiler litter fertilizer worksheet is a useful tool to help calculate the value of broiler litter based on prevailing retail selling prices of inorganic N, P, and K fertilizers and the nutrient content from the laboratory analyses (https://aesl.ces.uga.edu/calculators/BroilerLitter/).

Thrips Infestation Predictor for cotton (*Phillip Roberts*): Understanding risk and being prepared to address insect pests in a timely manner is key to efficient management. There is a model or predictor for tobacco thrips which is the most common thrips infesting seedling cotton. This model or the Thrips Infestation Predictor (TIP) for Cotton uses weather data to make predictions of thrips dispersal timing, cotton growth affecting seedling susceptibility, and injury risk that results from thrips dispersal and seedling susceptibility occurring at the same time. Running this tool will require users to enter a planting date and a location. You can run the TIP model at the following website:
https://products.climate.ncsu.edu/ag/cottontip/

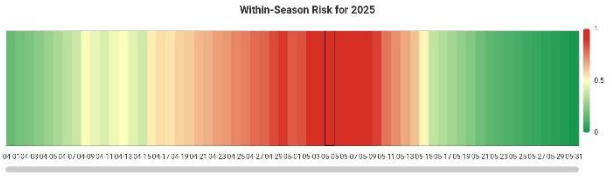
Below are outputs from the model I ran on May 5, 2025 from various research centers in Georgia. The image on the left is the within season risk for 2025 at each location. Planting dates range from April 1 to May 31. The predicted risk for each planting date ranges from least (dark green) to highest (dark red), regardless of whether the current year's risk is high or low relative to prior years. The image on the right is the interannual risk or a comparison of thrips risk by planting dates for 2025 compared with the preceding five years. Thrips risk varies by location. We believe this model will better prepare us to make better decisions regarding thrips management.

This is only a model and cannot replace scouting and observing thrips injury in the field. A couple of reminders. Thrips will infest every acre of cotton. An at-plant treatment should be used for thrips control. Supplemental foliar sprays may be needed (the threshold for thrips is 2-3 thrips per plant with immatures present on non-ThryvOn cotton). Immature thrips will be crème colored and wingless, adults are typically black or brownish and have wings. On ThryvOn cotton, supplemental sprays should be based on thrips injury, not on thrips counts. We have observed thrips populations exceed threshold on ThryvOn cotton with little to no injury. Thrips infestations will be lower in reduced tillage environments, the more cover or residue on the ground the greater the reduction. Cotton is susceptible to thrips until seedlings reach the 4-leaf stage and are growing rapidly; growing rapidly is an important part of this statement. Small seedlings are at greater risk to thrips than larger seedlings (i.e. 1-2 leaf cotton is more susceptible to thrips than 3-4 leaf cotton). Slow growing seedlings are more susceptible to thrips injury and likewise rapidly growing seedlings are more tolerant to thrips. To date acephate has continued to provide good control of thrips in Georgia, but there are problems in other parts of the Cotton Belt.

J. Phil Campbell Sr. Research and Education Center (Watkinsville)



Southeast Georgia Research and Education Center (Midville)



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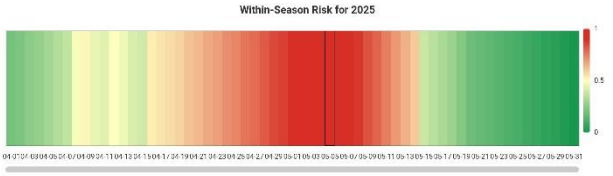
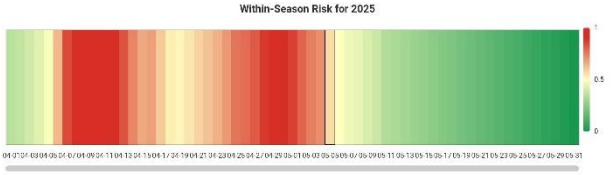
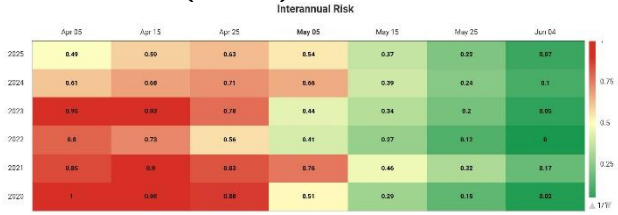
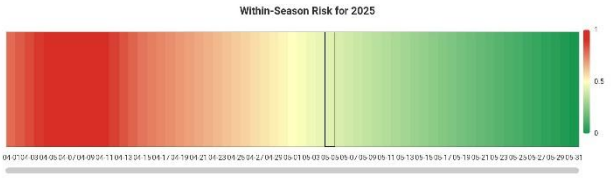


Coastal Plain Experiment Station (Tifton)

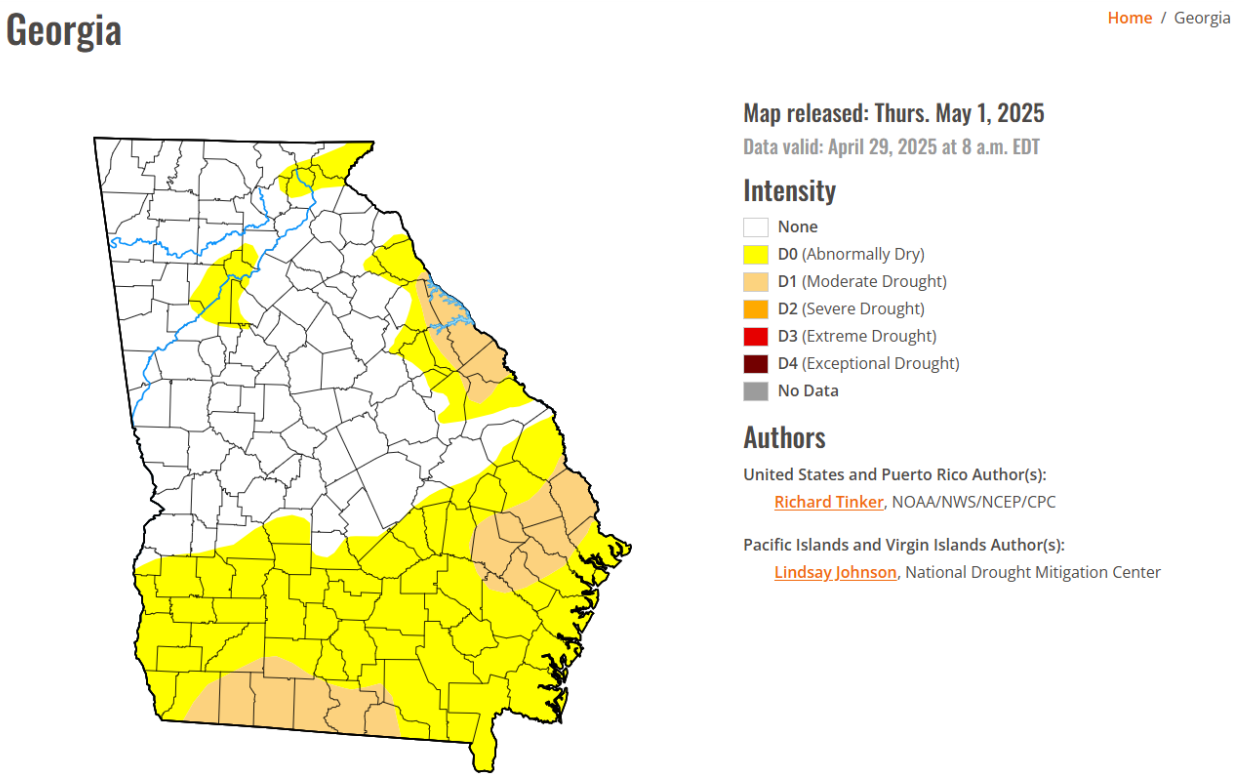




Attapulgus Research and Education Center (Attapulgus)



Early season irrigation requirements for cotton production (*Wes Porter, David Hall, Jason Mallard, Phillip Edwards, Daniel Lyon*): Unlike last year this year has brought very little rainfall and it is currently dry across most of the state. As seen in the most recent US Drought monitor map for Georgia, most of the southern portion of the state is currently in the abnormally dry category with portions in the moderate drought category. Thus, as you start to plant and consider crop management it is important to closely monitor the weather, soil moisture conditions, and weather forecast to make the right decisions for this year's challenges. Based on late April's drought monitor map we are currently classified as abnormally dry throughout most of South Georgia. The long-term forecast does have a few chances of rain included, but how widespread or significant those events are yet to be determined. Thus, chances are high that the levels of drought will continue to increase.



Historically, we have had hot and dry weather during the month of May (with the exception of May 2024). Knowing this, we need to plan for dry conditions and should consider applying a small amount of irrigation prior to planting to initiate germination in irrigated fields. It is also important to note that to receive the maximum benefits from recommended pre-emerge chemicals, another irrigation application should be planned shortly after planting. This of course depends on the expected weather. It has been documented that cotton seedlings receive less damage if the chemicals are incorporated with around 0.5 inch of water soon after the radical has formed but before emergence. This is a tight window so be prepared to be timely. Ideally, most of the cotton across Georgia should be planted during late-April or early- to mid- May. Similar to peanuts, cotton does not require very much irrigation during the first month of plant development. In some cases, if adequate rainfall is received, cotton can go up to squaring

and even bloom without additional irrigation applications as shown by the red box and water use curve below in Figure 1. UGA Extension has developed an Irrigation Reference Guide for Corn, Cotton, Peanuts, and Soybeans | UGA Cooperative Extension for use as a quick and easy irrigation scheduling guide that is laminated and contains the four major row crops grown in Georgia. If it gets hot and dry again like it has in recent years you may need to apply a few small irrigation applications either weekly or potentially a few times per week. The red box below represents the cotton water requirements for the first five weeks after planting. It is important and critical to keep track of rainfall and temperature, your irrigation efficiency (typically around 65-70% for high pressure systems and 80-90% for low pressure systems) and make irrigation applications accordingly. Keep in mind that the water requirement in the figure is irrigation plus rainfall, and the weekly water requirement recommendation was developed based on a historical average evapotranspiration. Thus, your actual water/irrigation requirement may vary slightly based on weather conditions and rainfall during the growing season. For a more in-depth irrigation recommendation it is suggested that you consider implementing either a computer scheduling model such as the SI CropFit mobile app, or soil moisture sensors.

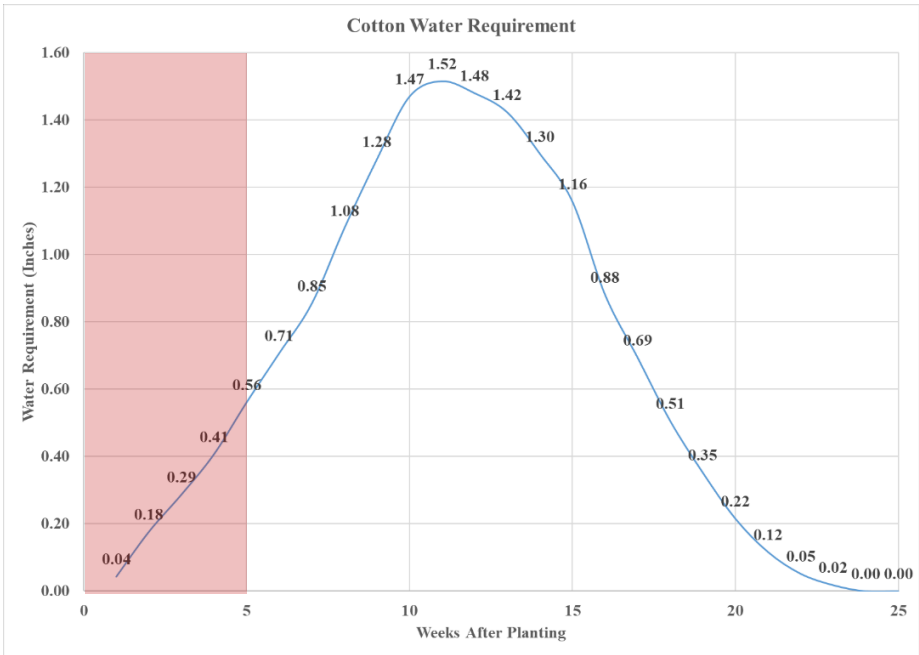


Figure 1. Seasonal Cotton Water Requirement.

For cotton farmers who utilize tools such as soil moisture sensors in their irrigation scheduling, there are a few key details to keep in mind. We tend to visualize the above ground plant biomass and forget what is growing below the surface. We can sometimes be guilty of placing a sensor in the field and not double checking periodically to ensure the sensor is collecting reliable data. Unfortunately, we need to know what is going on in the field before we blindly start following the sensor. If the sensor is installed correctly, it should represent the root zone of the plants around it, so it is important to return to the field to ensure a healthy plant stand is developing around the sensor. You may also discover after a large rainfall event that the sensor was installed in a wash, or that the soil settled into a “divot” around the probe. These

things should be corrected before using that sensor to make irrigation decisions. Based on when you planted certain fields, cotton may be spread in age by several weeks while some is still in the bag, this is a good time to think about "weighting sensor depths" according to rooting depths.

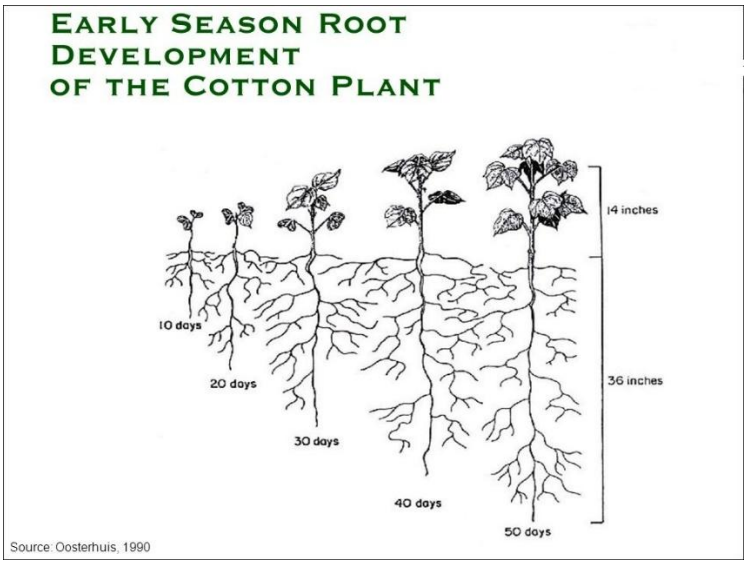


Figure 2. Visual development of root development as the cotton plant progresses in age.

As the plant root depth increases and seasonal water requirements change, it is important to change how we interpret the data from a soil moisture sensor. Early in the season, we generally have cool nights and afternoon temps are "normally" around the low to mid 80s. The evaporation rate is low in comparison to the dry hot summer days and nights. The root profile for the first month develops shallow in the soil. The plants' water requirements change throughout the season and are dependent on these environmental factors as well as the plants' phenological stage, as reflected by the UGA Checkbook method. Most sensors read soil moisture at three or more depths. We give each depth a different "weight" depending on the depth of the crops root zone at that stage. This is called "weighting" the sensor. Modern Capacitance sensors have almost eliminated the need for the user to manually weigh sensors. Some use historical models to predict the active root zone and others analyze slight changes in the moisture readings at each depth to determine real time if the root zone has reached that far. In the case of the model, it is important to follow the projected depth of the root zone and compare it to the above ground actual plant mass and developmental stage. You should have an option in most cases to manually change the root zone to what you believe is accurate. If the sensor is not displaying an accurate root zone, the sensor may call for less irrigation than needed because it is assuming that the roots are able to reach deeper moisture. Some sensors may not be weighted at all and just show the data for each depth and an average of them all. For example, if a 16" depth is showing dry soil while the 8" sensor is reading adequate moisture, the average of these two depths may persuade you to irrigate regardless of if there are even roots at 16". If the cotton plant has just fully emerged, then its root zone is likely no deeper than 10". In this scenario, you do not need to irrigate. Now, considering the rooting depth let's weight the 8" sensor by an 80% value and the 16" sensor by 20%. Since the average is weighted higher on the shallow sensor irrigation may not be needed. You should not begin to fully use deeper sensors for irrigation scheduling decisions until you see

water use occurring at those depths. Weighting moisture sensors is an important part of irrigation management but can do more harm than good if not done correctly throughout the season. If you are interested in weighting sensors, below are UGA Extension suggestions to consider for weighting sensors during the growing season:

D1 = shallow sensor; D2 = middle sensor; D3 = deepest sensor

- Early-Season: 80% * D1, 20% * D2, 0% * D3
- Early-Mid Season: 60% * D1, 30% * D2, 10% * D3
- Mid-Season: 50% * D1, 25% * D2, 25% * D3
- Late-Season: 40% * D1, 30% * D2, 30% * D3

Soil moisture sensors have proven to be one of the most profitable methods of irrigation scheduling. Nothing can beat the in-season real time data from a soil moisture sensor. If you have further questions about irrigation requirements or scheduling for your cotton, reach out to your local UGA County Extension Agent.

Understanding the cool test in cotton (*Wade Parker*): During planting season, the term germination seems to come up in conversations for obvious reasons. The term really "emerges" when growers do not get a satisfactory stand, or conditions are unfavorable. Understanding the cool test can be very beneficial when troubleshooting stand issues and deciding whether to plant.

The cool test for cotton is conducted at temperatures of 64º F, with that temperature being held constant for several days. To be counted, the seed must sprout but the radicles of the sprouted seed must reach 4 cm. The results of the cool test should not be viewed as a % of expected germination but rather viewed as a tool in the toolbox for planting management. I say this as there is no legal standard for the cool test, and it is common to see a wide range of cool test results from seed from the same lot. In terms of management, if the cool test result for a certain seed lot is 50% versus 70% from a different lot, then the grower should consider planting the one with 70% if planting in less-than-ideal conditions. As soil and air temperatures improve, then the lot with 50% can be planted, but you still may want to plant shallower and refrain from irrigation too soon due to seed shock from cold water. Many times, growers must request the cool test results of a certain seed lot, as it is not printed on the tag like the standard germination is. We do have farmers who plant early every year, and in these cases the cool test may hold more value. However, work conducted across the cotton belt over the last few years has shown that the cool test in its current form does not adequately predict field performance, and work is currently underway to reevaluate the radicle threshold for the cool test, which would improve the ability of the test to predict stand establishment in the field. Based on this, it is unnecessary to "shop around" for seed lots that have higher cool test results – instead, choose the variety you prefer to plant, and position it appropriately based on cool test results provided by seed companies and/or independent seed labs. Fortunately, companies have internal cool test standards (standard/warm germ is legally mandated), which helps in preventing issues.

We pay little attention to cool test results in ideal planting conditions i.e., high soil/air temperatures, good moisture and the ten-day forecast being favorable for stand establishment. At the end

of the day, if a grower is worried about the temperature, then keep the seed in the bag until the conditions are favorable. From an agent perspective, keep these concepts in mind as you troubleshoot early planted stand issues. A cool test result is just one variable to look at as you investigate.

How low can you go? (*Camp Hand*): As cotton planting is underway, phone calls have begun to pour in on multiple topics. But this time of year, with commodity and input prices at their current states, the question of the week is "How low can you go?" And while you may think I am talking about playing limbo on a beach somewhere, I am in fact talking about seeding rates.

Last month, Wade Parker wrote a nice article on choosing a seeding rate, and the gist of it was that recent research across Georgia has demonstrated that a seeding rate somewhere between 25,000 to 30,000 seed/acre (1.7 to 2 seed/foot on 36" rows, 1.8 to 2.2 seed/foot on 38" rows) is where we need to be. This work was done in multiple environments from Terrell County (red dirt), down to Grady County (beach sand), and up to Burke County. Additionally, there were dryland and irrigated conditions included, and multiple varieties from DP 2038 B3XF (small seed) to DG 3799 B3XF (large seed). Similar results were observed across all of these locations regardless of variety, irrigation, etc. Now, these two seeding rates were where we saw higher yields over two years across all of these locations with all the varieties we looked at. However, we did plant seeding rates lower than the two mentioned here and saw decent stands as a result, but yields were reduced.

Now, when a county agent calls me and asks, "How low can you go?" I give them a fairly smartaleck response and say, "You can go as low as you want." And while that isn't what they want to hear, there's a lot of truth in it. You, as a grower, are free to plant as low of a seeding rate as you want. However, once I get an ear full from the county agent that asked me that question about being a young, brash specialist, my follow up question is, "How confident are you that you will get a stand?" And a lot of times, that varies from grower to grower, field to field, and is highly based upon the situation we find ourselves in.
A good example of this was a few years ago I had a conversation with a grower on this very topic. He informed me that regardless of variety, field, etc., he planted 10 acres to a bag of seed. And I was thinking to myself that he was planting pretty thin (22 to 23 thousand seed/acre). So my question to him was, "Do you ever replant?" He said he didn't, and I was shocked. I asked, "Is that because you don't have to, or you just don't?" His response will stick with me forever: "Well, if I replant it's crappy cotton, and if I don't it's crappy cotton, so what's the difference?" Just FYI – he didn't say crappy. But I can't write the other word in this newsletter.

So here is what I would advise growers do in the current situation:

1. If you are planting more than 30,000 seed/acre, I think there is an opportunity for you to reduce your seeding rate to 30,000 or lower if you are comfortable. Every little bit counts this time.
2. Don't shoot yourself in the foot by going too low – the last thing we need to do is have the "opportunity" to replant cotton.

A lot more goes into getting a stand of cotton than just how many seed you put in the ground. Packing rains, lack of rain, crusting, sand blasting, insect pressure, hail, deer, seedling disease, etc. can impact how

many plants you have that will significantly contribute to yield at the end of the year. So how low you can go depends entirely on how confident you are that you will get a stand. A friend and colleague of mine likes to say, “Anybody can plant cotton, but can’t everybody get a stand.”

As always, if you have questions about this or anything else, don’t hesitate to reach out to your local UGA County Extension Agent.

Make Liberty (glufosinate) be all it can be (*Stanley Culpepper*): Obviously with our dicamba dilemma, Liberty will be more important this year so let’s discuss how to maximize its activity.

Rate selection is of course a critical element. The most economical approach remains getting to the field when the largest Palmer amaranth is ≤ 3 inches where the 32 oz/A rate of the standard 2.34 lb ai/gal material is ideal; however, if you are running behind increase your rate to a maximum of 43 oz/A. Completely killing the first flush of pigweed escaping the preemergence treatment is extremely critical. Keep in mind more crop injury may be observed at higher rates with tank mixtures but at least the cost of glufosinate is more reasonable this year. A follow up application at 29 oz/A for a seasonal total not exceeding 72 oz/A is allowed on the label.

Liberty Ultra (*glufosinate P-ammonium*) received registration and is more active with 24 oz/A equal to that of Liberty at 32 oz/A. The use rate ranges from 19 to 29 fl oz/A not to exceed 2 applications. Liberty can be applied from cotton emergence until the early bloom stage.

Time of day has a tremendous impact on all glufosinate formulations; avoid applying within 1.5 hours of sunrise and 2 hours of sunset if possible.

The weed size and being timely discussion will never change. Maximize control and your economics by treating most susceptible broadleaf weeds before 4 inches. Palmer amaranth and most annual grasses should be no more than 3 inches tall. Under dry conditions, weed size should be less than 2 inches. Goosegrass and spiderwort likely will not be adequately controlled and nutsedge is not controlled it’s just an illusion! Liberty **behaves primarily as a contact herbicide**, so good spray coverage is a sound economic investment. Ideally, use a spray volume of at least 15 gal/A with 20 gal/A being ideal and apply your product using a medium to coarse droplet. Slow down and you will get even better control.

Residual tank mix partners are suggested for most fields. Warrant can be applied after cotton is fully emerged but before first bloom; Outlook can be applied from 1-leaf cotton through the second week of bloom; Dual Magnum can be applied overtop of fully emerged cotton until early bloom or 100 days before harvest (whichever is more restrictive). Staple can be applied overtop of cotton from full cotyledonary cotton through early bloom or 60 d before harvest (whichever is more restrictive).

During 2024, Enversa herbicide was registered for use in cotton. Enversa, like Warrant, is an encapsulated formulation of acetochlor. However, research has observed signficant residual weed control differences when comparing Enversa and Warrant. It appears that the breakdown of encapsulation is influenced

differently by the environment. Research is underway to better understand which environments would favor an Enversa vs. Warrant application.

Mixtures with Roundup can also be applied in tolerant cotton. This mixture is very common and will provide excellent control of many common broadleaf weeds, such as morrningglory and small pigweeds. A tank-mix is not suggested for goosegrass, wild radish, purslane, perennial grasses (e.g., bermudagrass or johnsongrass), or annual grasses larger than 6 inches because the level of control with the tank mixture will likely be far less than glyphosate applied alone; instead, use sequential applications with Roundup applied 3 to 5 days prior to Liberty if feasible.

The Quiet Time: from the Closed Furrow to First White Bloom for Disease and Nematodes (*Bob Kemerait*): As we move through May and into June, growers finish planting and much of Georgia's cotton crop enters a period somewhere between the seedling stage and squaring. Traditionally, best disease and nematode management opportunities for cotton growers occur before the furrow is closed; disease management opportunities begin to reappear as the crop reaches first-bloom. Best management practices for seedling disease, Fusarium wilt, and management of plant-parasitic nematodes require that decisions are made at, or prior to, planting. More recently, growers have opportunity to manage target spot and areolate mildew with fungicide applications made at first-bloom and beyond. Often considered a "quiet time" for disease and nematode management, the period between planting and first-bloom offers opportunity for improved control of diseases and nematodes. Below are opportunities for cotton growers in the "quiet time".

1. **Use of oxamyl (Vydate CLV, Return XL, Vy-King 42) for additional protection from nematodes.** When cotton is between the 5th and 7th true-leaf stage, these products (17 fl oz/A) can be applied to supplement (not replace) earlier use of in-furrow nematicides. Though results from UGA studies are quite variable, application of one of these products is the only option for nematode management available to growers once the furrow is closed.

2. **Management of potassium.** Stemphylium and Cercospora leaf spot diseases cause significant yield loss in many cotton fields across Georgia each year. As Dr. Glen Harris told you before he retired, the secret behind management of these diseases is not use of fungicides (fungicides won't work for management of either disease) but by maintaining good soil fertility, especially with regards to potassium. Potassium deficiencies in a cotton plant make the plant susceptible to both diseases. Stemphylium and Cercospora leaf spots commonly occur in sandy areas of a field where potassium is more prone to leaching and where root-knot and sting nematodes are a greater risk. Damage from nematodes can affect uptake of potassium and other nutrients by the plant. These diseases are also more severe in non-irrigated fields during periods of drought as insufficient potassium is delivered to the plant.

3. **Early-detection of nematodes and Fusarium wilt helps for next season**. While there is very little that can be done during this time of the season (other than application of Vydate CLV or Return XL as noted above), growers still have the opportunity to identify areas of poor growth in their fields and to test for both nematodes and Fusarium wilt. Careful attention early in the season allows growers to make best-management decisions in future seasons.

Diseases and plant-parasitic nematodes cost growers each season in terms of lost yield and in cost of management. Care attention to the period after the furrow is closed and until first bloom can allow growers to better protect yield and profit now and in the future. As growers look ahead, they should be prepared to decide on the possible benefit for use of fungicides to fight foliar diseases.

Important Dates:

Georgia Cotton Commission Mid-Year Meeting - Statesboro, GA – July 23, 2025
Southeast Research and Education Center Field Day – Midville, GA – August 6, 2025
Southwest Research and Education Center Field Day – Plains, GA – August 13, 2025
Cotton and Peanut Research Field Day – Tifton, GA – September 3, 2025
Georgia Cotton Commission Annual Meeting and UGA Cotton Production Workshop - Tifton, GA – January 28, 2026