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Photo by John LaRose, Jr.

Cotton Moving North

*Missouri Agronomist Looking At Ways
To Move The Cotton Belt North*

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CAPE GIRARDEAU COUNTY, MO.

“If you look on the records for the state of Missouri, our county record will have 0.2 acres of cotton and it's all right here,” said Dr. Wes Mueller an agronomist in the Department of Agriculture at Southeast Missouri State University at Cape Girardeau.

“With cotton at \$1.00 a pound, farmers are going to be interested in growing it if possible. We're showing how we can do it and we did some experiments in the past on things we can possibly do to get it to mature a little bit earlier,” said Mueller.

Currently the cotton belt ends around Sikeston, Mo. and one reason is the weather is a little bit different. Mueller feels that by changing some agronomic practices, we can get the cotton to mature earlier.

“Last year we produced a crop with different amounts of phosphorous in the soil. The literature states that phosphorous hastens maturity. We did an experiment where we added 0, 60, 90, 120 and 180 pounds. We're trying to really push it and see if that would increase maturity and it turns out they were all about the same” said Mueller. “We need to rethink the effects of phosphorus. Instead of it hastening maturity, the lack of phosphorus slows maturity. This is a great lesson for all cotton farmers in the area. NEVER cut back on phosphorus. It may mean the difference between the crop maturing in time for harvest or not.”

The difference may be days but an extra few days may mean hitting that window of good weather. “That is a little take home message for not only the farmers here in Cape Girardeau but the farmers down in the Bootheel. We are now focused on getting the crop in on time. The earlier you get it in, the earlier you're going to be able to get yours harvested where your neighbor may not,” Mueller said.

This is Mueller's third year in planting cotton

in this area. “The first year I got it in a little late and again two weeks late is pretty bad. I know that 2009 was a hard year for cotton growers including those in the Bootheel. We had that cool spring, which delayed the crop. I got almost no bolls to open and would call it a completely failed crop.

Last year I planted by May 10th and that was excellent, perfect timing for planting and got planted between the rains. We had good weather through most of the summer and ended with an excellent crop. That was the best crop I've grown in the three years (2.4 bales per acre, a bale if 500 lb. of lint).

“This year we got planted by the May 18th and had a nice warm summer and cotton loves warm summers. Because we had such dry spells, everyone that could irrigate was happy with their cotton crop. We produced right at 2.1 bales per acre.”

The type of irrigation on the experiment site is an underground tile system used also for drainage. “We're in the bottom land with a creek along one side and drainage ditches along the other. A few years ago we put in an underground tile system with four-inch tiles 30 feet apart. This year when we had those huge rains this field was covered with water several feet deep and that water receded within a day. A week later we were able to get in and work the field.”

“It looks like a good crop down in the Bootheel this year. Now there's going to be farmers down there that will have 3 bales and more but I'd be very happy with 2.1 bales with the price of \$1.00 per pound.”

“What we are using here is Delta Pine 912, said Mueller. It's a triple stack which means it has genetically-altered genes in it for insect control and Roundup resistance. It's easy for weed control and being the only cotton patch around the insect problem is nonexistent.” Δ

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