Variability in Peanut Maturity

I have had questions from farmers, newspaper reporters and "the average Joe" as to whether or not peanuts are or should be ready to harvest. The story varies across the state. However, as you can see, in some Burke County fields it is time to dig peanuts.

Planting date and irrigation obviously played significant roles in the progress of the crop this year. Early planted peanuts (late April, first week of May) typically take longer to emerge and will often take more than the optimum number of days recommended for a cultivar to mature, thus lagging behind the norm. Late planted peanuts (last week of May through June) often will progress more quickly because of rapid emergence and a greater accumulation of heat units in the early growth stages of the crop, and thus may be ready to dig prior to the recommended number of days to maturity, hence catching up with earlier plantings of the same cultivar. This is being seen this year.

Late planted peanuts that are non-irrigated may not progress as rapidly as an irrigated late planting. When soil conditions go dry, the plant does not function normally. It goes into survival mode and reproductive growth and maturation can be slowed since the plant may not be taking up as many nutrients, N-fixation may cease because of hot temps, CA may not be taken up by the pods, and leaves may fold greatly reducing photosynthesis in order to conserve water inside the living tissue. Towards the end of this season in our county, a large part of the non-irrigated peanut fields just simply ran out of moisture and quit maturing.

As we have evaluated peanut fields on the maturity board, profiles have not looked typical. Often we have seen a rather steep incline rather than the usual 45 degree angle steady incline. In cases like these, farmers need to carefully consider a field's management and planting timeframe as that will assist in determining optimum digging time. I have not seen too many cases so far this year where it would be more profitable to risk losing a few of the first pods on the leading edge of the board in order to progress a higher percentage of the total harvestable fruit set further along. Dr. Scott Tubbs reminds us "to be cautious with a steep profile and inclement weather or unfavorable digging conditions can cause too great of a delay, then a matter of a couple of days can mean the difference between minor pod losses to extreme casualties."

Many factors affect peanut maturity. Heat Degree Units, temperature at planting, water and other factors can delay early plantings or speed up maturity of late plantings. Use a keen eye, coupled with as much information as possible about planting and field management to come to an educated digging decision. For more information on peanut production in Burke County or related questions, contact Peyton Sapp, Burke County Extension Agent at (706)554-2119.