

Cut costs without cutting yield

By BRETT SHEPARD

CAN you cut insecticide costs and maintain high yields? Northeast cotton consultant Bob Griffin says yes, and he's been doing it for two years.

"One grower, who was my highest yielder in 2007, kept his foliar insecticide costs for the year down to \$14.17," says

Key Pints

- Growers can cut insecticides and still maintain yields, expert says.
- Applications are no longer automatic for this consultant.
- Also focus on fertility, tillage, weed control and irrigation.

Griffin, who lives in Jonesboro, Ark. "He also averaged 1,512 pounds per acre on his 3,300-acre operation.

"The average price per acre of foliar insecticides that I recommended in 2006 was \$14.03. For 2007, that number was \$21.49. In 2007, the average cost for budgeted cotton insecticides in southeast Arkansas was \$48.82 per acre, according



SAVING GROWERS MONEY: Arkansas consultant Bob Griffin has been saving growers money for the past two years with a simple recommendation: Cut insecticide costs.

to the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service," he adds.

Griffin accomplishes this feat of low insecticide bills and high yields by doing several things. The first is eliminating unnecessary applications.

"Unnecessary insecticide applications are those not based on thresholds," he explains. "My recommendations are based on thresholds, 30 years of experience as a cotton consultant, and getting second opinions from other consultants and Extension."

For a few years after boll weevil eradication, Griffin recommended automatic applications for problem insects such as plant bugs. Two years ago, however, he started basing his recommendations on thresholds after listening to several university and Extension people. "I no longer recommend automatic applications," Griffin says. "If a grower still wants it done, that is fine; but I do not write it down on my recommendation sheet."

For example, Griffin keeps a close eye on plant bug thresholds. During midseason, the threshold in Arkansas is three plant bugs for five row feet. "If I find two and a quarter plant bugs and I am approaching threshold, I am going to treat," he says.

Griffin also uses the Cotman program to help him determine when to terminate insecticide applications. He stops spraying after he accumulates 350 heat units past NAWF 5.

In black and white

Additionally, Griffin has implemented an Access database that relates his growers' profits to their expenses. He gives each of his growers a printed report that shows the total amount spent on insecticide application for each field, which is multiplied by the acreage to give the total cost per field.

"The figures in those reports show that the amount of money that is put into insecticide application isn't necessarily going to produce bigger yields," he says. "You make better use out of your applications by making them more precise.

"Anybody can reduce their insecticide applications, but you have to look at your resulting yields. If both my neighbor and I make 1,300 pounds per acre, but my insecticide costs are \$20 per acre and his are \$75, that's a big difference."

In addition to insect control, Griffin believes that there are several other areas that Mid-South growers can fine-tune, including fertility, tillage, weed control and irrigation timing.

Shepard writes from Memphis, Tenn.

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