

Feature Story



South Texas cotton crop looks strong as the season begins

Lubbock, Texas, a city located in the high plains of Texas and known for its Texas Tech Red Raiders, boasts being the largest contiguous cotton-growing region in the world. In fact, within a 200-mile radius of Lubbock, you will find 3-4 million acres of cotton, roughly 30-40 percent of the cotton acreage grown in the United States per year.

Adam Hixson, Technical Service Representative for BASF, knows this area well. Calling Lubbock home, Hixson oversees a territory that covers Northern and Western Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico, making it one of the largest geographical areas managed by a BASF Technical Service Representative.

Hixson expects cotton farmers in his region will be staying busy in the coming weeks.

“On average, planting cotton in this area falls around mid-May and will go through early June,” Hixson said.

Although the cotton crop has just getting in the ground around Lubbock, Hixson mentioned that southern Texas cotton is 100 percent planted.

“I was in southern Texas a few weeks ago, and most of the cotton had emerged and looked very good,” Hixson said. “The area experienced a lot of rain while planting grain sorghum, but since planting cotton afterward, the moisture has really helped the crop.”

In the Rio Grande Valley and Coastal Bend of Texas, cotton planting is complete. In this area, the cotton plants vary from two-leaf to first bloom. Hixson suggests that growers in the Rio Grande Valley and Coastal Bend need to start thinking about plant growth regulator applications on cotton that is at or approaching the pinhead square stage.

While the conditions in Rio Grande Valley and Coastal Bend areas have been ideal thus far, timely rains will be needed to finish the season off strong.

In Central Texas, rain had been an issue for growers. Planting halted abruptly in April with significant rainfalls, allowing for only about 40-50 percent of the cotton to be planted. Conditions improved in late April, allowing growers to get back in the field. Now, 100 percent of cotton in this area has been planted.

Going north to Hixson’s area, around 50 percent of the cotton crop is irrigated, meaning growers can somewhat play the role of Mother Nature and provide the crop with the moisture it needs to get off to a strong start. This also means growers in the area can establish consistent planting dates, as weather becomes less of a factor in determining when they need to put the crop in the ground.

“On a yearly average, we’ll see around 15-20 inches of rain per year, while areas in East Texas will see around 50,” said Hixson. “That means irrigation is a must to grow high-yielding crops on a consistent basis.”

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Another reason for the magical May planting window is soil temperature. In general, soil temperatures need to fall within 60-65 degrees for good germination to get the crop to emerge properly.

Hixson spoke about the importance of rapid, strong emergence in cotton, mentioning that it can make or break a crop.

“Early on, cotton is a very fragile plant,” said Hixson. “Getting the crop off to a good start is key to success throughout the entire year. Weed control should be top-of-mind at this point in the season, to give cotton the start it needs for successful yields.”

If planted in cooler soils, cotton takes longer to emerge than other crops. When it finally emerges, it would have less vigor, making it more sensitive to disease and harsher weather conditions.

With growers around his area in the high plains gearing up for planting, Hixson urges them to make sure their crop gets off to a fast, vigorous start. This means planting in warm soil conditions and being very mindful of weed control.

“If you have any weed competition, they will take water and nutrients from those newly emerging seedlings,” said Hixson. “If you have competition from weeds early on, you’ll never be able to catch up.”