

Rain makes and breaks yields

By FARM PROGRESS STAFF

HURRICANES Fay and Gustav provided problems for Mid-South cotton growers as harvest neared. Excessive rains damaged the crop in the lower Mid-South, and quality was expected to suffer. Cautious optimism had prevailed before the hurricanes re-

garding a good crop.

Around the country, Texas suffered from lack of rain and was expected to abandon more than 200,000 dryland acres and 900,000 irrigated acres.

In the Southeast, dry weather continued to play a role as cotton producers had

Buckling



the Belt

to use

more irrigation, thus cutting into profits.

Timely rains in the Virginia-Carolina areas put the cotton crop in better shape than a year ago.

Against a backdrop of the lowest expected cotton production since 1989, Arkansas cotton



MISSING MOISTURE: Gerald Tyner, Town Creek, N.C., would have loved one more good rain before his cotton reached cutout.

producers could have a "pretty good" year, says the state's cotton specialist.

"We got a late start, but a lot of sunshine and cooler nighttime temperatures helped the crop put on a good bottom load," says Tom Barber, University of Arkansas Extension cotton specialist.

"I remain optimistic, but a little worried," Barber adds. "September is still going to be the magical month."

In its August Crop Report, the USDA pegged the average yield per acre in Arkansas at 1,113 pounds per acre on 690,000 acres, topping all Mid-South states and ahead of its five-year yield average of 1,031 pounds per acre.

Much of the Mid-South got a late start on cotton planting. Cool temperatures, along with a wet spring, saw cotton planting taking place into June.

"We may see a delay of two to four weeks harvesting irrigated cotton," notes Darrin Dodds, Mississippi State University Extension cotton specialist. "The 2008 crop appears to be as good or even a little bit above the average, but it probably won't surpass the statewide average of 960 pounds per acre reached last year." USDA estimates Mississippi's cotton production at 934 pounds per acre on 365,000 acres.

Louisiana began harvesting an "early" crop in mid-August, says Sandy Stewart, LSU AgCenter cotton specialist. Experts are calling the 909-pound estimated average yields in Louisiana "optimistic" because of dry weather on 285,000 acres. Production is expected to reach 540,000 bales, the lowest in 25 years.

Tennessee was anticipating average yields of 765 pounds per acre on 295,000 acres. In 2007, Tennessee had average yields of 823 pounds per acre.

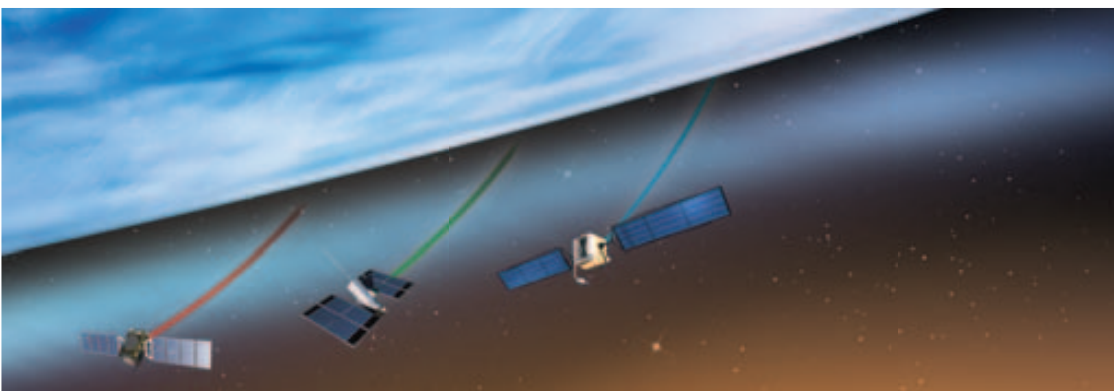
Missouri is estimated to have average yields of 963 pounds per acre on 299,000 acres.

Dry weather dwindles profit

Though the area shaded deepest red — signaling the most severe drought — is shrinking from Southeast drought monitor maps, cotton growers continued to be plagued by dry weather and the profit-wilting cost of irrigating at \$16.50 an acre-inch. Most growers in Alabama, Georgia, Florida and Tennessee, then, are thankful they either cut their cotton acres or completely quit on the crop — at least for 2008.

The good news is average yields likely will be higher than in 2007. You can't get lucky with Mother Nature every year.

Farm Progress cotton state editors Len Richardson, Cecil Yancy, Pam Golden, Richard Davis and J.T. Smith contributed to this report.



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