

Cotton Growers Slowly Transition To Round Bales

BATON ROUGE, LA.

Louisiana's cotton crop has been picked, baled and ginned. Large rectangular bales sitting by the fields are a common sight during the harvest season. But in some areas of the state, round bales are replacing the more familiar cotton modules.

The main advantage to round balers is fewer pieces of equipment and less labor needed, according to LSU AgCenter cotton specialist John Kruse. The new pickers harvest the cotton and create the round bales placing them on the turn-row as they go, with no need for a driver pulling a module builder or module operators.

"With this system the farmer has the freedom to go out and pick without having to rely on several other workers," Kruse said, adding that it also means less equipment to maintain.

The new pickers are pricey, Kruse said, around \$575,000-\$650,000. In Louisiana, cotton farmers mainly in the Mississippi Delta area have made the switch. The round balers are more common in Arkansas and Mississippi. Kruse said lower cotton prices have made it difficult for farmers across the state to invest in new equipment.

The round bales offer the benefit of protection to the cotton, Kruse said, adding, "Plastic wrap goes around the bale and seals it tightly."

Gins in areas where farmers have switched to round bales had to put in new equipment, but Kruse said they made the adjustment easily.

He expects to see more round bales in the coming years.

"This is just another step in the mechanization of agriculture," Kruse said. "The original cotton pickers replaced 100 laborers in the field. And now this piece of equipment allows more production with fewer workers." Δ



A round bale cotton picker sits at the edge of a cotton field near a round bale. The advantage to round balers is fewer pieces of equipment and less labor needed for harvest.

Photo by Tom Barber, University of Arkansas