

## New fiber co-op banks on returns from delivering consistent quality

By CECIL H. YANCY JR.

**T**HE farmer-owners of the new Signia Cotton Cooperative are tagging their future to “a brand that represents quality” from the field to the mill. They also hope a bigger paycheck comes with it.

The cotton grown by members of the cooperative remains in their names until it hits the mill.

The new cooperative, which extends from Oklahoma and Texas, through the Delta, the Southeast and into North Carolina, is now signing up members for the 2006 marketing season.

The concept had its genesis in the merger that created Syngenta in 2001, says John Freed of Syngenta. An extensive study looked at trends among major U.S. crops

### Market insight

In the cotton market, the study pinpointed what growers have known, and ventured into tracking how cotton is grown, identified and used at the mill.

The first trend: The market has flip-flopped from one of domestic to one of a global nature. China has become the dominant player for the U.S. cotton market.

The second trend: For numerous reasons, U.S. cotton has failed to consistently meet the requirements of foreign mills.

The third trend: Except for California, Arizona and south Texas, where specific varieties

### Key Points

- New Signia Cotton Cooperative is looking for members.
- Co-op is designed to reward growers for quality.
- Recommended production practices are encouraged.

are the focus, producers don't see much of the benefit from premiums paid for high quality, Freed says.

“We studied what is being produced in the United States; the type of cotton these foreign mills want is produced across the U.S. Cotton Belt,

but growers are not often rewarded for quality,” Freed says. “The grower has the capabilities, but is still rewarded for high yields, not for higher quality. There hasn't been a reason to think they could earn a premium for high quality.”

In sponsoring the formation of the cooperative, Syngenta is collaborating with Uster Technologies and Houchin Cotton Co. Uster produces the fiber-quality measurement instruments used in about 98% of mills worldwide. Houchin Cotton Co. of Bakersville, Calif., is the exclusive marketing agent for the cooperative.

The Signia brand name was adopted after testing in every major country in the world.

Bales sold under the Signia brand will be identified by a distinctive logo, Freed says. “The producers will be rewarded based on the quality that they



**JUST COMPENSATION:** Organizers say premiums are the aim of Signia. They want farmers to get paid for the quality they produce.

grow. The premiums will be returned to the growers.”

Where possible, the bales will be in a “virtual laydown to the mills.”

In the cooperative, growers agree to produce and gin their cotton under protocols that “help them produce and maintain quality consistency all the way to the product,” Freed says. “It's a team effort with the grower, the ginner and the warehouseman.”

In the buildup to the cooperative's formation and its study of cotton, Syngenta looked at the way cotton is being produced — from the air.

By using satellite imagery, the company documented trends that lead to the production of quality cotton. They'll have three years of data after the 2006 season, focusing on recommendations from variety selection to harvesting to

“help growers make decisions for consistent quality without sacrificing yields,” Freed says. The recommended production processes will be available to members of the co-op confidentially. “It's a process, not a product-driven brand.”

### Quality rewarded

Producers such as Brandon Warren of Newton Grove, N.C., and Justin Cariker of Dundee, Miss., hope it means they get premiums for producing quality.

“In California, Pima and Acala variety types have a reputation synonymous with fiber quality. Signia fiber is our opportunity to produce consistently high-quality fiber not dependent on variety or region,” says Warren.

■ Go to [www.signiafiber.com](http://www.signiafiber.com) for more on Signia.

## Crop report contains some big surprises

By CECIL H. YANCY JR.

**I**NDUSTRY observers were expecting changes in crop acres in USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service Crop Intentions Report, just not to the extent of the shifts in some crops.

Corn acres shifted to soybeans in a big way, largely on concerns over the high production costs. Nationally, the 78 million acres in corn would mean the lowest acreage since 2001. Growers say they'll plant about 77 million acres of soybeans. If realized, that would be a record.

Nationally, cotton acres are up 1.7% to 3% — depending on the National Cotton Council or USDA numbers — from last year at about 15 million acres. All states in the Mid-South expect to see increases in cotton acres. Only Alabama and South Carolina show decreases in cotton acres. Pima growers intend to increase acres by 24%, to a record high of 334,000 acres.

In the Mid-South, Mississippi producers expect to plant 1.2 million acres of cotton. Arkansas growers have intentions to plant 1.1 million acres. Louisiana expects to see 660,000 acres of cotton while Tennessee forecasts 680,000 acres. Missouri anticipates some 475,000 acres.

Overall, the USDA cotton numbers and those of the NCC were in the same ballpark. The NCC predicted 14.4 million while the USDA called for 14.6 million acres of cotton in 2006. The West is experiencing an 18.3% drop in cotton acres, according to USDA.

### Rice numbers

Since last year, experts have been predicting a decline in rice acres. The USDA report bore that prediction out. Many had said the decline could have been 30% or more in U.S. rice country. USDA numbers call for a 12% decline in acres in 2006.

Arkansas, the leading producer of rice in the United States, will plant 1.4 million acres of rice in 2006, down from 1.6 million in 2005.

California shows an increase in planting at 550,000 acres of rice in 2006. They planted 529,000 acres in 2005.

Louisiana producers plan to plant 440,000 acres in 2006, down from 530,000 last year.

Mississippi rice growers say they'll plant 210,000 acres in 2006. The state planted 265,000 acres in 2005.

Missouri registers a slight drop in rice acres in 2006, down to 211,000 from 216,000 last year.

Texas rice producers plan to also cut rice acres this season to 150,000 acres, down from 202,000 acres last year.

## ET dropping leaves around the Cotton Belt

By CECIL H. YANCY JR.

**C**OTTON growers are finding success with ET herbicide in their defoliation programs.

ET, a PPO inhibitor herbicide from Nichino America Inc., drops leaves in many cases with a single application, says James Scruggs, product manager. Where a second application is needed, ET picks up any regrowth that may have occurred.

A contact broadleaf herbicide that acts on cell membrane activity, ET can be used in tankmixes with other cotton harvest aids in single as well as in sequential treatments.

### Key Points

- ET herbicide offers defoliation activity in one or two shots.
- Effective herbicide can be tank mixed with other products.
- ET has its greatest impact on the leaf, not within the plant.

“If you tank mix ET with other defoliant, it gives the other materials a chance to act,” Scruggs says.

Louisiana State University weed scientist Donnie Miller has two years of data mixing 1.5 ounces of ET with Prep. He reports upward of 95% defoliation at 14 to 21 days in 2004. Last year, with the 1.5-ounce

rate, Miller had a defoliation rate of about 88%, but had to apply a second application at 2.0 ounces five to seven days later to pick up the rest of the leaves.

ET causes the plant to produce ethylene and accelerate leaf abscission. ET has its greatest impact on the leaf and not within the plant, even late in the season, Miller says.

While growers shoot for a one-shot defoliation program, they often have to use two shots to complete defoliation, Scruggs says.

“Occasionally we have fields that are extremely mature and bolls are about 50% to 60% open and one shot may be adequate,”

says Ken Smith, University of Arkansas Extension weed scientist. “That's usually the exception. In those cases, I have seen some advantage to using ET in that first shot, but ET works particularly well in the second shot of a two-shot program. We hit it [in the second shot] with ET and that takes care of the remaining leaves. In four to five days, the leaves are all off and we are ready to pick cotton.”

By tank mixing ET, a cotton grower can save money on application, Scruggs says. “It's very cost-effective.”

ET late in the season can also clean up problem morningglories prior to harvest.