THE 2013 CROP YEAR IN REVIEW

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The 2013 production season was quite different from that of any recent season in Georgia. Cotton acreage planted increased 6.2 percent from 2012 with 1.37 million acres planted and 1.34 million acres harvested according to USDA-NASS. Georgia remains the second largest cotton producing state in the country with Texas as the first.

The predominant defining factor describing the 2013 season was the abnormally excessive season-long rainfall that we experienced. Wet and cool weather in early spring delayed planting slightly later than normal, pushing much of the initial planting into late May, when a short-lived slightly drier spell occurred. Rains quickly returned and significantly delayed planting of the later crop, especially cotton planted behind wheat. Cotton in many areas struggled to get a good start. Substantial water logging occurred in many fields, which significantly delayed or prevented timely application of side-dressing fertilizers and/or layby herbicides. Cotton in many of these fields remained short with a suboptimal boll load season-long, and many fields had significant portions that drowned. Other fields, if well-drained, were able to recover and develop high yield potential, although much of the crop was later maturing than normal. This recovery could likely be attributed to the warmer, sunnier, and drier weather that occurred during August and September, which allowed for accelerated boll development and reduced losses due to boll rot and hardlock.

Harvest weather throughout the fall, although cooler than normal, was fairly cooperative, reducing additional losses and allowing for timely harvest. Some areas experienced a mild frost around October 25, which is slightly earlier than normal; however, most areas did not receive a significant frost until November 10-12, which is the typical approximate average first frost date for many areas in South Georgia.

The most common challenges for growers in 2013 included nematodes, which expanded into several more fields than normal, emphasizing the need for cultivar tolerance to nematodes or other effective treatment options. The loss of aldicarb and the wet weather during 2013 are largely to blame for the increased incidence of nematodes. Target spot was also a concern in many fields, as it was in 2012. Glyphosate-resistant pigweed remains a significant challenge, especially in fields where excessive moisture prevented or delayed layby applications. Despite these and other challenges, many parts of Georgia were blessed with better than expected yields, resulting in a projected statewide average yield of 831 lbs/acre.

Georgia is expected to produce 2.32 million bales for 2013, sustaining our commitment to cotton. Although yields were variable depending upon drainage and the effects of excessive rains, average statewide yields continue to remain above 800 lbs/acre, despite the loss of DP 555 BR, which is a true testament to Georgia's growers, their commitment to cotton, and the release of superior varieties. As new(er) varieties are being released onto the market in a much more rapid manner (due to increased competition and advancements by industry), variety selection remains a very important issue. Many of the new varieties performed very well for Georgia growers in 2013. The 2013 cotton acreage in Georgia was predominately comprised of Deltapine varieties (61.28 percent), Phytogen varieties (27.31 percent), FiberMax varieties (4.56 percent), and Stoneville varieties (4.41 percent) (www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/).

The quality of the 2013 crop was comparable to previous years for some parameters (Table 1). Of 2.244 million bales classed as of January 23, 2014, 1 percent was short staple (<34) and 22.3 percent were high mic (>4.9). Average staple was similar to that of the previous two years, although the incidence of short staple was very low.

Average micronaire was slightly higher than in 2012, but the incidence of high mic was noticeably higher in 2013 than in many preceding years. High micronaire is usually attributed to drought stress, when only lower fully mature bolls are retained or in environments with very high yield potential where the upper bolls reach full maturity. Drought stress was not significant in any part of the state in 2013. Therefore, some incidences of high micronaire may have been due to either high yields or water logging that caused stress to plants and limited growth, similar to what may be typically expected from drought stress.

Fiber length uniformity remained high in 2013, a likely result of the constant changing in varieties planted. Most noticeably, bark was lower in 2013 compared to 2012, but was slightly higher than in years preceding 2011.

Table 1. Fiber Quality of Bales Classed at the Macon USDA Classing Office, 2008-2013

	Color Grade 31/41 or better (% of crop)	Bark/ Grass/ Prep (% of crop)	Average Staple (32nds)	Average Strength (g/tex)	Average Mic	Average Uniformity
2008	25 / 93	all < 1.0	34	28.7	4.6	80.2
2009	26 / 96	all < 1.0	35	28.8	4.5	80.3
2010	50 / 90	all < 1.0	35	29.9	4.8	81
2011	38 / 84	2.6 / <1 / 1	36	29.6	4.6	81.7
2012	48 / 91	11.9 / <1 / <1	36	29	4.6	81.7
2013	49 / 89	5.3 / <1 / <1	36	29.6	4.7	81.8

Bales classed short staple (< 34)
2008: 20%, 2009: 22%, 2010: 4%, 2011: 2.8%, 2012: 1.4%, 2013: 1%

Bales classed high micronaire (> 4.9)
2008: 21%, 2009: 20%, 2010: 9%, 2011: 8.8%, 2012: 15.4%, 2013: 22.3%

Fiber quality data as of January 23, 2014. SOURCE: http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/

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