



THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Colleges of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences & Family and Consumer Sciences

AG BRIEFS

Monthly Newsletter from the Pierce County Extension Office

February, 2008

I've been a little slack (started one for every month though) over the last couple of months in turning out a newsletter and newspaper articles but will step it at this point forward. For the most part, we finished the 2007 growing season on a positive note considering how things looked this time last year. Looking at 2008, commodity prices are up and input costs (mainly fuel and fertilizer) are also. Management and planning are critical under these circumstances given our first thoughts are to cut corners through cutting inputs. There are places in our production systems to do this but there are also components of our systems that *if* reduced can directly affect yield. Fertility is the biggest one and a \$6 soil sample can tell you a lot. Our land is our biggest investment and ultimately contributes to our returns.

WHEAT

Final fertilizer applications should be going out shortly if not already to take this crop through. The overall appearance of this crop is variable. There may be other circumstances that I am yet to figure out that may be contributing to this but the primary one is weather. Other small grain crops look about the same so the only thing they have in common is weather conditions. If liquid nitrogen is used to side dress wheat and herbicides are also needed, it may be best to apply the two separately as some places across the state have had injury from the combination of herbicide and liquid nitrogen.



TOBACCO

Acreage is expected to be down statewide as well as locally based on the economics of the crop and the competitiveness, from an economical stand point of other crops. For those still in the business, Actigard and Admire treated seedlings are critical in the fight against spotted wilt. Although pressure was low last year, I would not bet on a repeat but hope for one. Actigard field sprays have gotten a lot of attention from UGA and NC State Researchers as being beneficial once symptomatic plants are noticed in the field (\$25/acre). I do agree that one single application has the potential to work but TIMING is essential and test results are variable. NC State has made it work in combination with a model they have developed that estimates thrips flight. But a bad year is a 15% loss from spotted wilt for them and a good year for us.



COTTON



What will replace DP 555 in a couple of years? Nothing in terms of overall yield and productivity but some varieties offered by DPL and PhytoGen come close. I have the data from the variety trial conducted here last year which was repeated in 5 other counties if you want to see the results. Acreage is expected to be down across the state and county as soybean and peanut acreage will be up. Price is slowly moving up on cotton and in the end may impact planted acres. We need cotton acres to work in our rotations of legume crops. If the price gets up and drought conditions are present, cotton still may be one of the better options to plant in dryland fields.

SOYBEANS

The top twelve soybean varieties for Georgia are available at my office. If you haven't made plans you might want to shortly given the availability of seed. The ones on the top 12 list have resistance to southern root knot nematode and are good producers. Two of the main reasons for planting soybeans this year are high prices for both nitrogen and for soybeans on the board. If weather cooperates, soybeans have the potential to be profitable this year but we still need to manage this crop at a high level. It starts with fertility, variety, inoculation of seed, insect management, disease control and harvesting. We can not totally eliminate inputs with the potential of insect problems (lessers, velvetbean, loopers and stinkbugs), disease problems (Asian rust), and harvesting (combines?). Inputs other than fertility are directly tied to observation and scouting and may or may not be needed. Asian rust is monitored on a national and state level and alerts are issued when present. Future newsletters or bulletins will discuss more on products, timing, benefits, and insect thresholds.



PEANUTS

I am in the process of determining county-wide yields at the present so I don't have anything concrete. My guess on the county average would be somewhere between 3,100 and 3,300 lbs per acre. **(Just in at print time-3,200 lbs/Acre)** The 2007 price was good and the '08 price is better. At \$500, we should cover our cost with 1 ton of peanuts per acre-depending on contracted tonnage. From a variety standpoint, stop by and pick up a copy of the 2007 Peanut and Cotton Performance Tests book. Several of the new varieties look really good but may have limited seed available. Peanut plants are scavengers of nutrients and will use what's there. Soil sample to make sure nutrients are adequate. If peanuts are following peanuts, don't be misled in thinking that baling the hay took out the disease. It may have helped some but the inoculums' in the soil for next year. Deep turning will help in a short rotation. Disease levels can't be predicted in any field because other factors also contribute. Scouting and preventative spraying are key management practices.



Folicur will be back in 2008. Provost fungicide should be looked at and Headline works great at the 40-45 day mark. In field trials across the state under heavy white pressure, Artisian, Moncut, and Provost work really well.



CORN

(Borrowed from 2008 Corn Production Guide)

Plant corn as soon as temperature and moisture become favorable for seed germination and seedling growth. Soil temperature in the seed zone should be 55°F or greater before planting. Corn seed will sprout slowly at 55°F while germination is prompt at 60°F. Delay planting if a cold period will drop soil temperatures below 55°F at the two-inch level is expected. However, if soil temperatures are near 55°F, and projections are for a warming trend, corn planting can proceed. Extremely early planting introduces a risk to frost or freeze damage and subsequent loss of stands. Usually, as long as the growing point is below ground level, corn can withstand a severe frost or freezing damage without yield reduction. It is best therefore to monitor soil conditions and weather if your desire is to plant as early as possible. Generally it takes corn seed 7 to 12 days to emerge when planted in soils there are 55°F. Early planted corn out-yields late planted corn. Depending on your location, planting dates may range from early March in South Georgia to mid-May in North Georgia. Early planting helps avoid periods of low rainfall and excessive heat during pollination, both of which lead to internal water stress during critical periods of corn development. Early planting is essential when double cropping soybeans, grain sorghum, millet or vegetables following irrigated corn.

BLUEBERRIES

The big question is, "How many acres are too many before the market will bust?" Acreage in Georgia and the United States has significantly increased over the last couple of years but demand remains strong for this commodity. Quality will be the key in the future. It is critical that we protect our Southern Highbush crop from this point forward as we are well into the bloom stage on most varieties. Gall midge samples should be pulled across all fields. This is done by taking several cuttings and placing them in plastic



bags and leaving them on the dash of the truck for a few hours. If they are there the larvae will come out and the fields should be treated as needed. Caution should be used when applying insecticides for the safety of bees. At least 1 strong hive per acre on 1-2 year plantings and 2 or more hives on mature plantings are needed for pollination.



PECANS

Most folks are expecting an “off” year following the large ‘07 crop. With an off year, we want to be sure to manage our orchards as efficiently as possible given fuel and fertilizer prices. Pecans trees normally store enough N for bud break and early shoot elongation. When the shoots are about 1/3 expanded, much of the stored N will be depleted and the trees begin to rely on uptake from the soil. This time frame puts us in April as being one of the most efficient times to apply nitrogen with consideration to an off year. I know this may be different from past years, but this is based on the biology of the tree and getting the most out of your fertilizer application this year. Applications in late February and March are beneficial but maybe not as efficient in the coming “off” year. Dry weather can make uptake difficult, regardless of application timing so this needs to be considered also. Look at the crop in May or June and determine if additional fertilizer is needed. Make use of tissue samples to help determine fertility needs during the summer.

Some pruning is needed on damaged trees resulting from the heavy crop load. Try to prune a damaged limb all the way back to the trunk or next adjoining limb without leaving a stub. Cuts should be made as small as possible. A proper cut should heal over with callus tissue, forming a barrier from decay.



LIVESTOCK/FORAGE

I borrowed the below from a publication written by Dr. Dennis Hancock, Dr. Johnny Rossi and Curt Lacy. The full publication with more explanations pertaining to each section is available at my office. I simplified it as much as possible for the sake of space. Hopefully, these tactics will not be warranted the year.

EARLY STAGES OF DROUGHT

Tactics

- Lower the stocking rate on each pasture (i.e., increase the area being grazed by the current number of animals).
- Investigate the prices of supplemental feedstocks (soybean hulls, corn gluten, cottonseed, etc.) that could stretch the available forage in the pasture if the drought persists.
- Maintain cows in a body condition score of at least five.
- Sample available hay lots, obtain a forage analysis, and develop balanced rations.
- Review or develop a cull priority list.
- Continue to monitor weather conditions and the short- and long-term forecasts.
- Wean calves that are seven months or older.
- Pregnancy test cows and sell cows that are open, old (\$ 10 years old), did not wean a calf, or have a physical defect.

ADVANCED STAGES OF DROUGHT

Tactics

- Maintain a stubble height of 2' of bermudagrass, 1½' of bahiagrass, and 2½-3' of tall fescue.
- Limit the grazing pressure on current pasture supplies by allowing animals to access hay or creep rations containing soybean hulls, corn gluten, cottonseed, or other such supplements.
- Maintain cows in a body condition score of at least five.
- Provide the supplementation based on a consideration of the available pasture and the quality of the supplement (i.e., maintain a balanced ration).
- Reduce the nutritional needs of brood females by weaning calves that are five months or older and allowing weaned animals to access pasture supplements and creep feeds.
- Identify and use only a specific set of paddocks. Choose future planned renovation areas to sacrifice.
- Maintain records on the availability of forage and other feeds.
- Start culling cows that had calves with below average weaning weights and have bad dispositions.
- Continue to monitor weather forecasts and the market price for indications to cull further.

EXTREME OR SEVERE STAGES OF DROUGHT

Tactics

- Continue to confine sacrifice animals in paddocks and limit the access of grazing animals to current pasture supplies (if any) by allowing them to graze for brief periods during the morning or evening.
- If the leaves and/or stems of warm-season grasses in the Sorghum family (sorghum, sudangrass, sorghum x sudan hybrids, and johnsongrass) are wilted and tan-colored, avoid feeding this forage as it may contain toxic levels of prussic acid.
- Continue supplementing this limited grazing with a balanced ration of hay, soybean hulls, corn gluten, cottonseed, or other such supplements to stretch the available forage.
- Maintain cows in a body condition score of at least five.
- Focus on investing resources only in animals that are likely to generate a return by continuing to cull according to your cull priority list. Begin culling more deeply based on calf weaning weights, cow age, and calving date. Try to maintain a herd of cows that will calve within a 90-day period.
- Wean all calves that are 60 days of age or older. If calves are retained, feed them a grain/by-product based diet (80 percent grain/by-product) to continue growing at acceptable rates.
- If the economics of feeding existing inventories of feedstuffs (pasture, hay, supplements, etc.) to remaining animals appears to be unprofitable and weather forecasts do not indicate immediate relief, calculate how many animals are feasible to carry and sell the remaining livestock.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Cotton Meeting
February 28, 2008 - 6:30 pm

Peanut Meeting
March 4, 2008 – 6:30 pm

Estate Planning
March 11, 2008 – 6:30 pm