

**EXTENSION - COTTON WEBSITE LAUNCH****Sandy Stewart****LSU AgCenter, Dean Lee Research Station****Alexandria, LA****Abstract**

I'd like to introduce you today to eXtension and a brand new website for cotton. eXtension is a relatively new term, so first let me begin by explaining what eXtension is.

eXtension is an educational partnership of more than 70 universities to help you improve life every day with access to objective, research-based information and educational opportunities.

eXtension is an interactive learning environment that strives to deliver the best, most researched knowledge from the smartest land-grant university minds across America. In doing so, eXtension offers credible expertise, reliable answers based upon sound research, connections to the best minds in American universities, creative solutions to today's complex challenges, customized answers to users' specific needs, and trustworthy, field-tested data.

Specifically, the cotton effort within eXtension will be an interactive learning environment to deliver the best research-based information for cotton production available from Land-Grant Universities in the US Cotton Belt. Cotton eXtension will be a one-stop portal to access individual state pest management recommendations, variety trial information, and extension newsletters. The site strives to be a reference for information on all phases of cotton production. The cotton eXtension site will have interactive learning environments which include the First Forty Days and Fruiting to Finish best management practices.

Importantly, eXtension will deal with production issues on a Beltwide level, while also allowing access to state and county-based information. While this is a large collaborative effort across state lines, eXtension will not replace state and local information, but rather augment them by placing the best information possible from around the cotton belt under one roof.

We believe cotton eXtension holds tremendous possibilities as a tool for the US cotton industry. Web-based technology continues to improve every day, so there are likely things that can be done and services that can be provided through eXtension that we are not even able to conceive at this time.

At its heart, this is and will be an unprecedented collaborative effort of cotton workers across the Belt. A colleague of mine who has been at it much longer than me recently remarked, that in his whole career he had not seen the number of collaborative efforts in cotton that he is seeing now. And, these are just now beginning to bear fruit.

An encouraging thing for the cotton industry is that this eXtension effort has emphatically demonstrated the commitment of the southern Land-Grant Universities to cotton. The beginnings of cotton eXtension have been made possible through the funding of the Southern Region Extension Directors. Each state in the cotton belt has contributed a portion to the operating budget. In effect, the Extension Directors in every state imposed a tax on themselves to make cotton a part of eXtension. It should be noted that cotton was the only group working in eXtension to be funded in such a way, and the fact that they stepped up to the plate under the budget constraints being experienced by every state say a lot. They felt strongly that cotton needed to be a part of this national initiative.

I'd like to show you briefly a few of the features of the cotton eXtension site. As stated before, it is part of a national eXtension initiative and can be reached through the main page at [www.extension.org](http://www.extension.org). At that page, you'll see that there are number of areas of information from horses to fire ants to wildlife damage management, and more will be coming soon. The cotton link is at the top left.

When you come to the cotton eXtension site, this is what you will see. There are stories of interest that will change frequently in the middle of the screen. The meat of the website can be found through the navigation tabs on the left hand side. There are currently 16 different subject areas ranging from cotton history to a compilation of state pest

management guidelines. There are literally several hundred pages of content on the site, and that number is growing regularly.

To show just one area, we can focus on the cotton physiology pages. By following that link, you can access a wealth of cotton physiology information. I chose this to demonstrate one of the values of cotton eXtension for placing valuable information on one cotton site. As we know, the Cotton Physiology Today newsletters published in the late 1980s and 1990s have been a tremendous resource for the industry. Bill Robertson of the National Cotton Council is currently reviving that program that has been so successful over the years. Those newsletters are as relevant today as they ever were, but they are out of print and circulation. Each one has been archived and can be accessed through cotton eXtension, which demonstrates the power of having such valuable cotton resources under one roof. There is a tendency to re-invent the wheel when dealing with new technology, but we wanted to recognize that much of the information that folks are after is already out there – it just needs to be placed in an accessible format under one roof. eXtension can do that.

Two other features of which I would like to make you aware are the frequently asked questions database, and the login feature. There are currently 122 frequently asked questions pertaining to cotton production in a searchable database to help you find the information you need quickly.

The login feature allows you to identify yourself as being from a certain state. When you do so, information such as upcoming events, state newsletters, and local extension contact information will appear each time you return. In this manner, cotton eXtension's information can be somewhat tailored to your geography.

Cotton eXtension is just in its infancy. Most of the information you will see on the site has been compiled and generated by the extension cotton specialists and put together with a lot of help from the national eXtension staff. However, you will probably find some things that you think are lacking, and we welcome your suggestions. We want to emphasize that this is not a cotton specialists' site – this is a cotton site. The numbers of people and the expertise we have working on this is beginning to grow as it should. The content will continue to expand, improve, and become more dynamic. We want you to check the site out – but the real goal is to give you a reason to return to cotton eXtension and use its information on a regular basis. We want to place as much useful information as we can at your fingertips for the good of the US cotton industry. We believe we have a website that will provide the foundation for that growth.

There will be an opportunity to speak with the people who have been working to put this together and demonstrate the site tomorrow from 11:15 to 12 noon in the Washington B room. I look forward to seeing you there. Thank you for your time.