

Improved testing procedures could bring better cotton fiber

By J.T. SMITH

TEXAS and Southwest cotton growers just keep steadily improving fiber. And Carol Kelly says fiber quality can get even better.

Kelly, a graduate student working on her doctorate in agronomy at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, says that's important since more than three-fourths of the U.S. cotton crop now depends on the export market.

Anything growers can do to give their American cotton the edge on the competition in the foreign marketplace is good, she notes.

In addition to her doctorate work at Tech, Kelly also is a fellow in the Cotton Incorporated Fellowship program, established five years ago.

Kelly spoke last summer to 160 industry representatives from five countries at the annual Cotton Incorporated Engineered Fiber Selection System Conference in Greenville, S.C. She also spoke in the fall at the World Cotton

Key Points

- Carol Kelly's research is aimed at better efficiency in cotton breeding.
- Work is geared to improving fiber and yarn quality of cotton.
- Better cotton fiber can make U.S. cotton more competitive globally.

Research Conference in Lubbock to cotton industry leaders from throughout the world.

Kelly is doing research aimed at improving the efficiency of cotton breeding programs for fiber and yarn quality through using the Advanced Fiber Information System.

"There is a current weakness in the breeder testing system, and that leads to missed opportunities," says Kelly. "We're finding that cotton breeders benefit more when they initially test their samples with high-volume instrument data, then use AFIS to further rule out less desirable cottons."

This can help U.S. cotton meet future demands and beat the competition, she notes.

Ongoing work

Kelly's current research work includes two tests of cotton germ plasm lines.

One germ plasm line is based on just HVI data. The other germ plasm has evolved from both HVI and AFIS.

Germ plasm will be planted in the upcoming crop year. Kelly then will evaluate these lines for cotton spinning performance and yarn quality.

The best lines then will be sent to a winter breeding nursery in Tecoman, Mexico, which will increase the seed supply more quickly.

In some years on the Texas High Plains and across West Texas, fiber maturity, reported as micronaire readings in instrument classing, has been an issue, Kelly observes.

Kelly says this is one area where feedback by numbers could help cotton breeders in their work to develop cotton



FOCUSED ON QUALITY: While working on her doctorate in agronomy at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Carol Kelly is doing research aimed at better cotton fiber quality through more efficient breeding. She also is a fellow in the Cotton Incorporated Fellowship program.

with better fiber maturity.

The work also looks at fiber strength and length, including length distribution of cotton fibers.

When combining the data that is available, Kelly feels the efficiency of cotton breeding for fiber quality can be improved.

Hay shipments stymied by fire ant quarantine

By J.T. SMITH

HAY production was abundant in 2007 in Texas as most of the state was blessed with above-average rainfall for much of the year.

But while agriculture benefited greatly from the rainfall, so did the imported fire ant, or IFA, in Texas.

Dry areas in other parts of the nation created a major hay market for Texas' hay production, notes Denton County Extension agent Eddie Baggs.

But shipping the hay has become a little more difficult than just loading it on 18-wheeler trucks and putting it on the highways, he adds.

"Local hay suppliers and shippers need to be aware of the IFA quarantine," Baggs cautions.

Texas now has 162 counties in the state — more than half of Texas' total counties — which are under quarantine for IFA, including Baggs' own Denton County.

Needs a certificate

Hay shipped from an IFA-infested county out-of-state or through a non-infested area must have a phytosanitary certificate issued by the Texas Department of Agriculture.

To obtain this certificate, hay must be stored on a concrete slab or heavy-duty plastic, and the premises kept free of IFA.

This involves using appropriate bait treatments for fire ants as recommended by Texas Cooperative Extension. Such recommendations can be found at fireant.tamu.edu.

After meeting the requirements, a TDA inspector will examine the hay and



Key Points

- Hay production was excellent in most of Texas in 2007.
- Imported fire ant wreaks havoc in some Texas counties.
- Phytosanitary certificates are needed for shipping some hay.

issue a phytosanitary certificate, if the hay is free of IFA, Baggs notes.

If the hay is from a non-infested county, it can be certified through TDA based on its origin.

For a list of infested quarantine counties, go online to www.tda.state.tx.us and click on "Hay Hotline" or call the Texas Department of Agriculture office in Austin at 800-TELL-TDA.

Other items needing certification

Other items requiring a certificate or permit prior to movement from a quarantined area include soil, plants with

roots with soil attached, baled straw stored in direct contact with the soil, used soil moving equipment, and logs and stumps. It also includes any other product determined by TDA that presents a hazard of spreading the imported fire ant.

"This is not anything new because fire ants are easily transported," says Baggs.

As early as the 1950s, USDA developed a quarantine program to slow the spread of the fire ant in the United States.

In many of the Southern states, all counties are quarantined and have been for years. So the battle against fire ants has been going on for a long time.

"It is hard to say if we are making progress in this war — or just holding our own — by keeping the fire ant population contained," Baggs concludes. "In either case, if it is not drought, it always seems to be something else hindering the farmer."

USDA approves cotton groups' budgets for 2008

THE USDA has approved both the Cotton Board's and Cotton Incorporated's 2008 budgets.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service approved the Cotton Board's operating budget at \$4,305,650, and Cotton Incorporated's total budget of \$78 million.

Darryl Earnest, deputy administrator of the Cotton Program, in a letter to Cotton Board Chairman Nancy A. Marino, included a specific breakdown list of individual Cotton Incorporated committees and their approved budgets. They include:

- fiber research, \$17,096,000
- product research and development, \$10,440,000
- global strategy and implementation, \$14,889,000
- consumer marketing, \$31,693,000
- Cotton Incorporated administration, \$3,882,000

Because many of Cotton Incorporated's program expenditures have both domestic and international components, Earnest encouraged the Cotton Board and Cotton Incorporated to work closely with and retain project approvals from USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service on international travel and market promotions.

"We wish both the Cotton Board and Cotton Incorporated another successful year of building and strengthening markets for cotton," Earnest stated.



Texas Cooperative Extension photo by Robert Burns