UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA EXTENSION

UGA Cotton Team Newsletter
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Recordkeeping for the Future (*Taylor Singleton*): Its officially the best time of year (in my opinion) …warm weather and timely rains mean its finally time to put some seed in the ground! I'm always itching to plant something coming out of winter, so its exciting to see planters rolling through fields.

While this month's newsletter will highlight preplant/early season considerations for you to think about, there's no doubt you are making a ton of decisions right now. As you think through what the season will likely have in store, and how to prepare for these challenges ahead of time, I would encourage you to think about your recordkeeping practices, and how the notes you keep can support your sustainability for years to come. And by "sustainability", I mean your ability to continue farming your land in a way that is *profitable* and *environmentally sound*.

This year's Using Pesticides Wisely training included an update on recent changes surrounding pesticide regulations as well what to expect in the years to come. Hopefully by now this is not new information to you, but if so know that when it comes to pesticide registration and use, compliance with the Endangered Species Act (the federal law that protects endangered and threatened species from harm) is set to completely change how we use pesticide products on the farm. While most (but not all) of this regulation is still being proposed and isn't finalized (yet), we can expect to be required by the pesticide label to implement mitigation practices that prevent/minimize the movement of pesticides out of a treated field through spray drift, surface runoff, or erosion. The good news – several of the practices included on the proposed "mitigation menu" are already implemented on cotton farms around the state (cover crops, conservation tillage, grassed waterways, terraces, etc.). However, if mitigation measures are going to be required by the label in the future, we have to start thinking about how we will document that we are doing these practices.

While we don't know all the specific information that will be required to be documented yet, I encourage you to go ahead and start taking notes on the things you do as you go throughout the growing season and the rest of the year. If you participate in a NRCS program or something similar, you may already do this. But if not, quick notes about how you install and **maintain** these conservation-focused practices, and what you observe (ground coverage, water movement, etc.) year after year will help you protect yourself and set you up for future success. Especially because some of these practices are long-term investments. Throw a notebook in the truck, send yourself a text/email, or make a note on your phone's notepad…whatever helps you recall what you did and how it worked. File them away at the end of the year, that way you have records in case you need them.

Maintaining good spray records is included in this practice as well. For more information on when records are required and what should be recorded, see "Pesticide Regulations" in the 2024 Georgia Pest Management Handbook (https://secure.caes.uga.edu/extension/publications/files/pdf/SB%2028-03_2.PDF). Having completed spray records and notes is always a good practice, regardless of the product used, and can help in protecting yourself and your operation, especially in the future.
While there's still a little time before we start to really feel the brunt of these regulations, its important that we go ahead and start preparing to minimize disruption at the farm level.

Considering Diseases and Nematodes between Planting and First Bloom (*Bob Kemerait*): All that a cotton grower can do to fight seedling disease must be done prior to closing the furrow, to include choice of planting date and use of seed treatments and in-furrow fungicides.

Nearly all that a cotton grower can do to fight nematodes must be done prior to closing the furrow, to include selection of a nematode resistant variety or use of nematicides.

All that a cotton grower can do to fight bacterial blight of cotton must be done prior to closing the furrow. The only management tool to fight bacterial blight is to plant a variety with resistance to this disease.

All that a cotton grower can do to fight Fusarium wilt must be done prior to closing the furrow, to include any opportunities to reduce damage from the plant parasitic nematodes that open the pathway for infection by the Fusarium pathogen.

Management of target spot and areolate mildew of cotton does not begin any earlier than the first week of bloom and often does not occur until the third or fourth weeks of bloom.

From above, significant opportunities to protect yield and increase profits occur before the furrow is closed and after the cotton begins to bloom. Given this, is there anything a grower should do with regards to disease and nematode management between planting and first bloom? Is there anything a grower CAN do between planting and first bloom?

The answers to these questions are "Yes, though disease and nematode management is less intense for the 40 days following planting, there is opportunity."

This opportunity includes:

1. Further protection of the cotton crop from nematodes by applying Vydate CLV or other products containing oxamyl at approximately the 5th to 7th true-leaf stage, or a split application at the 5th-to 7th true leaf stage and then again two weeks later.
2. By ensuring adequate levels of potassium, growers can greatly reduce the risk to Stemphylium leaf spot later in the season.
3. Carefully noting stand loss to seedling disease and then ensuring accurate diagnosis of the pathogen. Though nothing can be done after the furrow is closed, noting seedling disease and the causal agent (typically *Rhizoctonia solani*, *Pythium* spp., or *Fusarium* spp.) can lead to better management in subsequent cotton crops.
4. Carefully noting damage from nematodes and/or Fusarium wilt. Such damage is often detected by observing stunted growth and interveinal chlorosis ("tiger striping") on the leaves. Where root-knot nematode is the culprit, one may also find galling on the young roots. Growers who suspect a nematode problem can confirm this by submitting soil samples for confirmation of the type of the nematode and the size of the population. Growers who suspect Fusarium wilt can look for tell-tale discoloration of the vascular tissue by splitting the lover stem.

Although the "die is cast" for some important disease and nematode problems once the furrow is closed; there is still important opportunity for growers to plan for the next cotton crop by recognizing and identifying problems that develop before the cotton reaches bloom.

Seedling Vigor (*Wade Parker and Camp Hand*): Planting season always seems to make myself and everyone else involved a little nervous. I have experienced very good planting seasons where temperature (both air and soil) cooperate. The ideal amount of moisture would fall at the right time, pushing young seedlings to the forefront. However, there have been seasons when the rain quit around April 25th and didn't start back until June. In these dire situations, growers would dust cotton in, preventive planting claims skyrocketed and people just prayed for rain. Fortunately, East Georgia received widely scattered showers this past weekend as well as some rain last week. So all in all, we are in decent shape.

If planting conditions deteriorate, you will hear people start discussing seedling vigor on varieties. There is not an easy method to predict seedling vigor. Seed size is one predictor that comes to mind in addition to genetics. Larger seeded varieties tend to be more vigorous, as they contain more carbohydrates or energy. Thus, giving the emerging seedling more power to push through the soil. On the contrast, smaller seed may struggle getting thru the tough soil crust, while on both pre-emerge herbicides and early season insects all can take a toll. While it may be easier to get adequate stands with larger seeded varieties, variety decisions need to be made based on yield and quality and not seed size. However, becoming familiar with a varieties seed size will help you manage variables you can control at planting i.e. planting depth or addition of irrigation if available. I think a common misnomer is when people immediately classify a small seeded variety as a high yielder and a large seeded variety as a lower yielding variety. Many can still remember the high yield potential of DP 555, which was a very small seed variety and

lower yielding varieties with larger seed. If you study our variety trial results over the last few years, yield potential seems independent of seed size. High yields can be achieved by both large and small seeded varieties, giving that adequate plant stands are optimal. Our data substantiates this, so use caution in immediately discounting large seeded varieties because of the fear of low yield.

Just as a note, there is no official designation of a small vs. large seed. The designation is only relative when comparing the seed size to other varieties. The higher the seed number per pound, the smaller the seed and opposite for large seed.

Even within a variety, different lot numbers may have different average seed sizes. Just a couple of years ago we got some calls about growers that had purchased a variety because it generally is a larger seeded variety, but the seed were smaller than the grower expected. This is mostly tied to management during seed increase, which happened a year or two prior to when we get the seed to plant in the field.

Another thing to consider is that just because a seed is "big" doesn't make it of good quality, while just because a seed is "small" doesn't make it of bad quality. Just in the last few years seed quality has been discussed and research conducted across the belt, and much of this has looked at lot numbers with differing seed sizes, as well as differing warm and cool germs. Of interest is that two lot numbers of the same variety had nearly identical warm and cool germs, but the seed size varied by approximately 1,000 seed/lb. ***Emergence between these two lot numbers was identical!!!***

While all of these things are important, you all as growers know your fields better than anyone. The fields where it is a fight to get a stand may require a higher vigor variety, while in other places that may not be necessary. Keep these things in mind as we move forward, and as always, call if you need help. Happy planting!

Are Seeding Rates the Place to Cut? (*Camp Hand*): As we are now "full speed ahead" with respect to cotton planting, calls are starting to pick up about a multitude of things. Last week calls were coming in about chasing moisture, and according to the UGA weather monitoring network, it does look like most of the weather stations as part of the network have recorded a measurable rainfall in the last 7 days. While I understand that isn't representative of what is happening everywhere (got an email from an agent in East Georgia telling me they are dry), it is still good to be catching rain in places.

The theme for this season so far is calls based around, "Where can I cut?" Cotton prices for December are too low, input prices are still high, and for many it seems to be "do or die" time. And at this point in the season, there are a few things growers are thinking about cutting. Talk to Dr. Kemerait about closing the furrow and walking away, talk to Dr. Roberts about cutting with respect to thrips, talk to Dr. Culpepper about cutting preemergence herbicides, and talk to Drs. Harris and Sintim about cutting with respect to preplant fertility. But the calls I am getting are about seeding rates.

I feel like every year we talk about seeding rates, and rightfully so because cotton seed is expensive (more so in Georgia than anywhere else in the country). But what do we do? I had a grower call a couple of

weeks ago and he asked how many seed he should put in the ground. He likes to give me a hard time, so I'll give him one too. I said, "However many you want to put in the ground." And while my grower friend may not have appreciated my response, there's a lot of truth in my answer.

Some growers have different comfort levels with respect to seeding rates. Some companies advise lower seeding rates than others. But at the end of the day, it isn't important how many seed you put in the ground, ***its how many plants you wind up with***. Just in the last few weeks we have been planting on the station, we planted the same seeding rate on multiple fields, and got vastly different results based on the spot in the field when planted on the same day with the same variety and seed lot. So in this case, seeding rate was irrelevant and something else happened which affected our stand.

So my advice to growers is to go with what you are comfortable with. You know your fields, so plant whichever amount of seed you are comfortable achieving a final stand of ***one plant per foot of row, uniformly spaced***. If you feel comfortable cutting your seeding rate and still achieving this, then go for it. However, I would hate to see someone cut their seeding rate and the result be an "opportunity" to replant some cotton. Even if the company provides some seed to cover the replant, diesel fuel and labor aren't cheap – so let's get it right the first time.

Seeding rates and other topics are discussed on the now available Talkin' Cotton Podcast, so give it a listen for some more timely updates from myself and the rest of the team. As always, if you have questions or need anything please don't hesitate to reach out. We are here to help!

Cotton Development in the Early Season (*Josh Lee, John Snider, and Camp Hand*):

Lag period

Compared to other row crops such as peanut or corn, cotton has a slower rate of development in the early season. It feels like there is a rush to get everything right at planting, and then it's an extended waiting game until cotton begins to form its first floral buds (pinhead square), which occurs around five weeks after planting. This period of slow growth that precedes reproductive development and rapid canopy growth is referred to as the lag phase. As a person wanting to see faster results, I had the following questions: Why is my cotton crop not taking off in the early season? What is happening during the lag period? First, this lag period of crop development can be attributed to the small seed size of cotton compared to other row crops. This limits the energy reserves available to drive the earliest stages of seedling growth. Second, the first true leaves also develop after emergence from the region called the epicotyl, whereas some other crops have true leaves already at emergence. Third, cotton is investing a majority of its resources into root growth in the early-season. When the cotyledons ("seed leaves") are unfolding, the cotton tap root can be up to 10 inches deep in the soil profile. Canopy and root developmental rates can also be slowed down if weather conditions are not ideal; recall TOM (**T**emperature, **O**xygen, and **M**oisture) from last month's newsletter.

Figure 1. Early-season cotton stand. Photo by Josh Lee.

Leaf area development

Leaf area development is inherently slow in the first 6 to 7 weeks after planting, and then rapidly increases at early fruiting due to the presence of fruiting branches and their associated leaves. Leaf Area Index (LAI) is way to measure the crop's ability to intercept solar radiation at a given point in the season. For example, if LAI = 3 this means that one acre of land (43,560 ft^2) is covered by 43,560 x 3 = 130,680 ft^2 of leaves. An LAI of 3 also represents the critical leaf area index, where 95% of incoming solar radiation is intercepted by the crop canopy. This is also the point in the season where cotton first achieves its maximum crop growth rate. Under ideal conditions, cotton reaches canopy closure around 75 days

after planting. Factors such as temperature, water availability, fertility, and pest pressure can influence the rate of canopy closure. Delays in canopy development can also lead to delays in crop maturity. Delayed crop maturity could result in the growing season getting cut short due to cooler weather, depending on region and planting date.

Figure 2. Early season leaf area development. Photo by Josh Lee.

Pest management is a key consideration for maintaining leaf area at the beginning of the season. Thrips are a common early season pest that reduce leaf area and delay early-season growth. Planting date selection, seed treatments, timely pesticide application (in-furrow or foliar), or planting cotton varieties with transgenic thrips protection (ThryvOn™) must be considered. Please refer to the UGA pest management handbook, UGA cotton production guide, and Dr. Roberts portion of this newsletter for information regarding thrips management tools and rates.

Figure 3. 2-leaf cotton with thrips management tools (left) and no thrips management tools (right). Photo by Josh Lee.

Cotton yield is determined by the ability of the crop to capture incoming sunlight, the efficiency with which the canopy converts that sunlight into biomass, and how the crop partitions that biomass into fiber. It is fair to say that a good start to the growing season does not guarantee high yields because a lot can happen between planting and harvest. However, starting strong is important because rates of canopy development determine light capture by the canopy and form the physiological foundation on which yield development rests.

References

Guthrie, D., Burmester, C., Edmisten, K., Wells, R., 1995. Early season growth. In: Cotton Physiology Today. National Cotton Council, Memphis, TN.

Ritchie, G.L., Bednarz, C.W., Jost, P.H., Brown, S.M., 2007. Cotton growth and development. The University of Georgia, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Athens, GA. Bulletin 1252.

Early Season Irrigation Requirements for Cotton (*Wesley Porter, David Hall, Jason Mallard, Phillip Edwards, and Daniel Lyon*): No two growing seasons are the same; it is important to closely monitor the weather, soil moisture conditions, and weather forecast to make the right decisions for this year's challenges. This April has observed a significant amount of rain, and we are currently sitting in a no drought scenario according to the U.S. Drought monitor (https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/CurrentMap/StateDroughtMonitor.aspx?GA). However, some of these rainfall events have come very rapidly, causing runoff and/or deep percolation. Temperatures are forecasted to remain in the 80's for the time being. Despite that, in recent years it has turned hot and dry during the month of May. 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.

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. 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.

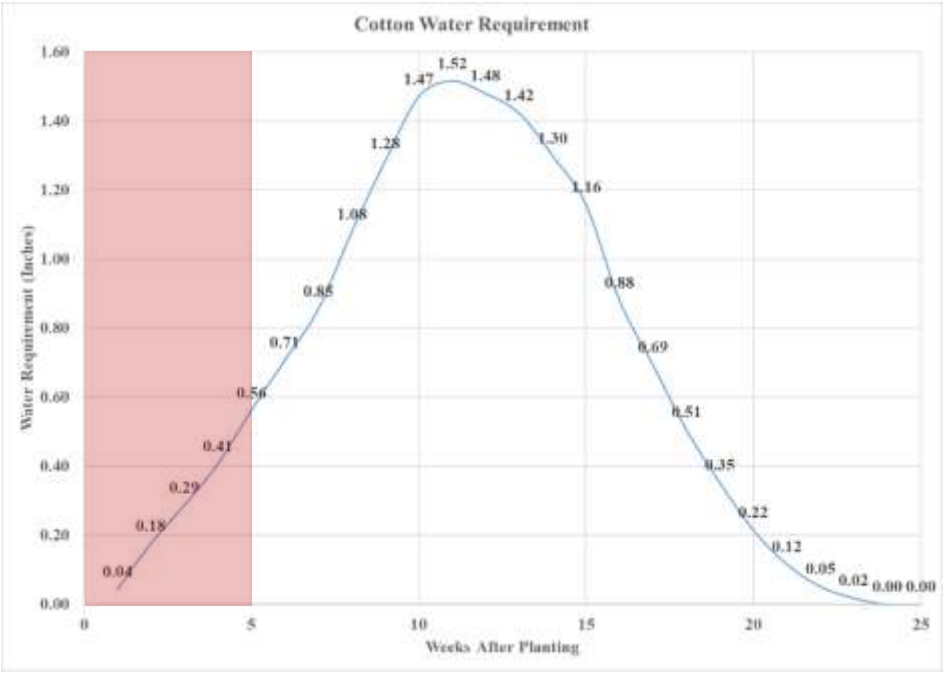

Figure 1. Seasonal Cotton Water Requirement.

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 be representing 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.

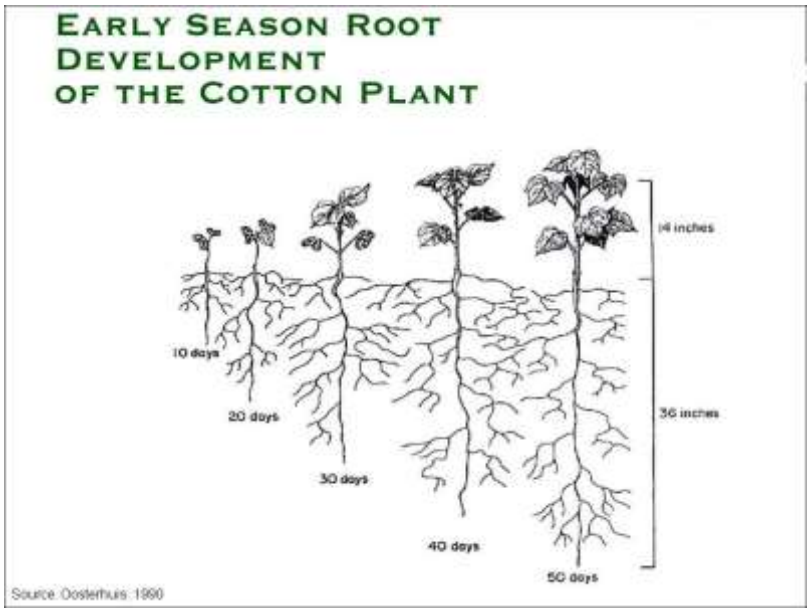

Figure 2. Visual development of root development as the cotton plant progresses in age.

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 development 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%. Now 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 is 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 on your cotton, reach out to your local UGA County Extension Agent.

Do I need to Spray for Thrips? (*Phillip Roberts*): Thrips will infest near 100 percent of cotton planted in Georgia. All cotton should include a preventive treatment at planting, regardless of planting date. Supplemental foliar sprays may be needed if environmental conditions are not conducive for uptake of systemic insecticides or if heavy infestations occur. The threshold for thrips is 2-3 thrips per plant with immatures present. Immature thrips are wingless and crème colored whereas adults are typically black or brownish and have wings. The presence of numerous immatures suggests that the at-plant systemic insecticide is not providing acceptable control. Thrips eggs were laid in the plant (interestingly a high percentage of thrips eggs are laid in cotyledon leaf tissues), the eggs hatched, and thrips are developing. Excessive thrips injury results in crinkling of leaves and stunting of plants. In reality many decisions are made based on plant injury symptoms. Ideally, we would like to scout (count thrips) and also be observant for injury. Thrips feed in unfurled leaves in the terminal bud. As new leaves unfold the injury becomes apparent, so be sure to look at newly unfolding leaves. Foliar insecticides include acephate, dicrotophos, and dimethoate. In 2023 we received numerous questions about susceptibility of thrips to acephate as some tolerance or resistance is suspected in other parts of the US. Field trials conducted during 2023 demonstrated that we continue to observe good control of thrips with acephate. Seedlings are susceptible to thrips injury until they reach the 4-leaf stage and are growing rapidly. Growing rapidly is important, if 4+-leaf cotton has lots of thrips injury and plants are stunted and not growing a spray would be justified.

ThryvOn is a transgenic trait which significantly reduces thrips injury. We have conducted field trials with ThryvOn for several years and have never observed a planting which would benefit from a supplemental foliar insecticide for thrips control. ThryvOn does not result in high levels of thrips mortality, however thrips feeding and egg laying are significantly reduced. Typically, we observe about a 50 percent reduction in actual thrips numbers when scouting and sometimes we observe populations exceeding the threshold in ThryvOn cotton. However, we rarely see significant plant injury even if very high thrips infestations are present (i.e. above the threshold of 2-3 thrips per plant with immatures present). For this reason, it is important that we DO NOT make decisions to treat ThryvOn for thrips based on insect counts. The threshold for thrips on ThryvOn cotton is treat if excessive plant injury is present and immature thrips are present.

Grasshopper Questions (*Phillip Roberts*): We have received scatter reports of grasshoppers in some reduced tillage fields, especially in lighter soils. Grasshoppers overwinter as eggs deposited in the soil; the lack of tillage allows greater survival of the eggs. Dry winters also favor overwintering survival of grasshoppers. Grasshoppers may feed on foliage, but more serious damage occurs when they feed on the main stem of seedlings. In some situations, grasshoppers may completely cut the main stem (this type damage looks like cutworm damage) whereas in others they may partially chew through the stem which weakens the plant which may eventually tip over. Treatment should be applied if the stand is threatened. Immature grasshoppers (wingless) are easily controlled with insecticides however adults (winged) are more difficult to control and high rates of labeled insecticides should be used. Acephate at 0.75 lb per acre has provided consistent control of adult grasshoppers. The insect growth regulator Dimilin provides good residual control of immature grasshoppers but has no activity on adults. When monitoring fields for grasshoppers, be sure to walk the entire field. In some situations, grasshoppers may be migrating into the field from turn rows, fences, ditches, etc. and be present at much higher populations near the margins than the interior portions of the field. When we have observed serious grasshopper injury it is generally associated with grasshopper populations that emerged from eggs laid in the field last fall. Whether or not grasshoppers will actually feed on cotton is unpredictable. We have observed fields with high infestations of grasshoppers and minimal feeding on cotton and vice versa have seen fields with moderate grasshopper counts and significant plant injury. This makes management decisions difficult.

Grasshopper damaged plants on left. Picture on right shows a damaged main stem which has been partially chewed by a grasshopper.

Cotton, Peanut, and Soybean Scout Schools (*Phillip Roberts*): Scout schools will be held at the UGA Tifton Campus Conference Center in Tifton on June 3, 2024 and at the UGA Southeast Research and Education Center in Midville on June 11, 2024. The program will begin at 9:00 a.m. and conclude at 12:30 p.m. These programs offer basic information on cotton, peanut, and soybean insects and scouting procedures and will serve as a review for experienced scouts and producers and as an introduction to insect monitoring for new scouts.

Important Dates:

Cotton, Peanut, and Soybean Scout School – Tifton, GA – June 3, 2024
Cotton, Peanut, and Soybean Scout School – Midville, GA – June 11, 2024
Georgia Cotton Commission Mid-Year Meeting - Statesboro, GA – July 24, 2024
Southeast Research and Education Center Field Day – Midville, GA – August 7, 2024
Southwest Research and Education Center Field Day – Plains, GA – August 15, 2024
Cotton and Peanut Research Field Day – Tifton, GA – September 4, 2024
Georgia Cotton Commission Annual Meeting and UGA Cotton Production Workshop - Tifton, GA – January 29, 2025